

Quality Data: The Role of the Principal

Responsibility

As the chief instructional leader, you are ultimately responsible for data collection and reporting in the school. You have the responsibility to report data as accurately as possible.

Things to Think About

- How do you and your staff use data to measure student achievement?
- When you place your signature on a report, how certain are you that the data are correct?
- What data are collected in your school?
- What can you and your staff do to produce quality data?

Things to Do

- Check reports for accuracy and reasonableness before “signing off” and sending to the district.
- With staff, periodically spot-check source documents against data entered to ensure that required data (e.g., medical information) are actually being entered.
- Ensure that your staff have access to appropriate technology tools.
- Stay current by attending meetings and training about data requirements.
- Provide district data personnel with recommendations for improvements in data collection procedures.
- Allow and encourage staff to attend training in their areas of expertise.
- Consider using a variety of training strategies, including the “train-the-trainer” model, where necessary.
- Work with your staff and the district to develop and use standard procedures for data entry and reporting.
- Provide trained staff to back up data entry personnel during peak periods (enrollment, scheduling, etc.).
- Understand and communicate laws and regulations that affect data at your school (e.g., the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 [FERPA] and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 [HIPAA]).
- Support and monitor district data security policies and procedures.
- Encourage the use of data to make daily instructional decisions.
- Provide an environment conducive to accurate data entry.
- Develop a calendar for data reporting deadlines.

Outcomes (What’s in it for me?)

You have many diverse responsibilities within your school; among these is the responsibility to ensure that what is happening at your school is accurately reflected in the data. It will take time and effort to develop a Culture of Quality Data within your school. By helping staff to understand the importance of data entry and data collection, as described above, the quality of instructional and operational decisions will improve.

Quality Data: The Role of the Teacher*

Responsibility

You are responsible for entering timely and accurate data about your students, as required.

Things to Think About

- Who uses the data that you enter (e.g., parents, students, school board members, the principal, other teachers, payroll staff, the news media)?
- How do you use data to make important individual and group instructional decisions (e.g., progress toward content standards, need for remediation/intervention)?
- What is the effect of the data you enter on students' educational experiences?
- What is the impact of incomplete or inaccurate data?
- What can you do to increase the accuracy of data?

Things to Do

- Ask for and attend training on the use of data in the instructional program.
- Ask for appropriate instructions and documentation.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions about your data responsibilities.
- Identify barriers to effective data entry and communicate these to the principal or other appropriate personnel.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of student data by protecting data from students and unauthorized personnel.
- Follow your district data security policies and procedures (e.g., change passwords frequently, do not share passwords with colleagues or students, etc.).
- Enter data accurately and in a timely manner.
- Check your work for accuracy and completeness.
- Ask for help if you make an error.
- Share good ideas and best practices about data entry with your peers.
- Check your calendar for data reporting deadlines so that you can allocate time for data entry.

Outcomes (What's in it for me?)

Your ability to make sound educational decisions about your students will be improved because those decisions will be based on quality data. You will be able to improve students' educational experiences because the instructional program will be based on accurate data.

*The suggestions in this Tip Sheet may apply to others in the school, such as a counselor or nurse.

Quality Data: The Role of Office Staff

Responsibility

You are responsible for entering important data accurately and completely, maintaining data security, and understanding how the data will be used.

Things to Think About

- Who uses the data that you enter (e.g., school board members, the principal, parents, teachers, students, payroll staff, the news media)?
- How are data used to make important instructional decisions (e.g., student placement)?
- What is the effect of the data you enter on schools or programs?
- What can you do to ensure the accuracy of the data you enter?

Things to Do

- Enter data accurately and in a timely manner.
- Ask for and attend professional development programs.
- Ask for appropriate instructions and documentation.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions about your responsibilities.
- Identify barriers to effective data entry procedures and communicate these to the principal or other appropriate personnel.
- Implement the district data security policies and procedures (e.g., change passwords frequently, do not share passwords, treat data confidentially, etc.).
- Check your work and run appropriate edit reports.
- Ask for help when you make an error.
- Identify a peer who does work similar to yours so that you can share ideas and best practices.
- Check your calendar for data reporting deadlines so that you can set aside time for data entry.

Outcomes (What's in it for me?)

You are at the center of any effort to build a Culture of Quality Data in your school. You take pride in and ownership of your work. You understand the importance of the data you are working with and have taken steps to raise the level of data quality in your school. As a side benefit, working more efficiently means that your data entry tasks will be easier and less frustrating.

Quality Data: The Role of the School Board Member

Responsibility

As a school board member, you are responsible for setting policy.

Things to Think About

- What information do you need?
- How does your district use data to demonstrate achievement in educational programs?
- How do you know that the data are accurate?
- What do personnel in a school do to enter and gather data?
- What is a school required to do when you request non-mandated data?

Things to Do

- Understand the impact data has on funding programs.
- Allocate appropriate resources to enable schools to meet the ever-increasing need for data collection and data entry.
- Invest in computer hardware and software as a routine cost of doing business.

Outcomes (What's in it for me?)

Pressures on school board members are always increasing. By becoming knowledgeable about the data entry process and the district's procedures for ensuring data quality, you can rely on the information you use with more confidence. Improving data quality is an investment. If the resources used to produce accurate, timely data result in information to justify programs or secure additional needed funds, it is money well spent.

