Evaluating professional learning

in this issue ...

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL
THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

in this issue ...

FOCUS 21
ON EVALUATION

IDEAS 41

I SAY

Cindy Marten

U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education

"The NETP (National Educational Technology Plan) calls for what we know we need — ongoing, job-embedded professional learning for teachers to effectively use edtech for learning."

— Source: Speaking at the launch event of the National Educational Technology Plan on Jan. 22 at the White House.

To learn more about the National Educational Technology Plan and its professional learning implications, see pp. 73-74.

[NEW]

Standards Assessment Inventory

Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) is a valid and reliable survey administered to instructional staff that measures alignment of school and system practices to the Standards for Professional Learning.

The SAI provides crucial data on professional learning in your schools to help you identify needs, maximize resources, and focus on areas of greatest priority to improve teaching and students' success.

Survey responses from your instructional staff reveal the state of high-quality learning in your school, district, or system.
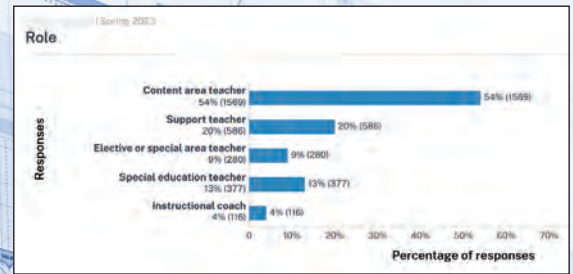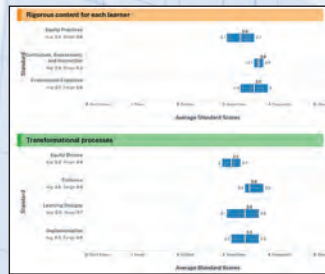
THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY:

- Provides data on teachers' perceptions of the professional learning they experience in their schools.

- Reveals the degree of success or challenges systems face with professional learning practices and implementation in the system as a whole and in individual schools.

- Provides data on the quality of professional learning as defined by the Standards for Professional Learning, a system's alignment of professional learning to the standards, and the relationship of the standards to improvements in educator effectiveness and student achievement.

- Elicits extensive collegial conversations among teachers and administrators about the qualities of professional learning that produce results for students.

- Connects the Standards for Professional Learning (vision) with educator Action Guides, Innovation Configuration maps, and other planning and implementation tools.

- Helps schools focus on particular actions that contribute to higher-quality professional learning as guided by the questions on the inventory.

SAI PRICING:

One school $500

Systems with fewer than 15 .... $750 plus $70 per school participating schools

Systems with more than 15 ....$1,000 plus $70 per school participating schools

State/provinces with 30% of all schools ....$60 per school participating

States/provinces with less than 30% ....$1,000 plus $70 per school of all schools participating

Regional service centers.........................$1,000 plus $70 per school

Projects that do not fit into the categories above will be priced on an individual basis. Price includes two administrations of the survey in one school year, detailed district and school reports available on the SAI website, additional resources and support materials, and a 45-minute data analysis consultation with Learning Forward.

For more information on the SAI, contact **Tom Manning**, senior vice president, professional services, Learning Forward, at **tom.manning@ learningforward.org**.

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

LOOKING BACK HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE PATH FORWARD

Twenty years ago, this journal, which was then called *JSD*, was my first introduction to the unique considerations involved in evaluating professional learning. I was struck by how field leaders like Hayes Mizell, Joellen Killion, and Thomas Guskey provided guidance so elegant that the complex process of program evaluation seemed straightforward and almost natural.

Of course, elegance only *looks* easy. You'd be hard pressed to find a professional learning leader who would call evaluation easy, even among the experts named here. That's why we still need guidance on how to do it and why we continue to hear impassioned calls to use the best methods available to fortify the evidence base.

As I've reread many years' worth of articles and books, I have seen the phrase "evaluation is more important now than ever" repeated frequently. Yet it never reads like a cliché because it is always true, and now is no exception. With federal funds on the chopping block (again), ideological and strategic divisions, and competing priorities due to students' compounding needs, it is of the utmost importance that we ensure professional learning is making a difference and document the impact. This issue is devoted to supporting your efforts to do just that.

This issue builds on *The Learning Professional's* ongoing research and evaluation features to go deep into the topic. If you've been reading the journal for a long time, you'll see updates to some classic resources, including Killion's 2003 article, "8 smooth steps," which was the first thing I — and many other educators — ever read about evaluating professional learning. The new version, "Is your professional learning working? 8 steps to find out," has revised tools and timely examples.

At the same time, this issue highlights fresh voices and new directions in professional learning research and evaluation. For example, the Research Partnership for Professional Learning shares its efforts to increase studies' rigor, and the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network, in collaboration with NWEA, describes a collaborative approach to designing and evaluating a statewide professional learning initiative.

Our team is pleased to debut some new features for the 2024 issues of *The Learning Professional*. The Changemakers column highlights educators whose professional learning work is making a difference for schools, systems, and students, as shared by their colleagues. The series kicks off with Stacie Angel, supervisor of instructional services for the Berkley School District in Michigan, who was nominated by colleague Angela Church.

District Member Spotlight showcases systems that are making high-quality professional learning a priority across schools, with the help of Learning Forward's district membership. In this issue, you'll hear from Melvina Crawl, who credits district membership with helping her build standards-aligned professional learning in Georgia and Virginia.

Finally, we're making *The Learning Professional* easier to read than ever, with a digital flipbook version that allows you to turn the "pages" onscreen. Log in to our website to find this feature on each new issue's landing page. The traditional PDF format will continue to be available as well.

Evaluation is more than a topic we write about. It's a value we prioritize in all our work. To help us make our resources the best they can be, we encourage you to participate in our annual member surveys and focus groups and we invite you to reach out at any time with feedback. ∎

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@ learningforward. org) is editor of *The Learning Professional*.

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VOICES

LEADERS MAKE AN IMPACT

Leaders' roles in high-quality professional learning should be supported and celebrated. Leaders at all levels — classrooms, schools, district offices, and beyond — have a big effect on whether educators' learning leads to student learning. They influence every stage of the process, from professional learning goals (p. 14), to implementation (p. 12 and p. 16), to evaluation (p. 8).

SHOW YOUR COMMUNITY THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Evaluation allows us to document and share the changes we are making that benefit students. That kind of transparency builds trust.

When I was a child, it never occurred to me that my teachers and principal were still learning. I just assumed they knew everything they would ever need to know. And even though Mom and Dad were very involved in my education, I suspect it never occurred to them, either, that my school's esteemed staff would need to engage in continued growth and development.

My perspective changed when I became a teacher and then a principal. Everything I did was in service to students, including a commitment to growth and improvement. Students and their parents were more than just my customers — they were my purpose. And I owed it to them to learn everything I could to meet their needs.

Now I have language for this, in the form of the Professional Expertise standard of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. It reminds us that educators need to "continually build their discipline-specific expertise to understand the conceptual foundations that undergird their roles and responsibilities" (Learning Forward, 2022). As an elementary teacher, that meant staying abreast of evidence-based strategies to meet the academic needs of each and every one of my students. As a principal, it meant continuing to build my own leadership skills to strengthen the conditions in my school for optimal learning and teaching. And as CEO of Learning Forward, it includes building a professional learning community with other association and field leaders to continually strengthen my professional learning and leadership skill sets.

But this kind of learning is still not transparent to most students and parents. If I were a student today, I would probably make the same assumptions I did when I was a child. It's time to change that pattern. And one of the strategies we need to do so is the focus of this issue of *The Learning Professional*: evaluation. In this issue, you'll hear from several authors about why it's important to document and share evidence that professional learning is making a difference for students. I'll add two of my own reasons: modeling the importance of learning for your community and demonstrating impact to policymakers.

SHARE THE RESULTS OF YOUR LEARNING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Although I quickly learned the value of professional learning, it took me time to realize the importance of sharing that message with students and parents to model learning as a priority for everyone. As a teacher, I remember going to my first National Council of Teachers of Mathematics conference. I came back with so many new strategies and ideas to try with my students. It didn't take long for them to see the fruits of my learning, but I never made that connection for them. I never took time to say, "This new strategy is something I learned at the conference." As I look back, I realize those were missed opportunities.

As a principal, I got better at sharing my learning with students and parents. I remember taking a group of teachers, a parent, and a student to the Coalition of Essential Schools conference. I invited the parent, who was a member of our parent-teacher organization, because

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I wanted her to see what we were learning and communicate it to fellow parents. I invited the student to present the work of my principal's advisory council, a group of students who helped me as a principal think creatively about teaching and learning in my school, and to encourage him to communicate to his classmates how his teachers and principal were learning to improve their practice.

Over time, I have learned that sharing our learning journeys with students and parents is important, but it's not enough. They also deserve to know the impact of our professional learning. Evaluation allows us to document and share the changes we are making that benefit students. That kind of transparency builds trust, which is an essential component of school leadership and high-quality teaching. It also helps parents understand why we take time for learning and helps them become supporters and allies of professional learning, even when it means changes to their students' schedules.

As a field, we know a great deal about how to effectively measure the impact of professional learning. Yet we often miss opportunities to use those methods and invest the time and effort necessary. To change that pattern, we need to take consistent and concrete steps to make evaluation a priority and share the results. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Have a strategy for showing the short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes of your learning. For many, the creation of a logic model can be a helpful tool in documenting that journey. Learn more about logic models and many other useful tools on p. 58 and throughout this issue of the journal.
- Create a culture where outcomes are transparent and accessible to parents and students. For students, it can be as simple as saying, "I learned these new strategies as part of my

professional learning. Now you get to benefit from that learning." For parents, you might share data showing aggregated student improvements that can be tied to teacher practice informed by the professional learning experience.
- When the data give you reasons to celebrate, do it! Share in the parent newsletter, on the marquee outside the building, or during events.

MAKE THE CASE TO POLICYMAKERS

There is another important reason to conduct and share the results of evaluation: the dollars to support professional learning may disappear if we can't make valid arguments for their continuation. At this very moment, there is a political debate about funding to support professional learning. In recent months, you've heard Learning Forward describe how the early budget negotiations in the U.S. House of Representatives effectively zero out Title IIA, the funds many districts count on to support their professional learning efforts. These dollars pay for instructional coaches and other positions, teachers' and leaders' opportunities to attend external learning events, and more. At the core of the debate in Washington, D.C., is the question, "Does professional learning actually make a difference for students?" We need to show that it does. If we can't make that case with evidence, the dollars may disappear.

Learning Forward is continually collecting data to make that case. For example, the meta-analysis we conducted with the American Institutes for Research showed that activities aligned to the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning resulted in student growth (Garrett et al., 2021). Our organization will continue to collect more evidence on the impact of professional learning. But we are also counting on districts and schools — counting on you — to contribute to this growing evidence base.

Advocacy for professional learning funding is not only a federal issue. At the district level, school boards across the U.S. and in other countries are making decisions about whether and how to use funds to support professional learning. If school board members don't understand the impact of professional learning, they are less likely to prioritize dollars to support it.

Here are steps you can take to help:
- Collect the evidence and show your data about the impact of professional learning on educator practice and results for students.
- Share your stories of impact locally with students and parents. During school board meetings, take time to describe the learning journey of your teachers and principals. Help board members understand the role professional learning played in improving educator practice and results for students.
- Don't be afraid to bring parents to professional learning activities, whether local or outside the district. Parents can become your biggest advocates when they understand the power of professional learning.

As we at Learning Forward continue to strengthen our documentation of the impact of professional learning, we promise to share our learning with you and other stakeholders. Together, we can make the case for the power of professional learning as a key lever for meeting the needs of each and every student.

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Learning Forward. (2022). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Author. ■

Melvina Crawl, Alexandria City Public Schools, Virginia

VIRGINIA DISTRICT BUILDS A PATH TO STANDARDS-ALIGNED LEARNING

The world is changing, our families, our culture is changing, and the way we teach and lead is changing. Professional learning can support all of these changes.

Melvina Crawl knows the importance of making a districtwide commitment to educator learning that aligns to the Standards for Professional Learning. As executive director of professional learning and federal programs for Alexandria City Public Schools in Virginia, Crawl is nurturing a systemic approach to build all educators' capacity in the service of student learning. A Learning Forward district membership is a central part of that approach.

Crawl began in her current role in September 2023. She saw the benefits of district membership when she was director of professional learning in Griffin-Spalding County Schools, Georgia. That district became proficient in the Standards for Professional Learning, used the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) to evaluate and improve professional learning, and leveraged publications, webinars, and other resources to build a common understanding of high-quality professional learning across the district. (Learn more about the SAI on p. 38 of this issue.) Crawl also advocated for the standards to become part of the local school division policy, and now they are — a milestone that makes her proud. Griffin-Spalding, a 21-school district serving 9,400 students, continues its Learning Forward district membership.

Shortly after joining Alexandria City Public Schools, a district of over 16,000 students and 18 schools, Crawl pursued a Learning Forward district membership. The district has used Learning Forward resources in the past, but this is the first year with a district membership. As the district becomes familiar with its membership resources, Crawl's goals are to align the district's professional learning plan and priorities with the Standards for Professional Learning and support her staff in implementing the standards throughout their work so that all students benefit from instructional excellence. Crawl talked about standards-based professional learning with Associate Editor Jefna Cohen.

Why does professional learning matter, and why do you do this work?

After 25 years of working in public education, I truly believe that professional learning is key to making a difference in the quality of teaching and leading in schools across the nation. Our children come to us each day and we are impacting their lives, possibly for the rest of our lives. Professional learning is how we as professionals grow and improve our practices so we can better equip our students and families to achieve their goals, leading to greater achievements in student outcomes. [It] is a powerful tool because it allows us to grow individually and collectively through collaboration with our peers within our existing divisions and beyond. Professional learning has helped me refine my practice. It should never be the first item on the chopping block when considering funding cuts. If anything, we should be pouring more money into professional learning to support the attraction, recruitment, and retention of employees. The world is changing, our families, our culture is changing, and the way we teach and lead is changing. Professional learning can support all of these changes.

How are you building systemwide use of the Standards for Professional Learning?

One of the areas I will focus on in the upcoming year is bringing awareness to the Standards for Professional Learning. This includes ensuring the central office, school building leadership, and the instructional leadership team are all trained on the standards so we can align them to our work.

To help us meet this goal, I will be inviting staff to take advantage of the online Standards for Professional Learning course that is part of our district membership. For the people who take the online course, I invite them to join me in small sessions that make sure everybody is aware and understands how we will use the standards in aligning our professional learning. The standards are key in aligning professional learning work. In the previous district where I served, we included the standards in training for new teacher orientation, new instructional coaches, and new administrators. We provided a (standards) class, and I would make sure that they had copies of the standards books. By offering the training each year, it helps to build sustainability of implementation and alignment.

To further support use of the standards, they are built into the professional learning management system. As courses are entered into that system, course builders can select the standard that is used to design the professional learning experience, whether it is a course or series. That is one way I can check that we are actually using them and aligning correctly.

How does this work connect to your district's strategic goals?

Our division has a five-year strategic plan with five goal areas and division priorities. As schools and division staff design their professional learning, they also identify the strategic goal area that aligns to the professional learning. We are currently engaged in a division professional learning needs assessment as we prepare to plan for the upcoming year. I look forward to analyzing the data with our division team and planning how we can strengthen our professional learning practices.

The Standards Assessment Inventory is part of the district membership. What role has that played in your work to build high-quality professional learning?

In my previous district, staff took the SAI every year because the data was used to support our federal grants. In Alexandria City Public Schools, we are going to administer the SAI in March, and we will use the results as a source of data for our division improvement plan and school improvement plans, as well as for our Title I grant and Title II grant, which primarily funds professional learning. I am excited about seeing the results for this year to identify the areas that we can strengthen in the upcoming year.

What role does the district membership play in your teacher recruitment strategy?

New teachers coming into the profession often do not have money to invest in professional membership and organizations because they are just getting started. This year, I will be sharing our district membership at our in-person recruitment event in February because our district membership is a valuable asset. I love the resources and tools that they have (access to) as part of their beginning year. I will also share this information at our upcoming new teacher orientation this summer.

With district membership, you also get one job announcement in the Learning Forward Career Center. I like that feature because you have nationwide coverage. You can expand your reach to other areas nationwide and even internationally. This job announcement is being used to support hard-to-fill positions.

What are your goals for the district membership over the next year?

Since the district membership is new here, I am launching a campaign to make sure everybody knows all of the features that are available, and I run that in our district newsletter. My goal is to continue to spread the word in our principal meetings and senior leadership team meetings so that more and more staff are aware of this resource and how it can benefit their teams.

We had one staff member complete the Learning Forward Academy, and I would like to have more staff participate in the upcoming year. In addition, we took a team of 13 staff to the Learning Forward Annual Conference this past December, and we look forward to attending the conference in Denver in December 2024.

As I reflect upon the upcoming year, I see a more robust system of professional learning with incorporation of the Standards for Professional Learning. Our division is doing amazing things with a focus on positive culture and increased student achievement. I consider it an honor and privilege to serve with wonderful, high-caliber leaders focused on creating positive experiences for our students, our families, and our staff.

What is the district membership's superpower?

Learning Forward's district membership is such a great resource with lots of tools on so many different topics. It is great to have resources available to our instructional coaches, our assistant principals, and principals. Teams can use the resources to support learning communities or individuals can support their own professional growth goals. The Learning Forward district membership is like a toolbox that you have available to help you in your journey as an educational professional. ■

FOCUS ON PRINCIPALS
Ayesha Farag

HOW CAN WE SUSTAIN AND RETAIN PRINCIPALS?

As my district's assistant superintendent for elementary education, I supervise, support, and evaluate 15 elementary school principals. From this work, as well as my own 14 years as a principal, I can attest to the challenges principals face and the need for ongoing support, networking, and professional learning to sustain and retain strong school leaders.

Despite the vital importance of principals in teaching and learning (Grissom et al., 2021), many who choose the role do not remain in the profession for long. Twenty percent of principals leave their schools in a given year (NCES, 2023), and the average tenure of principals is only four years (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

While much research has focused on supporting aspiring and novice principals, far less has focused on how to support experienced principals' ongoing growth, effectiveness, and longevity. I believe this is key to understanding and reversing the troubling trend in principal attrition and ensuring strong leadership for all schools.

I looked to the principals with whom I work for insight because their role longevity exceeds national averages. I wanted to know what fuels their commitment and continued job satisfaction despite mounting complexity and challenges in recent years. Here are themes I heard from the principals.

Build and maintain a supportive ecosystem.

Principals are more likely to stay in their roles when they work within a supportive and collaborative district ecosystem. Principals note that their job satisfaction and longevity is enhanced by environments characterized by trust, transparent communication, and commitment to building relationships — elements of psychological safety, "the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes" (Edmondson, 2012).

Principals further appreciate when their supervisors model and support their need for balance, acknowledge and respond to the daily stressors inherent in their roles as school leaders, and provide genuine opportunities for involvement in decision-making and problem-solving.

Identify core values and align them with actions.

My principal colleagues shared that their commitment is bolstered by the alignment between their personal values and those of the district. For example, our district's school leaders are deeply devoted to principles of equity and social justice, and they derive immense fulfillment from our district work in this area.

When districts lead with clarity about their values and emphasize what they consider paramount, it helps them recruit and hire principals who will be a good fit and enables principals to seek positions in districts that share their values. Once principals are hired, this alignment of values can help them find a sense of purpose and direction in their work that helps them navigate challenges. Research shows the vital role of clearly held values in inspiring perseverance and

> **Principals are more likely to stay in their roles when they work within a supportive and collaborative district ecosystem.**

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Principal supervisors can cultivate the three conditions for principal longevity by asking themselves the questions in the second column, using the questions in the third column to guide discussions or surveys with principals and incorporating responses into next action steps.

Keys to principal longevity	Guiding questions for principal supervisors	Discussion/survey questions for principals
Supportive ecosystem and regular collaboration	How can I cultivate a district ecosystem that fosters trust, transparent communication, and intentional relationship building for principals? How can I foster a collaborative community of practice among principals to enhance collective learning and support?	What is your perception of trust, transparency, and your opportunities for contributing to decision-making within the district? What processes and structures best support you in your role as a principal? How can I strengthen support for you in your role?
Alignment with values and vision	How can I communicate and reinforce the district's vision and values and create a shared understanding and commitment among principals? How can I support principals in translating their visions and values and that of the district into actionable strategies within their schools?	To what extent do you feel that districtwide decisions and policies reflect and promote shared values, and in what ways can this alignment be improved? Reflect on the driving force behind your work as a principal. What intrinsic "why" motivates your daily efforts, and how does it show up in your leadership?
Opportunities for continuous professional learning	How can I identify and respond to principals' collective and individual learning needs? To what extent is the professional learning provided to principals aligned with the overall goals and priorities of the school or district?	What structures or support mechanisms do you believe are crucial for your ongoing learning and success as a principal? What specific skills or areas of expertise would you most like to develop further? How do you imagine doing so would enhance your leadership?

managing stress in challenging times (Brown, 2018; McGonigal, 2016).

