Education for the Future

How can Central Offices of School Districts best help schools, their administrators and teachers, and their students and families?

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Central Offices mean well by having districtwide initiatives. However, to really improve learning for every student in every school, strategies and services need to be specific to the student population, school culture, and teaching force.

Central Offices can help schools and their students and families by working with administrators and teachers to gather, review, and report schoolwide data to reveal student, teacher, parent, and school needs. Together, the district and schools can determine systemic solutions and services, which might be different for each school.

The work *Education for the Future* particularly wants **Central Offices** to perform on behalf of school communities is as follows:

1. Establish standard data reports via the district data warehouse. We know the data schools need to review to understand where they are now, and how they got there. Because it takes time to pull the reports together, schools (and districts) often do not do this. Standard reports can become data profiles of schoolwide demographics, perceptions, school processes, and student learning data. The district can provide standard reports for demographics and student learning, each report starting with the most general information, leading the readers to more specific information. For example, a data profile would start with schoolwide enrollment over time, then by grade level, gender, ethnicity/race, SES, and lead to the details of behavior and special education. Student learning data start with schoolwide results over time, and the same disaggregation mentioned above, then follow cohorts to ensure that student growth and a continuum of learning are in place for the school. Central Offices can then help schools:

a. Identify and support administration of quality student, staff, and parent questionnaires that reveal climate and school-related needs.

b. Determine the School Processes (i.e., instructional, administrative, and organization processes) that each school uses to meet the needs of its clientele. After analysis, the school might determine changes are needed to get different results.

2. Help all staff review the data for strengths, challenges, and implications for the continuous school improvement plan. When done well, the data profile will become the story of the school. Demographics give the context; perceptions give the viewpoints of stakeholders; school processes indicate how the school is getting its results; and student learning shows the results. It is important that all staff systematically review the data. They will

> **"** *When done well, the data profile will become the story of the school.* **"**

see things others saw in addition to what they saw and, together, they can see the whole system and determine how to improve the system. Important things to remember as staff review the data profile, include:

a. Start with independent reviews, one data element (i.e., demographics) at a time, so all staff members read the data and come up with their own analysis. Have staff merge their thinking in small groups, and then merge the small group findings into schoolwide findings.

b. Use strengths, challenges, and implications for the continuous school improvement plan. These prompts will help staff see what needs to change to get better results. Many staff that use strengths and weaknesses as prompts complain that their data analysis does not get them to what needs to be in the plan. This is because most of the challenges of schools would never be referred to as weaknesses.

c. Look across the four types of data implications. If the strengths, challenges, and implications are done well, staff can look across the implications and lasso commonalities.

The result will be a plan that makes a difference for students, staff, and parents.

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DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. What are the school's demographic strengths and challenges?

Strengths	*Challenges*

2. What are some *implications* for the continuous school improvement plan?

3. Looking at the data presented, what other demographic data would you want to answer the question *Who are we?*

Victoria L. Bernhardt, Ph.D., is Executive Director of *Education for the Future*, **a not-for-profit Initiative whose mission is to build the capacity of learning organizations at all levels to gather, analyze, and use data to continuously improve learning for every student.**

Dr. Bernhardt is the author, or co-author, of 22 books, including *Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement, 4th Edition*, **published by Routledge, and** *Measuring What We Do in Schools: How to Know If What We Are Doing Is Making a Difference.*

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