

INTRODUCTION

Proceedings From the Wing Institute's Sixth Annual Summit on Evidence-Based Education

Performance Feedback: Using Data to Improve Educator Performance

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Over the past 6 years, the Wing Institute has examined the state of education with the goal of building an evidence-based education model that can make a marked difference in meeting society's need for academically proficient young people. Much has been written about the disappointing performance of the American education system, most evident in the flat test scores of the past 30 years. Unfortunately, the most recent attempt to alter this picture, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has hardly made a dent in changing student performance, as measured by high-stakes testing and graduation rates. Accountability and national standards that are at the core of NCLB, though initially praised across the political spectrum, have recently been called into question because of the lack of data to support students are making substantive progress.

Along with NCLB, other structural fixes have proliferated at the state and local levels: class size reduction, charter schools, increased spending, school sizes (large and small), stricter teacher credential standards, and voucher systems. When taken to scale, all of these interventions championed as methods to improve student performance have consistently disappointed school reformers (Yeh, 2007).

Against this backdrop of failure upon failure in school reform, the Wing Institute has presented a series of "summits." Each annual 2-day summit is designed to look at a specific pressing issue, provide the latest research on the topic, analyze the practices that are working, and explain what might be done to increase the likelihood of success when schools select and implement reform. Nationally recognized speakers are selected to present at a working session as

well as stimulate and lead the day's discussion. Participants are able to interact with a diverse group of stakeholders in our education system: researchers, university faculty, school administrators, national and local policy makers, service providers, and parents.

PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK: USING DATA TO IMPROVE EDUCATOR PERFORMANCE

This book is compiled from the proceedings of the sixth summit entitled "Performance Feedback: Using Data to Improve Educator Performance." The 2011 summit topic was selected to help answer the following question: What basic practice has the potential for the greatest impact on changing the behavior of students, teachers, and school administrative personnel?

The following chapters are developed from the presentations at the Wing Institute's 2011 summit. Research consistently finds feedback to be a powerful method for changing performance (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Hattie, 2009; Walberg, 1999). Whether in the form of monitoring student progress, coaching teachers on how to implement practices, or requesting input needed to continuously improve organizations, feedback remains at the core of potent and successful change. The promise that accountability, as measured by high-stakes tests required in NCLB, is enough to boost student performance is too good to be true. In reality, outcome data are not especially effective in improving any category of performance without feedback on the practices that lead to the outcome, such as high-stakes tests. Successful use of data to change student or teacher performance requires systematic feedback on important outcomes—mainly, student achievement—as well as on teacher instructional skills and school administrator support promoting the acquisition of learning.

The chapters developed for this book expand on the 2011 proceedings to provide readers an in-depth examination of each topic. The chapter authors offer their wide range of experience and knowledge, from education to corporate organizational development, to help educators design and implement performance feedback systems.

Randy Keyworth, senior fellow at the Wing Institute, contributed the first chapter: *Feedback at the System Level: Benchmarking U.S. Education Performance*. Keyworth examines sources of data on the performance of the American education system. This information provides a historical context for judging the effectiveness of education and current practices to achieve meaningful results. He lays out the argument for establishing benchmarks as yardsticks of achievement to guide reform efforts. The highlighted benchmarks consist of high-stakes testing outcomes and graduation rates; process measures to gauge the performance of all educators including teachers and principals;

and system measures including equal access to resources and effective teacher preparation practices.

In the second chapter, *Feedback in Education: On Whom and for What*, Dr. Aubrey Daniels offers a perspective on education reform derived from his extensive experience in business. He provides examples from his work to improve performance, paying particular attention to the role of performance feedback.

Daniels reinforces the critical need for education stakeholders to define why schools exist. Only then can objective measures be established to tell us if current practices are achieving what we want of them. He emphasizes the need for implementing effective feedback mechanisms to ensure the system as well as individuals are performing as expected. He defines performance feedback and clarifies the purpose of feedback in education.

In the third chapter, *Seeking the Magic Metric: Using Evidence to Identify and Track School System Quality*, Dr. Mary Beth Celio reviews the impact that accountability and budget cuts have placed on embattled educators. For many educators, NCLB was viewed as a quick fix to solve the many problems of an ailing system through setting goals and offering incentives and consequences. Its failure to meet the very high expectations of so many people has resulted in calls for its repeal. Despite the failure of NCLB to meet expectations, Celio believes the law has had positive effect through focusing attention on standardizing the tracking and use of outcome data.

Celio examines the purpose of different types of data available to educators that can drive performance. Celio underscores the need for choosing indicators that enable educators to intervene early when there is still time to change performance before failure occurs. The chapter stresses the importance of finding indicators that are not only meaningful but also easy for users to read. The design and use of key indicator reporting is presented in a way that is practical, enabling educators to develop reports adapted to meet the needs of their own unique settings.

In the fourth chapter, *Are We Making the Differences That Matter in Education?*, Dr. Amanda VanDerHeyden criticizes the education system for paying too little attention to defining what it means when schools are successful. She argues that this leads us to adopt solutions that on the surface appear to address deficits, but are often not correlated with improved student achievement.

VanDerHeyden discusses the necessity for stakeholders to focus more on outcomes and not just process. She examines popular interventions with superficially broad appeal that have proved ineffective in achieving results, such as class size reduction and poorly designed reading curriculum. She addresses reasons why effective practices often fail to achieve the desired outcome, and the fact that many practices are implemented improperly with

little attention paid to treatment integrity. VanDerHeyden notes the many costs and profound negative impact on schools as a consequence of selecting ineffective practices—leading to a downward spiral of disenchantment with reform efforts. She details a model for responding effectively to the needs of students, Response to Intervention (RtI), highlighting the components that rely heavily on feedback as a reliable, cost-effective solution for overcoming deficits inherent in the current education system.

As a whole, these chapters provide an important look at one of the most powerful tools available to educators—performance feedback. It effectively links school reform initiatives to improved student performance.

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