Principal supervisors can work with principals to identify their values and reflect on aligning values and actions. Allocating time for this work allows principals to feel invested in the collective purpose, which, in turn, further enhances their capacity to navigate the demands of their roles.

Prioritize continuous professional learning.

Principals thrive when they feel challenged to improve and have access to continuous support. My colleagues said that tailored professional learning, peer collaboration, and consistent growth opportunities are integral to success, motivation, and commitment to school leadership. It's important to create clear structures for dedicated, specialized support that addresses real problems encountered in practice, is responsive to the multifaceted nature of principals'

responsibilities, and helps them to build their repertoire of leadership knowledge and strategies relevant to their role.

Principal supervisors should prioritize fostering effective practices outlined in research sponsored by The Wallace Foundation: instructional leadership, fostering positive school climates, supporting collaboration and professional learning, and effective management of personnel and resources (Grissom et al., 2021).

THE KEY ROLE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

Principal supervisors play a key role in establishing these conditions and opportunities (Goldring et al., 2018). Assistant superintendents and other district leaders should develop and sustain open channels of communication and regular engagement with principals, not only to provide resources and facilitate reflection, but also to gather feedback and respond in ways that can

improve the district's work. Specific steps include:

- **Institute regular check-ins and promote hands-on support**, including school visits to gain firsthand insight into daily challenges.
- **Facilitate collaborative learning and decision-making opportunities**, bringing principals together regularly to create a community of practice and engage in shared decision-making and problem-solving.
- **Promote reflective goal-setting**, prompting principals to articulate and align personal vision and values with professional and school goals.
- **Frequently communicate alignment of decisions with district values**.
- **Promote peer learning communities** where principals

LEADERSHIP TEAMS

Jody Spiro and Douglas Fisher

STRONG TEAMS START WITH COLLECTIVE VISION AND EARLY WINS

In summer 2023, we shared an overview of why leadership teams are important for school success on Learning Forward's blog (Spiro & Fisher, 2023). We are pleased to have the opportunity to write a recurring column for *The Learning Professional* to explore leadership teams in more depth, focusing on what makes them successful.

Strong leadership teams are an important way that site leaders accomplish their goals. Leaders cannot make every decision or direct every action within their school, much less teach all the students. Leadership teams spread the workload and responsibility among a wider group of people and create feedback loops for ongoing communication and consistency.

Two foundational elements for developing leadership teams are setting a collective vision and establishing an early win to demonstrate the feasibility of achieving the vision.

The collective vision is an agreed-upon definition of what the team should accomplish. When all team members have a clear and consistent vision, they are more likely to allocate their time and effort toward accomplishing what is most important. Conversely, when teams do not have a shared understanding, members may be at odds with one another's goals.

Teams should be able to clearly and succinctly answer questions such as:
- Why does this team exist?
- What are our priorities?
- What commitments do we make?
- What do we want to achieve as a team?
- How does our vision align with the school (and/or district's) vision?

Doing so is an important aspect of collective efficacy, but one that is often missed. Collective efficacy is not simply believing in the team's ability to do good things, but drawing on evidence that the team is increasingly successful in reaching goals.

To demonstrate this success, teams need to monitor their progress toward reaching goals. A tool that can assist with this is an early win — a concrete, observable result achieved in a short time that contributes to ultimately accomplishing the larger vision. An early win demonstrates that the vision is feasible and likely to result in benefits for those involved.

Having an early win helps everyone see that they are on an effective path. It establishes momentum and builds confidence among team members and the entire community.

If the team waits until it can document full success in achieving the vision, there may be too long a gap between setting the vision and seeing results, leading the team and the community to lose faith that the vision can be accomplished.

For example, if the team has a vision of dramatic improvement in student achievement, boosting standardized test scores will not occur overnight. But steps such as documenting and reviewing students' classroom work to gauge progress can help ensure the work is starting to make a difference and bolster the team's and community's confidence that they are on the right track.

The early win must be carefully designed for maximum effect. Here are important characteristics of an early win that the leadership team should consider when planning:

Having an early win establishes momentum and builds confidence among team members and the entire community.

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- **Perceived by the team as furthering the achievement of the vision.** Achieving a win just to have a success means little if it doesn't move the vision forward. The vision should always undergird the work.
- **Tangible and observable within a few weeks.** The leadership team needs to define specifically what work will be undertaken and when.
- **Symbolic of a shared value.** When the school and district community perceive the win as furthering their values, it will ultimately become part of the culture. This will help create the kind of lasting improvements sought by the leadership team.

Celebrating early wins is important, not just for the leadership team but for the community as a whole. This step is too often overlooked. Planning ahead with milestones, deadlines, and opportunities for sharing results can help.

At the same time, when looking at early results, the team can learn from what isn't working and engage in continuous improvement processes to get on track. The team can never know everything up front, and a "learn as you go along" approach is important.

Here are some examples of ways leadership teams can establish early wins:

- **Do a values clarification exercise** to find out what is most important to the team, faculty, and students to form the foundation of the vision. Build next steps, including professional learning, around those values.
- **Create subject-area teams** that engage in 45-day continuous improvement cycles to review student achievement and evidence of progress, and plan accordingly for the next 45 days. Design each cycle's goals to be achievable in the allotted time frame to encourage wins that build momentum and lead to further wins.
- **Engage teachers in peer observations** through classroom visits. Use a short, standard protocol for observation and documentation. Create opportunities for participating teachers to present their learning to the leadership team and faculty and use the insights to spread best practices or revise practices and processes as needed. Some districts organize visits across schools and include central office staff to encourage learning and shared understanding throughout the district.

Communication between the leadership team and the school community should occur early and often. The team's vision and early wins — as well as future steps — should be transparent to the entire school community and reflect the community's larger values.

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FOCUS ON PRINCIPALS / Ayesha Farag

can collaborate, share insights, and learn from each other's experiences.
- **Encourage action research projects** that directly address challenges in their schools, promoting hands-on and practical learning experiences.
- **Establish a feedback loop** to collect input from principals regarding the effectiveness of learning opportunities and make adjustments accordingly to meet evolving needs.

Supporting principals thoughtfully and strategically takes an investment of resources, including time and effort, which can be affected by district size, organizational structure, the availability of networks, and other factors. Regardless of size and resources, though, principal supervisors should be deliberate in their efforts to understand and respond to principals' needs.

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CHANGEMAKERS:
STACIE ANGEL

NOMINATED BY ANGELA CHURCH

Stacie Angel is supervisor of instructional services in the Berkley (Michigan) School District. In her nomination, colleague Angela Church says, "Stacie's guidance has led to a cultural shift that emphasizes learning for everyone."

Welcome to our new column featuring the people behind professional learning that is making a difference for students, educators, and schools. Our first installment directs the spotlight on Stacie Angel, supervisor of instructional services for the Berkley School District in Berkley, Michigan.

Angel was nominated by Angela Church, a secondary instructional coach in the same district. Church recognizes Angel's network leadership, her skillful collaboration, how she integrates job-embedded learning and coaching, and the ways Angel lifts up those around her. Here are some highlights of Angel's work, in Church's words.

LEADING JOB-EMBEDDED, STANDARDS-ALIGNED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Stacie led our district in embracing a new literacy approach, supported the implementation of instructional coaches, and has been at the forefront of intentional design that centers learners. She's also led job-embedded professional learning through the Oakland Schools Job-Embedded Professional Learning Network, which strives to support facilitators of job-embedded professional learning and deepen our understanding of effective coaching, leadership, and professional learning in school districts across the county.

As one of the network's primary facilitators, Stacie has helped member coaches, district leaders, educators, and administrators dig into Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and supported them in making connections between their work and the standards.

For the 2022-23 school year, Stacie developed professional learning with her colleagues so sessions for the network were grounded in the standards. We read and analyzed portions of the text, which allowed us time to get familiar with the standards as well as use them to identify how to prioritize our time and resources back in our own districts.

LEVERAGING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO IMPROVE LITERACY

Recently, Stacie introduced our district to disciplinary literacy for middle and high school students. This involves specific reading strategies for understanding, analyzing, and interpreting different content-area texts, since specialized vocabulary and unique text features appear in different disciplines. Though it's new, already we are seeing educators embrace problem-based learning, diversify classroom text offerings, and move toward cohesion at the secondary level. Stacie supported this implementation with instructional coaches while consistently focusing on learner-focused intentional design.

Stacie's guidance has led to a cultural shift that emphasizes learning for everyone. The professional learning process provided time for educators to identify how they read and think about their content areas and how they will implement the practices in their classrooms. The staff work together in deeper ways, as we've begun to establish a culture of collaborative inquiry.

Our processes of developing inquiry questions, identifying instructional practices to address the inquiry, gathering data, and then reflecting on those practices and students' growth have been rewarding. Together we look closely at what we're teaching and what we want students to know, make adjustments, and refine implementation and practice. This cycle of continuous improvement has developed with Stacie's leadership.

A FOCUS ON COLLABORATION

One of the things I admire about Stacie's approach is how she continuously develops and nurtures collaborative structures. Throughout her work, Stacie centers community and uplifts her colleagues. Through her work in the Job-Embedded Professional Learning Network, Stacie has invited other educators to join the leadership team and facilitate portions of the professional learning, allowing educators to highlight the work they are doing in their home districts.

Within the Berkley School District, she leads in a similar way. She seeks opportunities for teachers to share their practices, successes, and challenges so that educators can learn from and with each other.

If you would like to nominate a changemaker, visit **bit.ly/48YbHHL**. ■

RESEARCH

RESEARCH REVIEWS CONNECT THE DOTS

Research syntheses bring together the results of many studies to show what is known about specific topics, such as whether and how professional learning improves instruction for multilingual learners (p. 18). Syntheses provide a "broad landscape of research in the topic area, while also describing individual studies that practitioners might delve into based on their particular context or instructional challenge," writes Elizabeth Foster.

RESEARCH REVIEW
Elizabeth Foster

WHAT WORKS FOR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS? RESEARCH SYNTHESIS OFFERS CLUES

All but one study reported positive changes in teacher knowledge and practice and high fidelity of implementation.

Ensuring multilingual students are supported in accessing academic content is critical to those students achieving grade-level standards. But it can be challenging to determine which evidence-based strategies to employ amidst the pressure of maintaining the pace of lessons and curriculum. Research syntheses are an efficient way to understand what we know so far.

A recent synthesis of research studies about professional learning that supports teachers in addressing the literacy needs of multilingual students with evidence-based instruction and intervention offers guidance and practical strategies as a helpful starting point.

▶ THE STUDY
Shelton, A., Hogan, E., Chow, J., & Wexler, J. (2023). A synthesis of professional development targeting literacy instruction and intervention for English learners. *Review of Educational Research, 93*(1), 37-72.

▶ METHODOLOGY
This synthesis aimed to determine effective strategies to address achievement differences between students who are native English speakers and students who are English learners, often referred to as multilingual students. It is based on a systematic review of studies of professional learning focused on literacy instruction and interventions for multilingual students published between 2000 and 2020. To be included, studies needed to provide a clear description of the professional learning design and duration, explanations of the literacy instructional and intervention activities, and qualitative or quantitative results related to changes in teachers' instructional knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, or practices. Student outcome data were not required but were included in some of the studies. Nineteen studies met the criteria for analysis.

Studies were coded for professional learning provider characteristics, research methodology, the nature and methods of the professional learning, and teacher and student outcomes. The authors noted a large amount of variability in school contexts and research methods. Among the subset of studies that reported student outcomes, there was also a wide range of student characteristics and demographics and a range of classroom settings in which those students were taught (e.g., traditional English language arts classrooms, English immersion settings).

The professional learning was assessed against five characteristics of effective professional learning proposed by Desimone's (2009) review of research: a focus on content, active learning, coherence (with other professional learning, educators' knowledge and beliefs, and school, district, and state policies), sufficient duration (20-plus hours), and collective participation in an interactive learning community.

It was also measured against Ortiz and Robertson's (2018) essential competencies for language and literacy instruction for multilingual learners: understanding of language, language acquisition, bilingualism and biliteracy, ability to create learning environments that value students' linguistic and cultural assets, knowledge of policies and structures that might restrict students' education, and knowledge and skills related to essential elements of instruction for multilingual learners.

The instructional strategies described in the studies were measured against Baker et al.'s (2014) recommendations for effective academic and literacy instruction for multilingual learners: intensive instruction on academic vocabulary words over multiple days in varying activities; incorporating oral and written language instruction in English in content instruction; regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills; and small-group intervention for students

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demonstrating difficulty in literacy and English language.

▶ FINDINGS

Ten studies included professional learning that fully aligned with Desimone's characteristics of effective professional learning. Among all studies, the most frequently aligned characteristics were active learning and content focus. Coherence was difficult to identify or was not described in many studies.

All but one study reported positive changes in teacher knowledge and practice and high fidelity of implementation. These positive changes included teachers being observed using more linguistic and visual scaffolding, incorporating more literacy into instruction in other content areas, and demonstrating increased knowledge about teaching academic vocabulary and making connections between English and Spanish.

Two studies that did not include coaching or individualized professional learning support found that teachers gained knowledge about second-language acquisition and connecting cultural backgrounds to instruction but "were not able to enact this knowledge in instruction."

The researchers acknowledge that some of the teacher outcomes were self-reported but nonetheless argue that their findings support earlier research that effective professional learning experiences "extend over time, provide active learning opportunities, are content-focused and coherent, and include collective participation."

Eleven of the 12 studies that included student measures yielded positive outcomes on reading-related measures, and where the data were disaggregated, professional learning helped reduce the gap between native English speakers and multilingual learners.

Although the synthesis found generally positive outcomes for teachers and students, these results were focused on literacy instruction overall and did "not typically attempt to address teachers' implementation of interventions specific to the needs of ELs facing literacy difficulties." The researchers note that the gap in knowledge about intervention for struggling students may be because none of the studies took place in settings where a multitiered system of support (MTSS) might have assessed teacher and student needs in ways that would have focused the professional learning differently.

▶ IMPLICATIONS

A research synthesis of this nature is helpful because it provides a sense of the broad landscape of research in the topic area while also describing individual studies that practitioners might delve into based on their context or instructional challenge. Particularly helpful is the comparison of studies against existing frameworks of effective characteristics because this builds a common language about and metrics for effectiveness. Learning Forward believes the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) can be used in this way, and we are working to build capacity for doing so.

This study speaks directly to several standards:

- **Equity Practices** calls for educators to recognize and honor student assets through instruction. This review highlights evidence-based strategies that recognize the ways in which multilingual learners enhance the classroom environment and bring a unique perspective on language and literacy.
- **Equity Drivers** asks educators and other stakeholders to examine the structures and norms that maintain inequities in opportunities to learn. The review does so by recognizing that traditional approaches to literacy instruction can treat multilingual students as "less than" native English speakers.
- **Evidence** calls for educators to integrate research at all stages of designing, implementing, and assessing professional learning and consider multiple research methods and approaches. The review focuses on determining practical applications from studies that represent a range of methodologies and contexts, and the researchers call on practitioners to use these and other results to guide decision-making.

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DATA POINTS

3 IN 10 TEACHERS SAY CURRICULUM IS TOO DIFFICULT

The use of high-quality instructional materials is on the rise, according to the RAND Corporation's annual American Instructional Resources Survey. During the 2022-23 school year, 51% of math teachers and 35% of English language arts teachers in grades K-12 reported regularly using standards-aligned core materials. This is up 20 percentage points from 2018-19, the first year of the survey. But not all teachers use these materials most of the time. Three in 10 teachers reported their required curriculum to be too challenging for students, a sentiment found to be more often held by those with less experience or in high-poverty schools. Math teachers who reported that the curriculum was too difficult were significantly less likely to use the materials. A bright spot in the findings was that teachers who reported professional learning helped them use their materials were less likely to say their materials were out of reach for students. **bit.ly/48Cg8Pv**

86% OF SATISFIED TEACHERS STAYED IN THEIR JOBS

Job satisfaction leads to teachers staying in their schools, according to survey results published in the 2021-22 *Attrition and Mobility of Teachers* report from the National Center for Education Statistics. The report, a follow-up to the National Teacher and Principal Survey, includes K-12 teachers in U.S. public and private schools. Of teachers who reported general job satisfaction for the 2020-21 school year, 86% stayed at the same school, 7% moved schools, and 8% left teaching altogether. A sense of agency over what one teaches matters, too. Among teachers who reported having moderate or a great deal of control over the domains of planning and teaching, nearly 85% remained at the same school in the 2021-22 school year. **bit.ly/3HkXz6p**

30 HOURS OF TEACHER LEARNING ABOUT RESILIENCE HAS POSITIVE EFFECTS ON STUDENTS

A peer-reviewed study of mindfulness-based interventions for teachers and the connection to students' academic and behavioral outcomes found promising results. A group of 224 teachers in 36 high-poverty public schools in New York City took part in the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education program. During one school year, educators spent 30 hours over five days focusing on mindful awareness practices, emotional skills instruction, and compassion and listening practices. Over 5,000 students in grades 1-5 were assessed before and after teachers participated in the program. Students with teachers in the program had higher post-test scores in engagement, motivation to learn, and reading proficiency compared to students in the control group. **bit.ly/3vE2Blp**

1 DEEP DIVE INTO SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

A team of Australian researchers conducted a systematic review of 31 publications on substitute teacher experiences, mainly from the U.S. and Australia, offering insights into how professional learning can support these teachers. The review noted that substitute teachers are an essential part of school improvement efforts since they allow teachers to take part in professional learning activities. Often, they are early in their careers and seeking permanent work. And while critical to school function, this group was found to be perceived as having lesser value than their full-time counterparts. Especially for those new to the profession, professional learning surfaced as being important, but these opportunities were difficult to come by. Study authors conclude that substitutes are a key component of the workforce yet lack targeted support, noting that educational systems must develop policies to address the needs of this specific teaching group. **bit.ly/4aW9qW9**

A CLOSER LOOK AT LEARNING

Evaluation is essential for understanding when, why, and how professional learning works and whether it leads to better outcomes for students. Learn about the reasons to evaluate educator learning (p. 22), why rigorous studies matter (p. 34), how to understand different levels of impact (p. 28), and how a measurement tool can improve implementation (p. 38).

7 REASONS to evaluate professional learning

BY JOELLEN KILLION

Each year, educators engage in hours of professional learning to enhance their practice. Those hours are limited, both by contract and the imperative of keeping teachers in classrooms as much as possible. It is essential that this professional learning time is well-spent and pays dividends toward the goal of all public education: ensuring that each student succeeds. Evaluation is fundamental for assessing the quality, effectiveness, and impact of professional learning. It provides data for planning and strengthening educators' learning and, ultimately, explaining and justifying school systems' investments in it.

> **Evaluation is fundamental for assessing the quality, effectiveness, and impact of professional learning. It provides data for planning and strengthening educators' learning and, ultimately, explaining and justifying school systems' investments in it.**

When educators neglect to collect and analyze data about the effects of professional learning, they tend to default to some common fallacies about it:

- When educators attend professional learning, students automatically benefit.
- If educators report that professional learning was beneficial, they will change their practice and students will benefit.
- Spending more on professional learning guarantees that educators and students will benefit.
- When professional learning focuses on evidence-based practices, student success automatically increases.

These assumptions have limited educators' efforts to collect data and measure the relationship between professional learning and student success. In many cases, there is, in fact, a positive relationship between professional learning and improvements for educators and students. But without evaluation, we don't have an abundance of evidence to support the claim. This means that policymakers, parents, teachers, and others may question the value of professional learning that is making a difference. Just as concerning, they may rely on learning that isn't as effective as it can be.

To address those gaps, professional learning leaders engage in evaluation. Evaluating professional learning is a systematic process of identifying questions, collecting and analyzing data, and formulating conclusions or generalizations about the link between educator learning and student success to plan next actions. (See sidebar on p. 27 and the tool on p. 58 to read about the eight steps of successful professional learning evaluation.)

Professional learning evaluation is a particular type of research, with certain unique considerations that have been described in key resources. Donald Kirkpatrick's seminal book, *Evaluating Training* (1974), provided a valuable foundation because it identified four levels for evaluating training programs: participant reaction, participant learning, participant use of learning, and results, often expressed in terms of organizational benefits.

