



Applying Continuous Improvement Principles: Implementing Evaluation Practices

Juan D'Brot, Ph.D.
W. Chris Brandt, Ph.D.

Applying Continuous Improvement Principles: Implementing Evaluation Practices

Region 5 Comprehensive Center

The Region 5 Comprehensive Center (R5CC) is one of 20 technical assistance centers supported under the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers program from 2019 to 2024. The R5CC serves the needs of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia by building capacity to improve policies and programs to improve student performance.

The contents of this resource were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education by Region 5 Comprehensive Center at Westat under Award #S283B190030. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

This resource is in the public domain. While permission to reprint is not necessary, reproductions should be cited as:

D'Brot, J., & Brandt, W.C. (2024). *Applying Continuous Improvement Principles: Implementing Evaluation Practices*. Rockville, MD: Region 5 Comprehensive Center at Westat.

A copy of this publication can be downloaded from <https://region5compcenter.org>.



Contents

Introduction	1
Evaluation Guiding Principles	1
Principle 1: Casting a Vision and Creating SMART Goals	2
Principle 2: Engaging Partners and Building Collaborative Ownership	2
Principle 3: Building Continuous Feedback Loops	3
Principle 4: Ensuring Data Quality and Integrity	3
Principle 5: Promote Utility and Create Actionable Results	4
Integration with Continuous Improvement Systems	4
The Role of Evaluation in Continuous Improvement	4
Strategies for Integration	5
Challenges and Solutions	7
The Role of Partners	9
State Educational Agencies	9
Local Educational Agencies and Schools	9
Educators and School Leaders	9
Parents and Community Members	10
Case Studies/Examples	10
Example 1: Evaluation in Action - Improving Literacy Outcomes in a Rural District	10
Example 2: Collaboration and Capacity Building—Enhancing Evaluation Practices in a Statewide Initiative	11
Principled Steps to Practically Support Evaluation Efforts	12
Conclusion	13
References	14
Appendix A: Program Evaluation Standards Checklist	15



Introduction

Evaluation is a critical component of continuous improvement in education. Robust evaluations enable engaged parties to determine program and intervention impact on key outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and guide future actions. Additionally, as educational systems increasingly focus on data-driven decisionmaking, evaluation becomes even more vital in ensuring continuous improvement processes and outcomes support intended goals.

This series' third and final paper focuses on the critical role of evaluation practices in supporting continuous improvement systems. The first paper outlined the key features of continuous improvement systems. The second paper explored the role of balanced assessment systems in enhancing continuous improvement. This paper proposes guiding principles for evaluating the effectiveness of programs and interventions. Additionally, it offers principled steps for integrating evaluation into a continuous improvement process. Building on the insights from the previous two papers, this third paper offers practical guidance for state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) to use evaluation to foster sustainable improvement.

Evaluation Guiding Principles

Education evaluation practices should be grounded in a principled process to ensure they are effective, meaningful, and actionable. Evaluation principles guide the design and implementation of evaluations, ensuring that they contribute positively to the continuous improvement process. The Program Evaluation Standards (PES; Yarbrough et al., 2010) offer a framework to ensure that evaluations are credible and fair and provide valuable information for decisionmaking. The PES forward 30 standards, grouped into (1) utility, (2) feasibility, (3) propriety, (4) accuracy, and (5) accountability. The PES should be a reference and provide the foundation for the following guiding principles. Please refer to Appendix A for a brief description of the PES and the Joint Committee for Standards in Educational Evaluation (JCSEE, 2018) Evaluator's Checklist.

