



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Collaborative Structures for Data Use

Richard Halverson, Ph.D. • November 2009

Topic: Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making  
Practice: Vision for Data Use

### Highlights

- Schools need to integrate a data plan within the school's overall school improvement plan. A data plan can provide specific steps needed to reach goals.
- It is important for schools to consider data at multiple levels, from state assessment data to classroom and student-level data.
- A school-based data team comprising individuals with a range of expertise can provide leadership for data use and guide the school toward fulfilling its vision.

### About the Interviewee

Richard Halverson is an associate professor in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is a cofounder of the Games, Learning, and Society Research Group and the Learning Sciences Program at UW-Madison and has appointments in the Educational Psychology and Curriculum and Instruction Departments. Dr.

Halverson holds a Ph.D. in the learning sciences from the Northwestern University School of Education and Social Policy as well as an M.A. in philosophy, also from Northwestern University.

## Full Transcript

Rich Halverson, associate professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Most schools have school improvement plans that coordinate the overall progress of reform in the school. The data plan needs to support the school improvement plan. Data plans take goals, general goals, from the school improvement plan and operationalize them into more intermittent goals. They specify what individual members of the school community need to do and the information they need to gather in order to move towards the overall school improvement goals.

There are several different kinds of data that are of use in a school. The kind of data that a lot of people talk about are the summative data that come from state test scores, and those data are very helpful for informing how the school as a system is doing to improve student learning. But by themselves those data don't really help teachers make better decisions about students. You need two other kinds of data that are largely developed at the school level to improve student learning. One is the teacher-level data, classroom-level data to help teachers understand how they are progressing with student learning, how is their teaching providing information about student learning. And the other is student-level learning so you can understand how each individual student is reacting to the instructional program and is progressing in terms of the instructional program. So leaders need to provide a vision for how to integrate those three levels of data collection and use in a school so that the teachers can make their best decisions about student learning.

It's important for schools to form data teams because no one person in a school has the expertise that's necessary to bring together the information on student learning, teacher practices, and outcomes all in one person. Traditionally, we think that principals should be in charge of running a school and providing instructional leadership. A distributed leadership perspective suggests that we need to identify the tasks that are important to improve student learning and to find the people in the school who can engage with those tasks. In this case, we need people who are capable of analyzing the information, collecting the information, and then using information to change everyday practices.

A data team has two main roles. One of the roles is what I will call *problem finding*: to analyze the data; to collect, look at the information that's generated as a result of student learning; and to identify the areas that the school needs to focus on in order to improve student learning. The second role of a data team is what I will call *data reduction*. Schools are awash in information. They have information on student learning, student performance, school-community climate surveys; they have input from parents; they have external community data. The problem isn't enough data; the problem is too much data. And a key role that

data teams play is in reducing the information so they can make problems solvable for the teachers in the building.

Leaders can support the use of data for instructional decision making by grounding analysis activities and design activities in the everyday practices of teachers. The problem here is that leaders have to try to change an existing culture of practice in schools. Teachers are accustomed to taking data and gathering data on students in the forms of grades or notes, quizzes, that kind of information, and making decisions about what to do with students. Most teachers are not accustomed to the idea of taking outcome data that are gathered collectively across the school and using those to make decisions about their kids. So when leaders create data teams, data teams would be well advised to ground the activities of data analysis in the everyday activities that teachers are already engaged with.

Principals can support the work of data teams by providing the time, the resources, and the authority for the data teams to do their work. Principals need to treat the data team seriously and give it the same kind of responsibility that other functions in the school have. For example, the academic dean or the guidance counselors all have both formal positions that allow them to do their work, but they also have resources to get their work done. Data teams need the same kind of respect in a school. It's difficult for professionals who are committed already 100% to jobs to also take on the responsibility of being on a data team. They need some relief in their responsibilities so that they can get their work done as well. One way to do this is for the principal simply to be a member of the data team so the principal can understand what's being asked of the data team, what kinds of analytic tasks are being conducted by the data team, and what recommendations are being made to teachers.

If data teams don't have the ability to follow up in classrooms to understand whether teachers are using the practices that are recommended by the data team, it's difficult for them to do their work. And so integrating the work of the data team with teacher evaluation, with professional development, and with the ongoing instructional initiatives in the school is an important part of the work of the data team, and it's something that principals really have to be involved with.