Thomas Guskey enhanced Kirkpatrick's work and applied it to the field of education by adding a fifth level in his influential work, *Evaluating Professional Development* (2000). (See the article on p. 28 of this issue to learn about Guskey's framework.) My own work in *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Professional Learning* (Killion, 2018) addresses evaluating the impact of professional learning on student success.

Thanks to these and other efforts, evaluating professional learning for its impact on educators and students has matured in the last several decades from a stance of impossible-to-do to necessary-to-do. And the focus for evaluating professional learning has sharpened into several distinct purposes, each providing essential data to make formative and summative decisions about professional learning as a vehicle for continuous improvement within school systems. Today, professional learning leaders evaluate professional learning for seven distinct purposes:

1. Problem identification;
2. Planning;
3. Quality;
4. Implementation;

5. Effectiveness (changes in educators' knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors);

6. Impact on students; and

7. Social justice and human rights.

1. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The first purpose for evaluation is understanding the need or problem that professional learning is expected to address. Data allow planners to identify the necessary changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors, which in turn inform the content for the professional learning. Analyzing available data about students, educators, the environment, resources, previous experience and success with change initiatives, scope of the change, and leadership stability are useful for these purposes.

Useful tools for this type of evaluation include the fishbone diagram; SWOT (successes, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats); fault tree analysis; positive deviance; and root cause analysis. These tools and processes are designed to gather data to identify root causes for presenting problems so that they, rather than symptoms, can be addressed (Killion, 2018).

2. PLANNING

The second purpose for evaluating professional learning is planning. This requires collaboration between evaluators and professional learning designers to ensure that the professional learning is adequately planned and sufficiently supported to produce the intended results. A solid plan for professional learning, one that is ready to be implemented and evaluated, requires clear goals for the program; specific outcomes that specify changes in educator and student knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors (KASAB) (Killion, 2018); standards and indicators of success for the goals and outcomes; a theory of change that maps out how the changes are likely

to occur; and a logic model to plan for and monitor the program's progress.

Evaluators engaging in evaluability assessments look for clear goals and outcomes, theories of change, logic models, indicators of success, and standards of success so they can assess the professional learning plan's comprehensiveness.

Evaluating the plan can ensure that professional learning meets the definition of a "set of purposeful, planned, research- or evidence-based actions and the support system necessary to achieve the identified outcomes" (Killion, 2018, p. 10). In practice, what educators call professional learning is often reduced to training alone without the surrounding support that moves learning into practice. A planning evaluation can help determine whether that is the case and whether the plan needs to be adjusted.

A comprehensive plan integrates coaching; collaboration; safety in taking risks; ongoing and personalized support; extended learning opportunities; feedback processes; and strong leadership to maintain a focus and level of persistence to work through challenges that occur in the implementation dip and frustration associated with significant change (Killion et al., 2023). This support is necessary in varying degrees depending on the scope of the changes desired and educators' current state of practice. Based on the goals, evaluators can determine which changes they are looking for in the plan and whether they are sufficiently represented.

3. QUALITY

To what degree does the professional learning meet the standards of high-quality? Sometimes overlapping with the planning evaluation, the quality evaluation applies a specific set of quality criteria as a benchmark against which to assess professional learning. Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, a research-based compilation

of the attributes of and conditions for high-quality professional learning that produces results, serves as a useful tool for analyzing the quality of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022). Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory (**sai. learningforward.org**) is a way to measure the standards in practice and is a valuable tool to analyze data for quality evaluation.

Using the elements of high-quality professional learning as criteria, professional learning leaders can gather data about how each component of the standards is integrated into the program and use those data to adapt the plan. Savvy leaders continuously evaluate the quality of professional learning design as it occurs to gain additional data, often from the participant perspective, to modify the program to address unanticipated needs or gaps.

For example, evaluators might ask if the learning experiences engage participants and promote collaboration. They might also investigate if the professional learning includes support from coaches and school administrators to facilitate changes in teacher practices and organizational support.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

This type of evaluation zeroes in on how well the actions described in the professional learning plan are being accomplished as planned and, if they are not, what barriers are interfering and need addressing. Logic models that delineate the specific actions to achieve the intended outcomes can be useful to track the implementation of those actions.

Input from learners about how they experience the actions provides helpful data about implementation. Examining the program's various outputs, such as attendance records, documents produced to support learning, attendance records, and end-of-session satisfaction data, offers data about implementation of the professional learning.

SUMMARY OF PURPOSES FOR EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	
Evaluation purpose	**Questions evaluation aims to answer**
Problem identification	• What are we hoping to accomplish? • What problems or situations are we trying to address? • What are the root causes of the problem? • What is the scope of the problem? • Whose actions influence the problem? • What changes do educators in various roles and levels need to make? • What are research- and evidence-based best approaches to address these changes?
Planning	Is the plan: • Aligned to the identified problem, stakeholder needs, the goal, and outcomes? • Supported by research or evidence? • Plausible/feasible? • Sufficient? • Logical?
Quality	• Does the professional learning as planned meet standards, criteria, or expectations for high-quality, including the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022)?
Implementation	• Is the professional learning plan working as planned? • What surprises are occurring? • Is everyone doing their part? • Are we meeting the timeline for program activities? • Are we expending program resources as planned?
Effectiveness	• What changes in KASABs are educators making? • To what degree are those changes aligned with standards of excellence? • How accurately are the changes applied in practice? • How frequently are the changes applied in practice?
Impact on students	• Do changes in educator practice resulting from professional learning positively contribute to or affect student success?
Social justice and human rights	• Is professional learning equitably accessible to all educators? • Is the professional learning contextually appropriate? • Is it fair and culturally responsive? • Are we applying practices that are respectful of different learners? • Are we equitably distributing burden and resources? • Are we respectful of diverse needs?

Implementation evaluation results can be used in multiple ways. A plan poorly executed is unlikely to produce the intended results. An implementation evaluation can identify problems early on and prompt midcourse corrections to get the plan back on track. On the other hand, an implementation evaluation can also identify when the original plan requires adaptation. A plan that is insensitive to the context in which it is being implemented and unresponsive to emerging issues is also unlikely to produce the results intended.

While a thorough planning evaluation might have surfaced these challenges, they often do not become evident until the rollout of the professional learning occurs. Too frequently, evaluation ceases at this point without asking the remaining questions. But an implementation evaluation can provide the data to help designers make decisions about how to adapt the plan.

For example, program implementers may find that educators cannot access coaching support in a timely manner or that the resources provided for educator use are not aligned with the district-adopted instructional materials. This might lead to the hiring of more coaches or identification of new curricular resources.

5. EFFECTIVENESS

Transferring learning into practice is an essential step in generating results from professional learning. An effectiveness evaluation asks: Is the professional learning effective in contributing to changes in educator knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors (KASABs)?

Effectiveness may be confused with impact, yet it is distinct. Effectiveness refers to the initial and intermediate outcomes of professional learning that typically enable changes in student opportunity to learn and student success. Initial changes frequently occur in knowledge and skills, while intermediate changes are those in attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors. When these changes are fully realized, educators persist in applying new learning in practice, and results for students are more likely.

This purpose might also be confused with performance evaluation. However, it focuses on the specific practices associated with the professional learning rather than the full spectrum of role responsibilities. This evaluation requires clarification of the specific outcomes expected

and sufficient ways to gather data about those behaviors. It focuses on how educators are implementing their learning as planned and if the support system meets their individual and collective needs.

Tools such as observation rubrics or checklists, walk-through guides, Innovation Configuration maps, work samples, and anecdotal data gathered from practice are useful for this type of evaluation if they are tightly aligned with the practices the professional learning intends to refine or implement.

6. IMPACT

Too frequently, evaluation ceases at the previous level — effectiveness. Yet changes in educators do not necessarily guarantee results for students. Educators may gain knowledge and skills, yet insufficiently have the commitment to implement new practices with fidelity or consistency.

Habits of practice are challenging to shift, and occasional, incomplete, or inaccurate implementation of research-based practices is often insufficient to change learning experiences for students. Impact evaluation is the only way to know if a relationship exists between professional learning and student learning.

To address this purpose, evaluators choose among several evaluation design options such as randomized or quasi-experimental trials, pseudo-causal theory of change, matched comparisons, pre-post comparisons, or post-post comparisons. Some design options are more conducive to practitioner-driven evaluation, while others are more useful in applied and basic research.

Student data of all forms, from daily formative, common, or end-of-course assessments, work products, presentations, or projects, can be used for this type of evaluation. Less useful are high-stakes assessments that might not measure the expected results of the educator practices being implemented.

For example, if a mathematics

professional learning program emphasizes the implementation of student discourse and productive struggle, a state assessment may not provide data about how students are engaged in discourse and use productive struggle. Relying solely on the state's assessment in mathematics is a mismatch between the expected results for students associated with the professional learning and what is being measured.

This type of evaluation is most helpful when it is combined with the implementation and effectiveness evaluations described above. The hypothesis evaluators formulate is this: If educators change their knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations and apply the behaviors with consistency and accuracy, students' learning opportunities will increase and their level of success will change, ideally in a positive direction.

This success will be enhanced if data about educator implementation is used to guide adjustments in the professional learning plan to address the unique combination of educator, environment, and student. A positive direction in the relationship between educator practice and student learning opportunities and success is the goal of professional learning and the measure of the impact of it.

7. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A final purpose for evaluating professional learning, social justice and human rights, examines whether the professional learning is culturally responsive, contextually relevant, and accommodating of diverse needs. This kind of evaluation might occur simultaneously with any or all the other evaluations.

Questions about cultural responsiveness might be asked in the needs evaluation to determine the degree to which the full scope of the population's needs have been examined. In a planning evaluation,

STEPS TO EVALUATE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Evaluating professional learning is a systematic process. Broken down, it includes eight steps that fall into three broad areas. Each step requires thoughtful planning and execution to collect reliable and valid data to draw conclusions about the link between educator learning and student success.

Learn more about the eight steps and how to use them in the tool that begins on p. 58.

PLANNING

1. Assess evaluability.
2. Formulate evaluation questions.
3. Construct evaluation framework.

CONDUCTING

4. Collect data.
5. Organize, analyze, and display data.
6. Interpret data.

REPORTING

7. Report, disseminate, and use findings.
8. Evaluate the evaluation.
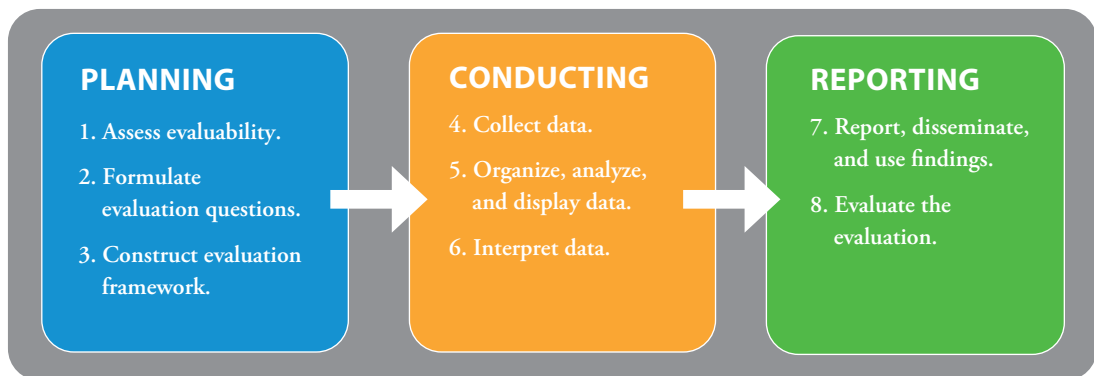
Source: Killion, 2018.

evaluators might examine the proposed professional learning for representation in learning design, materials, or access. In the implementation evaluation, evaluators might analyze if resources are equitably distributed. In the effectiveness evaluation, evaluators might assess if the new practices are consistently and accurately applied in all contexts to ensure that no student is being denied opportunity to learn. And in impact evaluation, evaluators measure the degree to which student success occurs across student groups versus looking only at mean differences.

Tools such as rubrics that focus on culturally responsive pedagogy can be used to review professional plans. Focus groups of diverse participants can serve as reviewers of professional learning plans, materials, and tools. Community members with diverse backgrounds and perspectives can

participate in professional learning and serve as critical friends. Interviews with educators can investigate how the professional learning program meets their unique learning needs and the degree to which they receive personalized and relevant support in transferring their new learning to practice.

STRONGER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

While the purposes of evaluation are many and the effort may seem burdensome, this kind of investigation is vital to justify investments in professional learning and be accountable for just and fair benefits for educators and students that flow from these expenditures. Problem identification, planning, quality, implementation, effectiveness, impact, and social justice and human rights evaluations are ways educators can strengthen professional learning to

increase the likelihood that their efforts and investments will pay dividends for students and educators.

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Look beyond the satisfaction survey

A framework to evaluate results of professional learning

BY THOMAS R. GUSKEY

Professional learning is vital to address the multiple issues facing educators today. Recovering from declines in student achievement brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic requires educators to prioritize learning goals and develop new ways to accelerate students' learning progress. Political discord, social tensions, and global conflicts compel teachers to guide students in exploring diverse perspectives and engaging in constructive, respectful dialogues. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), necessitates teachers and school leaders to consider entirely new paradigms in instructional methods and assessment.

At the same time, there is a great need for credible evidence on the effectiveness of professional learning. Rachel Garrett and her colleagues (2021) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of high-quality studies

of teacher professional learning published between 2010 and 2020. The aim was to establish connections between features outlined in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) and teacher instruction as well as student learning.

To be eligible, studies needed to "(1) include teachers in Grades K-12, (2) examine the impacts of professional learning on instruction measured through classroom observation, and (3) have enough information to compute effect sizes" (p. 5). Among the hundreds of studies identified, only 48 met these modest criteria for inclusion.

This combination of a significant demand for professional learning and a paucity of credible evidence yields two critical implications. First, it highlights the pressing need for *enhanced methods of collecting sound evidence on the impact of professional learning*. While many professional learning initiatives may indeed have a positive influence on teaching and student learning outcomes, there has been a lack of concerted effort to adequately document these effects. Second, it underscores the necessity of *using trustworthy evidence to elevate the quality of professional learning experiences for all educators*. This entails more systematic and purposeful evaluations of professional learning initiatives.

A LONG HISTORY

These two implications have long been recognized. I recall discussions with Dennis Sparks, Stephanie Hirsh, Shirley Hord, and Susan Loucks-Horsley during my initial involvement with Learning Forward, then called the National Staff Development Council. I had just graduated with a degree in educational measurement and evaluation, and these influential leaders sought my advice on developing new and better methods for gathering evidence on the effects of professional learning.

Initially, I proposed a model developed by Donald Kirkpatrick in 1959 for evaluating training programs in business and industry. Kirkpatrick's four-level model included trainees' *reaction* (initial satisfaction), *learning* (knowledge, skills, and attitudes), *behavior* (on-the-job performance), and *outcomes* (increased productivity). However, early attempts to apply the model to professional learning in education were challenging and proved unsuccessful. It was apparent that something unique to the field of education was missing.

Analyses of the lack of success in applying Kirkpatrick's model consistently pointed to organizational factors. Professional learning leaders were successful from a training perspective, but challenges arose when participants returned to organizations that either did not sufficiently support implementation of new ideas or posed barriers to implementation.

In response to these organizational challenges, I adapted Kirkpatrick's model to create a five-level model that included *organization support and change*. This modification recognized the crucial role of organizational support in the success of professional learning initiatives. By incorporating this additional level, the model aimed to address the unique dynamics of educational settings and the importance of aligning organizational structures and culture with the goals of professional learning.

A MODEL FOR EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The new evaluation model I proposed presents a comprehensive framework for assessing the effectiveness and impact of professional learning initiatives in education. It can be applied to event-driven activities like workshops and seminars, as well as to the wide range of ongoing, job-embedded professional learning activities such as study groups, action research, collaborative planning, curriculum development, structured observations, peer coaching, mentoring, and so on.

The model provides a systematic

approach to evaluation, emphasizing the importance of not only measuring participants' reactions, but also delving deeper into the outcomes and changes in teacher practices and student learning.

The model comprises five levels, each focusing on a specific aspect of evaluation. At the first level, *participants' reactions* is gauged by collecting feedback from educators who have experienced the professional learning. This initial step acknowledges the importance of participant perceptions and engagement and recognizes that satisfaction contributes to the overall success of the effort.

The second level explores *participant learning*, assessing the knowledge and skills acquired by participants during professional learning. This emphasizes that professional learning is a purposeful endeavor with intended learning goals for participants. Evidence gathered at this level must be aligned with the activity's learning goals to offer meaningful feedback on areas of strength and shortcomings, facilitating continuous enhancement of professional learning.

Moving beyond individual participants, the third level considers *organization support and change*. This level concentrates on the conditions and resources necessary for high-quality implementation. A key element at this level is strong leadership that supports individuals in navigating the complexities of change. A culture of collaboration and open communication is paramount.

In addition, adequate resources and infrastructure coherence are crucial for success. This includes the provision of adequate time, access to current teaching materials, technology, and ongoing follow-up opportunities. When educators have the tools, resources, and support they need, it empowers them to confidently embrace and implement new practices.

The fourth level, *participant use of new knowledge and skills*, emphasizes the practical application of newly acquired

knowledge and skills within school and classroom settings. This level recognizes that successful implementation goes beyond mere acquisition and understanding; it involves the effective use of new strategies and practices.

The concept of "mutual adaptation" (McLaughlin, 1976) describes the dynamic nature of this process. Participants are not only expected to adjust to the use of new strategies but also to adapt these innovations to suit their unique educational settings, highlighting the need for a flexible and context-sensitive approach. This level is crucial for understanding the practical application and relevance of the professional learning, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The fifth level focuses on the ultimate goal of professional learning activities: *impact on student learning outcomes*. This level addresses critical questions about the effectiveness of the changes in practices on students. Did these changes lead to improvements in students' learning? Did they influence students' attitudes, dispositions, or behaviors? The assessment of student learning outcomes is tailored to the specific goals of the professional learning, reflecting a forward-looking perspective that underscores the importance of achieving lasting and transformative change in education.

The fifth level also recognizes that different stakeholders trust different forms of evidence. Because district and school leaders tend to rely on large-scale standardized measures, while teachers put more trust in classroom assessments and observations (Guskey, 2007), diverse measures of student learning are essential to comprehensively evaluate impact. In addition, multiple sources of evidence help capture the potential for unintended outcomes.

For instance, suppose a group of elementary educators organizes a study group to find ways to enhance students' writing skills and sees a significant increase in writing scores. A deeper analysis reveals, however, that over the same time, students' math scores

declined, potentially resulting from a reallocation of instructional time. This shows the need for a holistic approach to assessing student outcomes, ensuring that possible unintended consequences are identified and addressed.

The insights gained from this level serve as a crucial guide for refining all aspects of professional learning, including activity design, implementation, and follow-up. By linking changes in practice to tangible improvements in student learning, educators can continually refine their approaches to maximize positive outcomes. Additionally, evidence on student learning outcomes provides a basis for estimating the comparative cost-effectiveness of professional learning initiatives.

The figure on p. 31 describes these five levels in detail. Focusing on these five levels reflects a commitment to evaluating the pragmatic impact of professional learning, acknowledging the complexities of the process, and promoting a continuous cycle of improvement in educational practices.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE MODEL

Since initially described in the 1998 article "The age of our accountability" (Guskey, 1998), this model has emerged as a foundational framework for evaluating professional learning worldwide. *Evaluating Professional Development* (Guskey, 2000), which explains in detail the model's five levels, has been cited in over 6,200 scholarly articles and served as the foundation for more than 40 doctoral dissertations (e.g., Newman, 2010; Ross, 2010). This widespread use demonstrates the model's relevance and applicability across diverse educational contexts. Crucial to this work are three primary implications that emanate from the model.