The PES guides ethical, useful, and rigorous evaluations, ultimately improving educational outcomes and program effectiveness. These standards support the following principles, which guide the evaluation process as part of SEAs', LEAs', and schools' larger continuous improvement processes:

1. Establishing a vision and creating SMART goals
2. Engaging partners and building collaborative ownership
3. Building continuous feedback loops
4. Ensuring data quality and integrity
5. Promoting utility and actionable results



Principle 1: Casting a Vision and Creating SMART Goals

Establishing a clear vision and setting SMART goals is essential for ensuring that evaluation efforts are purpose-driven and aligned with desired outcomes. This principle emphasizes the importance of starting with a road map that guides the entire evaluation process. See Region 5 Comprehensive Center (2024) for details on how this can be supported using the Networked Improvement Community Modules. Examples of how to cast a vision and create SMART goals include:

- » **Start with a Vision:** Begin by defining a clear, shared vision for the evaluation's goals. This vision should align with the institution's broader educational goals, such as improving student outcomes, enhancing teaching practices, or addressing inequitable system outcomes.
- » **Develop SMART Goals:** Break the vision down into specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals. For instance, if the goal is to improve reading performance, set specific targets, such as expanding the delivery of educator training by 25 percent within a year for a particular content area or embedding reading specialists in each grade-level team within a district to achieve a 3:1 teacher-specialist ratio.
- » **Use a Logic Model:** Implement a theory of action using a logic model to determine how specific activities will lead to desired outcomes. This model provides a road map for evaluating resources, interventions, and strategies and helps ensure that the evaluation focuses on the right goals throughout the process.

By following these steps, SEAs and LEAs can establish a clear direction for their evaluation efforts, ensuring that every aspect of the process is aligned with the overall vision and goals for a program, initiative, or project.

Principle 2: Engaging Partners and Building Collaborative Ownership

Collaboration is a cornerstone of effective evaluations. Engaging key partners from the outset builds trust and ensures that the evaluation is aligned with the needs and priorities of all involved parties. Creating shared ownership can foster a deeper commitment to using the findings for improvement (Russell, et al., 2019). Example actions that facilitate engaging partnerships and build collaborative ownership include:

- » **Involve Key Partners Early:** From the beginning, involve educators, school leaders, parents, and community members in the evaluation process. Conduct needs assessments and hold collaborative planning sessions to ensure everyone's voice is heard.
- » **Create Shared Responsibility:** Assign specific roles to partners for data collection, interpretation, and application. This could involve teachers tracking classroom-level data, administrators leading school-wide assessments, and community members providing feedback on outcomes.
- » **Facilitate Continuous Communication:** Establish regular communication channels for partners to review data, provide feedback, and discuss findings. Create space for reflection, where participants can talk through challenges, lessons learned, and next steps for improvement.



Evaluations and their processes will benefit by fostering collaboration and ensuring shared responsibility. This can ensure that evaluators include multiple perspectives, leading to more meaningful and broadly accepted results that drive collective action by users and community members.

Principle 3: Building Continuous Feedback Loops

Continuous feedback loops are essential to ensure that evaluation data are used in real time to make course corrections and scale promising practices to new sites. This principle emphasizes the importance of ongoing reflection and adaptation when implementing a change. Example actions to build continuous feedback loops include:

- » **Use Formative Evaluation Throughout Implementation:** Set up checkpoints during the program or initiative to gather data and provide feedback. These formative evaluations help track progress and identify potential challenges early.
- » **Facilitate Rapid Cycles of Improvement:** Integrate short cycles of data collection and reflection (such as monthly or quarterly). This allows educators and leaders to quickly adjust to feedback and data trends.
- » **Create Data-Driven Reflection Practices:** Use the data collected to inform reflective practices. For example, use data review meetings with teachers and administrators after each evaluation cycle to discuss findings and plan the next steps for classroom or program adjustments.

Continuous feedback loops ensure that continuous improvement efforts remain dynamic and flexible, enabling educators and administrators to make timely adjustments that lead to sustained improvements in student outcomes.

