

What are some examples of data inquiry within your district?

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Many of our data practices are directed by expectations of those outside the system. For example, local schools may develop plans to meet federal accountability. Classroom teachers may review district assessment data. Districts may concern themselves with state frameworks for improvement. These can be worthwhile reasons to use data in service of others; however, they may not represent the most critical questions that educators have or that a community needs us to ask. In the Tumwater School District, we use human-centered practices to develop questions and inclusive data models to engage in inquiry about these types of problems. This means that the greatest value for data inquiry is based on what the people inside the system care most about.

For example, one of our elementary schools noticed that they had no first graders who liked to read. The school had a reading program in place, an intervention model, assessment scores, experienced teachers, and a strong PLC model at that grade level. Students were learning to read, but that is a different goal from developing a lifelong love of reading. As part of the staff inquiry into how to address this problem, they decided to use the number of books checked out from the school library as a way to gauge enthusiasm for reading. They posted a chart that was 8 feet by 10 feet near the front of the school. Everyone could view the weekly updates by grade level. This helped change practices about access to the library, showed the entire school community what was valued, and most importantly, changed attitudes about reading. None of this was in response to poor test scores, district direction, or other outside pressure. This was a function of people being at the center of identifying an issue for inquiry and then being supported to represent their data in a way that made the most sense for them.

Our largest effort has been from our district datashop with our [Data Stories](#) project. Over the last several years, we have used paper, pins, beads, and more to construct physical displays ranging up to 12 feet in length that explore questions such as how elementary report card comments reflect biases and whether a student's sequence of teachers has an impact on outcomes in math. Although our displays are uncommon, they reflect the ways in which others see and experience the world. Mimi Onohua writes that "Data showing racism might be useful in clarifying the things we already know to be true, but it is far more limited in terms of shifting them." For us, this means that it is not enough to show disaggregated data in the usual bar and line charts. If we are going to create new conversations and change, we have to include a broader range of data

representations and practices. Placing people at the center of our work, instead of the data, is an important step to becoming inclusive with both different forms of inquiry and the approach we take to change outcomes.

We are not going to get away from student attendance data, our state framework for ESSA, or district strategic plan goals. They have a purpose to serve. However, there is empowerment in also identifying your own sources of inquiry and the form that those take. It is your classroom. Your school or department. Your district. The people in these systems have ideas and questions worth investigation that may depart from well-known indicators. Putting people at the center of our work is a fundamental purpose of education. Their questions should be no different.

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