

Professional Development Activity on Evaluation

Central to sound evaluation, and more specifically, meaningful accomplishment of the inquiry cycle, is the ability to ask good *what*, *how*, and *why* questions. This activity helps the team review its *what*, *how*, and *why* questions to gain maximum information from collected data.

Time Frame

The team should plan one hour to complete this activity.

Materials

The team will need a facilitator, its district's foundational statements, pens or pencils, and paper.

Process

After identifying a desirable outcome from the foundational statements, continuous improvement planning, or strategic plan that the team would like to evaluate, teams should do the following.

1. Review the following three question types and the team's intended purpose for each activity.
 - ♦ **What is working and what is not?** This question clarifies how an activity connects positively or negatively to the intended outcomes the school board–superintendent team set.
 - ♦ **How well is this working?** This question focuses on the process or processes implemented to accomplish an activity, including whether changes were made or should have been made.
 - ♦ **Why does it matter?** This question assesses the rationale for the activity and addresses overall impact as well.
2. Write *what*, *how*, and *why* questions (approximately three per question category) for the outcome the team intends to evaluate. It is important to note that not every question must begin in *what*, *how*, or *why* (see the following example). The facilitator can assign a category of questioning (for example, what, how, or why) to teams of two or three, then share and edit with the larger group, or the team can do this as a school board–superintendent team. For example, let us assume the team wants to evaluate whether district attendance has improved over the past academic year, based on its strategic plan. The following questions might be appropriate.
 - ♦ **What?** What schools, on average, have evidenced improved attendance rates? What grades per school, on average, have evidenced improved attendance rates? Is there a difference in attendance rates per school among gender, socioeconomic status, or qualifying categories (for example, special needs, gifted or talented, or English learner)?
 - ♦ **How?** Did the new attendance incentive program (for instance, to opt out of final exams for good attendance) for high school students increase attendance? How did parents perceive the new attendance expectations at each developmental level (for example, elementary, middle, and high school)? How did the home-visit initiative for students missing more than

eight days impact attendance after the home visit? Did the mid-year change to make a home visit after eight days instead of ten days impact student attendance?

- ◆ **Why?** Was the additional time required for home-visitations worth the investment? Because of the heightened attendance expectations, did more students or parents opt to homeschool? Was the missed experience of preparing for and taking a final exam worth the incentive of opting out?
3. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2013) has a checklist for assessing evaluation questions, adapted into the following list of ten criteria. The team (or smaller groups reporting back to the team for consensus) should ask if the individual evaluation questions, written earlier, meet the following criteria. If not, the question or questions should be edited to meet the criteria, or the team should justify its inclusion.
 - a. Stakeholders who can act on the evaluation finding and those affected by such findings will be engaged in answering the question.
 - b. Stakeholders will be engaged in next-step actions based on the answer to the question.
 - c. The question supports the team's overall change agenda.
 - d. The question is directly linked to goals and objectives, if applicable.
 - e. The question reflects the district's vision, mission, and core values.
 - f. Answering the question will transform data to provide useful information to stakeholders.
 - g. The answer can be obtained ethically and respectfully (for example, no harm done to an individual such as breach of confidentiality).
 - h. Sufficient resources (for example, time, money, personnel) are available and able to be directed toward answering the question.
 - i. The question may be answered in an acceptable and usable time frame.
 - j. This question, in addition to other questions, provides a complete picture of the activity selected to evaluate.
 4. Armed with questions meeting the ten criteria, or justifications for those not meeting the criteria, the facilitator is now ready to delegate the questions to appropriate stakeholders for data collection as part of the inquiry cycle. A process such as this is recommended as a means to evaluate all interested activities.

Results

Participation in this activity helps team members strengthen their ability to ask good *what*, *how*, and *why* questions. Asking good questions is tantamount to effective inquiry about what is working and what is not within a school district.