Introduction

The worldwide drive for accountability has created an environment in which schools in all developed countries are expected to show improvement in student achievement through the use of data, often based on the results of state or national assessments. But such information shows only the outcome of an instructional process, which may be informed by hunch or by fashion rather than grounded in real solutions to demonstrated, specific issues. This is where comprehensive, valid, reliable data (also referred to throughout this book as *evidence* or *information*) can be used to inform decision making and to improve student performance efficiently.

As school leaders, we have to make a choice in response to test scores: use the information available to work with staff through a data-driven school improvement process or just to change strategies based on what we already believe are the issues and hope that student performance improves. This book is designed to help school leaders who wish to make the former choice and work collaboratively with their staffs or departments, using evidence to "drill down" to discover the root causes of issues in student performance and to remedy them in an ongoing, accountable fashion. In particular, new administrators who do not have any experience in using data to inform curricular decisions will find this book helpful. Experienced administrators will find this book a concise summary and overview of the research in the area. It may also provide the experienced principal, assistant/vice principal, and department/grade head with some new tools and strategies to help refresh data-driven school improvement in their areas.

ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1 looks at the global drive for educational accountability and how that has led data-based school improvement planning as the most efficient and reliable method of both increasing student performance and improving the transparency of the process of continual school improvement.

Chapter 2 deals with the roles the principal plays in data-driven school improvement: leader, professional developer, and communicator. These are three essential roles successful principals must play during the improvement process, working within and without the school as model, mentor, monitor, mediator, and conduit for information. The principal is pivotal in the process, and the chapter explains how the principal can ensure that the improvement planning is successfully initiated, supported, and continued.

Chapter 3 outlines how a principal can successfully introduce data-driven school improvement planning, from convincing staff that such an endeavor has a great payoff to creating a culture of using broadly based data to inform all decisions.

Chapter 4 is about what data is and is not. The four types of data are defined, and activities are provided to help staff members understand the importance of gathering relevant, valid, complete, and reliable evidence of as many types as possible to ensure that decisions are based on the whole picture, not just part of it.

Chapter 5 describes the data-based school improvement planning cycle and how to use it to make, implement, and follow up on instructional plans based on good data.

Chapter 6 looks at refining the process once it is in place: using the concept of *root cause* to define issues further that need to be addressed and using the data-driven school improvement cycle to build SMART goals.

"Educator Toolkit": At the back of the book is an extensive toolkit of information to help the principal lead a school through the introduction and use of the data-driven school improvement planning cycle, as well as a glossary of commonly used terms and a list of suggested additional readings for those who wish to delve deeper.

This book will get you started on using data to inform, shape, revise, and assess your school improvement plan. It will start your school on a journey to true accountability and to demonstrable improvement in student performance.