



EVALUATING PROGRESS AND IMPACT: PART 2

Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning: Policy Solutions for States October 2019

While working with states to implement innovative student-centered learning policies and programs, ExcelinEd has identified policies and practices that hinder new student-centered learning models. [Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning: Policy Solutions for States](#) is a policy brief series dedicated to addressing these challenges.

This brief, *Evaluating Progress and Impact: Part 2*, was co-written by ExcelinEd and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Student-Centered Learning team as a result of a collaboration to provide states with a tool to inform their evaluation planning. View Part 1 at ExcelinEd.org.

THE CHALLENGE: EVALUATING AND COMMUNICATING PROGRESS AND IMPACT

State education agencies (SEAs) are charged with serving their districts and schools—through both traditional and innovative education programs—while being good stewards of public dollars. Consequently, they have a responsibility to develop an evaluation plan to support districts and schools striving toward next generation learning approaches. This plan should include strategies to effectively use data, create a process for continuous improvement and identify ways to effectively communicate the impact of these initiatives to external stakeholders.

Evaluation plans are vital for next generation learning programs. Because these innovative programs are untested, they are frequently subject to scrutiny from policymakers, media, parents and other stakeholders. Questions arise—sometimes simply for political reasons—as program participation expands, programs sunset or appropriations are requested.

While SEAs are charged with serving districts and schools as they pursue next generation learning, many SEA staff do not have the capacity or tools to accurately monitor the progress of these new programs much less effectively communicate successes and lessons learned from initial implementation. As a result, programs could be sunsetted or eliminated prior to being evaluated. It is critical that SEAs are proactive to ensure the tools and structures are in place to assess the effectiveness of next generation learning programs *and* articulate the impact and supports required for and to various stakeholders in order to continue new and innovative approaches.

STATE SPOTLIGHT

The legislation enabling Idaho’s Mastery-Based Education incubator wisely instructed the state department of education to “provide ongoing statewide outreach and communications to increase awareness and understanding of and promote interest in mastery-based education for teachers, administrators, parents, students, business leaders, and policymakers.”

Early on, the department made a critical decision to authorize two outside evaluations. The first was an [Implementation Evaluation of the Idaho Mastery Education Network](#) conducted by Education Northwest, and the other was the [Idaho Mastery Education Progress Report](#). These reports provided a thorough look at the initiative’s history and goals, offered a multi-faceted picture of the status of implementation and identified bright spots and challenges within the initiative.

THE SOLUTION: EVALUATION PLANNING TOOL

A new [evaluation planning tool](#) developed collaboratively by ExcelinEd and CCSSO provides guidance for developing an effective evaluation process that includes objectives, guiding questions and indicators of success or progress. With existing capacity, SEA staff can use this tool to take critical preliminary steps to pave the way for the development and implementation of an evaluation plan. The tool can help SEA staff identify the essential goals, indicators and timelines to begin building a framework, roadmap or RFP for an effective evaluation plan.

The tool also includes guidance and actions SEAs can use to develop a complementary communications plan. Together with the evaluation, a communications plan can help inform both internal and external stakeholders such as SEA staff, families, teachers, the community and policymakers about the status of innovation or pilot programs.



While it is ideal for SEAs to begin planning for program evaluations in early program design phases, this does not always happen. Thus, this tool can be used at any time during the program design process to provide structure and a means to step back and lay the foundation for an effective evaluation plan.

To ensure the guidance provided in the tool is both sound and practical, ExcelinEd and CCSSO conducted a pilot with Kentucky and Arkansas—in addition to a workshop at ExcelinEd’s Network of State Innovation Partners convening—to garner feedback and improve the tool and process.

“Not only did the new Evaluation and Communication Plan development give us the chance to ask our stakeholders the key questions we need to address in building our plan, it was also an excellent opportunity to reflect on where we had been.”

David Cook, Director of Innovation and Partner Engagement, Kentucky Department of Education

[View the Evaluation Planning Tool](#)

How to Use the Evaluation Planning Tool

The [evaluation planning tool](#) is accessible online and can be used jointly by multiple stakeholders to facilitate collaboration. Responses can be exported and used to help formulate key components of the evaluation plan.

The tool can be utilized to develop a plan for multiple innovation or pilot programs. However, the first step is to clearly define the specific program being evaluated and have clear programmatic goals to ensure clarity on the metrics that should be reflected in an eventual evaluation.

Once the program has been identified, SEA staff will need to take the time to collect essential information on the program including statutory citations, program goals, indicators and critical stakeholders. Depending on the program and SEA, an individual staff member could complete the tool, or it might require multiple staff members to accurately populate the information required.

After completing the questionnaire, the SEA program lead can leverage the responses to inform the development of the evaluation plan.

Sample Questions and Answers from the Evaluation Planning Tool

List major stakeholders and their role (i.e. State Superintendent, SBOE, Governor, Legislators, Program Participants, LEAs, Public, Press, Third-party organizations, Families, Students)

Commissioner, SBOE, Program Participants, Communities, Faculty, Staff, Students

Are there defined measurable program objectives?

Each LEA will provide data on comparison of students’ success rates on state assessments before and after implementing the competency approach.

What gaps/challenges have already been identified in reaching and tracking program objectives and goals?

Vocabulary differences among participating LEAs. Also, fully understanding the ultimate goal of an integrated system where standards and competencies are measured together and not as two separate assessment structures.