Administrator Data Literacy Fosters Student Success

When school and district administrators are empowered to lead a culture of data use, students do better.

As states focus on improving overall school quality and ensuring success for all students, they need a workforce of school and district administrators who are equipped to use data to continuously improve. State leaders are uniquely positioned to align policies and programs that train and support school and district administrators. State policymakers must lead the way by creating the conditions to ensure that administrators have the skills to effectively interpret and use data.

All administrators have a role to play in improving student outcomes regardless of title, level, or whether they work directly with students, and they must know how to use data in a way that is tailored to their individual roles and responsibilities. When administrators have the timely, useful data they need—from academic information like assessment data to administrative data used for daily school and district operations—they are empowered to support instruction, foster continuous improvement, and communicate broadly about school and district challenges and successes.

School and district administrators need to be able to collect, analyze, and use data to inform decisions and take action. Data-literate administrators ensure that data use is ongoing throughout the year and seek to establish a culture in which data is prioritized and embedded into everyone's day-to-day practice.

Administrator Data Literacy in Action

Though administrators may not work directly with students in the classroom, they must still share the goal of using data as a tool to improve students' academic outcomes. Data-literate administrators can effectively use both academic and administrative data to understand trends; examine professional development and personnel needs; and marshal resources to support student achievement, both day to day and long term.

Data-literate administrators take the following actions:

° Take the lead on deciphering what data is important and how it is being collected and generated—and ensure that it is valid, reliable, appropriate, and high quality.

° Demonstrate the value of data for meeting goals by modeling effective data use.

WHO ARE ADMINISTRATORS?

Many school or district employees must be able to use academic (student performance, etc.) and administrative (budget, operations, personnel, etc.) data to help make student learning possible, even if indirectly. For instance, staff in charge of transportation, finance, and other administration and logistics also have a role in fostering student success, and they need data to be effective. But for the purposes of this paper, the term *administrator* refers to school and district leaders who have roles focused on strengthening the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. At the school level, examples include principals, assistant principals focused on academics, and instructional coaches. At the district level, examples include superintendents; assistant superintendents focused on curriculum, instruction, and personnel; and directors of curriculum and student support areas.

WHAT IS DATA LITERACY?

Data-literate school and district administrators continuously, effectively, and ethically access, interpret, act on, and communicate multiple types of data from state, local, school, and other sources to improve outcomes for all students in a manner that is appropriate to individual professional roles and responsibilities.

- Embed data use into the jobs of diverse staff and reinforce goals, including using data to improve student outcomes, regardless of role.

- Gather and use student learning data, administrative data, and other classroom performance data to identify aggregate student needs and set goals for the school or district.

- Use teacher performance data to support classroom practice and improve instruction.

- Use data to foster a culture of collaboration, collective responsibility, and continuous improvement.

- Engage parents and the community in the story that data tells about the school or district, including both successes and challenges.

- Provide ongoing, quality training on effective data use for teachers and broader school and district staff—including how to recognize valid, reliable, appropriate, and high-quality data.

- Create opportunities for adults in various roles to use data collaboratively to set and meet goals.

- Prioritize the privacy, security, and confidentiality of student and adult information, and ensure that all adults in the school or district understand their responsibility to keep student information safe and use it appropriately.

Conditions for Administrator Data Literacy

Administrators are charged with creating a culture of effective data use in schools and districts. To meet that responsibility, they need the tools at their disposal to make their own data use possible.

- **Access:** Administrators' access to different sources like district and longitudinal data should be easy, timely, and tailored to their roles.

- **Time:** Data use must be prioritized and embedded into day-to-day work. When this prioritization happens, data use becomes an ongoing practice rather than a one-off activity.

- **Training:** Administrators come from many different backgrounds. Certain aspects of their roles vary, from their day-to-day responsibilities to what type of data they interact with and what tools and platforms they use. Therefore, they require training that lasts their entire careers, including during preservice and preparation programs.

- **Common Understanding:** Part of the administrator role is to set a vision for data use, which involves ensuring that everyone has a clear understanding of the value of data and the expectations for its use within a school or district.

When it comes to creating a culture of data use in districts and schools, leadership and good practice matter. Administrators across various roles and functions need the access and skills to use data effectively in their roles, every day. Whether analyzing the budget for programs or working with teachers to improve instruction, administrators must use data to support student success.

SUPPORT INSTRUCTION

FOSTER CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

COMMUNICATE BROADLY

BUDGET | GOALS
RESOURCES

WELCOME! BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT!

ADMINISTRATOR DATA LITERACY in ACTION

How State Policymakers Can Support Administrator Data Literacy

State leaders have lofty goals for school success. To make those goals a reality, schools and districts need a culture in which data use is valued as a tool for continuous improvement. When administrators are data literate, they can set the tone for data use and are more likely to ensure that their district or school has the needed resources to make data use possible. State leaders can create the conditions and ensure the capacity needed for administrators to be data literate. State policymakers should:

☑ Promote Data-Use Skills

° **Embed the definition of data literacy into school and district administrator policies,** including preparation program approval, licensure and certification, professional development, evaluation and support systems, and others as relevant.

° **Promote, support, and incentivize job-based professional development that is career long.** This professional development should be focused on using multiple types of data, including academic and administrative, to improve student outcomes and foster continuous improvement within the school or district. Administrators should also be familiar with the policies and practices that dictate data collection and use.

☑ Ensure Ease of Access

° **Consider making an assessment of available data to ensure relevance.** States should develop policy and practice questions that will help set priorities for data-driven decisionmaking in support of student success. If districts are collecting data that does not help answer those questions or inform decisionmaking, state and local leaders should consider no longer collecting that data.

° **Provide administrators with actionable, easy-to-access data.** States have a responsibility to take the administrative and academic information collected from school districts and create useful tools and resources that support administrator data use. States should ensure that administrators have access to longitudinal data side by side with current data.

° **Ensure that schools and districts have the needed technical infrastructure for easy data use.** States also have a role in promoting and supporting the types of systemic structures (e.g., infrastructure and governance) necessary to promote data use within schools and districts. For more information on districts' data needs, see *District Actions to Make Data Work for Students*.

☑ Safeguard Data

° **Design and implement policies and practices to protect the privacy and confidentiality of student, teacher, and administrator data and ensure that systems are secure.** States should take the lead by setting clear policies and guidelines for data.

° **Provide school and district administrators with tools and resources to understand how to safeguard data, use it ethically, and communicate about privacy to families and communities.** Legislation alone will not lead to effective and ethical data use. States need to support school and district efforts to protect privacy through appropriate and relevant resources and training.

Conclusion

Schools and districts are most successful when adults have the data to see the full picture of their students' learning needs. Much focus has been placed on teacher data use, but teachers cannot go it alone. Support from leaders and other staff to collect, analyze, and use data is critical. School and district administrators need to model and support effective data use at every level, including as part of classroom instruction.

States, districts, and schools will never fully realize their goals for continuous improvement—and improved outcomes for students—unless administrators know how to use data to take action and inform decisionmaking. More must be done, especially at the state policy level, to ensure that administrators are data literate.

LEARN MORE

For a deeper dive into what data literacy looks like and how states can support it, see our policy brief *Teacher Data Literacy: It's About Time*.

For a closer look at data use at the district level, see *District Actions to Make Data Work for Students*.

Acknowledgments

The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to bring every part of the education community together to empower educators, families, and policymakers with quality information to make decisions that ensure that students excel. For more information, go to www.dataqualitycampaign.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter (@EdDataCampaign).