Chapter 2
Data Dissemination Practices of Elementary School Principals

Trent Herring
Live Oak Elementary, USA & Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

ABSTRACT
A review of literature about data dissemination by elementary school principals and data-driven decision-making (DDDM) revealed some principals used accountability data for student achievement, but many did not. Many principals relied more upon their own intuitive experiences instead of systematic data use. This qualitative study focused upon five high-performing elementary school principals from a southern Louisiana school district that had neither prescribed DDDM practices nor data dissemination protocols designed to support principals. Goals of this study were to examine principals’ data dissemination processes, what influenced practices, and if principals did have ideal dissemination processes. The study revealed that each of the principals did utilize a data dissemination process, although not formal processes. Certain factors influenced DDDM and subsequent dissemination by principals.

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this chapter is to explore data dissemination as only one part of the larger perspective presented in this book, which is the use of data for accountability purposes by educational leaders in the K-12 setting. The information presented comes from a study completed by the author of this chapter. In particular, the phenomenological case study was an in-depth review of data dissemination processes as related to overall data use practices by educational leaders, specifically, principals. Research questions for this study were:

1. To what extent do elementary school principals utilize a dissemination process?
   a. What process is used?
   b. How is the process used for student achievement?
2. How is the dissemination process in elementary schools influenced?
   a. What factors led to the current data dissemination process?
   b. What currently influences the data dissemination process?

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3. What do elementary school principals define as their ideal dissemination process?
   a. How is the current process evaluated internally and externally and by whom?
   b. How does the current process compare to the defined ideal?
   c. How could elementary schools establish an ideal process?

In the accountability era, as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and then the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), the primary goal of school leaders is to increase student achievement scores. The study objectives were designed to discover and/or report new information regarding data dissemination by principals for future leaders’ use in the pursuit of improving student achievement. Knowledge of principals’ data dissemination decisions may inspire educational leaders to reflect upon their own dissemination practices to develop new or adjust individual practices as part of a concerted effort to improve their own schools’ scores. Without a thorough knowledge base of data use processes to reflect for guidance in this accountability era, educational leaders may remain at a disadvantage in their preparation for sustainable school achievement.

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Present a literature review covering data dissemination processes, or topics that may be pertinent to dissemination of data by principals;
- Describe the methodology used in the study;
- Present the actual processes that school leaders used to disseminate data;
- Discuss influences on data dissemination; and
- Describe leaders’ thoughts about ideal data dissemination practices to which they aspire.

Decision making regarding subsequent data dissemination is important, and there is a need to identify exactly what principals are doing with school and other assessment data to improve student achievement.

BACKGROUND

The exploration of decision-making in regards to actual practices of school principals from a southern Louisiana high-performing school district was an objective of the study. Decision-making is relevant to subsequent data dissemination practices when principals desire to improve student achievement. According to Creighton (2007), many principals purported they used accountability data for improving student achievement, but this was contrary to what they were actually doing. Research suggested that principals were relying more on their own intuitive experiences instead of relying upon systematic data collected to drive decision making for student achievement. During Creighton’s study it was also noted that schools’ Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as defined by the NCLB (2001), results were not being utilized as tools to initiate student achievement change at a most critical place, the school level. The use of appropriate data was then and continues to be a concern for many school systems with contemporary accountability requirements that promote student achievement. There is a need for principals to disseminate data to the very people who are organizing and implementing plans to directly improve student achievement, the teachers.
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