

# Preface

What does it look like when a school uses data wisely? As researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and as current and former K–12 teachers, administrators, and consultants, we have been lucky enough to work with many leaders—both teachers and administrators—who are committed to using data to measure, understand, and improve student learning in their schools. The stories of a few of those leaders form the heart of this book. These individuals have worked to foster school cultures that support a collaborative process of inquiry, planning, and reflection. Still, they are not superheroes—just caring educators who, despite real challenges, use evidence and collaboration to improve student learning. If you are such an educator pursuing similar goals in your own school, we hope the stories in this book will provide insight and inspiration to guide your work.

In 2005 we shared a collaborative process for using data in *Data Wise: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning*. The nineteen authors of that book, which was edited by Kathryn Boudett, Elizabeth City, and Richard Murnane, included faculty members and doctoral students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) as well as school leaders from the Boston Public Schools. The book offered a practical, step-by-step approach that would provide busy teachers and administrators with a comprehensive model for using data—including but not limited to standardized test data—to identify

common student learning needs, to generate and implement instructional solutions, and to measure those solutions' effectiveness at raising student achievement within a department, grade-level, or school.

*Data Wise* incorporated vignettes about two fictional schools, Clark K–8 School and Franklin High School, to illustrate the steps of the process. The fictional schools were composites of real schools in which the book's many authors had worked. The vignettes illustrated typical issues, dilemmas, and conversations that arise within schools at each stage of the Data Wise improvement process.

Since its publication, *Data Wise* has been read by tens of thousands of school leaders, many of whom have shared the book with colleagues and staff. It has also become the core text of the graduate, summer, and online Data Wise courses offered at HGSE. Students from around the world have told us that they have found it a valuable and practical resource.

However, the success of *Data Wise* has generated a new demand among school leaders: to hear real stories from schools that are implementing the process. Over and over, people who have read the book have told us that they wished there were a real Clark or Franklin from whose experiences they could learn. With *Data Wise in Action*, we hope to grant this wish.

In deciding to develop this book of case studies, we knew of a number of schools that had been implementing the Data Wise improvement process for several years.

Those who had been doing the work longest had participated in the early years of a graduate Data Wise course sponsored jointly by HGSE and the Boston Public Schools. We also knew of schools that, after participating in HGSE's Data Wise summer institute or reading the book, had begun implementing the process more recently. We chose eight schools to feature in this book and talked to staff members at each school about how they had implemented one or more of the eight Data Wise steps. Through these case studies, we attempt to illuminate the leadership challenges schools face and the strategies they use to overcome those challenges.

This book is intended first and foremost for educators who are interested in implementing—or are already working to implement—the Data Wise improvement process in their schools. Current and potential “Data Wise leaders” work in a wide variety of schools and hold a wide range of positions, including classroom teachers, principals and headmasters, assistant principals, instructional directors, and peer coaches. Some Data Wise leaders are seasoned teaching veterans; others are enthusiastic educators new to the field. Some have little experience with data analysis, while others are longtime data explorers. What unites them all is an interest in working with colleagues to use data to improve student learning.

A key goal of this book is to present examples and concrete suggestions about how to implement the Data Wise improvement process, while also illustrating the complexity (and messiness!) of the work. A second goal is to demonstrate how the schools we profiled adapted the Data Wise process to fit their particular needs. We hope that showing

the variety of ways in which schools used the process will help drive home the point that there is no one “best way” to do this work. Our final goal is to illustrate that Data Wise school cultures often start with a single leader and spread outward. In your school, that single leader could be you.

In writing this book, we have been extremely fortunate to have the support of many individuals. Kathleen McCartney, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Bob Fogel, Dean for Administration, have been steadfast supporters of the Data Wise project since its inception. Their dedication to fostering a community that informs the nexus of practice, policy, and research has been a major source of inspiration for our work. We are grateful for the financial support they provided for this research through the Dean's Dissemination Fund, which was made possible by a generous grant from Al and Kate Merck. We are also particularly indebted to Keith Collar, Executive Director of Research, Innovation, and Outreach at HGSE, who has accompanied us every step of the way on this journey. Keith helped us sharpen our overall vision for the book, regularly attended writers' group meetings, read and commented on drafts, and provided advice throughout the process. The final product owes much to his ideas and commitment.

In addition, we are deeply indebted to our editors at Harvard Education Press, Caroline Chauncey and Douglas Clayton, who have been involved with Data Wise since the idea for the first book began to take shape. We have been incredibly fortunate

to have Caroline at our side throughout the planning, writing, and editing processes. Her creative thinking about this work has never flagged, her insights guided our planning, and her keen eye helped us chisel out crisper, sharper, more compelling versions of each draft that we produced. We are also grateful to Dody Riggs and Jeffrey Perkins, who guided us through the book production and design processes, respectively, and to Daniel Simon, whose finely tuned copyediting added polish to our work.

Richard Murnane and Elizabeth City continued their pioneering involvement with Data Wise by serving as valued advisors to our work. We greatly appreciate their guidance about how to coordinate a case-based project and craft a compelling book as well as their willingness to help us improve preliminary drafts. We also appreciate Mary Grassa O'Neill for all that she and her colleagues at HGSE's Principals' Center have done to support the Data Wise Summer Institute, through which we were introduced to several schools profiled in this book. In addition, Rachel Becker and Virginia Eves offered valuable comments on preliminary drafts, Daniel Koretz provided sage technical and editorial feedback, and Kimberly Steegamely proofread chapters at the eleventh hour. During the project's planning and research phases, Kerry Herman, a senior researcher at the Harvard Business School, met with our writing group and provided expert, step-by-step guidance on both the logistics and the art of case writing. Susan Moore Johnson and Stacey Childress also provided insightful perspectives on the case-writing process. And throughout the project, Melita Garrett offered vital administrative assis-

tance when we needed it most.

Finally, this book would not exist without the administrators and teachers who invited us into their schools, shared their strategies for data use, and told their stories of carrying out the Data Wise improvement process. With gratitude, then, we extend our lasting appreciation to the staff of Pond Cove Elementary, Newton North High, McKay K-8, West Hillsborough Elementary, Murphy K-8, Two Rivers Public Charter, Mason Elementary, and Community Academy, and to the principals who allowed us to profile these schools: Tom Eismeier, Jennifer Price, Almi Abeyta, Anthony Ranii, Mary Russo, Jessica Wodatch, Janet Palmer-Owens, and Lindsa McIntyre. We were continually impressed by the commitment and creativity these principals and their staff members bring to their work, and we hope we have done justice to the incredible efforts underway in these schools. We are honored to share their stories.