

September 8, 2009

Purposeful Decision Making and the Use of Data

Because we are busy collecting data to create our Local School Plan, and because our teachers are busy collecting data to best address the needs of our students, I would like to address the terms "purposeful decision-making" and "data," and their role in improving our work at Janney. With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and measures of Adequate Yearly Progress in our public schools, we entered a new era of accountability towards raising the academic achievement of all students. Since then, this critical goal has brought the use of data to drive decisions into the forefront, but it has also raised questions around the effective use of high-stakes testing in our schools.

At Janney, the use of data will go well beyond a response to our end-of-year test, the DC-CAS. Instead, many types of data will be used towards purposeful decision-making, accurately determining strengths and areas of growth along with measuring our responses. At the core is the belief that all students can and must achieve at high levels, academically and socially, and that all stakeholders must be involved in making that belief a reality. As an administrator working in tandem with our Local School Restructuring Team (LSRT), it means looking at school-wide trends to set overarching goals. For teachers, the group that research proves has the most impact on student achievement, the use of data means collaborating to adopt practices that directly respond to student needs. Administrators and instructional coaches also collect data on teacher practice to ensure that they receive the support needed to impact their students. Students are taught to be reflective, to understand their own progress and to see that their actions result in improvement. Parents are integrally involved in understanding their own students' progress and how to provide targeted support in and out of the classroom, as well as actively participating in the conversation around the Local School Plan.

It is also crucial that the types of data we use are appropriate to the decisions we are making. Although testing data like the DC-BAS and the DC-CAS are important, multiple or triangulated sources - informal assessments, classroom tests, student conferences, student portfolios, observations, surveys, demographics, attendance, and Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) data to name a few - allow for better analysis. The aim of our response to this broad collection of information is not to reach an end goal, but rather to foster a sense of efficacy or a celebration of effort that leads to growth. Nor are our goals static; we will return to updated data sources to observe the impact of our actions and to reset our responses. I have asked our teachers to ask the question, we are teaching, but are all of our students learning? By making choices that have a clear purpose, growth for all students, not proficiency, must be our goal.