

## FOCUS

### MEASURING IMPACT

#### Why evaluations fail:

To achieve meaningful results, address these common challenges.

*By Joellen Killian*

In schools and school systems, educators who lead, facilitate, manage, and advocate professional learning as a primary means for improving educators' professional practice and student results struggle to find practical, meaningful, cost-effective, and timely means to evaluate this crucial work. Evaluation of professional learning is challenging work primarily for three reasons: clarity of outcomes, clarity of the evaluation's purpose, and appropriate methodology and design. This article explores these challenges and recommends ways to avoid them.

#### Where do you want to get to?

Effective professional learning begins with a clear destination in mind.

*By Thomas R. Guskey*

Educators often shy away from evaluating professional learning experiences because they believe the process requires knowledge and skills they don't possess. As a result, they either neglect evaluation procedures completely or leave them to "experts" who come in at the end and gather data to determine if anything made a difference. But these ad hoc procedures rarely yield information that helps educators improve the quality or effectiveness of their professional learning experiences. In truth, evaluation is a relatively simple process that begins by answering three essential questions.

#### Learning that's made to measure:

Embedded assessments gauge educators' growth and impact.

*By Giselle O. Martin-Kniep and Rebecca Shubert*

Educators from 10 school districts

sought to learn about and assess critical thinking, metacognition, and problem solving. They worked collaboratively in small teams, first to uncover their understandings of these outcomes, then to determine what to assess and what metrics to use and, finally, to engage in peer reviews as they completed different drafts of their work. Such collaborative work enabled them to draft and field-test assessment tools aimed at evaluating or promoting these outcomes. Their experience illustrates how program-embedded assessment can help facilitators and learners document their learning while revealing the inherent complexities of assessing hard-to-measure learning outcomes.

#### Partners in a common cause:

External evaluators team with practitioners to build data use practices.

*By Stephanie B. Wilkerson and Margie Johnson*

A partnership between educators in Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee and external evaluators with Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL Appalachia), with funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, used a well-defined process to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of a new data use initiative from its inception. The partnership created awareness and understanding of the evaluation process along with buy-in and produced lessons to guide evaluators and practitioners interested in establishing collaborative evaluation partnerships.

#### Pilot program aims high:

Challenges en route help district find success in measuring impact.

*By Eric Celeste*

Denver Public Schools' Professional Learning Center decided to tackle a problem of practice that has vexed systems and departments across the country: How to measure the impact of professional learning. To do so, the center created a new comprehensive measurement approach. The complex task came with an added challenge: That program would be tested within the confines of another department's high-profile efforts to launch an early literacy initiative involving 2,500 teachers. Along the way were struggles, modifications, and lessons learned that eventually helped the program bear fruit.

## IDEAS

#### An argument for learning:

Science teachers and students build literacy through text-based investigations.

*By Cynthia Greenleaf and Willard R. Brown*

One of the hallmarks of the Reading Apprenticeship approach to professional learning is that teachers actively inquire into the processes by which they work through comprehension problems in texts. They learn the art of making their invisible thinking processes visible. This helps them see more clearly that they have internal resources to help students master similar kinds of thinking processes. Participants in the California Teacher Inquiry Network learned how to use texts as resources for

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inquiry, deepen their understanding of disciplinary argumentation, and explore what is involved in developing models to explain scientific phenomena.

### **Growing support for principals:**

Principal supervisors collaborate and problem solve in learning communities.

*By Jill A. Baker and Gary S. Bloom*

Over the past four years, the role of principal supervisor in Long Beach Unified School District in California has shifted from compliance and at-a-distance supervision practices to a deeply rooted coaching orientation, support for addressing student achievement issues, and a focus on quality instruction in every classroom. A professional learning community equips principal supervisors with the skills to support principals.

*This article is sponsored by The Wallace Foundation.*

### **What literacy means in math class:**

Teacher team explores ways to remake instruction to develop students' skills.

*By Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, and Megin Charner-Laird*

A team of six high school math teachers in Brookline, Massachusetts, participated in a two-year exploration of disciplinary literacy in content classrooms. The team chose a colleague in the department as team leader to facilitate weekly professional learning community meetings for two years and

help guide the team's inquiry into and exploration of various aspects of literacy instruction in math settings. As a result of their work, the teachers designed instructional routines in math classes that are sensitive to and supportive of students' development of the literacy skills necessary for mathematics.

## **VOICES**

### **MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

Andrea von Biberstein, teacher and program coordinator at Ridgeview Charter School in Sandy Springs, Georgia.

### **OUR TAKE**

**Bring your best evidence forward to show professional learning's worth.**

*By Tracy Crow*

The persistence of negative perceptions about professional learning makes it all the more imperative that educators include evaluation as a vital component of their planning.

### **WHAT I'VE LEARNED**

**Let's focus on quality of instruction rather than quantity.**

*By Michael McNeff*

We seem to think that if we have more time in front of kids, they will learn more. What if we reduce the amount of instructional time and build in teacher collaboration that is focused on improving instruction?

## **ASK**

**How do I justify the professional learning plan for my school under ESSA?**

*By Stephanie Hirsh*

Guidance documents on implementation explain ESSA's four levels of evidence.

## **BEING FORWARD**

**Bring stakeholders on board by gathering multiple measures of success.**

*By Scott Laurence*

It's important that professional learning leaders continue to find ways to document success and tie it to teacher excellence and student achievement.

## **RESEARCH**

### **RESEARCH REVIEW**

**Meta-analysis reveals coaching's positive impact on instruction and achievement.**

*By Joellen Killian*

A meta-analysis of 37 studies of teacher coaching, many focused on literacy coaching, reveals that coaching positively affects both teaching practice and student achievement.

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