Principle 4: Ensuring Data Quality and Integrity

The integrity of the evaluation process depends on the quality of the data collected. Accurate and reliable data provide a solid foundation for decisionmaking and ensure the evaluation findings are credible and actionable. Examples of how to ensure data quality and integrity include:

- » **Implement Rigorous Data Collection Protocols:** Train educators and staff on how to collect and report data accurately. Ensure that data collection tools, like surveys or assessments, are well-designed, coherent with one another, and aligned with the evaluation's goals.
- » **Conduct Regular Data Audits:** Schedule regular reviews of collected data to ensure it is being collected consistently and to check for errors. These audits can be done quarterly or at key milestones to ensure data integrity.
- » **Provide Ongoing Data Literacy Training:** Build teacher and staff capacity to interpret results accurately and take data-informed actions (actions that are tightly coupled to evidence). Offer professional development sessions on data literacy, addressing how to read, interpret, and apply evaluation data to everyday practice.



Focusing on data quality and integrity can increase confidence in the evaluation findings, enabling more informed decisionmaking and more effective application of the results to improve educational practices.

Principle 5: Promote Utility and Create Actionable Results

Finally, evaluations must go beyond data collection to produce meaningful and actionable results. This principle focuses on the importance of making evaluation findings practical and ensuring that they lead to real improvements in instructional and organizational practices. Examples of how to promote utility and create actionable results include the following:

- » **Translate Data into Action:** After completing the evaluation, create clear and concise reports accessible to all partners and users. Highlight actionable recommendations tied directly to the evaluation findings. For example, if the data shows that math instruction needs improvement, provide targeted strategies for teachers to adopt in their classrooms or identify a high-quality curriculum that can support more coherent instructional sequencing.
- » **Tailor the Results for Different Audiences:** Provide customized reports or presentations depending on the audience (teachers, administrators, parents, or the community). For example, focus on instructional practices for educators and systemwide changes for administrators.
- » **Monitor and Track the Implementation of Findings:** After making recommendations, establish mechanisms for tracking how findings are applied. This could include follow-up meetings, progress reviews, or post-evaluation assessments to monitor whether the recommended actions are making a difference.

Ensuring that evaluation results are clear, actionable, and tailored to the needs of different interested parties, educators, and administrators helps users more easily apply the findings to drive meaningful improvements in their schools and districts.

Integration with Continuous Improvement Systems

Evaluation practices are integral to the continuous improvement process. By providing systematic, data-informed insights into the effectiveness of educational initiatives, evaluations help ensure that continuous improvement efforts are responsive to emerging needs and aligned with long-term educational goals. Integrating evaluation practices within continuous improvement systems (D’Brot & Brandt, 2024) is essential for creating a feedback-rich environment where data is continuously used to refine strategies, enhance instructional practices, and improve student outcomes.

The Role of Evaluation in Continuous Improvement

Evaluations are crucial in supporting continuous improvement by providing evidence of impact and identifying areas where adjustments are needed. In a continuous improvement framework, evaluation practices serve as a check-and-balance system, ensuring that the interventions and strategies implemented are actually driving the intended outcomes. For example, an evaluation of a new mathematics curriculum might reveal that it effectively improves student test scores but does



not adequately address problem-solving skills. This finding would prompt educators to revise the curriculum to better align with deeper educational learning goals.

Evaluations also contribute to the accountability aspect of continuous improvement, ensuring that educational programs are held to rigorous standards of effectiveness. By systematically assessing program outcomes, evaluations provide the evidence needed to make informed decisions about continuing, scaling, or modifying initiatives. See Brandt, Dadey, and Evans (2024) for more information about how evaluations can be designed and implemented to build an evidence argument over time.

Strategies for Integration

Integrating evaluation practices within continuous improvement systems may require targeted strategies that promote coherence, alignment, collaboration, and data-driven decisionmaking. These strategies ensure that evaluation processes are practical and fully embedded in broader improvement efforts. Below are several key strategies that can help achieve this integration, fostering data-informed decisionmaking and iteration with continuous improvement systems.

Coherence Across Systems. To effectively integrate evaluation practices within continuous improvement systems, there must be coherence across all levels of the educational system—from SEAs to LEAs to individual schools. Each level is responsible for ensuring that evaluation goals align with the continuous improvement goals.

