

## Using Data to Identify Programmatic Interventions

### WEBINAR QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

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On December 14 and 15, 2011, the Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center hosted a Webinar titled “Using Data to Identify Programmatic Interventions.” During the session, the presenter, Dr. David Osher, Principal Investigator for the Safe and Supportive Schools Technical Assistance Center, received several questions from the audience. Since the presenter could not answer all of the questions during the event, the Center has prepared the following Webinar Question and Answer Summary with responses to each question. For additional information, please email or call the Center ([sssta@air.org](mailto:sssta@air.org); 1-800-258-8413).

*Please note the content of this summary was prepared under a contract from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students to the American Institutes for Research (AIR). This Q/A summary does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does it imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.*

**Q1. We have staff members who are deeply invested in the ways that programs are currently being offered in their school. What strategies have you seen used to successfully help engage them in considering the need for change? In other words, people have to give something up in order to do something new.**

People are committed to do something that isn't working or even is harmful? If that's the case, then it's important to present the need for change from the standpoint that you are using resources inefficiently or even badly—money, time, and space resources. But I'm assuming that's not what you're talking about. It's that you have a good program; people want it but it's not realizing everything you want. Assuming that's the case, you may want to look at the quality of implementation. Are things being implemented in the way that the program intends for implementation to take place? And that is both the quality with which people do things but it's also the dosage, the intensity with which they do things.

If things are being done with quality and dosage, it may be the case that the program is working for some students and not for others. This is where disaggregating data for subgroups becomes important. If that's the case, you may want to then make tweaks to the program to really try to enhance the outcomes for the students for whom it's not working. And in order to do that, you may need to do analyses. You may need to bring in people. I think it's often useful to bring in the students to ask them what is working or not working, also to bring in teachers is to ask what is not working.

Change is never, never easy. I think it's important to both hook the people with the overall goals that the collectivity has, whether it's the district or the school, while at the same time, tying those larger goals to people's personal values and aspirations. And most people are in the business because they want to help students learn, and they want to help students thrive. Then

the key is to help them look at what evidence exists regarding where they're being successful, but also where they're not being successful. And it's not they as individuals, but with the programs that they're doing. I think that's a real key. I mean if people don't feel a need, it's going to be hard to move them. If on the other hand you have data, then that will help.

The collection and analysis of data is very important because oftentimes when people just think about what they do, they are more likely to remember their successes and not to remember the failures. And if you're not collecting data on both the groups for which interventions and programs are working well with and those they are not working well with, people will only remember the group for which programs were successful.

**Sandy Keenan:** I would add that we also are finding that communities are including in this particular part of the work a piece on integration. They're looking at how the new programs they're possibly considering actually integrate with the existing programs with common outcomes and common strategies.

**Q2. We've been doing climate surveys on youth for years, especially to understand bullying problems. And despite the implementation of evidence-based strategies, the bullying rates have remained fairly constant. However, other data suggests that the bullying is not a problem, like discipline data or teacher surveys. We believe that the rates are more reflective of students' awareness of bullying and not necessarily an increase in the problem. How can we be sure?**

Well, there are many factors that may be at work here. First of all, there is now one very comprehensive review of bullying prevention programs that suggests even the best programs together only reduce victimization and bullying by about 20%. And you may be caught in that. Secondly, and I don't know what intervention program you're using, but that same comprehensive review that's published by the Campbell Collaboration also suggests that the best results have been realized in Europe, particularly in Norway, and not in the United States. So there may be a fit issue. And the third thing is there are many people in the bully intervention world right now that suggest combining an array of things if you want to reduce bullying. And they include things like social/emotional learning for everyone - so people know how to respond. It may include also more targeted interventions both for the bullies and also people who are bullied. Because often, people who are bullied may end up being bullies as well. So those may be possibilities. The pattern across the world is that when you ask students about bullying rates, they will give you a higher base rate than will adults. And my own disposition, be right or wrong, is to say I would probably take young people seriously.

We also know that people define bullying differently. At the Department of Education and the Department of Justice's Bullying Summit last year, young people there said that they didn't agree with the definition of bullying. And one of the things that the government has been doing this year is coming out with a new definition. That's important because if we're dealing with bullying among students we need to deal with their perception.

