

# DATA DRIVEN DECISIONS IN K-12 EDUCATION

A comparative case study about data driven decisions in two  
rural K-12 school districts

Susan Gail Wilderman

Dr. Karen Cockrell, Dissertation Supervisor

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how the use of data drives academic planning in rural Missouri schools by exploring and comparing the processes in two Missouri school districts. Previous research has identified the importance of this process in larger schools (Blink, 2005), as well as the need for examining, evaluating, and revising this process in all school districts that purport seeking to become true learning organizations (Jones, 2006; Learning Point, 2004; McIntire, 2002; Senge, et al., 2000).

The following research questions were developed to guide the research.

- 1) In what ways do districts use data to inform decisions around curriculum and instruction for student learning?
- 2) What factors impede developing and implementing curriculum and instruction for student learning?
- 3) What factors facilitate developing and implementing curriculum and instruction for student learning?

The comparative case study design was chosen so that information could be gathered in multiple research settings and compared for possible similarities, thus giving the researcher a better opportunity to identify significant characteristics and behaviors. The targeting of qualitative data being gathered allows for an increased flexibility of data acquisition leading to the identification of factors affecting the research questions (Cresswell, 1994). Comparative

descriptive studies are better suited to provide the structure of such inquiry and to achieve the research goals of understanding how participants perceive the use of data and apply their interpretation to decision-making (Lauer, 2006).

As all data were subjected to axial and open coding, five distinct themes became apparent. Although some interview responses and observations provided data that fell across more than one of these main themes, all data still fell in this framework. These themes were as follows: Resources, Curriculum Development, Assessment, External Requirements, and Leadership.

Lack of adequate training was identified as an impediment to decision making, along with the shortage of time and funding. Teacher turnover in District # 1 was identified as an obstacle to the development of curriculum and instruction. Another impediment indicated by the data was the applicability of the administrative and teacher leadership styles to the final results in the classroom.

Conclusions include 1) both districts actually exceed the federal and state mandates for the administration and analysis of standardized assessment instruments, 2) results of this data collection and analysis are communicated to the public and their representatives, 3) curriculum and instruction are revised per this process of analysis and communication, 4) three most prevalent impediments to developing and implementing curriculum and instruction for student learning all deal with resource allocation, and addressing these deficient allocations of resources has a positive effect on academic performance.