1. Each level is important.

The model emphasizes that each of the five levels is crucial in evaluating educators' professional learning experiences, and no level can

FIVE LEVELS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVALUATION

Level	What questions are addressed?	How will information be gathered?	What is measured or assessed?	How will information be used?
1. Participants' reactions	Did they like it? Was their time well-spent? Did the material make sense? Will it be useful? Was the leader knowledgeable and helpful? Were the refreshments fresh and tasty? Was the room the right temperature? Were the chairs comfortable?	Online questionnaires and surveys.	Initial satisfaction with the experience.	To improve the design and format of the experience.
2. Participant learning	Did participants acquire the *intended* knowledge and skills?	Questionnaires and surveys. Performance tasks or assessments. Simulations or demonstrations. Participant reflections (oral or written).	*New* knowledge and skills of participants.	To improve the content, format, and design of the experience.
3. Organization support and change	Was implementation advocated, supported, and facilitated? Was the support public and overt? Were sufficient resources made available? Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently? Were successes recognized and shared? What was the impact on the organization? Did it affect organizational procedures, climate, and culture?	Minutes from follow-up meetings. Questionnaires and surveys. Interviews with participants and leaders. Participant reflections (oral or written).	The leaders' and organization's advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition.	To document and improve leader and organization support. To inform future improvement efforts.
4. Participant use of new knowledge and skills	Did participants effectively apply or implement the new knowledge and skills?	Direct observations. Interviews with participants, leaders, and students. Questionnaires and surveys. Focus groups. Implementation records and reflective journals.	*Degree* and *quality* of participants' implementation of new practices, knowledge, and skills (i.e., fidelity).	To document and improve implementation of new knowledge and skills.
5. Impact on student learning outcomes	What was the impact on students? Did it affect student performance or achievement? Did it influence students' attitudes, dispositions, or behaviors? Are students more confident as learners? Is student attendance improving? Are graduation rates increasing?	Student data. School/district data. Questionnaires and surveys. Interviews with students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. Participant reflections.	Student learning outcomes: a. Cognitive (performance and achievement). b. Affective (attitudes and dispositions). c. Psychomotor (skills and behaviors).	To focus and improve all aspects of activity design, implementation, and follow-up. To demonstrate the overall impact of professional learning.

be neglected. Each level represents a different stage or aspect of the professional learning process, and each requires a different form of evidence. Taken together, these five levels represent a holistic approach to evaluation, considering the various facets and stages of the professional learning process.

2. Each level builds on the levels that come before.

While achieving success at a lower level is often a necessary foundation for success at a higher level, it does not guarantee it. Breakdowns in the effectiveness of professional learning can occur at any point along the way. And once it breaks down, progress ends. This emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the entire process and the potential challenges that may arise during the transition from one level to the next.

3. When planning professional learning, the order of levels must be reversed.

The third and perhaps the most crucial implication is the importance of a reversed approach to planning. Instead of planning forward from the initial stages of professional learning to student learning outcomes, effective planning is "backward" (Guskey, 2001). It means starting with the desired end goal of improvements in student learning, then working backward to determine the necessary steps and components at each preceding level. This deliberate approach aims to ensure that the entire professional learning process is aligned with the primary goal of improving student learning outcomes.

Backward planning starts by clearly defining the desired student learning outcomes and deciding what evidence best reflects those outcomes (level 5). This could include goals such as improving reading comprehension, enhancing problem-solving skills, boosting confidence in learning situations, or fostering better collaboration among classmates. The identification of these outcomes is informed by critical analyses of relevant data from classroom and large-scale assessments, examples of student work, and school records.

Once the desired student learning outcomes are determined and evidence sources established, determine the instructional practices and policies that are supported by pertinent research evidence to achieve those outcomes (level 4). Ask critical questions about this evidence, considering factors such as its reliability, applicability to specific contexts, and whether it is research-based rather than simply opinion-based. Be especially cautious about adopting popular trends without solid research backing.

Next, consider what aspects of organizational support need to be in place for those practices and policies to be implemented (level 3). Active engagement and support from school leaders will be vital for success. Sufficient planning time and necessary resources must be in place. In addition, aspects of the organization that pose barriers to implementation must be identified and revised. Certain policies regarding student discipline and grading, for example, may determine teachers' options in dealing with students' behavioral or learning problems. A big part of planning involves ensuring that organizational elements are in place to support the desired practices and policies.

Then, decide what knowledge and skills the participating professionals must have to implement the prescribed practices and policies (level 2). What must they know and be able to do to successfully adapt the innovation to their specific context and bring about the sought-after change?

Finally, consider what set of experiences will enable participants to acquire the needed knowledge and skills (level 1). Workshops and seminars, especially when paired with collaborative planning and structured opportunities for practice with feedback, action research projects, organized study groups, and a wide range of other professional learning strategies, can all be effective, depending on the specified purpose of the professional learning initiative.

What makes this backward planning process so important is that the decisions made at each level are interconnected. For instance, the choice of specific student learning outcomes directly influences the selection of instructional practices and policies. Similarly, the chosen practices and policies have implications for the required organizational support or changes. This interconnectedness in the backward planning process shows that 90% of the crucial questions in any professional learning evaluation are addressed *before* any activities begin. It also emphasizes the need for a holistic and purposeful approach to planning.

The complexity of professional learning is further compounded by its context-specific nature. What works effectively in one context with a specific community of educators and students may not yield the same results in a different setting with diverse participants. This recognition of context-specific challenges highlights the difficulty in developing comprehensive best practices that can be applied universally across various educational settings.

The backward planning process is essential because it recognizes the interconnectedness of decisions at different levels and navigates the challenges posed by the context-specific nature of professional learning. The dynamic interplay between student learning outcomes, instructional practices, organizational support, and the unique context underscores the need for a tailored and strategic approach to professional learning planning and evaluation.

SHIFTING TOWARD PURPOSEFUL EVALUATION

Traditionally, evaluating professional learning has not been a

> **BACKWARD PLANNING KEEPS THE FOCUS ON STUDENTS**
>
> The five-level evaluation framework is helpful for planning professional learning. Start with the end goal of improvement in student learning, then work backward to identify the steps to get there. Follow this process:
>
> • Define the desired student learning outcomes (level 5).
> • Determine the instructional practices and policies to achieve the outcomes (level 4).
> • Identify organizational support needed to implement the practices and policies (level 3).
> • Determine the knowledge and skills needed to implement the practices and policies (level 2).
> • Select or design learning experiences that increase the knowledge and skills (level 1).

priority for educators. Many view evaluation as a cumbersome and resource-intensive process that diverts attention from more immediate tasks such as planning, implementation, and follow-up. Others believe that they lack the requisite skills and expertise to engage meaningfully in evaluations.

Contrary to these reservations, effective evaluations don't need to be complex or resource-draining. They simply require thoughtful planning, the ability to pose pertinent questions, and a fundamental understanding of how to obtain valid answers. When approached purposefully and strategically, evaluations yield meaningful information that can be instrumental in making informed and responsible decisions about professional learning processes and their effects.

In addition, the shift toward more purposeful evaluations aligns with the evolving landscape of education. As the demand for accountability and evidence-based practices grows, educators are recognizing the need to assess the impact and efficacy of professional learning. This shift in mindset involves viewing evaluation not as an isolated, burdensome task, but as an integral part of the continuous improvement cycle within education.

While there may be challenges associated with evaluating professional learning efforts, the benefits far outweigh the perceived drawbacks. A mindset shift toward embracing evaluation as a valuable tool for improvement can empower educators to make informed decisions, enhance the quality of professional learning experiences, and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for both teachers and students.

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Building the evidence base for professional learning:
Q&A with Stacey Alicea

BY LEARNING FORWARD

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) is a collective of professional learning practitioners, researchers, educators, and funders focused on studying educator learning to inform improvements in practice and outcomes for students. *The Learning Professional* asked RPPL Executive Director Stacey Alicea to describe the organization's goals and strategies for increasing rigorous research evidence about professional learning.

Q: Why and how is RPPL aiming to refocus the questions that researchers study about professional learning?

Our goal is to transform teacher learning and practice to ensure that all students — especially those from historically marginalized groups — learn rigorous content and thrive in equitable schools. Much of the existing professional learning research has focused on testing whether specific professional learning interventions work to change teacher and student outcomes.

At RPPL, we are interested in building knowledge about the specific design features of professional learning that best support shifts in teacher instructional practices that, in turn, improve student learning and development. We believe that we can advance educational equity for all students at a faster pace if we intentionally focus on the core features that maximize educators' ability to improve student outcomes.

Q: What are the key research questions your organization is tackling, and why?

RPPL outlined a learning agenda (Hill et al., 2021) when we launched our work together in summer 2021. Its areas of focus include increasing teacher engagement in professional learning, accelerating skill development, sustaining long-term enactment of new practices, and improving the conditions for adult learning.

We have further grounded our learning plan in three areas: equitable teaching practices, the use of high-quality instructional materials, and supportive classroom environments. Our learning agenda also describes how

we will introduce planned variation in design features, advance our data collection methods and tools for analyzing data, and build a collaborative research infrastructure.

This is a huge learning agenda. It requires complex coordination and intensive collaboration among researchers, professional learning organizations, school districts, funders, and policy and advocacy organizations. Part of our work is to learn how to do this better together, as a collective, to benefit the whole field.

As we've worked to launch cross-organizational, multidistrict studies, and a number of smaller studies driven by member organizations, we have also sought to synthesize existing research knowledge. This led us to publish our *Busting Myths* and *Building Better PL* briefs (Hill et al., 2022; Hill & Papay, 2022). It will also guide our efforts to prioritize how we pursue our next research steps.

Q: Why did you choose the 14 studies you are currently funding, and what do you hope professional learning leaders will learn from them?

We are building a portfolio of studies grounded in the focus areas of the learning agenda (RPPL, 2023). We hope that, together, these studies will provide insights into how to scale effective professional learning in key areas of practice. To date, the majority of our studies have incorporated high-quality instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning.

Some of these studies were intentionally co-designed with RPPL's member and affiliate organizations and researchers to reflect the goals of the collective. For example, some of our

current cross-organization research focuses on teacher mindsets and student expectations, teacher agency in how professional learning is organized and facilitated, and social accountability as a design feature — that is, teachers holding each other accountable for learning and implementing new practices.

Other studies were designed by specific professional learning organizations, based on questions they were grappling with in their work and opportunities to test different design features with their district partners. If successful, we believe these studies will help us and the field understand what works in professional learning and lead providers to align their practices and models to our evidence-based findings.

Q: RPPL aims to promote research that supports causal inference — that is, that can show if professional learning leads to meaningful changes. How can educators and programs incorporate more rigorous methods into their evaluations?

Part of the reason RPPL was founded is because, as a field, we weren't doing professional learning research as well as is needed to move the needle on addressing disproportionate outcomes among our students. Professional learning organizations and districts alike were asking: How do we know if what we are doing is working? What do we currently know, and what do we still need to study to have confidence that certain kinds of professional learning make a difference?

One of the things we need to do is better leverage experimental research about which professional learning features lead to impact. We also need

RPPL'S THEORY OF ACTION

RPPL's theory of action describes how the coalition's work is intended to improve professional learning research which should, in turn, lead to changes in educators' practices and students' outcomes.
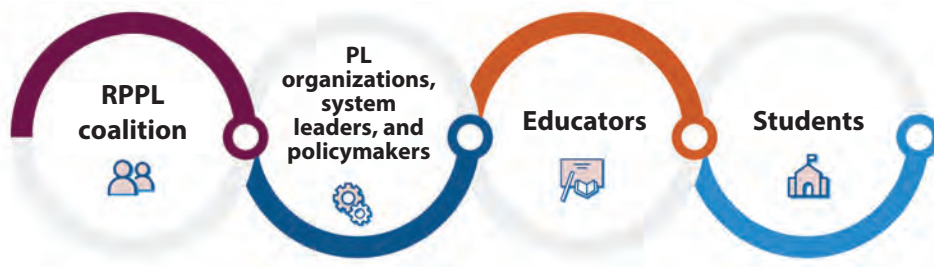
The RPPL coalition's efforts influence the broader education sector to drive equitable student outcomes.

If the RPPL coalition:
- Creates the research vision for high-quality professional learning;
- Sets a consensus-driven learning agenda around professional learning that includes diverse voices at different levels of the education system;
- Facilitates partnerships to promote advancement of the learning agenda;
- Strengthens enabling conditions that support causal research at scale;
- Generates actionable evidence about the design features of effective teacher professional learning to support equitable instructional practices; and
- Convenes our robust network to share evidence, plan, and guide practical application of learning.

Then professional learning organizations, system leaders, and policymakers will:
- Conduct rigorous and practical research;
- Invest in more impactful professional learning; and
- Apply evidence-based learnings and solutions to implement better professional learning.

Then educators will:
- Engage in more evidence-based professional learning that transfers into stronger instructional practices and more equitable, rigorous, and joyful learning environments that close disproportionate student academic and developmental gaps.

And all students, especially those from historically marginalized groups, will:
- Learn more;
- Experience increased engagement and well-being in safer, more rigorous learning environments; and
- Flourish and thrive, ensuring more success in school and life.

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to interrogate for whom and under what conditions promising professional learning features work to reduce disproportionality in student learning and development because we recognize that not all features will work in every context or with every group of teachers and students.

We don't have all of the answers on how we do this well, but we do believe that rigorous research should allow

us to make causal inferences and also understand the processes through which specific design features work to create the change we are seeking.

Trying different ways of doing research together will help us learn what works best. Over the past year, we have learned so much by trying things, seeing what works, and adjusting accordingly. From researchers collaborating with member organizations, to member

organizations collaborating with their district partners, we are working out systems, structures, communications, and designs that work best for all.

We are learning that in addition to taking on "big R research" (A/B tests, quasi-experimental designs, etc.), we also need to invest in targeted "little r research" (such as implementation studies and mix-methods that allow us to contextualize our findings).

The latter can test the feasibility of professional learning approaches and build capacity among member organizations and the larger collective, which can in turn inform efforts to conduct "big R research" that aligns with RPPL's learning agenda.

Q: RPPL's most recent report, *Measuring Teacher Professional Learning,* acknowledges some of the challenges to conducting rigorous evaluations. What are the next steps for getting beyond these barriers?

Our paper was driven by the experiences and expertise of professional learning organizations doing this work on the ground every day in districts across the country. The themes it highlighted showed that it will take a collaborative effort among many stakeholders to improve how we measure professional learning at scale.

While getting professional learning measurement right is complex, there are tangible, practical ways the field can begin improving data collection and increasing the effectiveness of measurement. If we can do that, we will be better positioned to engage in research and learning that can drive real change for teachers and students.

Right now, we are focusing on generating strong alignment among our collective about what

we should measure and how. We are engaging with our member and affiliate organizations, our funders, and increasingly our district partners to build consensus around shared measurement and the development of robust measurement strategies that can and should meet their needs.

By the end of this year, our goal is to begin testing a relatively narrow, agreed-upon set of measures and data collection tools across roughly 10 RPPL organizations. This work will be iterative and dynamic in nature. We hope to generate proof of concept — that we can collectively measure the things we care about in service of generating research and learning that builds the field, while simultaneously attending to the unique contexts and needs of our multiple partners.

Q: What role should professional learning leaders (such as district leaders, coaches, and program designers) play in strengthening the evidence base for professional learning?

We need to engage all professional learning leaders, as well as the educators who participate in the learning, in co-designing research on how specific features of professional learning can drive more equitable, rigorous, and joyful instruction in classrooms.

It will take all of us, bringing together our diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and expertise, to ensure every student has what they need to thrive and be successful in school and life. We encourage everyone who is interested in engaging in research with us or learning from our work to join the RPPL network.

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Data collection tool drives professional learning improvements

BY TOM MANNING

Collecting evidence of professional learning's impact starts with assessing the current state of professional learning in any school or system. Measuring whether and how practices are impacting teaching and learning can shape the approaches that systems start, stop, and continue and increases the likelihood that professional learning strategies and programs achieve their intended outcomes.

For years, Michael Mauriello has used a valid and reliable method for assessing the current state of professional learning in Rockdale County Public Schools. Since 2015, the district of 15,000 students in Conyers, Georgia, has used Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory to measure alignment of Rockdale's professional learning practices to Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

School Name	Number of Responding Teachers	Rigorous content for each learner			Transformational processes				Conditions for success			
		Equity Practices	Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction	Professional Expertise	Equity Drivers	Evidence	Learning Designs	Implemen- tation	Equity Foundations	Culture of Collaborative Inquiry	Leadership	Resources
Armstrong Middle School	11	⊥ 2.9	3.9	3.2	⊥ 2.9	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.6	4.1	⊼ 4.1	3.2
Foster High School	19	4.0	3.8	⊼ 4.0	3.8	3.7	⊥ 3.6	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.8
Lanham Elementary School	10	4.3	3.9	3.8	⊼ 4.5							
Manning Elementary School	12	3.5	3.7	3.4	⊥ 2.9							

Data reports provided on the Standards Assessment Inventory website help systems identify areas of strength and growth for the system and individual schools. SAI reports include school comparisons of SAI scores (top) and frequency count reports for all SAI indicators and standards.
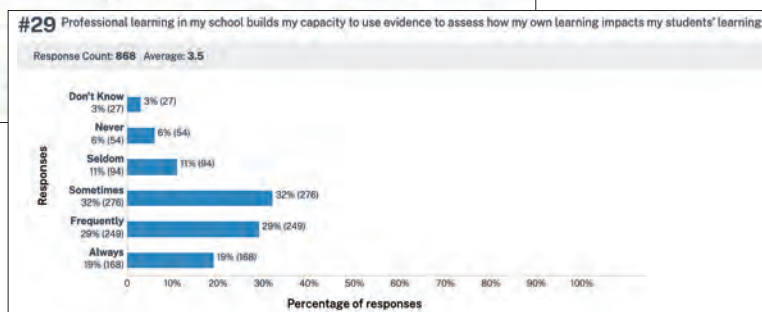
"The Standards Assessment Inventory has been a reliable tool that provides our district and schools with a clear picture of our professional learning strengths and areas we need to focus on for improvement," says Mauriello, director of professional learning in the district.

WHAT IS THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY?

For nearly two decades, the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) has provided relevant, educator-level data helping systems of all kinds — states, districts, schools, provinces, and organizations — gather and track data about the professional learning their educators experience.

An online, confidential, valid, and reliable instrument administered to school-based instructional staff, the SAI asks teachers to provide their level of agreement with statements about the professional learning they experience. The SAI requires no familiarity with the Standards for Professional Learning to complete. SAI items, or indicators, are phrased as statements that align to a key

concept within a standard, to which users measure their level of agreement on a five-point scale.

In Rockdale, measuring alignment to the standards has helped the district identify key focus areas and design professional learning around areas of growth identified by the SAI and aligned to school improvement goals. Through annual administration of the tool, they are able to track their progress on key indicators across time.

One of the recent focus areas was coaching, where the district focused on providing professional learning for instructional coaches. "Our SAI data indicated that our teachers needed additional job-embedded professional learning opportunities," Mauriello said. "As a result of our SAI data and trends we saw in that data, we created a collaborative coaching model that focuses on providing our academic coaches with the skills they need to better support our teachers."

NEW STANDARDS, NEW SAI

With the 2022 revision of the Standards for Professional Learning,

Learning Forward revised the framework for the SAI to measure professional learning practices aligned to the new, evidence-based set of 11 standards.

Field-tested and validated by the American Institutes for Research, the current SAI provides data to help systems measure the alignment of their current professional learning practices to the standards; assess how well their professional learning meets the needs of their instructional staff; identify strengths and areas of focus in their professional learning; plan professional learning that gets results for teachers and students; and measure improvement over time.

One notable change in the 2022 version of the standards, as well as the SAI, is the inclusion of three equity-focused standards and SAI items aligned to those standards. While previous iterations of the standards had equity embedded within them, the 2022 revision includes three distinct equity standards: Equity Practices, Equity Drivers, and Equity Foundations.

SAMPLE SAI INDICATORS

- Professional learning in my school builds my capacity to implement my curriculum with integrity.
- I have the opportunity to build discipline-specific content knowledge and expertise through professional learning at my school.
- The professional learning I experience at my school is relevant to my work.
- Professional learning at my school includes conversations about how cultural and historical barriers can impact student learning.
- Teachers in my school receive ongoing support (e.g., coaching, co-teaching, peer feedback) in various ways to improve teaching.
- My school system has structures and procedures that support collaborative educator learning.

Specifically highlighting the professional learning practices that lead to more equitable outcomes for teachers and students has helped school systems get a clearer picture of what equity actually looks like in the system.

In Rockdale, the administration of the revised SAI shed new light on the district's professional learning practices around equity. "Our results on the equity standards on the revised SAI told us that our teachers need more opportunities to engage in conversations about how diverse cultures, identities, and lived experiences contribute to the learning environment," Mauriello said. "The revised SAI's Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard and our results there also support the work our district is engaged in around collective teacher efficacy and continuous improvement."

WHAT THE SAI PROVIDES

Systems that administer the SAI have access to a wide range of reports and tools that help them understand and analyze their data to make professional learning decisions.

Each system receives a series of data reports for each individual school or campus, as well as the system as a whole. These reports include average results for each standard and item within it, rated as "Skillful," "Progressing," or "Needs Attention" based on the average of responses.