What would I do? You're doing a very, very good thing by looking at your data and asking the questions. And what I would suggest as something you may or may not have done is, given what you have, I would pull young people together and I would conduct focus groups to try to get their explanation for why the bullying programs don't seem to be making a dent. You might want to do the same thing with teachers. I was doing evaluation work in a district coming in after a good bullying intervention program was implemented at the middle schools. I can share that it didn't work. And what I learned from the teacher representatives was that there was zero teacher buy in. It was just imposed. The training was not very successful. And so what'd I suggest is to engage your stakeholders to help you figure out what else may be useful.

**Q3. How does one compare student, parent, and staff school climate results?**

Whenever I'm looking at results, I want to ask questions. One question is what can somebody tell me based on their own experience? What do they see or not see? So for example, if you go back to the bullying example, I'm not surprised that students may report a higher rate of bullying than adults. Students may be in places where they see things that adults don't. And so, there are some questions that I'm more likely to ask people because of what they know. At the same time, I also want to ask people questions that they will act on. And so, there may be some things that are particularly relevant to students.

We know from some survey data that some students in some places miss a day of school because they're afraid to come to school. That's something that you want to hear from a student. At the same time, we know that parents may change schools if they have opportunities because they worry about the safety of their kids. And that's where parents act and you need to know how the parent feels. Teachers may be concerned with their own safety, and that may affect the way in which they're teaching. And if we're concerned with issues of how teachers feel, or teacher absences, or teacher turnover, we may want to ask questions of teachers.

So what I would say is that each respondent can tell you different things. Each respondent also can tell you important things. If you're trying to paint the best picture of the school, what you want to do is you want to listen to multiple respondents.

**Q4. Can you give an example of family supports and engagements in the slide where you talked about the family, teacher, and friends in classrooms?**

I'll give an example of what I learned from Sandy Keenan who was once the Deputy Director of Special Education in Rhode Island and was helping turn around the district. Family engagement was really important. And one of the things that they did was really make sure that families were actively supported with the information they needed before they came to the IEP meetings so that they could actually come to those IEP meetings really prepared to be active participants both in terms of buying into the interventions, but also providing information about when an intervention might not work. What's the type of logistical support that you need? That's an example.

We are not endorsing any interventions, but if you look at the SAMHSA model program registry and also OJJDP's, you'll find Families and Schools Together, which is an intervention that data suggests really does a good job of engaging parents and effecting their interactions with teachers and other school staff that has impacts on their children's learning. And it's been done with a whole array of different ethnic and cultural groups, and so it tends to have that type of ecological validity I was talking about before.

**Q5. Do you have any strategies that you could suggest for incorporating discussions of the impact of poverty on school climate and student achievement?**

I think that what you want to do is to both sensitize people to the challenges that students face, but do it in a way that does not create self-fulfilling prophecies. And to be very, very clear, there has been a history in this country that goes for over 50 years of people talking about cultures of poverty that in a way contributed to people lowering expectations rather than thinking about what the supports are that young people need to succeed.

So it's very important to both have that conversation and have people understand challenges. That a student who may be sleeping in class may be sleeping in class because of the fact that he or she is babysitting for a younger sibling very late at night and is living in an environment in which there's too much noise. That's important to know, in part to provide the student with some support, but not in a way that assumes the student can't succeed.

So I think it's very important to have that conversation, but to remember to keep the focus on what are the school and community supports that are made available in order to help that student succeed? Because what we know is no matter how poor a student is, if provided with appropriate support and expectations, that person can succeed at a high level.

**Q6. There's often a heated debate among members of our faculty about the fish or the water. These two points of view can often be reflected in team meetings when they're talking about the school climate work and the views continue to be a point of contention. Do you have any strategies to suggest about managing these two very different views?**

What you need to do is to really enable the participants to be aware of that tension and really think through the implications. Now my guess is the answer is usually both – it's the fish and the water. All of us are affected by the environments in which we operate; and at the same time, our capacity to do something affects how we succeed.

A strategy in dealing with the people who are looking at the fish and not the water is to ask them to think about their own circumstances. If they're teachers, ask them to think about how the environments in which they're operating in -- the water -- affect their capacity to teach? And at the same time, if you are dealing with people who only want to think about environment but not think about capacity, you might want to have them think through some of the challenges that they're facing where there are issues that their own personal capacity could help them address something.