Quality Data: The Role of the Superintendent

Responsibility

As a district superintendent, it is your responsibility to enhance the educational program of students, to improve student achievement, and to see that district policies are implemented.

Things to Think About

- How does your district use data to demonstrate achievement in educational programs?
- How do you know that the data you review are accurate?
- What data are schools responsible for entering into computer systems?
- Is there an inventory of data collected in your district?
- Do personnel in your district understand the use of data in the instructional program?
- Do personnel in your district understand the use of data in funding programs?
- How do you deal with redundant requests for data?
- Are personnel available to enter data into computer systems at schools?
- Are staff responsible for data entry receiving appropriate professional development?
- Is there a process in place to resolve discrepancies in information?

Things to Do

- Set education benchmarks that use data to measure student achievement.
- Support the development of a Culture of Quality Data in your district through an effective professional development program.
- Encourage principals to make data-driven, building-level decisions.
- Support your information technology director in the promotion of more efficient data collection procedures, the use of technology to decrease data entry errors, and the movement toward applications that are “interoperable” (i.e., that interact with each other using a minimum amount of programming resources).
- Support the allocation of funding to provide schools with the appropriate resources to enter data.
- Assign a member of your staff to be a data “steward” or coordinator.

Outcomes (What’s in it for me?)

A Culture of Quality Data in the district will result in reliable data that are useful for evaluating the instructional program and student achievement and for pointing out areas of success and places where improvements are needed. A Culture of Quality Data will enable you to have confidence in the information that you review and, most importantly, will allow you to make effective decisions.

Quality Data: The Role of the Data Steward or Coordinator

Responsibility

You serve your administrator by ensuring that the statistical information reviewed by senior staff represents data that have been entered accurately and collected systematically. Furthermore, you enhance the information reporting process through staff development and collaboration with the various offices and programs responsible for producing data and information.

Things to Think About

- Does the information reviewed by your superintendent and senior staff represent facts based on accurate data from programs and offices?
- Does everyone in your school district understand how data are used to benefit the instructional program and provide funds for services?
- Are data collected systematically in the school district?
- Are the staff responsible for entering data trained to do an effective job?
- Is there a process in place that allows “end-users” to request or modify reports?
- Are you and the information technology (IT) director operating collaboratively?

Things to Do

- Coordinate the data collection process.
- Provide professional development for staff members leading toward a Culture of Quality Data in the school.
- The sessions might include
 - demonstrations that incorporate hands-on training, enabling data entry personnel to become used to the actual data entry screens;
 - examples that actually reflect situations that will be encountered;
 - handbooks or guidebooks, with copies of data entry screens, systematic instructions, and the rationale for entering the data;
 - descriptions of the procedures for obtaining assistance (e.g., help desk phone number, online and/or e-mail query process); and
 - copies of the reports created from the data, enabling trainees who enter information to have a sense of how their work affects the operation of the school.
- Resolve discrepancies in information before reports are forwarded to senior staff.
- Develop a process that allows staff to request new reports or modifications of existing reports.
- Collaborate with the district technology director or coordinator to enhance the ability of computer programs to determine effective editing procedures for reports and other information.

Outcomes (What’s in it for me?)

By helping staff members to understand the importance of data entry and data collection, and to see the process that leads to data-driven decisions, you are directly involved in courses of action that lead toward improved student achievement and increased services provided to the district and schools.

Quality Data: The Role of Technology Support Personnel*

Responsibility

You maintain and secure the hardware, software, and network that allow staff to enter, store, secure, and transfer data.

Things to Think About

- Are the data and the hardware secure?
- Do you have the appropriate hardware and software to allow efficient data entry and storage?
- Are standard data definitions used in the software?
- Are the computer applications “interoperable” (i.e., able to interact with each other using a minimum amount of programming resources)?
- Are you and the data coordinator operating collaboratively?
- Do you have an effective help desk process in place?

Things to Do

- Ensure that effective security measures, including password protection, are in place. (See Weaving a Secure Web Around)
- Education: A Guide to Technology Standards and Security [National Forum on Education Statistics 2003], which deals with system security in detail.)
- Work with the data coordinator and other staff involved with data entry to develop efficient editing and data verification procedures.
- Work with the data coordinator to provide technical assistance with professional development and dissemination programs.
- The assistance could take the form of a
 - CD-ROM with training information that can be duplicated;
 - website address, with frequently asked questions (FAQs) that can be distributed to trainees; and/or a PowerPoint™ presentation.
- Provide a help desk and/or an online help area for data entry staff.
- When selecting computer applications, you might want to ask the following questions:
 - Does this application comply with our district data standards?
 - Can the application “talk” to other computer applications (i.e., interoperability) in the district?
 - Does the application use the same keystrokes to move around screens as our existing applications? Alternatively, can the new system be modified so that the same data entry keystrokes are used in both new and legacy systems?
- Develop an electronic audit trail so that people are able to determine potential flaws at each of the various stages of data collection.

Outcomes (What’s in it for me?)

Your involvement in data entry and data collection, including training and professional development, does pay dividends in both the instructional program and the services you are able to provide to the district and schools. Through your involvement in these areas, staff will be more responsive when you request funding to improve the technology infrastructure.

*The suggestions in this Tip Sheet may apply to the information technology director, coordinator, technician, etc.