Data-Informed Leadership in Education

In *Data-Informed Leadership in Education*, authors Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland, and Monpas-Huber write about schools’ recent increase in data use, the types of data used, and the number of ways data are used. They write about the way things used to be:

An argument can be made that educational leaders have always had “data” of some kind available to them when making decisions intended to improve teaching and learning. Effective leaders gathered whatever information they could readily access, and then, drawing on accumulated experience, intuition, and political acumen, they chose the wisest course of action to pursue. The data they collected was likely impressionistic and rarely systematic, complete, or sufficiently nuanced to carry the weight of important decisions.

The authors then go on to describe “data-informed leadership,” a more thoughtful and intentional approach to using data. This phrase has important implications for principals because encouraging effective data use is emerging as one of their most important responsibilities. The researchers stress that the change in terminology from data-driven decision-making to data-informed leadership signals an important shift in the way data use should be viewed. In this new framework, data are not thought to “drive” decisions. Instead, data use acknowledges that educators bring into the process:

- core values and insights into those aspects of the practice for which there is not yet good data, and may never be... The notion of data-informed leadership captures the complex and often ambiguous nature of data use in educational settings.

Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland, and Monpas-Huber see leaders as providing an “anchor” for effective data use since they “are in a position to define the focus for the data they might generate and use.” They also suggest some leadership focus areas principals might find productive for their schools:

- **Leadership that focuses attention and effort on improving student learning.** Both quantitative and qualitative data can help identify what students know and can do, and they can help suggest aspects of teaching that need improvement, for example, through classroom assessment for differentiating instruction and grouping by ability; by formative assessment to refine instruction and enhance motivation; and through student self-assessment.

- **Leadership that guides the learning of individual professionals.** Quantitative and qualitative data about various aspects of professional practice can stimulate productive conversation and problem-solving by teachers and administrators. In the hands of a skilled leader, data become a tool for focusing professional learning on the improvement of daily practice.

- **Leadership that guides what has been called “system learning.”** Various data can provide a picture of the system’s functioning as a whole, documenting accomplishments and helping to spot problems that need work.