Frequency counts provide more in-depth detail about how a school or system arrived at their averages, showing the total number of educators who gave each answer choice on each indicator. These reports help systems take the next step beyond average scores to drill down in specific areas.

Another set of reports disaggregates SAI data for each school. These are displayed within the SAI platform to allow districts to see side-by-side data comparisons of all schools and subsets of schools, providing an opportunity to see areas where individual or groups of schools show practices that could inform other schools and help best practices scale and spread.

For Mauriello, who leads administration of the SAI for Rockdale's 21 schools each spring, the data help focus conversations at both the district and school levels on professional learning that maximizes resources and provides educators with

support in critical improvement areas.

"In Rockdale County, we believe that professional learning is a partnership between the district and the schools. The district reports provide us with the big picture, and the school reports allow us to determine specific areas of need for each school," he said.

Data-analysis tools and standards implementation resources are provided within the SAI platform for system coordinators, school leaders, and SAI takers who want to more deeply explore the standards.

For Rockdale, the new SAI provides ongoing opportunities to track continued impact of professional learning in the system with a focus on the revised standards. "We are excited about the revised standards and will continue to use the SAI as a tool to support our goal of continuous improvement in Rockdale County," Mauriello said.

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IDEAS

COLLABORATE FOR INSIGHT

Successful evaluation is a team sport. It takes many stakeholders working together to study what's working and what can be improved. Evaluation examples illustrate key consideration for teams, including the value of multiple perspectives (p. 48), how to work through challenging conversations (p. 52), and how to choose the right methods for your context (p. 42).

Practical evaluation points the way toward impact

BY REBECCA TAYLOR-PERRYMAN, ARIANA AUDISIO, AND LAURA MEILI

As U.S. school leaders anticipate the end of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds and contemplate possible budget shortfalls, they will have to make hard choices about how best to leverage limited resources to improve student outcomes. With the stakes high, lawmakers and experts urge school system leaders to rely on research and program evaluation to guide decisions. Unfortunately, high-quality research that demonstrates positive outcomes and aligns with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2023) is rare for many types of educational interventions, including professional learning.

Evaluations by external researchers are expensive and often take multiple years to complete.

For small organizations or districts, the investment may not be feasible. Even where studies of educational interventions do exist, common challenges stand in the way of providing sufficient evidence of positive, significant results for students (Boulay et al., 2018).

Too often, ratings of professional learning are based solely on teacher satisfaction rather than Thomas Guskey's four other levels of evaluation, which examine effects on teacher practices and impact on student achievement (see p. 28 of this issue). When professional learning providers or school leaders do evaluate these other levels, they often rely on data focusing on adult perspectives or actions (e.g., teacher engagement or knowledge) and stop short of identifying whether the program led to desired changes in student achievement (Roth et al., 2019).

In addition, they often lack access to equivalent comparison groups and longitudinal data that examine effects over time. Without these factors, analyses can misattribute changes in outcomes that were already underway to a particular program.

Rather than throw up our hands and only evaluate impact every few years in a small subset of cases, which may not tell us if a particular intervention will work in other real-world contexts, we recommend that professional learning providers and school systems engage regularly in *practical evaluation*.

Educators may be familiar with the concept of practical measurement, an approach for collecting data that are useful, easy to obtain, and yet

Practical evaluation is timely, uses accessible data collection methods, produces results that are easy for stakeholders to understand, and yet uses methods that go beyond pre-post comparisons so stakeholders can make inferences about what contribution an intervention may have had to an outcome.

consequential — i.e., their analysis will yield meaningful insights to support improvement (Hirschboeck & Takahashi, n.d.). Practical evaluation is similar in that it is timely, uses accessible data collection methods, produces results that are easy for stakeholders to understand, and yet uses methods that go beyond pre-post comparisons so stakeholders can make inferences about causality — that is, what contribution a particular intervention may have had to an outcome.

Inferences about causality are not the same as *proof* of causality but, over time, many practical evaluations can help build a stronger understanding of when and where certain interventions are likely to yield results. Through this, we can engage in the kind of continual evidence-building called for by ESSA evidence standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Building on the call from the Department of Education to grow our collective knowledge about effective innovations and on Guskey's evaluation framework for professional learning, we

have developed the following evidence-building continuum (see figure on p. 44):

- With **limited evidence**, a district or school leader may only be able to answer evaluation questions such as: Did the teachers like the professional development? Did they attend?
- With **beginning evidence**, a leader can begin to understand whether instructional practice and/or student outcomes are changing, but without insights as to what may have caused those changes or how those changes relate to other trends.
- With **practical evaluation**, leaders can better understand how impacts on teaching and learning are likely related to different investments and, consequently, how to better invest time and resources in the future.
- Ultimately, **strong evidence** allows leaders to be very confident in long-term investments in programs that have consistently demonstrated impact over time.

Our organization, Leading Educators, is proud of schools and districts who have partnered with us to achieve significant effects on student learning with studies that meet the most rigorous levels of ESSA evidence standards (Audisio et al., 2023, Mihaly et al., 2022). However, we know that conditions for these studies are not always possible.

As an alternative, we also often conduct practical evaluations. Two examples of such evaluations

IDEAS

Limited evidence:
Single point in time, measures focus on satisfaction, engagement.

Beginning evidence:
Two time points (pre- and post-), outcomes for teachers and students.

Practical evaluation:
Three or more time points, moving toward causal evidence using control groups (often tier 3 of ESSA).

Strong evidence:
Multiple causal studies meeting tier 1 or tier 2 of ESSA evidence standards.

EVIDENCE-BUILDING CONTINUUM

are presented here to illustrate practical evaluation's usefulness for understanding impact and likely reasons for the impact. In addition, we share a list of questions any district leader can ask a professional learning partner or service provider to evaluate their approach to analyzing data and the quality of evidence they share about their work.

COMPARING ACHIEVEMENT TRENDS OVER TIME IN SOUTH CAROLINA

A midsize district in South Carolina identified a set of schools performing in the bottom 5% of schools in the state and sought a professional learning partner to advance opportunity for those schools using a research-based model for school turnarounds. Over three years, we partnered with the district team to design and deliver a comprehensive set of supports for teachers, teacher leaders, principals, and district leaders aligned to new high-quality instructional materials in English language arts and mathematics.

The district's goals were to empower staff in these chronically underperforming schools to support all students with relevant, grade-appropriate lessons and close achievement gaps. Teachers, teacher leaders, principals, and district leaders

engaged in ongoing coaching and professional learning facilitated by Leading Educators.

In their schools, teacher leaders led professional learning communities to guide teachers through making instructional decisions with a deeper understanding of content standards, features of high-quality curriculum, pedagogical moves that support classroom environments, and data that can inform decisions to reach rigorous, grade-level student goals.

Although we would have liked to conduct a rigorous causal study of the intervention, it was not the right fit. A causal research study requires experimental and control groups to either have similar characteristics, especially on the outcome variables, or to have similar outcome trajectories before the intervention starts. But because district leaders were understandably focused on the urgency of immediately supporting all of the turnaround schools in the district, there was likely no suitable control group that did not receive the intervention.

Nonetheless, district leaders were still eager to collect and analyze data to understand the impact of this work. We knew that if we relied on a pre-post analysis alone, we might have found positive outcomes, but we wouldn't have been able to attribute them to

professional learning because other factors, such as the new curriculum or other districtwide policies, may have been responsible for the growth.

We decided on a practical evaluation approach that drew on seven years of data for the entire district to better understand trends over time in both the intervention schools and other schools in the district. We compared intervention schools' results to those of other, more advantaged schools in the district, specifically focusing on achievement gaps.

We wanted to understand whether the achievement gap between more and less advantaged schools was reduced after the intervention and whether intervention schools were able to outpace the growth of other schools. To increase confidence in the findings, we implemented statistical strategies to help us compare the change in the supported schools with the most equivalent comparison group possible within the district schools.

In the years before the partnership began, summative state assessment scores at the district's turnaround schools were *declining* by four to five points per year, while all other schools in the district *increased* by seven to eight points per year. After the partnership with Leading Educators, the average yearly growth for turnaround schools

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DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES TO INCREASE RIGOR

We used difference-in-difference and event study strategies to control for observed and unobserved differences.

Difference-in-difference is a statistical technique that attempts to simulate an experimental research design using observational data to estimate the difference in the outcomes of a treatment and a control group after an intervention.

Our analyses included controls for percentage of students in poverty, percentage of multilingual learners, percentage of white students, percentage of students with disabilities, and grade-year and school fixed effects. See Angrist and Pischke (2009) for additional details.

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not only improved, but also matched and doubled the district average growth in English language arts and math, respectively.

- In English language arts, turnaround schools and comparison schools both achieved growth of 21 points per year.
- In math, turnaround schools achieved nearly double the growth rate of other schools, at 13 points per year compared with seven points per year.

It is worth noting that these impressive results occurred in 2022 and 2023, years when achievement for the highest-need students declined nationally (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

But were these changes all caused by the professional learning? Some of these changes could have been caused by other districtwide initiatives. To find out, we turned to the more rigorous statistical methods. Results were as follows:

- There were positive and statistically significant improvements in English language arts that could be attributed to the professional learning because there was a comparison group sufficiently equivalent to the treatment group.

- In math, the comparison group did not show sufficient equivalence to the treatment group, which makes it harder to draw conclusions about the cause of the change.

Examining trends over a long time period (seven years) for the intervention and nonintervention schools was helpful because it allowed the district to begin to understand how the rate of change was correlated with participation, and the more rigorous statistical analyses pinpointed where we could be most confident in that correlation.

This allowed the district to more accurately identify where their investments were having the most impact and explore the root causes of those differences to guide future support for teachers and students.

COMPARING SIMILAR SCHOOLS WITH AND WITHOUT COACHING IN TEXAS

A large urban district in Texas planned to gradually roll out a new high-quality math curriculum. All schools would ultimately implement the new math curriculum, but Leading Educators partnered with the district to support an initial subset of schools.

We supported district-level instructional coaches and school leaders through coaching and professional learning sessions, and they in turn facilitated ongoing learning for teachers in their schools to support the new curriculum.

The district's goals were to ensure instruction was aligned to the instructional shifts demanded by rigorous college and career-readiness standards and for all students to gain deeper mastery of mathematical standards. Because the district's budget was limited, some schools attended professional learning sessions and received coaching support directly from Leading Educators and a different set of schools only attended Leading Educators' professional learning sessions and received coaching support from existing district coaches.

The schools included in this rollout came to participate in two different ways. All schools identified by district leaders as lowest-performing and highest need participated. In addition, district leaders were eager to support the gradual rollout with initial wins, so they allowed other schools to opt in and pilot the new math curriculum.

This had implications for our program evaluation design. Because district leaders believed it was critical to support all of the schools they saw as having the greatest need, finding a strong comparison group for those schools would have been challenging.

IDEAS

> **WHAT IS A MATCHING ANALYSIS?**
>
> Matching is a statistical technique for estimating the effect of an intervention by comparing the units that receive the intervention with units that did not receive the intervention that are similar in observed characteristics. For this analysis, we used multilevel matching with the matchMulti package in R (Pimentel et al., 2023).

However, we had other tools to analyze data. We were able to create matched comparison samples.

Because the schools came from a very large district, we could identify comparison schools that were similar to the intervention schools, thereby reducing the chances that differences we found would be due to factors like the student populations served, teachers' and leaders' knowledge and skills, and schools' motivation to participate.

With the matching analyses, we compared the change in standardized state assessment math scores for supported schools with a set of schools that were very similar in baseline outcomes and other characteristics but that did not receive the support.

Additionally, we were able to disaggregate into groups based on whether schools received coaching support directly from Leading Educators and whether they opted in or were assigned by the district.

We found that:
• All schools that received coaching from Leading Educators *grew* by 0.06 standard deviations, while matched comparison schools *decreased* by 0.04 standard deviations.
• Schools that implemented the new curriculum but did not receive Leading Educators coaching *decreased* by 0.01 standard deviations during this time. This difference suggested

the importance of investing in external coaching for leaders when implementing a new curriculum.
• Schools that received Leading Educators coaching grew at equal rates regardless of whether they opted in or not. Since the lowest-performing schools who were assigned to participate started 0.6 standard deviations below the district average and the schools who opted in started roughly at the district average, this suggested this program could be effective for schools at a range of starting places.

The strong matched comparison group provided some confidence that the difference in growth was likely due to Leading Educators' coaching and not due to other factors occurring across the district at the time. Additionally, since there was no difference based on whether schools opted in, we could be more confident that the growth was likely not due to motivation to participate but instead to the intervention itself.

Observations provided additional evidence of how this growth occurred, finding improvements in use of the new, high-quality curricular materials: 78% of math materials regularly used in classrooms were considered high-quality, compared to only 23% the year before.

Nevertheless, as a practical

evaluation of only one year of the initiative, the study had limitations. While the study was able to find an equivalent comparison group, the differences in rate of growth between the groups were not statistically significant, perhaps due to the size of the sample. As a result, the district was encouraged by the results but also recognized the need for additional evidence. As with all practical evaluations, repeated studies over time are needed to corroborate the findings.

CALL TO ACTION

Practical evaluations like the ones described here can be done in every systemic instructional intervention, every year, to ensure that investments have impact where it matters most: for students. Meaningful steps to increase the quality of evidence are always possible, even when conditions for more rigorous evidence standards are not met.

There is a valuable middle road between conducting rigorous, randomized evaluations and placing all our trust in single-group pre-post analyses of professional learning initiatives. With practical evaluation, we can increase the frequency with which we consider whether interventions make a difference, and whether they can do so repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. Driving improvement along the way, we can achieve greater results for all.

QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

How can district leaders determine whether their professional learning has impact? How can partners support stronger evaluation of professional learning? The following questions can help leaders understand how trustworthy the evidence is. Answering these questions can help provide a more nuanced understanding of impact and how likely it is to be replicated.

- Are changes in outcomes measured for both teachers and students (e.g., instructional practice, student learning, or student engagement)?
- In comparison to the schools that engaged in the professional learning intervention, how did other similar schools change on the outcomes in the same time? What is similar or different about the comparison group that could have influenced those outcomes? Is there a better comparison group available?
- Is the outcome measured in a way that may leave out important information, such as only including the percentage of students performing at a particular level, which will not provide information about the movement of students above or below that threshold?
- Who is included or not included in the data analysis? For example, are some groups of students or teachers who received support excluded, and if so, why? How could that influence the results?
- What were trends like before the program started? Were schools that received the intervention already improving, and at what rate? How many years of data are included? Are any significant years left out?
- Were the changes in outcomes experienced equally by all schools who received the program?

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Program evaluation and design go hand-in-hand in Tennessee

BY JOE ANISTRANSKI, KAREN HARPER, AND STEPHANIE ZEIGER

Educators and researchers often think of program design and program evaluation as separate endeavors, even intentionally creating a firewall between them. But what if designers and evaluators worked together, combining their insights to strengthen both the program and the study of it? In our work evaluating a statewide professional learning program in Tennessee, we have found this approach benefits everyone involved.

Since 2022, we've undertaken an ambitious task of evaluating the Reach Them All computer science initiative's professional learning for school- and district-level educators across Tennessee (see sidebar on p. 49). We have engaged in a collaborative evaluation design process that started at the beginning of the initiative to explore how the professional learning program works.

We made strategic evaluation decisions based on the program goals while continually integrating incoming information based on ongoing data collection that presented new opportunities for action. By gathering evidence from educators across the state, we're constructing a nuanced, actionable picture of how a program

gains a foothold in instructional practice and establishes processes to sustain high-quality teaching and learning.

In this article, we share strategies for a collaborative approach to evaluation, show how this approach is improving our ability to develop meaningful data collection tools, and conclude with three specific lessons for collaborative design. Because this initiative serves teachers who are not content-area experts in computer science, we believe our approach is applicable to evaluating professional learning in any content area.

HOW WE BEGAN

In 2022, the Tennessee General Assembly unanimously passed legislation requiring the teaching and learning of computer science in all grades statewide by the 2024-25 academic year. To implement professional learning at this scale, the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network — a public-private partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education and Battelle, a leader in STEM and workforce development programming — devised the Reach Them All program. The program is based on the network members' expertise and input from an advisory board of academic and industry experts.

Reach Them All is a train-the-trainer professional learning model in which core program representatives redeliver interactive, collaborative learning to educators within their districts. This is no small task in a predominantly rural state education system covering two time zones with more than 60,000 teachers and 1 million students (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

To make data-driven improvements in this large-scale initiative, the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network partnered with NWEA, a nonprofit that provides evidence-based products and services to schools and districts, to undertake ongoing, formative program evaluation from the beginning of Reach Them All. This work is based on NWEA's expertise in evaluating professional learning.

ESTABLISHING EVALUATION DESIGN GOALS

During an intensive, three-day collaborative evaluation design session in Nashville, Tennessee, NWEA and members of the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network collaborated to construct an evaluation plan based on Thomas Guskey's evaluation framework (e.g., Guskey, 2000; Nordengren & Guskey, 2020; also see the article in this issue on p. 28). Guskey's framework is based on the work of Donald Kirkpatrick, who developed a four-level model for evaluating training programs in business and industry (Kirkpatrick, 1959).

We leveraged NWEA's previous experience working with Guskey to design and validate similar approaches in other professional learning contexts (Nordengren & Guskey, 2020) and welcomed the opportunity Reach Them All provided to apply Guskey's framework at scale.

We opened the first day of this process by facilitating an active discussion of goal development among all participants to ensure shared understanding of essential outcomes. This resulted in an evaluation strategy tied closely to three main professional learning goals:

1. Teachers develop a foundational understanding of computational thinking and computer science concepts.
2. Teachers discover connections between what they teach and computational thinking and computer science concepts. Teachers use these connections to integrate computational thinking and computer science concepts into their classrooms.
3. Teachers cultivate a mindset that expects all students to participate in computational thinking and computer science.

By collaborating to define what we needed to learn about the program, we streamlined the collection, analysis, and reporting of data connected to program outcomes. We generated a system of surveys, observations, and portfolios to gather multiple levels of evidence of the effectiveness of Reach Them All based on these goals.

DESIGNING SURVEYS

We concluded the first day of our design session by creating surveys to learn how program participants experienced Reach Them All. These surveys were designed to capture educators' reactions to professional learning, knowledge of state legislation, experiences of organizational support and change, and their need for additional support.

We needed a survey that would represent both the district-level program representatives (called delegates and ambassadors) who learned to facilitate professional learning and the school-level educators with whom those representatives worked. We knew that we needed sufficient information from two

distinct groups and that the data would be more meaningful if collected at more than one time point.

We also acknowledged the importance of balancing our need for data with real-world demands on educators' time, so we minimized the number of questions and the time required to complete surveys by maintaining a tight focus on the three essential outcomes of Reach Them All.

We optimized our collection of essential data by planning surveys at key program time points, using the calendar of professional learning activities. We collected information from delegates and ambassadors during their initial entry to the program and after their intensive two-day professional learning sessions.

When delegates and ambassadors redelivered learning in their districts, we surveyed participants at the end of their learning experiences. Then, we conducted a midyear follow-up survey of those participants to gauge what stuck with them from the learning and what additional support they would need. We worked as a team to determine essential reporting deadlines, and we planned for surveys to close with time to analyze data by those deadlines.

CREATING OBSERVATION AND PORTFOLIO RUBRICS

On day two, we created a classroom observation system focusing on educators' application of the knowledge and skills targeted by Reach Them All. To observe teaching and learning in such a large state, we needed a trustworthy tool that would reflect program goals in classrooms across the state and show consistency across different types of instruction (e.g., different content areas, grade bands). This took many rounds of revision, and we alternated between individual reflection and group revisions to refine our rubric.

After ensuring the rubric identified observable educator behavior aligned with professional learning goals,

we developed a plan for training delegates and ambassadors to serve as our data collection team, leveraging their connections in districts across Tennessee. We framed the observations as the basis for professional learning conversations about instructional practices. We viewed this as a key opportunity for our evaluation to build longer-term capacity in districts by supporting ongoing improvements in educators' practice.

Our third collaborative design day focused on student learning outcomes. We prioritized accessing what students do in their learning to assess how educator professional learning may have shaped students' experiences. We chose to collect classroom portfolios of digitally submitted artifacts and crafted a portfolio rubric similar to the observation rubric. This created an opportunity to understand how professional learning may be reflected across lessons or through specific activities within student work.

We refined the rubric through multiple rounds of collaborative revision, focusing on aspects of high-quality instruction emphasized in Reach Them All. Similar to our observation strategy, we relied on delegates and ambassadors to collect portfolio artifacts in their districts. We created a secure digital submission portal to for them to share these artifacts with us.

