



## Core Feature 7: Data

**In recent years, the focus on data has been elevated in both education and mental health. Data systems and data-based decision-making are common themes for professional development and leadership development initiatives. Our focus on data has two sides. On the technical side, data quality and data systems are of critical importance. On the human side, the perceived value and connections across data sources advance or constrain its effective use.**

Comprehensive school mental health systems must address both the technical and human sides of data. In co-creating this Dialogue Guide on data, we first look at the cross-sector agreements among national experts. Then, we explore those issues with decision-makers, practitioners and families at the state, local and organizational levels. Across these groups, the potential for data to improve practice is a priority issue.

The source document, [\*Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field\*](#), summarizes the expert panel conversations on data by setting out four critical agreements:

- Data outcomes, data systems and data-driven decision-making are all critical components to supporting a comprehensive school mental health system.
- **Data outcomes.** Comprehensive school mental health systems must document the provision and impact of service and supports. Data may include student-level outcomes such as numbers of students referred to and receiving mental health supports, as well as documented improvement for students served. School-level outcomes, such as school climate, teacher retention and discipline practices, may also prove useful in

documenting the impact of universal mental health programming. Tracking and monitoring these outcomes at the school and district levels can improve understanding of the system and of student needs, gaps and service utilization patterns. School mental health systems routinely face barriers to systematically tracking individual student data, including:

- Lack of staffing capacity.
  - Lack of technological options/infrastructure.
  - Lack of knowledge, training and time to create a data collection system.
  - Limited data sharing across systems (e.g., between school and community providers).
- **Data systems.** Use of existing student information systems and partnerships with experts in data collection (e.g., through university partnerships) can facilitate the collection of information to document services and outcomes.
  - **Data-driven decision-making.** A critical component of school mental health systems is the use of comprehensive data for data-driven decision-making (DDDM) to inform school mental health planning and delivery. DDDM can inform decisions related to appropriate student supports and can be used to monitor progress

and outcomes across multiple tiers. Data can facilitate information sharing across team members, achieve common understanding of target concern(s), and inform decisions about which strategies to try to test and how to adjust interventions as needed.

While there is broad agreement with the Core Features, in co-creating this Dialogue Guide the array of stakeholders identified four issues with these common concerns. Consider how you may use these Dialogue Starters in your setting or in your organization. Collectively, we have a role in bringing attention to the need for comprehensive systems of school mental health.

The conversation among stakeholders focused on four themes:

- Data as a Picture of Success and Need
- Data Connections
- Stakeholder Participation in Data Systems
- Telling Data Stories

This Dialogue Guide incorporates both sources. The guide offers *Reaction Questions* and *Application Questions* from which you can choose Dialogue Starters that will allow you to take these conversations into your work.

## Resources

Resources to inform this content are available at:

- [Data-Driven Decision Making](#)
- [Data Quality Campaign](#)
- [Data Literacy Project](#)
- [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Impact](#)
- [Telling the Story of Nonprofit Impact through Data](#)
- [Dialogue Guide Response Strategies](#)

# Practice Issue 1

## Data as a Picture of Success and Need

### Reaction Questions:

1. A school reports a 92% attendance rate. What thoughts does this data raise for you?
2. When you hear that 90% of students in a certain school district qualify for free lunch, what might you assume about the kinds of interventions that should be in place:
  - For academic support?
  - For health?
  - For well-being?
3. When you read that a particular school within a district is performing academically above others, what thoughts come to mind about that school's climate and practices?
  - What thoughts come to mind about other schools?

### Application Questions:

1. Think about the way that data is discussed in your setting. To what extent is the focus:
  - On meeting a performance standard for the school or district?
  - On strategies to support students in meeting the standard?
  - On why meeting the standard is important to the student's choices in school and life?

What should we do to help the discussion focus on a more complete picture of the system and the student in the system?

2. Data dashboards are a popular tool in communicating data and the change in data. In your setting, does the discussion of data:
  - Go beyond the data dashboard to focus on the conditions for learning?
  - Go beyond academic interventions to consider social, emotional and behavioral supports?
  - Include a range of staff that might contribute insights and strategies?
3. Beyond professional development, to what extent do we understand what staff believe about data? How would you know whether:
  - Expectations are connected to interpretations of data?
  - Data training improves individual practice?
  - Staff members make logical connections across data sources?

What other considerations will tell you that staff members are really making use of data in shaping their practice?

# Practice Issue 2

## Data Connections

### Reaction Questions:

1. The connections between academic performance and psychological well-being are well documented. In your view, what are some of the common data points that should tell us about the well-being of students?
2. The expert panel pointed to the research that shows the factors that are important for us to consider in our data systems. These include:
  - School Connectedness
  - Engagement with Learning
  - Social and Emotional Wellness
  - Mental Illness
  - Interpersonal Relationships
  - Food and Housing Insecurity
  - Risk Behaviors

Of the factors listed:

- Which are well understood by the school community?
  - Which are less well understood?
3. What does your school staff say about the connection of these issues to their daily work?
  4. How would you describe “school connectedness” to families and the community?

### Application Questions:

1. What data is currently collected that could inform the factors listed above? Explain the connections.
2. Data is not always shared or acknowledged in different parts of the school system. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*:
  - What is above the surface in sharing data across parts of the school system?
  - What lies beneath the surface?
3. What data from community providers might be connected to the factors identified by the expert panel?

4. To what extent:
  - Do school and community sources share relevant data?
  - Do school and community providers turn to each other to understand issues?
5. Using the *Give and Get* response strategy:
  - What can schools get from data discussions with community providers?
  - What do schools give in data discussions with community providers?

## Practice Issue 3

### Stakeholder Participation in Data Systems

#### Reaction Questions:

1. In your view, what is the value of observational data in our data systems?
  - How well do we use observational data from school staff?
  - Do we/could we invite families to contribute to our data?
2. Multiple stakeholders have different interests and insights. What structure do we have in place or need to create to communicate the data among the various stakeholders?
3. In our view, what is the right balance between quantitative and qualitative data when communicating with families and the community?
4. What is data literacy and how can we achieve it for families and the community?

#### Application Questions:

1. What value lies in our data systems investing in data literacy among stakeholders?
2. What unique insights can stakeholders contribute in designing data collection on our different populations (**e.g.**, *boys of color, Hispanic girls, non-English-speaking populations, LGBTQ+ outcomes*)?
3. What is the value of stakeholder participation in designing data systems on issues that are sensitive and demand perspectives beyond the school staff (**e.g.**, *disciplinary data and how it looks with different populations*)?
4. What other issues demand stakeholder participation in collecting and interpreting data?
5. In your view, how do data sharing and data input differ?

6. How can a stakeholder perspective help us construct a more holistic picture of student performance and well-being?
7. Using the *Four Quadrants* response strategy, place the following in one of the quadrants:
  - Stakeholders inform potential connections among data sources.
  - Stakeholders have opportunities to become more data literate.
  - Stakeholders have a role in analyzing and communicating sensitive data.Share your reasons for that placement.

# Practice Issue 4

## Telling Data Stories

### Reaction Questions:

1. From your perspective, how would a data story make the data more understandable?
2. How could a data story be important:
  - In reaching important groups?
  - In communicating complex issues?

### Application Questions:

1. In your view, can/should a system write its own data stories?
  - Why or why not?
2. Data stories are often said to represent the “people under the data.”
  - What does that expression mean to you?
  - Why is it important in your work?
3. How could data stories be used to understand different perceptions:
  - By staff?
  - By stakeholders?
  - By the community?