I have found across the world when I'm talking about social/emotional learning, and I use the example of stopping and thinking before you do something. Did it resonate the people? People immediately start thinking about times they've done something without stopping and thinking. So what I'm suggesting here is both helping them resolve the problem by observing it just as you have, but also letting them work it out in a context that's different from the problems they've been focusing on, but in a way that makes sense to them as an individual, or as groups of individuals.

**Q7. Do you know of any mini grants to support this process? We've got some great data and some schools undergoing change, but we're facing huge budget cuts within our district.**

**David Osher:** Increasingly, there are social entrepreneurs who have created Web sites and tools that can help schools solicit mini grants. Given the fact that you have great data, you may want to link into those sites. In addition, you may be able to attract support from places in your community. For example, rotary clubs or local corporations may be interested in investing in better education for their future workers, especially if you're not asking for large sums of money from one pot. Also, the United Federation of Teachers has an innovation fund that local members can apply to. And so what I'd encourage you to do is to really be strategic in looking at where resources exist and can be pooled in your communities.

**Sandy Keenan:** We also know that within schools, there are quite a lot of resources being expended on multiple programs and multiple initiatives. We've made reference before to Denise Gottfredson's work on the numbers of interventions in schools, and something like 14 interventions was the average number in schools. And by resource mapping and really looking at what's going on within the school, sometimes you're able to free up some resources that are being directed towards programs that are not being effective, and thereby, shifting those resources into focusing more on the things we've talked about today.

**David Osher:** In the previous webinar we did, one of the things we suggested is using school climate data to help save schools money by redeploying resources more efficiently and focusing on the problems that are really affecting conditions for learning and academic achievement. I think maybe you want to try to persuade the district leadership or the school leadership that some of this kind of resource mapping analysis might be in their interest, because it might help save money as well as use resources more efficiently.

**Q8. How long do you recommend a program be in place to determine its effectiveness?**

I think it is very important to prospectively think about the benchmarks that will tell you along the way whether or not a program is realizing your goal. And I think people often don't do that. If you have an evaluator, developers, or a research department, they can help you with this. But if, for example, we're implementing a program that's aimed at helping students learn to stop and think, it may take a month or a year to start making a movement in that direction; BUT you can still say what you should be seeing at the end of two or three weeks to know that you're implementing the program well and starting to move in the right direction.

**Q9. Would you comment on selecting a balance of universal strategies or interventions versus selected targeted interventions for the Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative?**

I often think about the four conditions for learning and the three levels. And so if you think about a 3 x 4 matrix, I think ultimately you're going to get at every cell. But you use your data to figure out the starting point— the starting point is strategic. It's what's going to help you get to where you want to be in the long run. The balance between universal and more targeted interventions must be struck; use the data to help guide you to the appropriate balance for your populations.

**Q10. How do you change a school culture from making the child fit the program to instead addressing the child's individual needs?**

One thing is leadership. And when I say leadership, I don't just mean the principal. It can be numerous people. Think both about why we enter the work we do, which is to help young people flourish, and also think about the increasing body of research and data that really say that child-centered approaches are more effective. And so I think it is both changing attitudes by touching people's hearts but it's also changing attitudes by providing information.

And while people change as individuals, they are nested in a community of individuals. The more you can use things like professional learning communities where people can really move forward and see in others' successes and experiences how they can realize their aspirations for young people in a more student-centered way, the better.

**Q11. On your Web site, are there interventions directly linked to climate survey domains, such as school connectedness?**

On our Web site, we have a compendium of vetted school climate surveys. Information is provided about the surveys' respondents, domains, and research done to establish the validity of these surveys. You can find that list of school climate surveys here:  
<http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=133>.

We also provide you with information that will help you identify evidence-based programs here:  
<http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=32>. One other source where you can find things that may be helpful is [findyouthinfo.gov](http://findyouthinfo.gov), which includes information on evidence based programs that are available across the federal government.

**Q12. Would you comment on the role of the point person at the school level to lead school climate improvement efforts and how much time that person may need to lead such efforts?**

About a decade ago, the Safe and Drug Free School Program supported prevention coordinators in schools. And they were full-time positions and they were very, very important because they helped schools be strategic in addressing issues. You want a point person. You want someone who owns it, which doesn't mean they do everything, but really feels responsible. You want to give them as much time as possible, but there is no one answer. The key is that if one person

does not have a sufficient amount of time, that's when you want that owner to have a team of people who can deploy things as well.