Guidelines for Data Walls or "The Science Fair for Grownups"

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One of the most powerful techniques educators and school leaders can use to improve decision making in the classroom, school, and district is the "Data Wall." Ideally, the Data Wall is a portable display, using the three-panel display style frequently used for exhibits in student science fairs. When administrators gather to discuss their ideas for improving student achievement, the Data Wall provides a rich source of information about the strategies employed in each school. Within each school, Data Walls can be the focal point for faculty discussions on improving student achievement. For principals and teachers who are already using data to guide their instructional decision making, the use of a Data Wall will be no additional work. For leaders who are not using data to guide their decisions, Data Walls provide a valuable technique to jump-start their work. Most importantly, this technique will ensure that analysis of student data is not isolated to a single seminar or a staff development program on data, but rather becomes a continuous part of faculty and administrative decision making throughout the school year.

Three Essential Parts of the Data Wall

1. External data, such as state test scores
2. Internal data (classroom assessments or other school measurements involving teaching practices; chosen by the school to reflects its unique needs)
3. Inferences and conclusions (drawn from the data)

Information for the Panels

Left Panel includes tables, charts, graphs that illustrate state test scores for the school and district. There may also be narrative comments, such as:

> 84% of our students are proficient and higher in mathematics according to the state test scores and 78% are proficient according to a district test. A review of the last three years of data shows consistent progress on both state and district measurements, with particular gains in the problem-solving portion of the math assessments.

Middle Panel includes data on teaching strategies associated with the content area (e.g., mathematics) followed by another brief narrative, such as:

> The charts show that the number of mathematics assessments including student writing has increased significantly in the past three years. Those assessments have emphasized the problem-solving portions of the state test. The charts also show a strong increase in interdisciplinary mathematics instruction, with the frequency of math instruction in music, art, physical education, technology, science, and social studies much greater for the most recent school year than was the case in earlier years.

Right Panel includes inferences and conclusions, such as:

> Our analysis of the data suggests that multidisciplinary instruction in math and writing in math have both been effective strategies to improve student performance. Therefore, we have planned to expand these strategies in the following manner [*give examples of the strategies specifically applicable to the individual school*]. We remain very concerned about the 16% of students who are not proficient on the math portion of the state tests, and have developed individualized learning plans for each of these students. In addition, we have added the following intervention strategies for all non-proficient students [*include specific strategies applicable to your school*].

Other Notes on Preparing for the "Science Fair for Grownups"

1. Principals need not make formal presentations—Data Walls speak for themselves. Principals should, however, be prepared to respond to questions from colleagues about the Data Walls.

2. The primary function of Data Walls is to allow principals to ask one another questions and share informally how they achieved their successes. [*If the Data Wall display takes place during a multiday leadership conference, the displays should be set up during the breakfast of the first day and left up throughout the conference.*]

3. The process of continuous collaboration must continue all year, not just at a retreat or conference. Data Walls can be the focus of internal staff development, joint faculty meetings with other schools, and planning for instructional interventions and professional development activities.

4. **CRITICALLY IMPORTANT:** Data Walls are *not* for the purpose of impressing outside observers, the superintendent, or any other external audience. The primary purpose of Data Walls is to help principals share information with their fellow principals and, most importantly, with their faculties.

5. Principals will have to make choices regarding which data to use. They will want to show the information that is most important, so that clear conclusions can be drawn; this makes the point to faculty members that principals are not merely displaying data, but are *using* data to inform their leadership decision making.

Data Walls: Left Panel Information

State (Tier I) Assessment Results		
Reading	Mathematics	Writing

District (Tier II) Assessment Results		
Reading	Mathematics	Writing

Building (Tier III) Assessment Results		
Reading	Mathematics	Writing

AYP Subgroup(s) Results		
	Reading	Mathematics
Hispanic		
Asian		
African-American		
Caucasian		
ELL		
SpEd		
FRL		

Data Walls: Right Panel Information

Instructional Strategies		
Reading	Mathematics	Writing

Is It Working? Monitoring Continuous Progress

Frequent and Ongoing Assessment Results		
Reading	Mathematics	Writing

Other Relevant Student Achievement Information

Data Walls: Center Panel Information

Analysis of Effect Data			
Celebrations	Strengths	Concerns/Areas of Urgent Need	Priorities

Analysis of Cause Data			
Celebrations	Strengths	Concerns/Areas of Urgent Need	Priorities

Goals Annual: School-wide Goals
Reading: Writing: Math:
Annual: Grade-Level, Team, and/or Department Goals

Labels for Data Wall Components

- State Assessment Results
- District (Tier I) Assessment Results
- Building (Tier II) Assessment Results
- AYP Subgroup(s) Results
- Instructional Strategies
- Are They Working? (Results Indicators)
- Monitoring Continuous Progress
- Frequent and Ongoing
- Assessment Results
- Analysis of Effect Data
- Analysis of Cause Data
- Goals

Planning YOUR Data Wall

1. What information will you use?

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2. Who will help prepare the Data Wall?

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3. Where will the Data Wall be displayed?

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4. What other Data Walls would be beneficial?

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