

Look Where the Data Has Driven Us



By Sherilyn V. Anderson

Data driven decision making has got to be the most used phrase in education today. I recall hearing it used in nearly all of my staff development sessions as well as being the first thing we learned in my educational leadership program. The premise behind using educational data is to provide stakeholders with a vehicle to make informed and prudent decisions regarding public education. After all, when it comes to something as precious as children, we can't afford to have people making willy-nilly decisions, pulling answers

out of thin air, or good old-fashioned making stuff up. We use data to drive our decisions.

Teachers use it to determine if students have mastered an objective and what concepts they should focus on next. Principals and school administrators use it to check student progress, form curriculum and instructional practices, determine who to crown as Master Teacher, and who to serve with a dreaded growth plan. In an economic downturn, data can decide who gets to remain employed or what schools will be closed down. See, data is like a powerful and sharp sword. Those who use it should be thoroughly trained before wielding it all over the place because a lack of responsible use could be detrimental to a child's education.

Across the nation, we have leaders of some federal, state, and local educational entities who have little or no formal educational training or experience. We have a movement that insists teachers are bad for education, especially the ones who graduated from traditional teacher training programs and have more than three years of experience. We have parent groups or school boards who decide what books to remove from library shelves or what classes to restrict as a curricular offering. We have administrators who demand students not use crayons or read silently in class because "21st Century students don't learn from these archaic activities." We have students being instructed in a manner reminiscent of a line from A Field of Dreams. Remember, "If you build it, they will come?" In education, that line has been changed to, If we test them, they will learn. Maybe somewhere between the diagnostic tests, benchmark tests, formative assessments, summative assessments, and **the** test, students will receive some actual instruction.

I'm sorry. It appears I went on a bit of an unnecessary ranting tangent. Surely, everything I previously mentioned makes sense, is instructionally sound, and ensures all of our children will receive a top-notch public education because, in America, we use data to drive our decisions...right?