

Can there be too much emphasis on gathering more data?

Over and over, we hear the line: *In God we trust, from all others demand data!*
We certainly value good data.

And, of course, policy makers and practitioners value making data-driven decisions.

BUT ... lately it seems folks are going so overboard that too much bad data, false data, and the absence of data are leading school improvement efforts astray.

Concerns about all this are not new. The problem is that the concerns are ignored as efforts are made to meet the overwhelming demands for more data. In our work with schools, we have come to think of the problem as “assessment-itis” (e.g., the push for gathering more and more data in the erroneous belief that this is necessary for solving many problems encountered every day at schools).

This belief is especially at play in efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Yet, the reality is that there are plenty of data on the factors that interfere with so many students not benefitting from good instruction. The need is not for more testing and screening. Indeed, spending more on data gathering often uses up sparse resources that are needed to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports for the many who need extra assistance. It is such assistance that is essential to enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. And a continuing overemphasis on more testing and screening of students will simply not lead to the type of systemic changes that can end the marginalization and fragmentation of student/learning supports.

Here’s a cautionary statement attributed to Yankelovich:

- >The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. That’s okay as far as it goes.
- >The second step is to disregard that which can't be measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value. That’s artificial and misleading.
- >The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily isn't very important. That’s blindness.
- >The fourth step is to say what can't be measured really doesn't exist. That’s suicide.

From Thomas Edison: *Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that won't work.*

The homework you assigned wasn't evidence-based, so I didn't do it.



For more on this, see the Center’s Quick Finds on

- >Assessment and Screening – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1405_01.htm
- >Evaluation – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/evaluation.htm>