Article # 6, “First Things First: Demystifying Data Analysis” by Mike Schmoker

The key question that Schmoker addresses in this article is: Which data, well analyzed can help improve teaching and learning? Schmoker suggests that teachers’ use of data has the most direct impact on student achievement. Data analysis can provide teachers with answers to the following two questions: How many students are succeeding in the courses I teach? Within those subjects what are the areas of strength or weakness? Answers to these essential questions yield imperative information that drives instructional practice which can greatly enhance student learning. An important point that Schmoker presents in this article is the tendency of educational leaders to make the use and analysis of student achievement data a complex and onerous task for teachers. This statement implies that the effective use of data depends on the simplicity in which it is presented to teachers. Teams of teachers should collaborate and create attainable goals focused on the specific areas where their students need to make improvements. Teachers must target their analysis of data to answer such questions as: Within an identified subject area where do we need to direct our collective attention and expertise? The main point of this article is that educational leaders have a responsibility to provide teachers with the data they need to conduct meaningful, purposeful, targeted analyses of student achievement data in order to make informed decisions to improve student performance.