

Data encompasses measurements or statistics, which provide a base for reasoning, discussions, and calculations. School building and district leaders use a variety of measurements across classrooms, buildings, as well as at the district level to make informed decisions. Data is easily skewed, can be difficult to interpret, although is easily collected, allowing multiple facets of information to be collected in a concise manner.

There are four measures of data use specific to the education field. They are demographics, school process, perceptions, and student learning. Demographics include enrollment, attendance, dropout rate, ethnicity, gender, and grade level. These aspects are important in understanding the makeup of a classroom, building, and district. Leaders must be able to interpret demographic data in order to ensure all students are receiving the greatest impact of their education. School Process data includes identifying and describing the different programs and processes available to all students. This data helps to ensure all students are receiving the programs and processes, which have the greatest impact for them. Data on perceptions includes the reception of the learning environment, the values and beliefs, the attitudes and the observations from all stakeholders. This data assists leaders in making decisions about how to implement, how to direct, and how the impact of programs will affects students, staff, families, and the community. Lastly, student-learning data indicates the achievement levels of all students using standardized tests, norm/criterion-referenced tests, teacher observation of abilities, and authentic assessments. This data is critical for stakeholders to understand where students are in relation to where they should or want to be.

It is essential for building and district leaders to consider data as they make decisions. The effects of the four areas of data allow leaders to identify the impact of demographic factors, understand the impact of the learning environment on student achievement, identify the best programs and processes for each student and student group, and the raw data of student achievement. These four measures of data combined allow predictions of actions, processes, and programs that best meet the needs of all students.

Leaders and teachers use data collaboratively through sharing challenges, not weaknesses, identifying real issues, and creating staff buy-in to build more effective implementation. Effective practices in data use to support student achievement and social/emotional health include attendance, graduation and dropout rates, differentiation for English language learner and students with disabilities as well as behavior monitoring. Continuous school improvement relies on a shared vision amongst all stakeholders, evidence of where the building or district currently is, the collaboration between all stakeholders and learning together to create consensus. These areas are essential for all stakeholders to buy-in and build success with school improvement.

In my experience, not all stakeholders have access to attendance data, which is collected. It is critical to give all those involved the opportunity to understand and work with the data. The shared vision is lost amongst the crowd when only certain individuals or small groups are aware of any changes, or monitoring of the data. It is my hope to see data more effectively viewed and used in the future by all stakeholders to ensure a greater impact on the shared vision.