ADJUSTING EVALUATION PLANS IN REAL TIME

During the rollout of the program and its evaluation, we kept our design partnership active and used our collaborative design session as the foundation for responding to real-world needs as they unfolded. For example, we recognized an unplanned opportunity to check the consistency of our observation rubric before implementing it.

Concurrent with Reach Them All, the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network created a computer science video library by filming K-12 educators teaching lessons in multiple locations

across Tennessee. These videos proved to be a valuable resource for calibrating the observation rubric and training observers. This replaced our initial plan to pilot and calibrate the rubric with a small group of delegates and ambassadors, allowing us to complete the reliability calibration months earlier than anticipated and shift our focus to training observers.

In another example of real-time adjustment, we discovered an opportunity to analyze documents that participants were generating as part of the professional learning program. One focal point of Reach Them All is that districts have autonomy over how and when they redeliver professional learning based on their local context.

During their two-day training, delegates and ambassadors completed and uploaded a document detailing their plans for when and how they would facilitate professional learning in their local districts, which provided us with important information about the planned rollout.

From this, we learned that the professional learning schedule would extend beyond our anticipated time frame because some districts opted for a phased approach distributed across the entire academic year. We were then able to adjust the timing of our main evaluation components accordingly. We also learned how some districts added extra components to the program, such as using asynchronous learning opportunities.

LESSONS LEARNED

Data collection and analysis will conclude in spring 2024 with a full summary to follow in summer 2024. These data will yield valuable information about the results of the program for teacher practices and student learning. But we are already learning important lessons about the value of a collaborative evaluation approach:

- Collaboratively defining and refining the goals of a professional learning program

are instrumental in both the rollout of the program (e.g., in training and supporting delegates and ambassadors) and the evaluation. District delegates and ambassadors learned these goals during training, enabling them to tailor redelivery to our overarching objectives. Core goals can be a continual guide through program development, delivery, and evaluation, but it takes teamwork to stay tightly focused on these goals as experienced in Reach Them All.

- In the context of a complex, statewide professional learning initiative, it is essential to tailor evaluation to the realities of professional learning at the local level. Our partnership in Reach Them All revealed the importance of recognizing and embracing unexpected opportunities to make our evaluation more representative of what actually happened in professional learning. This allows us to look more deeply into how professional learning works in context, what additional questions we need to ask, and what next steps we need to take.

- The dynamic nature of professional learning requires in-the-moment adjustments to the evaluation plan and the professional learning program itself. Because we established our partnership at the beginning of the professional learning program, we were able to actively adjust our approach by working together to determine what additional evidence we needed to collect and use along the way. Our collaboration led to a nimble evaluation plan, which shows the true value of consistent collaboration and communication when evaluating professional learning programs.

Some discussions of evaluating professional learning encourage

evaluating the evaluation, and many evaluators choose to do so at the end of implementation. Based on our experiences in Tennessee, we believe it is better to reflect, assess, and adjust the evaluation process in an ongoing collaborative process.

We strongly encourage this model for states and districts launching new teaching and learning initiatives in a variety of content areas. Multiple perspectives are a tremendous asset that can strengthen both programs and their evaluations. Partners help each other stay focused on the core goals to adjust the program and evaluation so that all stakeholders can ensure the best possible outcomes for students.

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Equity-centered evaluation brings up emotions. That's OK

BY JENNIFER AHN

Strong emotions can surface when we evaluate our work, especially when we are deeply invested in it. Since professional learning is about shifting adult mindsets and behavior, it is work that frequently challenges assumptions, expectations, beliefs, instructional practices, and long-standing habits.

Complex and variable, the evaluation of its efficacy often involves strong feelings, especially when we are already trying hard to do what we think is right for our students, and especially when we think about the equity implications of our evaluation.

As a result, we often default to simplistic, compliance-driven modes of evaluation, simply measuring what

people did. Compliance-driven modes of evaluation can create safety in their simplicity — we can avoid tricky topics and strong emotions if our evaluation is a checklist of tasks. Did people do what we asked them to do? Did they do it on time? Did they document what they did so we can track it? Easily measured, these forms of evaluation can lead educators to prioritize completion

FOUR EQUITY TRAPS	
Deficit thinking *Expressing biases about students and their communities* • Our students can't … • This student doesn't … • Most students don't …	**Blame game** *Shifting focus elsewhere, often to an area outside of one's locus of control* • If only the student … • If only their parent/guardian/family … • If only our school/district …
Excuse the data *Fixating on the validity of the data* • We had a bad day in class, so … • This assessment is not valid because … • My data isn't ready …	**Relinquishing responsibility** *Removing responsibility through helplessness, confusion, or lack of expertise* • I've tried everything possible … • That's not my job … • There's nothing I can do because …

above quality and tasks over the people they hope to better serve — students and families.

But staying at that level means never digging in to understand the impact of our professional learning. This not only deprofessionalizes educators and ignores the complexity and humanistic aspects of the work. It also directs the focus of our improvement away from student groups who most stand to benefit from it.

The fear that our hard work has not led to the changes we want to see for marginalized students can lead us to shy away from examining it, which just undermines our goals. So how do we move beyond compliance-driven modes of evaluation to those that enable us to examine the equity implications of our work and have hard but important conversations about which students are ultimately being served by our professional learning? How can we create evaluative systems that center conversations about equity, especially when we are making sense of the results? And how can we help educators work through the strong emotions that emerge when examining the efficacy of their work?

To have meaningful and productive conversations about evaluation and data, educators must be equipped with effective practices and tools that allow them to recognize and work with strong emotions. And these opportunities must be a cyclical, embedded part of the evaluation process. That way, every time we evaluate professional learning, we ground our conversation in equity and data, centering the people we are most trying to support.

I explore these questions and ways to address them here using a case study from a large high school in the Bay Area of San Francisco, California, which I will call Bayview High to protect the school's anonymity.

▶ CASE STUDY: BAYVIEW HIGH

TACKLING RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITIES

Since 2021, Bayview High staff have been tackling racial disproportionality in attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes, paying specific attention to their Black/African American students. During this time, I have worked with them

and have seen their commitment to this goal manifest in their professional learning for the whole staff as well as in smaller professional learning communities (PLCs). This commitment threads throughout the restructuring of their walk-throughs, training in key initiatives, and the alignment of curriculum for their advisory period.

After two years of hard work, Bayview teachers and their school administrators were curious to evaluate the impact of their professional learning. They had spent the last two years planning, learning, and implementing. They were eager to understand if their efforts were leading to their desired equity outcomes.

A SOLID STARTING POINT

If Bayview teacher leaders and administrators were simply inventorying their action steps, their evaluation would reflect a glowing success. Collectively, they had done more in two years compared to similar schools, and their ability to generate staff buy-in and integrate new practices was remarkable.

While there are still a few reluctant colleagues, many staff can identify

their schoolwide goals and feel invested in them. The school revamped walk-throughs to integrate peer-to-peer observation and shifted grading policies to raise the floor from zero to 50%; teachers identified focal students in every advisory period.

While taking stock of action steps is an important first step in any evaluation process, it can't end there because it doesn't assess impact. Questions exploring impact would include: Are peer-to-peer observations deepening awareness and aligning instruction? Did raising the grading floor decrease racial disproportionality in grades? Do focal students experience more belonging and come to school more often?

Fortunately, Bayview educators went beyond an inventory of actions and chose to evaluate their professional learning more deeply. They engaged in collaborative, sensemaking conversations grounded in data to evaluate how their professional learning was affecting student learning, with a closer look at their focal Black/African American students. Their conversations were richer than a summary of check-boxes.

A CHALLENGE: EQUITY TRAPS

Creating space to collectively look at data and make sense of it is essential in evaluation. Bayview teachers recognized this and created opportunities for discussion about the data. But a challenge quickly arose: Many educators fell into common equity traps.

An equity trap is a distraction that enables us to shift thinking and personal responsibility away from understanding root causes of inequity. People fall into them for a variety of reasons, but usually it is because of the strong emotions that emerge when we try to have candid conversations about equity, including racial and gender justice.

During a conversation facilitated by administrators, Bayview's staff noticed that, despite their best efforts, students' progress report grades continued to

reflect disproportionate outcomes. Black/African American students received more D and F grades than other groups.

Bayview administrators invited teachers to partner with them in a sensemaking conversation, hoping it would illuminate possible causes. Teachers were asked to pay specific attention to any Black/African American students on the list, guided by carefully crafted questions like:

- Are we doing what we said we were going to do?
- Did our actions make progress toward our desired change?
- Is there other data we could review that would give us more information?
- What are our key learnings and next steps?

Teachers could see that disproportionality was still present in the progress report data, but instead of raising genuine questions and honestly discussing root causes, many teachers fell into equity traps, such as discussing students' lack of engagement or will.

These traps didn't go unnoticed, but they often went undiscussed. One Bayview teacher leader told me that she noticed her colleagues engaging in one or more equity traps, but that she wasn't sure how to discuss this in a safe way.

Another teacher leader wondered if colleagues deflected responsibility and fell into equity traps because they felt frustrated and at a loss for what to do. For instance, one teacher leader said that she worked really hard — calling students' homes and pulling students aside for one-on-one conversations — and that she felt frustrated with the grading data because she didn't know what else to do.

The Bayview teacher leaders identified strong feelings as reasons why they, and their colleagues, were falling into equity traps. These thinking patterns enabled them to deflect their defensiveness, shame, or fragility back onto the data or their students. Unfortunately, that also prevented them

from being able to engage meaningfully in sensemaking conversations to evaluate their work honestly.

Based on my experience, the table on p. 53 outlines four equity traps to watch out for when looking at data to make sense of and evaluate impact.

NAMING EQUITY TRAPS

In some cases, the conversation led to discussion about the need for mindset shifts.

At one point in Bayview's debrief conversation, a teacher leader said she was nice to those students on her D/F list, but they still didn't attend. She felt she had tried and framed "niceness" as a best practice for increasing attendance, relinquishing her responsibility to do more.

Seeing this as the equity trap of relinquishing responsibility, a colleague responded, "Maybe we shouldn't just be nice to them. Maybe we shouldn't just be OK with them hardly coming to class. I feel like we've had this conversation every year, and we don't act."

While this comment created some tension, it also reflected progress. Earlier in the year, the Bayview staff participated in professional learning about the "culture of nice" and how it confuses courtesy with deep equity work.

The second teacher's response references that work and weaves it into this conversation, bringing visibility to the equity trap. Perhaps the comment could have been shared more artfully, but we cannot always wait for feedback to come packaged according to our listening preferences. This comment marked a turning point that led the group toward deeper sensemaking and evaluation, and the evaluation process became more honest.

One teacher leader suggested that instead of making assumptions about this progress report data, they should discuss it with their focal students and adapt based on students' responses. A school principal wondered aloud about

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Centering Voices of Color framework

Listen to BIPOC voices. When evaluating impact, disaggregating data is a start, but also take time to engage in conversation with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students, families, and staff. How are they experiencing learning at your site? Humanize their experiences and value their oral history as much as you do your quantitative data.

Acknowledge feelings. When discussing the existence and impact of racial inequity within our work, strong emotions may emerge. Are there protocols or norms that support educators to work through these feelings? Whose feelings are we prioritizing in these protocols? We must honor and center BIPOC experiences so they do not have to defend their truth; too often, we center fragility above the needs and feelings of BIPOC colleagues and students. Since all of us fall into equity traps, how do we acknowledge our feelings as learning opportunities?

Examine assumptions. When evaluating progress, assumptions and biases may emerge. Provide ways for people to recognize and grapple with them. Are there words or phrases that need to be unpacked? How do we support one another to face our assumptions and deepen our awareness?

Activate anti-racist action. Evaluation is cyclical; there is no endpoint. Once your evaluation identifies equity gaps in your professional learning and practices, initiate anti-racist adaptation and innovation. Ask: How are we centering vulnerable groups as we enact change? How do we return to our equity goals so our anti-racist actions become normative shifts?

"the difference between best practices and equity."

As a group, they became curious and shifted their attention to learn more about their focal students. Able to handle this kind of honest talk, the group began looking at underlying assumptions as possible root causes.

AN EQUITY-CENTERED EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

When our evaluations do not equip and support educators to acknowledge equity traps, it is a missed opportunity. But this is easier said than done. How do you successfully discuss racial biases, which stir strong feelings?

To understand how to do this and in service of racial equity, I started a BIPOC leaders network filled with teacher, school, and district leaders from across the Bay Area in spring 2021. This group seeks to center BIPOC educators' experiences — and their thriving in schools — both as learners and as practitioners.

Listening to their experiences,

wisdom, and feedback led my colleague Malia Tayabas-Kim and I to generate a framework that centers racial equity in professional learning. It includes the evaluation of professional learning and the sensemaking conversations that should accompany any evaluative process. See the elements of the framework above.

WORKING WITH EMOTIONS

After the debrief conversation at Bayview, I followed up with the administrators. They expressed concern and wondered if it had increased tension amongst the staff. I replied by saying that emotional tension also represents forward progress. Emotions are gifts that reveal our thinking, rich sources of learning that can catapult us to deepen our awareness of what we believe and value.

It takes bravery to acknowledge and work with our emotions in professional settings. By embracing the emotional load that comes with equity-centered evaluation, Bayview is better equipped

to work toward transformational change. Administrators and teacher leaders are leading as partners, becoming learners who are exploring how to evaluate impact alongside their staff.

The Bayview High administrators, teacher leaders, and colleagues demonstrate a schoolwide commitment to racial justice by honestly evaluating their progress through equity-centered sensemaking. Collectively, the staff works to identify equity traps that may emerge.

In a move from assumption to inquiry, they have held regular learning partnership conversations with Black/African American students and families. And, instead of doing one-off evaluative processes based on the completion of tasks, they routinely examine their professional learning outcomes so they can continuously adapt and improve.

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TOOLS

EVALUATE YOUR WORK, STEP BY STEP

Evaluation doesn't have to be overwhelming. Step-by-step guidance (p. 58) can help educators at all levels determine what questions to ask, how to answer them, and how to apply the insights learned. Joellen Killion walks through these steps and strategies in an update to a seminal resource from 2003. Also in this section is a preview of Learning Forward's evaluation resources.

Is your professional learning working?
8 steps to find out

BY JOELLEN KILLION

Evaluating professional learning to measure its effectiveness and impact on student learning is an important process for those who design, lead, and facilitate educator learning. Evaluation demonstrates a commitment to accountability for investments in professional learning and a mechanism to ensure its continuous improvement. The Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) articulate the importance of evaluation. According to the Evidence standard, "Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators create expectations and build capacity for use of evidence, leverage evidence, data, and research from multiple sources to plan educator learning, and measure and report the impact of professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2022).

Evaluating professional learning requires thoughtful and intentional effort. As I have defined it in *Assessing Impact* (Killion, 2018), "Evaluation is a systemic, purposeful, standards-driven process of studying, reviewing, and analyzing data about a professional learning program gathered from multiple sources to make judgments and informed decisions about the program" (Killion, 2018, p. 8).

OVERVIEW OF STEPS

1. Assess evaluability.
2. Formulate evaluation questions.
3. Construct evaluation framework.
4. Collect data.
5. Organize, analyze, and display data.
6. Interpret data.
7. Report, disseminate, and use findings.
8. Evaluate the evaluation.

However, not all evaluation efforts are rigorous enough or sufficient to make a claim that professional learning impacts student learning.

Using the following eight steps of the evaluation process, drawn from extensive practice and research in program evaluation, professional learning leaders will be able to answer important questions about the relationship among professional learning, educator practice, and student learning. The process is described in this article. Threaded throughout is an example of evaluating a professional learning effort to improve teachers' math instruction to improve student achievement in math.

1. ASSESS EVALUABILITY.

The first step is determining whether a professional learning program or initiative is ready to be evaluated. This is based on the degree to which the professional learning, as planned, is sufficient to generate the intended results. A program of professional learning, not individual events or episodes, is far more likely to change educator practice and student learning. A program of professional learning is a "set of planned and implemented actions, guided by research, evidence, and standards of effective professional learning, accompanied by adequate resources, and directed toward the achievement of defined outcomes related to educator practice and its impact on student learning" (Killion, 2018, p. 8).

Assessing evaluability involves determining if the program's design is likely to produce its intended results. "It is futile to expect results for students from a professional learning program that is unlikely to produce them. Evaluation cannot compensate for a professional learning program that is poorly conceived and constructed. Perhaps Chen (1990) said it best: 'Current problems and limitations of program evaluation lie more with lack of adequate conceptual framework of the program than with methodological weakness (p. 293)' " (Killion, 2018, pp. 44-45).

Before evaluating any professional learning program, the evaluator asks whether the program is feasible, clear, sufficiently powerful to produce the intended results, and worth doing. To determine whether a program is ready to be evaluated, an evaluator analyzes the program's goals, expressed as expected changes for students; outcomes, expressed as changes for educators; indicators of success; standard of success; and the program's theory of change and logic model, each of which is described below.

Goals

A program's goals express its intended results in terms of student success. Instead of a goal such as training all teachers, a results-driven program has a clearly stated goal for students, such as all students meeting grade-level expectations in math. A strong goal is to increase student performance on end-of-course assessments by a certain percentage over a defined time period. When student performance reaches the established threshold, the program is working as intended. If not, the program requires adjustment in its design, operations, or resources.

Outcomes

Outcomes describe the specific changes necessary to achieve the goal. The changes occur in some or all of these areas: knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors, which can be remembered through the acronym

TOOLS

KASAB. These changes occur in practices associated with the student goal area and, for professional learning, they are most closely connected to changes educators make. They can occur among multiple stakeholders. For example, in some cases, coaches are expected to change their practices to support desired changes in teachers' instructional practices. Principals, too, will be required to change some of their monitoring and supervisory practices to align with the classroom changes. When principals change their supervisory practices, central office may make changes to help principals spend more time in classrooms. Even parents may be expected to make changes, if they are asked to modify how they are supporting students at home.

Indicator of success

An indicator of success is the specific way success is demonstrated. Any goal and set of outcomes might have multiple indicators of success to strengthen the reliability of the claims evaluators are able to make about the program. Professional learning designers identify one or more indicators of success early in the planning process so the program's design aligns with the expected results. An indicator of success also guides an evaluator to know what type of data to collect. Indicators can include formative assessments, classroom tasks, observations, enrollment of underrepresented populations in advanced-level courses, grades, and performance on national standardized tests.

Standard of success

A program's standard of success is the benchmark that defines whether the program has achieved its goals. It typically is a number representing the performance increase that, when met, is sufficient to declare the program successful (or, when not met, to signal the need for adjustments). For example, a 10% increase in math performance on a common formative assessment is a standard of success. Specificity is

important; if evaluators have not set a specific target, then any degree of improvement, even a 0.002 increase in average test scores, may be interpreted as success, even if it is not practically meaningful. For example, for changes in educator practice associated with a mathematics professional learning program, a standard of success is setting the expected level for teachers' accuracy and frequency of implementation of the mathematical instructional practices at 85% during year one and increasing it gradually to 100% by the third year.

Theory of change

A theory of change articulates "what the professional learning program is and how it is expected to produce the intended results. A program's theory of change delineates the causal processes through which change happens as a result of the program's strategies or actions" (Killion, 2018, p. 54). It includes the program's components, their sequence, and the assumptions upon which the program is based (Killion, 2018). An explicit theory of change is a road map for program designers, managers, participants, and evaluators showing how the program will work and how they see the connection between educator learning and student success. It is the big picture that serves as a planning tool, an implementation guide, a monitoring tool, and a tool for evaluating the program's success. Without the theory of change, the connection between the program's components and intended results — especially the connection between educator learning and student improvement — may be unclear.

Theories of change can be based on existing theories, research, or best practice. For example, the social interaction theory of learning might serve as the basis for designing adult learning, in which case the theory of change would include multiple, frequent, in-depth opportunities for participants to process their learning with colleagues.

Consider the sample theory of

change on p. 61 for a mathematics professional learning program.

Every theory of change is based on a set of assumptions that guide decisions about the components included and their sequence. For example, here is one assumption on which this theory of change is based: Coaching enhances the implementation of instructional practices.

Any one program can have multiple theories of change. Individual theories are neither right nor wrong, but one may be more appropriate for a specific context and circumstances. Furthermore, when multiple actors are expected to influence the success of professional learning, there may be several theories of change, each related to a specific group of stakeholders, such as central office staff, principals, and coaches. Those theories of change layer together, as depicted on p. 62.