- » **SEAs:** SEAs are responsible for setting overarching guidelines for evaluation and continuous improvement processes. They must ensure that the state’s goals for student achievement, accountability, and instructional improvement are reflected in both evaluation frameworks and continuous improvement initiatives.
- » **LEAs:** LEAs play a critical role in implementing state guidelines and adapting them to local contexts. Their responsibility is to align districtwide continuous improvement efforts with the evaluation systems provided by the SEA. This alignment can promote consistency across data collection, analysis, and reporting that connects to both district and state goals.
- » **Schools:** At the school level, administrators and educators are responsible for using evaluation data to inform instructional practices and student interventions directly. Their role is to ensure that classroom-level goals for improving student learning are coherent with LEA and SEA continuous improvement goals, creating a seamless connection between evaluation and actionable improvements.

Alignment of Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Efforts. In addition to coherence across levels, it is critical to align the goals of evaluation with the goals of the continuous improvement process. Evaluation data must feed directly into the continuous improvement cycle, helping educators and administrators at all levels make data-driven decisions aligning with short- and long-term improvement objectives. This alignment ensures that:



- » Evaluation results are used to assess the effectiveness of continuous improvement initiatives.
- » Continuous improvement efforts are refined based on data generated from the evaluation.
- » Both processes work in tandem to address gaps in student achievement, instructional quality, and overall school performance.

Collaborative Evaluation Processes. Engaging partners in the evaluation process enhances the integration of evaluation practices with continuous improvement. Collaboration between SEAs, LEAs, schools, and community members strengthen the alignment between evaluation and continuous improvement efforts.

- » **SEAs:** SEAs should work closely with partners such as evaluation experts, LEA and school leaders, state policymakers, and community members to co-design evaluation frameworks and processes that reflect state and local goals. Engaging partners in the design phase ensures that evaluations are relevant, and their findings will be meaningful at both the state and local levels.
- » **LEAs:** LEAs should promote collaboration across schools and departments to ensure that evaluation processes are integrated and that findings are applied consistently across the district. This may involve creating cross-functional teams that bring educators, data specialists, and administrators together to interpret evaluation results and plan for the next steps.
- » **Schools:** Schools should engage teachers, students, and parents in the evaluation process to include diverse perspectives. Teachers, in particular, should play a central role in collecting and using evaluation data to inform instructional changes. Engaging parents and community members can also help to ensure that evaluation findings are responsive to broader community needs.

Data-Driven Decisionmaking. One key strategy for integrating evaluation with continuous improvement is fostering a data-driven decisionmaking culture. This involves training educators and administrators to use evaluation data effectively, ensuring they can interpret and apply the results to improve instructional practices and program design. Continuous professional development focused on data literacy is essential to building this capacity. Examples at each level include:

- » **SEAs:** Provide guidelines and tools that standardize the use of data across the state. SEAs could also offer training resources and technical assistance to support LEAs and schools in effectively analyzing and applying evaluation data. Additionally, SEAs can create data systems allowing state and local agencies to explore longitudinal relationships between information collected across government agencies such as education, mental health, and juvenile justice.
- » **LEAs:** LEAs should build data infrastructure that supports the collection, analysis, and sharing of evaluation results. Additionally, LEAs should develop and deploy district-wide professional development programs focused on data literacy so educators can make informed, evidence-based decisions.



- » **Schools:** At the school level, administrators and teachers should incorporate data-driven practices into decisionmaking. This includes using data to monitor student progress, evaluate instructional effectiveness, and adjust real-time interventions to meet students' evolving needs.

Ongoing Feedback and Refinement. Incorporating continuous feedback loops is another critical strategy for integration. By conducting formative evaluations throughout the implementation of initiatives, educators can receive timely feedback that allows for mid-course corrections. This ongoing iterative process ensures that the CI efforts remain dynamic and responsive to changing needs.

