

Navigating the Data Inquiry Process

The education system contains a wealth of data. There are raw data and a variety of data displays from state education agencies, school districts, schools, vendors, and curriculum providers. Additionally, there are any number of formal and informal data that teachers collect at the classroom level. With this wealth of data, there are a few challenges we hear often:

- There is so much data available, where do we start?
- What do we prioritize?
- How can we find and review the data to make data-informed decisions when we don't have enough time?
- Is it important that we engage the many stakeholders in our review of data? And if it is, how do we do it?

This article briefly highlights two strategies that support efficient use of time and inclusion of voice when engaging in data-informed decision making. The first strategy is to engage in a systemic data inquiry process; the second strategy is to identify and use protocols within every stage of the inquiry process. A new tool published by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Data Inquiry Guide, is a one-stop guide for both strategies.

What is data inquiry?

OSPI's Data Inquiry Guide defines data inquiry as the process for data-informed decision making that centers on developing a deeper understanding through a repetitive cycle of questioning, analyzing, measuring, and evaluating. Through this type of systematic inquiry, educators have the opportunity to give purpose and meaning to the data, which devoid of interpretation or inquiry carry no meaning (Wellman & Lipton, 2017). It is through the process of answering a question by analyzing relevant data that give data purpose. To support educators in engaging with data, the guide has organized this process by applying data protocols to each stage of the PDSA model for Cycle of Inquiry: Plan, Do, Study, Act. Whether an educator is new to data inquiry or an experienced practitioner, OSSI believes that they will find the Data Inquiry Guide a helpful tool as they engage with data to improve student outcomes and close equity gaps.

Why are protocols so valuable?

As McDonald et al. (2007) explain, protocols may help participants set aside presumptions to focus on a process that allows them to see alternatives that would have otherwise remained hidden. When approaching data without a protocol, we risk limiting our discovery by seeing only what our experiences, values, and bias allow us to see. Data inquiry is about engaging in dialogue with other stakeholders so we can move beyond the individual to seek deeper collective understanding. Dialogue is essential to data inquiry, and protocols serve to facilitate that dialogue. The Data Inquiry Guide includes some of our favorite protocols for data inquiry through dialogue. Some of the guide's protocols focus on engaging every voice, the allocation of time, and on reaching a desired outcome. Such protocols can be combined to engage every voice in a time efficient manner that is focused on a specific outcome. You can access the Data Inquiry Guide at <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/school-improvement/data-and-implementation>

McDonald, J. P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E. C. (2007). *The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Wellman, B., Lipton, L. (2017). *Data-Driven Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide to Collaborative Inquiry* (2nd ed.). Charlotte, VT: MiraVia.