Logic model

A logic model is a particular kind of action plan that specifies the inputs, activities, outputs, and initial, intermediate, and intended outcomes that will accomplish the identified goal. A program's logic model is related to but distinct from the theory of change: "A theory of change identifies rationale for the chain of causal actions that predicts and explains how the program works to achieve the intended results. … A logic model uses the theory of change to depict the operation of a program by delineating several key components of an action or operational plan" (Killion, 2018, p. 60). A logic model ensures that all the program's activities align with the intended outcomes and that initial and intermediate outcomes will lead to the intended results. An evaluator uses the logic model to assess the thoroughness of the plan before beginning an evaluation and uses it as a progress map in the program's formative evaluation, which focuses on implementation of the program and benchmarks that lead to goal attainment.

SAMPLE THEORY OF CHANGE

District leaders analyze student and educator data about mathematics performance to identify high-leverage opportunities for increasing student learning.

Professional learning leaders design and implement a course to develop and extend teacher and coach understanding and use of mathematics instructional practices.

District and school leaders provide classroom instructional materials and resources to support teacher and student success.

District leaders support principal and coach understanding of how to gather data about effective mathematics instructional practices and support teacher use of them.

Coaches provide ongoing coaching support to teachers as they implement and refine their use of mathematics instructional practices.

Coaches and principals engage teachers in problem-solving and extended learning about the use of mathematics instructional practices and how to assess student learning.

Coaches and teachers review classroom tasks and daily assessment results to adjust instruction to address student needs.

A logic model has several components:

- Inputs: Resources assigned to a program, including personnel, facilities, equipment, budget, etc.
- Outputs: Products generated to support program implementation or documentation of a completed action.
- Activities: Services the program provides to clients.
- Initial outcomes: First-level changes in program participant knowledge and skills as a result of early activities. They may include changes in attitude. They have little inherent value, yet are important precursors to later-stage changes.
- Intermediate outcomes: Changes in program participant attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors resulting from the initial changes in knowledge and skills. They are essential to lead to changes in classroom practices that affect student learning experiences and success.
- Intended results: Desired results of the program (related to student achievement) expressed in the goal.

For an example, see the logic model on p. 63.

KASAB

Knowledge
Conceptual understanding of information, theories, principles, and research.

Attitudes
Beliefs about the value of information or strategies.

Skills
The ability or capacity to use strategies and processes to apply knowledge.
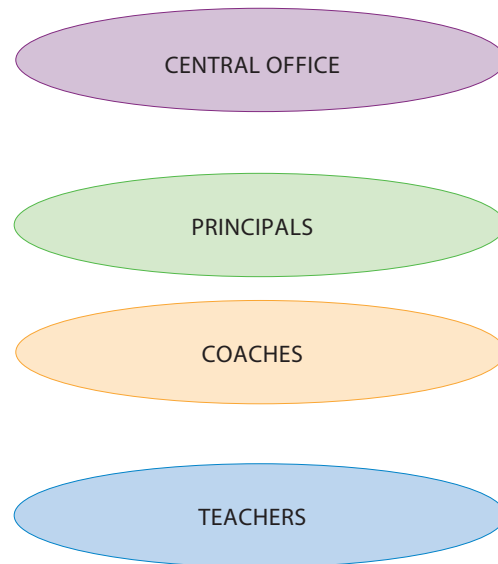
Aspirations
Desires, or internal motivation, to engage in a practice.

Behaviors
Consistent application of knowledge and skills driven by attitudes and aspirations.

Source: Killion, 2018, p. 50.

HOW THEORIES OF CHANGE LAYER TOGETHER

CENTRAL OFFICE

PRINCIPALS

COACHES

TEACHERS

Logic models are planned from the goals backward. The intended results for students drive the intermediate and initial outcomes, which in turn drive the actions teachers are expected to take and changes they are expected to make. These actions drive the outputs that will be created to support the changes and the inputs necessary to produce them. This backward planning is represented in the sample logic model by arrows at the top of the figure.

2. FORMULATE EVALUATION QUESTIONS.

Evaluators craft formative and summative evaluation questions that allow them to make claims about the effects of the professional learning program. The professional learning goals, outcomes, theory of change, and the logic model are used to generate the evaluation questions.

Formative evaluation questions are based on the program's initial and intermediate outcomes. Without first answering these questions, evaluators will be unable to claim

that teachers' learning contributes to student learning. Most professional learning programs have numerous initial and intermediate outcomes, so evaluators choose which are pivotal to the program's success and most likely to provide crucial information about whether the program is likely to lead to student improvement. For example, for the theory of change and logic model in this article, an evaluator may choose to focus on whether teachers are integrating the new practices in their instruction, rather than whether they can explain the practices, because use of the practices is more critical in student success. They may also decide to examine whether coaches and principals are conducting classroom observations of math instruction and using the data collected in reflective conversations with teachers.

Answering these kinds of formative evaluation questions helps program leaders monitor progress toward the goal so that they can adjust the program design, if necessary, to ensure that the actions are leading toward the goal.

It also helps them explain how the change steps are connected, which lends more support to claims about how the program impacts student achievement. For example, if the evaluation shows that teachers engaged in coaching to support the implementation of specific practices, teachers then implemented the practices with accuracy and frequency, and student achievement increased, the formative data will help make the case that the professional learning positively influences achievement.

Summative evaluation questions ask whether the program met its goals. A summative evaluation question for the goal above is: Does student success on end-of-unit and end-of-course assessments increase by 10% for all students when teachers are integrating the mathematics practices accurately and routinely in instruction? It is important for the goal and summative questions to examine student achievement. If the goals are not expressed as student success goals, then the evaluator may be able

SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL

Goal statement (intended results for students: **By the end of the school year, all students will increase their performance on end-of-unit and end-of-course assessments in mathematics by at least 10%.**

Order of planning: Logic models are planned from the goals backward.

←——————— ←——————— ←———————

INPUTS		OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES		RESULTS
Resources	Actions/strategies	Outputs	Initial educator learning outcomes	Intermediate educator practice outcomes	Intended results for students
Time to participate in the professional learning course. Math manipulatives.	Design professional learning course for teachers, coaches, and principals. Implement course.	Course materials. Video library of teachers applying the mathematics practices.	Teachers, coaches, and principals explain the eight mathematics practices with 85% accuracy (*knowledge*). Teachers, coaches, and principals identify the research-based explanation about how students benefit when mathematics practices are used (*knowledge, attitudes*). Teachers, coaches, and principals evaluate videotaped lessons for evidence of integration of mathematics practices with 85% accuracy (*knowledge, skills*).	All teachers and coaches remodel instructional units to integrate mathematics practices and explain the rationale for choosing the practices included and their alignment with the unit's content with 85% accuracy (*skills*).	All students increase their performance on end-of-course assessment by at least 10% by the end of the school year.
Math instructional materials that integrate the mathematic principles.	Engage teachers in analysis of instructional materials for integration of mathematics practices.	Formative assessments of student performance.	Teachers explain how to assess student performance that results from use of the mathematics practices with 85% accuracy (*knowledge, skills*).	Teachers generate daily and common formative assessments aligned with mathematics content standards and the mathematics practices.	
Time for microteaching.	Engage teachers in microteaching to apply the mathematics practices.	Classroom observation guide for implementation of the mathematics practices. Innovation Configuration map for self-assessment of the implementation of mathematics practices.	Teachers, coaches, and principals evaluate videotaped lessons for evidence of integration of mathematics practices with 85% accuracy (*knowledge, skills*).	Teachers, coaches, and principals explain the value of and advocate for the use of mathematics practices to colleagues, students, parents, and community members (*attitudes*).	
Time for teacher teams to plan and design units and lessons and revise student tasks, discuss challenges, and extend their content and pedagogical understanding.	Engage teachers and coaches in planning for instruction using the mathematics practices. Model instruction that integrates mathematics practices. Implement units and lessons integrating the mathematics practices.	Unit and lesson plan accommodations to meet needs of diverse learners. Criteria checklist for rating the integration of mathematics practices in planned and taught lessons and units.	Teachers generate a unit of instruction that integrates at least four of the mathematics practices that meet 90% of the criteria in the integration of practices checklist. All principals and coaches acquire data-gathering strategies to use in classroom observation about the use of the mathematics practices (*skills*).	Teachers generate five units of instruction that integrate at least four math practices with 80% accuracy. Teachers implement at least four of the eight mathematics practices into a unit of instruction with 80% accuracy five times during the school year (*behaviors*). Teachers use the criteria checklist for integration of mathematics practices to analyze their instructional lessons, student work products, and formative assessment data to reflect on the strengths of their application of the mathematics practices and identify opportunities for refining future instruction (*behaviors, attitudes, aspirations*). Teachers increase the frequency of their use of appropriate mathematics practices to 95% in all math instruction (*behaviors*). All principals and coaches acquire data-gathering strategies to use in classroom observation about the use of the mathematics practices (*skills*).	

to make claims about the degree to which the program achieved the initial or intermediate outcomes, but not its impact on student learning.

3. CONSTRUCT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK.

The evaluation framework is the plan for the evaluation. Decisions made in this step determine the type of data necessary to answer the formative and summative evaluation questions, the appropriate sources of those data, appropriate and feasible data collection methods, data analysis processes, timeline for data collection and analysis, and responsible persons.

These decisions influence the reliability and validity of claims made using the data, so evaluators seek the most robust data possible, along with ways to triangulate data sources, types of data, or data collection methods to strengthen the claims. In some cases, though, evaluators may decide to use approximate data because of feasibility issues. If, for example, evaluators want to know whether teachers are implementing mathematics practices, direct observations of classrooms is the most authentic source of data to answer this question. However, observing every teacher for the purpose of program evaluation is a costly and labor-intensive process. The evaluator might therefore use a teacher survey about how often they use the practices. Because this is an approximate data source, the evaluator may want to supplement the survey data with coaching notes and student work samples to triangulate the data.

In addition to the types of data, the source of the data matters. Ideally, a matched group of students and/or teachers not receiving the program is available for comparisons, yet that is not always feasible in practitioner-based evaluations. In this case, an evaluator may use a pre- and post-program design because two points of data are required to answer a question about an increase either in educator practice or student success.

For example, see the sample

elements for an evaluation plan on p. 65. Note that this is not a comprehensive evaluation plan, but rather an excerpt for illustrative purposes.

4. COLLECT DATA.

Data collection requires a systematic and thoughtful process to ensure that data are accurate. To ensure accuracy in this step, evaluators often create checks and balances to ensure that data are recorded precisely, errors in data entry are found and corrected, and missing data or outlier data are handled appropriately. Sloppy data collection and management can compromise the integrity of even the most well-designed evaluation.

When collecting data from human subjects, evaluators adhere to standards established by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Yarbrough et al., 2010). They ensure that they have met all the policy expectations of schools and districts for notification, privacy of records, or other areas, and abide by the evaluator code of ethics and standards.

5. ORGANIZE, ANALYZE, AND DISPLAY DATA.

"Throughout the data analysis process, the evaluator is constantly looking at new ways to combine, unpack, rearrange, and connect data to understand the program being evaluated" (Killion, 2018, p. 135). As data are collected, evaluators organize it, check its accuracy, and prepare for analysis. Evaluators pilot newly developed or modified data collection instruments to check the instruments' accuracy and clarity. If more than one individual is collecting data, data collectors may calibrate their processes to achieve accuracy and consistency. Evaluators check for any abnormalities in the data set such as inaccuracies or incompleteness in recording data.

Once evaluators are confident in the integrity of the data, they analyze it. Many practitioners hesitate to use inferential statistical analyses, yet in most cases descriptive analyses such as

counting totals, finding patterns and trends, or simple calculations such as determining the mean, median, mode, and range are sufficient to answer most evaluation questions. Some evaluation questions may require more sophisticated analyses such as factoring, assessing covariance, or creating statistical modeling.

After analyzing data, evaluators display the analyzed data in charts, tables, graphs, or other appropriate formats for interpretation. Careful titling and labeling of data displays facilitate data interpretation and make it more useful for stakeholders.

6. INTERPRET DATA.

While data analysis is the process of counting and comparing, interpreting is making sense of what the analysis tells us. It is a collaborative process carried out by program designers and diverse key stakeholders, including participants, who bring different perspectives into the process. In most evaluations of professional learning programs, this means that teachers, principals, central office staff, and sometimes students work together to study the analyzed and displayed data and form claims about the program's effectiveness and impact on student learning.

Interpretation involves three parts: making meaning, which is the process of determining the significance and explanation of the findings; judgment, which brings values to bear to determine merit and worth; and recommendations, which propose actions based on the results (Patton, 2008). For example, if the analysis demonstrates that math scores have gone up over three years, in the interpretation phase, evaluators engage stakeholders in exploring what the increase means in terms of the professional learning program, considering questions such as: What contributed to the increase? Was the increase consistent across all grades and student populations? What does the increase mean for our school's

SAMPLE ELEMENTS OF AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Professional learning program goal: **By the end of the school year, all students will increase their performance on end-of-unit and end-of-course assessments in mathematics by at least 10%.**

Measurable outcomes/ changes	Evaluation questions (formative and summative)	Data / evidence needed	Data source	Data collection method	Data analysis method	Timeline	Responsible person(s)
Goal: All students increase their performance on end-of-course assessment by at least 10% by the end of the school year.	Did all students increase their performance on end-of-course assessment by at least 10% by the end of the school year?	Student performance data on end-of-course assessment.	Students.	Assessment scores.	Comparison with previous year's student performance.	May–May.	Assistant principal; math teachers.
Teachers generate five units of instruction that integrate at least four math practices with 80% accuracy.	Did teachers' five units of instruction integrate at least four mathematics practices with 80% accuracy?	Teacher work products — generated units.	Teachers.	Collect units monthly November through April.	Scoring unit plans with criteria checklist.	November, January, February, March, and April.	Assistant principal, coach, district math specialist.
Teachers implement at least four of the eight mathematics practices into a unit of instruction with 80% accuracy five times during the school year.	Did teachers implement at least four mathematics practices into a unit of instruction with 80% accuracy at least five times during the school year?	Teacher classroom practice data.	Teachers. Student work products.	Classroom observation data. Teacher self-assessment using the Innovation Configuration map. Teacher reflection notes.	Trend analysis of practices (number and type in observed class) evident in observation and reflection notes. Means score on teacher self-assessment.	Monthly, November through April.	Assistant principal, coach, district math specialist.

math instruction going forward? Then stakeholders make a judgment about the program's merit and worth and recommend its continuation, modification, or discontinuation.

During the interpretation phase, claims of contribution — those stating that the program may have or likely influenced student success — can be made when the evaluation design is descriptive or quasi-experimental. But claims of attribution — that professional learning was the definite cause of the results — require experimental, randomized designs, which are not often used in practitioner-led evaluation studies.

7. REPORT, DISSEMINATE, AND USE FINDINGS.

After interpretation, evaluators decide the audiences to whom they will report the results and the most appropriate formats in which to share them. Not all audiences want the same kind of report. Some formats for sharing evaluation results include technical reports, brief executive summaries, pamphlets, newsletters, news releases to local media, and presentations.

A significant benefit of professional learning program evaluations is using lessons learned to improve future programs. This is most likely to happen when program evaluation results are widely shared, discussed, and used. Evaluators share in the responsibility with program managers or leaders

to use the results of an evaluation in making decisions about subsequent programs or modifications to the existing one.

Evaluation of professional learning increases the integrity of the field and contributes to its body of knowledge. "As the field of professional learning continues to grow and establish a firmer foundation based on evidence, every evaluation offers an opportunity to contribute knowledge to that foundation. Building on the successes of current professional learning and avoiding, when possible, past challenges, professional learning leaders will be able to design, implement, and evaluate more professional learning that has greater positive effects on educators and their students" (Killion, 2018, p. 194).

8. EVALUATE THE EVALUATION.

Evaluations rarely include this step, which is a missed opportunity. Evaluating the evaluation, a meta-evaluation, involves reflecting on the evaluation processes (rather than its results) to assess the evaluator's decisions and skillfulness, tools and processes used, the resources expended for evaluation, and the overall effectiveness of the evaluation process.

Evaluating the process is an opportunity to improve future evaluations and strengthen evaluators' practice. It may include critical friends who can review and reflect with the evaluator about how the evaluation was done. "When evaluators seek to improve their own work, increase the use of evaluation within an organization, and build the capacity of others to engage in evaluation think, they contribute to a greater purpose. Through their work, they convey the importance of evaluation as a process for improvement and ultimately for increasing the focus on results" (Killion, 2018, p. 200). This process is the hallmark of a reflective practitioner and, like all professionals, evaluators commit to continuous improvement by examining the effects of their decisions and actions.

INVESTING IN STUDENT SUCCESS

Evaluating professional learning requires applying a scientific, systematic process to ensure reliable, valid results. The effort required can be significant, but it is worthwhile. Evaluation not only provides information to determine whether professional learning impacts student success, it also provides information about how to strengthen efforts to increase the potential for

future success. Professional learning leaders face challenging decisions about how they invest their resources and effort to ensure that they have the greatest potential for increasing student success, and evaluations can provide the evidence needed to make these critical decisions, be accountable and responsible for investments, and contribute to strengthening the field of professional learning in the future.

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Mapping an evaluation step by step ⟶

This tool provides guiding questions to plan and conduct a professional learning evaluation, using the eight steps of evaluation described on the previous pages. In collaboration with other stakeholders (e.g., professional learning designers, participants, and evaluators), discuss the questions and take detailed notes.

To begin, ask:
- What is the purpose of this evaluation?
- Who are the primary users/stakeholders of the evaluation results?
- What is their intended plan for using the results?

Then, use the following questions to map out each of the eight evaluation steps. The tables on pp. 69-70 provide spaces to articulate the desired changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, actions, and beliefs and your logic model.

Planning an evaluation is a time-intensive process. These questions and steps will likely not be completed all at once.

1. Assess evaluability. Evaluators review the professional learning plan to make sure it is ready to be evaluated and, if needed, work with stakeholders to make changes to ensure the greatest likelihood for program success.	1. What are the professional learning program's goals?
	   • Are they student-focused and results-oriented?
	   • Are they measurable, time-bound, equitable, and inclusive?
	2. What are the professional learning program's intended outcomes for educators?
	   • Are they measurable, time-bound, and results-oriented?
	   • Do they specify the intended change (knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, behaviors)?
	   • Are they plausible and focused on educator behaviors/practices?
	3. Have the indicators of success and standards for success been set for all outcomes?
	4. What is the professional learning program's theory of change and the assumptions upon which it is based? Has it been reviewed by representative program stakeholders and participants?
	5. Is the professional learning program's logic model complete? In other words, what are the inputs, activities, initial outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and intended results of this program?
	6. Based on the status of the professional learning program plan, is this evaluation ready to initiate, or are adjustments in the program design needed first?

2. Formulate evaluation questions. Evaluators use the goals of the professional learning program to write the formative and summative evaluation questions that will drive the evaluation.	1. What are the evaluation questions?
	   • Formative
	   • Summative
	2. How well do the evaluation questions reflect the interests of the primary stakeholders?
	3. How well do the evaluation questions align with the program's goals and the evaluation's purpose?
	4. Are the evaluation questions:
	   • Reasonable, appropriate, and answerable?
	   • Specific about success indicators?
	   • Specific about the measure of program success?

3. Construct evaluation framework. Evaluators plan how to answer the evaluation questions, deciding what data to collect, from whom, how, and when, and how to analyze the data once they are collected.	1. Who will conduct the evaluation — a stakeholder internal to the program or system, an external evaluator (e.g., from a research organization), or a combination?
	2. How will the evaluation question(s) be answered?
	   • What are the key constructs/variables that will be measured? How have key terms (such as student achievement, improvement, increase, and professional learning) been defined so that they are clear and specific and aligned with the indicators of success?
	   • What type of evaluation design is needed to answer the evaluation questions? Do the questions require making a comparison to determine impact? If so, what are possible comparison groups? Which is the most appropriate comparison group for this evaluation?
	3. What will the data plan be?
	   • What kind of data can provide evidence that the intended changes have occurred?
	   • Who are the data sources that will provide evidence of the intended change? How essential is it to have multiple data sources for this evaluation?
	   • What data collection methodologies are most appropriate to obtain the needed data?
	   • When and where will the data be collected?
	   • How will data be analyzed?
	4. How much will the evaluation cost?
	   • Are resources, including time, fiscal resources, and personnel, available to conduct this evaluation?
	   • If resources are not adequate, what aspects of the evaluation plan can be modified without compromising the integrity of the evaluation?
	   • Is the evaluation worth doing given the cost and potential modifications?
	5. Who is responsible for each part of the evaluation?
	6. Have primary stakeholders reviewed and approved the evaluation plan?

4. Collect data. To begin the work of collecting data, evaluators prepare and field-test instruments, calibrate scoring, establish processes for managing data, and determine how to address missing or erroneous data.	1. Have the instruments and procedures for data collection been field-tested? 2. What revisions are necessary? 3. How will data collectors be trained? 4. After early data collection, do any data seem redundant? What are the advantages and disadvantages of continuing to collect these data? Is it appropriate to continue or discontinue collecting these data? 5. After early data collection, what data seem to be missing? Is it essential to collect these missing data? If so, how will a new data collection methodology be implemented to collect these data? 6. What processes have been established to manage data collection and recording? 7. What processes have been established to ensure safekeeping and integrity of data?
5. Organize, analyze, and display data. With data in hand, evaluators organize the data, analyze it using predetermined descriptive or inferential statistical procedures, display the analyzed data, and formulate findings from the analyzed data.	1. How will data be sorted, grouped, or arranged before analysis? 2. How will missing data be handled in statistical analyses? 3. How will data be displayed to facilitate interpretation and understanding? 4. How clearly and succinctly are the data findings stated?
6. Interpret data. This step engages stakeholders in interpreting the analyzed data and findings to make and support claims and recommendations based on the analyzed data.	1. What do these data mean? 2. What interpretations and claims can be made from these data? 3. How well-supported are the interpretations and claims? 4. Have possible alternative interpretations been considered? 5. Does this evaluation support claims of attribution or contribution? 6. Does this program have merit, worth, and significance? 7. What recommended actions can help program stakeholders improve their program and its impact? 8. Are the recommendations logical, actionable, and appropriate? 9. Have representative stakeholders and participants with diverse perspectives been involved in the interpretation process and formulating recommendations?
7. Report, disseminate, and use findings. Evaluators report on the findings, claims, and recommendations to the appropriate audiences, and engage or guide stakeholders in using the results to strengthen existing and future professional learning.	1. Will the evaluation have interim and/or final evaluation reports? 2. Who are the primary users of the evaluation report? 3. What components do the primary users want included in the evaluation report? 4. What format for reporting the results is most appropriate for the primary users of the evaluation report? 5. What other audiences are likely to want some version of the evaluation report? 6. What formats for reporting the results are appropriate for the other audiences? 7. Is the report sensitive to the human rights of participants (e.g., not including identifying information about individuals)? 8. How have other stakeholders and participants been involved in the reporting, disseminating, and use of the evaluation results? 9. Which groups are most likely to apply the results of this evaluation in their work? Have they been involved in learning about the evaluation results?
8. Evaluate the evaluation. As reflective practitioners, evaluators conduct a meta-evaluation of their efforts to strengthen their evaluation practice and inform future evaluations.	1. How will the effectiveness of the evaluation be assessed? 2. What questions will guide the evaluation of the evaluation? Consider credibility, validity, significance, resources, design, findings, and reporting. 3. What stakeholders will be involved in the evaluation of the evaluation? How will they be involved? 4. What key learnings about evaluation can be extracted from this evaluation that we want to apply to future evaluations? 5. What strengths are evident in the evaluator's practices, and what areas can be refined or modified?

Identifying KASABs

Delineating KASABs (knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors) is a way to define the outcomes of learning and the necessary changes required to achieve success with any initiative. In professional learning, KASAB defines the changes educators are expected to make to affect student success. Systemic change requires changes in KASABs for all key actors who contribute to, facilitate, lead, or are responsible for the change. For some initiatives, other actors such as parents and community members may also be expected to change.

This tool can be used in combination with the Mapping an Evaluation Step by Step tool. Fill out the desired outcomes for specific stakeholders. You will likely leave some cells blank.

Measurable outcomes	Students	Teachers	Coaches	Principals	Central office staff	Organization (policy, structures, systems, etc.)
Knowledge Conceptual understanding of information, theories, principles, and research.						
Attitudes Beliefs about the value of information or strategies.						
Skills The ability or capacity to use strategies and processes to apply knowledge.						
Aspirations Desires, or internal motivation, to engage in a practice.						
Behaviors Consistent application of knowledge and skills driven by attitudes and aspiration.						

Source: Killion, 2018.

Creating a logic model

Complete the table to create a logic model for your professional learning program, starting with listing the goal at the top. You may wish to use the sample logic model on p. 63 as a guide.

Professional learning program goal(s): _____

Inputs/ resources	Activities/ components	Outputs	Initial outcomes	Intermediate outcomes	Intended results
What resources, fiscal support, personnel, facilities, equipment, time, and technology do we need to accomplish the activities designed for this professional learning?	What is the sequence of actions we will take to achieve the outcomes of this professional learning?	What products, services, documents, or artifacts will we produce as we are engaged in the activities of this professional learning?	What are the initial changes in program participants we expect to see that, if present, will increase the likelihood of more substantial changes over time? (Usually changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes.)	What are the intermediate changes in program participants we expect to see that, if present, will increase the likelihood of impact on students? (Usually changes in aspirations and behaviors.)	What are the expected changes in students? Does the degree of change vary over time?

Establishing an evaluation framework

To create an evaluation framework, start by listing the program goal. Then complete the table, using your answers to the questions in the Mapping an Evaluation Step by Step tool. You may wish to use the sample elements of an evaluation framework on p. 65 as a guide.

Professional learning program goal(s): _____

Measurable outcomes/ changes	Evaluation questions (formative and summative)	Data / evidence needed	Data source	Data collection method	Data analysis method	Timeline	Responsible person(s)

EVALUATION is a vital way to make sure that professional learning is working as intended and benefiting educators and students.

Learning Forward has a wealth of resources to guide evaluation of professional learning.
A new page on our website features highlights from across our organization for easy access. Among the many resources available, you'll find:

JOURNAL ISSUES focused on evaluation and evidence
– Evaluating Professional Learning
– Measuring the Impact of Professional Learning

SELECTED ARTICLES about evaluation strategies and considerations
– "The rules of evidence," by Thomas Guskey
– "Why evaluations fail," by Joellen Killion
– "What works?" Q&A with Heather Hill

EVALUATION TOOLS
– *Professional Learning State and District Planner*
– *Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide*

WEBINARS on conducting evaluation and research
– "Collecting Evidence to Share Impact of Professional Learning: Districts Share Their Stories"
– "Evidence and Evaluation for ESSA: An In-Depth Conversation"
– "The Mythbusters Guide to Educational Research with Douglas Reeves and Thomas Guskey"

BOOKS about assessing professional learning's impact
– *Assessing Impact* by Joellen Killion

STANDARDS RESOURCES
– Evidence standard and Innovation Configuration maps
– Article: "Survey gives systems a clear picture of their professional learning"

Access these resources at **learningforward.org/evaluation**

To search by topic, keyword, author, date, or resource type: learningforward.org/search-resources

UPDATES

NETP 2024:
A call to action
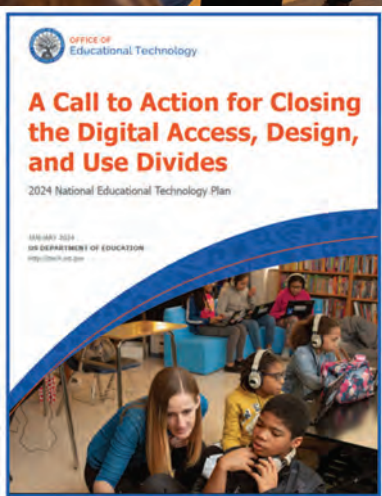
NEW PLAN TACKLES DIGITAL DIVIDES

The U.S. Department of Education recently released the 2024 National Educational Technology Plan at a White House event. Learning Forward was a member of the consortium that developed the plan, and Melinda George, Learning Forward's chief policy officer, participated in a panel discussion at the launch event, highlighting the plan's implications for professional learning. Learn more on p. 74.

Photo credit: U.S. Department of Education | creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

UPDATES

2024 National Educational Technology Plan released

The U.S. Department of Education has released the 2024 edition of the National Educational Technology Plan, titled *A Call to Action for Closing the Digital Access, Design, and Use Divides*. The plan focuses on how schools, districts, and states can use educational technology to design learning experiences that improve student access to educational opportunities and their outcomes. It highlights how schools can overcome three divides — digital access, design, and use — and emphasizes the importance of teachers' professional learning.

Learning Forward is a member of the consortium that developed the 2024 National Educational Technology Plan. We are examining how the 2024 plan iteration aligns with and informs our work, especially in ensuring that all teachers have the time and support they need to develop the capacity to better use and design with technology tools. Read the plan at **tech.ed.gov/net**

LEARNING FORWARD AT CARNEGIE FOUNDATION'S SUMMIT24 AND DEEPER LEARNING COMMUNITY'S CONFERENCE

Learning Forward's Michelle Bowman and Shannon Bogle will present the preconference session "Continuous Improvement is Professional Learning" at the Carnegie Summit24 in San Diego, California, March 24-27.

The summit gathers together a diverse community of equity champions committed to educational improvement. The event offers opportunities for active learning and strategy sharing to generate lasting change for students, teachers, and communities. For more information, visit **www.carnegiefoundation.org/carnegie-summit**

Bogle and Bowman will also participate in the Deeper Learning community's annual conference March 26-28 in San Diego. The community will examine current education systems and dream, create, and innovate the way to schools that better serve young people. Speakers and immersive learning experiences will cover a range of topics, from project-based learning, futurism, culturally responsive teaching, and social emotional learning to math pedagogy, leadership, and school transformation. Register here: **events.deeper-learning.org/events/deeper-learning-2024/**

2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE KEYNOTES ANNOUNCED

Two keynote speakers are confirmed for the Learning Forward 2024 Annual Conference, to be held Dec. 8-11 at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center in Aurora, Colorado. The theme of the conference is "Reach New Heights for Students."

Juliana Urtubey has used her platform as 2021 National Teacher of the Year to advocate for a "joyous and just" education for all students, one that is inclusive and celebratory of all students' identities, families, and communities. Urtubey, a National Board Certified Teacher, is also a strong advocate for teacher voice and expertise and supports teachers' development across the continuum of practice through her work as program director at the Arizona K-12 Center.

Frederick Brown is Learning Forward's president and CEO. Brown's career includes classroom teaching, school leadership, and roles that prepared him to lead Learning Forward's movement to strengthen student learning and educator practice worldwide through high-quality professional learning. He is a co-author of *Becoming a Learning System* (Learning Forward, 2018) and *The Learning Principal — Becoming a Learning Leader* (Learning Forward, 2021).

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Learning Forward Academy deadline approaching

Applications for the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2026 are due March 15. The academy, Learning Forward's flagship deep learning experience, is committed to increasing educator and leader capacity and improving results for students in the ever-changing landscape of education. The 2½-year experience includes five in-person learning sessions totaling 10 days and continues with four virtual learning events, as well as registration for three of Learning Forward's Annual Conferences.

Academy participation is an excellent way to increase your capacity as an educator and leader. With colleagues from around the world, you will align your problem of practice to cutting-edge, equity-centered professional learning standards that incorporate evidence from research and practice about critical topics for educators, including culturally sustaining instruction, social and emotional learning, and personalized learning.

For information and the application, visit **learningforward.org/academy**

LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

The Learning Forward Foundation supports the development of learning leaders through scholarships to the Learning Forward Academy. Scholarships cover the cost of academy tuition, and some include a travel stipend. Apply by March 17. Learn more at **foundation. learningforward.org**

REVAMP YOUR AFFILIATE WITH GRANT FUNDING

Applications are open for the Learning Forward Foundation Affiliate grant. The foundation will award $2,000 to a Learning Forward Affiliate needing to rebuild or strengthen its organization. The application deadline is March 17. Apply here: **foundation. learningforward.org/scholarships-and-grants**

LEARNING FORWARD TO HOST TITLE IIA PLANNING EVENT

Join us for a two-day learning event to help districts strategically plan their use of Title IIA funds to support comprehensive professional learning in their systems. The event is scheduled to be held Feb. 29-March 1 at Lubber Run Community Center in Alexandria, Virginia. Federal grant programs managers or directors at the district level and their team members, as well as directors of professional learning and teams, are encouraged to attend.

Participants will understand how to advocate for the strategic use of Title IIA funds to support district goals and best practices; develop a grant implementation plan that is compliant with statutory requirements and aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning; and learn how to evaluate the impact of professional learning programs and how to leverage evaluation data to advance strategy. For more information, visit **learningforward.org/maximize-title-ii-a-professional-development-funds**

✕ #TheLearningPro
FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Educators from Wake County, North Carolina Public Schools, donned their "What is professional learning?" T-shirts at work, carrying forward the spirit of Learning Forward's Annual Conference.

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using **#TheLearningPro.**

THROUGH THE LENS
OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Standards for Professional Learning describe the content, processes, and conditions of high-quality learning that makes a difference for students and educators. Understanding each standard can help learning leaders build professional learning that has a positive impact.

This issue of *The Learning Professional* looks through the lens of the Evidence standard to help you determine if your professional learning is working. The reflection questions below correspond to articles in this issue and can help you understand how to gather and use evidence.

HOW THE EVIDENCE STANDARD CAN IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Evidence standard: Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators create expectations and build capacity for use of evidence, leverage evidence, data, and research from multiple sources to plan educator learning, and measure and report the impact of professional learning.
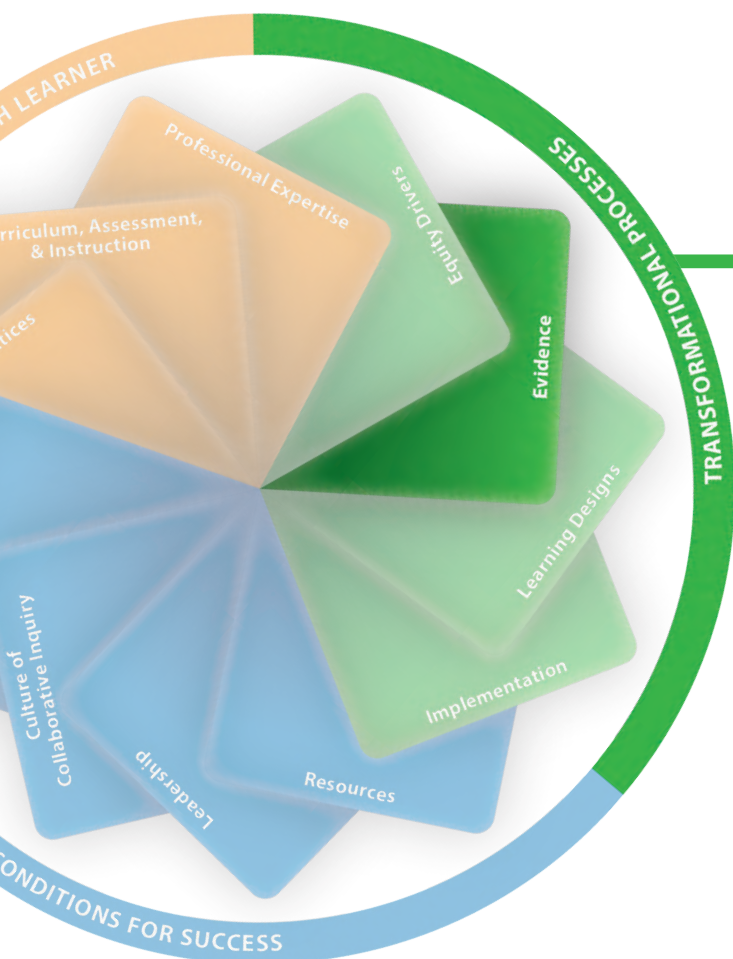
- **How do we strengthen evidence about professional learning beyond the participant satisfaction survey?**
  Thomas Guskey articulates a professional learning evaluation model with five levels of outcomes and impact: participant reaction, participant learning, organization support and change, use of new knowledge and skills, and impact on student learning outcomes. What levels have you examined so far? What levels will you examine next? (p. 28)

- **How do you gather data to know if your professional learning is working?**
  In an updated and seminal article with accompanying tools, Joellen Killion presents eight steps for systematically and purposefully reviewing and analyzing data about your professional learning system. What will you do differently after reading this article? (p. 58)

- **How can you best leverage limited resources for improving student outcomes?**
  Challenges like time and money often stand in the way of quality data-gathering, but practical evaluation methods offer a path to insight, even when more rigorous forms of research are not possible. How can you apply Rebecca Taylor-Perryman and colleagues' lessons to make the most of your time and resources? (p. 42)

- **How do you successfully discuss racial biases, which stir strong feelings?**
  Examining data collectively and honestly is essential in evaluation, as Jennifer Ahn illustrates in a vignette about a Bay Area school in California that took an equity-centered approach to evaluating professional learning. What steps can you take to examine and address racial biases in evaluation methods and results, and how can you navigate strong feelings that arise? (p. 52)

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at
standards.learningforward.org

6 things to know about evaluating professional learning

01 What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a formal process of collecting and analyzing data about a program or initiative to make judgments and informed decisions. It examines clearly defined outcomes so stakeholders can determine whether and in what ways the program was successful.

02 How is evaluation different from research?

Research explores the relationship among two or more variables to develop knowledge on a topic. It is a broad category of social science inquiry that can describe a phenomenon, examine the causes of a problem, or test solutions, whereas evaluations examine specific programs with defined outcomes.

03 What do policymakers mean when they ask for evidence?

Evidence is a type of data. Data are pieces of information that are analyzed to answer evaluation questions. Evidence is data that serves to answer whether and how well a program works.

04 What does it mean to show impact?

Impact is the effect of a program on its participants and the people they serve. In professional learning, impact usually means changes in teachers' and students' knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors.

05 Who can conduct evaluation?

Anyone. While many education systems hire external evaluators with research backgrounds, any educator can use an array of evaluation strategies that range from simple to complex. Resources are available in this issue of *The Learning Professional* and at **learningforward.org/evaluation**

06 Why does it matter?

Evaluation is important for understanding which professional learning approaches work, when, where, for whom, and why. With that information, all stakeholders can make good decisions about how to invest time and resources so that all educators grow and all students succeed.

*Some definitions are adapted from **Assessing Impact** by Joellen Killion (Corwin, 2018).*

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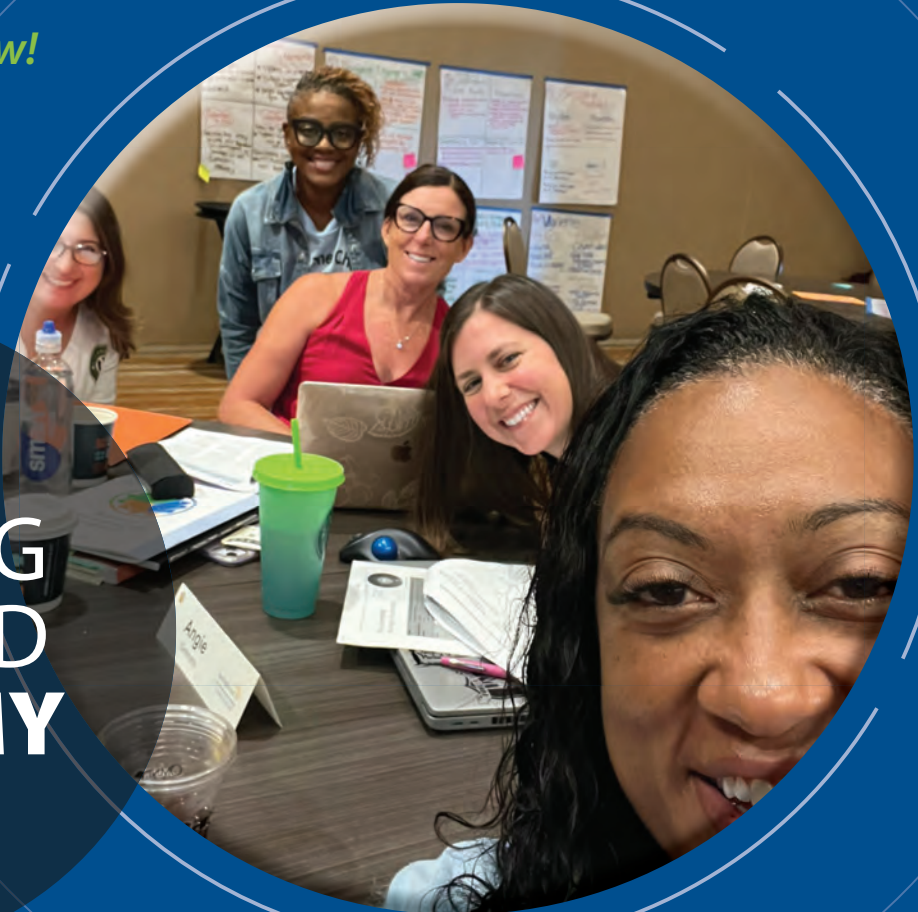
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