- » **SEAs:** SEAs should design statewide formative evaluation cycles, providing schools and districts with interim data highlighting improvement areas. This data can be used to evaluate the progress of large-scale initiatives or state-level interventions.
- » **LEAs:** LEAs are responsible for implementing district-wide formative assessments and feedback mechanisms aligning with state and district continuous improvement goals. These feedback systems should provide educators with actionable insights into student performance and program effectiveness, allowing for adjustments during the school year.
- » **Schools:** At the school level, educators can implement classroom-based formative assessments and feedback loops that provide immediate data on student learning. This enables teachers to adjust their instruction and interventions daily or weekly, ensuring that continuous improvement efforts remain responsive to student needs.

Challenges and Solutions

Implementing effective evaluation practices within a continuous improvement framework is not without challenges. However, by anticipating these challenges and developing targeted solutions, educational leaders can ensure that evaluations are both meaningful and actionable. Table 1 presents common challenges and considerations for addressing them.



Table 1. Common challenges and potential solutions associated with evaluation and continuous improvement

Common Challenges	Potential Considerations for SEAs and LEAs
<p>Resource Constraints: Conducting thorough evaluations requires time, expertise, and funding, which may not always be available in educational settings.</p>	<p>Building Evaluation Capacity: Consider increasing funding and investing in building evaluation capacity at all levels of the educational system. This includes providing professional development for educators and administrators, developing partnerships with external evaluation experts, and allocating sufficient resources to support evaluation efforts.</p>
<p>Data Quality Issues: Poor data quality often stems from inconsistent data collection processes or a lack of standardized measures. These challenges undermine the credibility of evaluation findings and can lead to misguided decisions.</p>	<p>Improving Data Quality: Consider implementing standardized data collection processes and invest in training for data collection professionals. Regular audits of data quality can also help identify and address any inconsistencies.</p>
<p>Preconceived Notions: Leaders and policymakers often have strong beliefs about achieving successful school turnaround and improvement. However, specific programs and practices in some contexts may not work well in others. Preconceived biases about what works or should work can often make it challenging to remain open and objective about what the data tells you about the program's (or intervention's) effectiveness in a given context.</p>	<p>Promote a Culture of Inquiry: Encourage leaders and educators to question their assumptions and remain open to the evidence provided by evaluation data. This can be supported by creating evaluation norms, using external facilitators, inviting diverse groups to engage in the inquiry process, and conducting scenario planning or sensitivity analyses. Creating a space where evidence challenges preconceptions can help education leaders remain open to adopting or adapting a change or intervention.</p>
<p>Resistance to Evaluation: Educators and administrators may resist evaluation, viewing it as an added burden or fearing negative findings could have repercussions. This resistance can hinder the implementation of evaluation practices and limit their effectiveness.</p>	<p>Cultivating a Culture of Continuous Improvement: Overcoming resistance to evaluation requires cultivating a culture where evaluation is seen as a learning and growth tool rather than a punitive measure. This can be achieved through clear communication about the purpose and benefits of evaluation and by involving partners and users in the evaluation process.</p>
<p>Lack of Evaluation Capacity: Many educational institutions may need more internal capacity to conduct rigorous evaluations. This includes more trained personnel with the skills to design, implement, and interpret evaluations. There may be sufficient personnel resources, but they may not have the knowledge or experience to conduct evaluations.</p>	<p>Leveraging Technology: Technology can significantly help overcome resource constraints and data quality challenges. For example, automated data collection and analysis tools, like a learning management system and business intelligence analytics, can reduce the burden on staff and improve data accuracy and consistency. Additionally, technology can facilitate the dissemination of evaluation findings, making them more accessible and actionable for all partners and users.</p>



The Role of Partners

The successful implementation and sustainability of effective evaluation practices within continuous improvement systems depend on key partners' active involvement at various educational system levels. Each partner group plays a critical role in ensuring that evaluation practices are aligned with educational goals, integrated with continuous improvement efforts, and responsive to the needs of educators, students, and the broader community.

State Educational Agencies

SEAs are pivotal in promoting and supporting evaluation practices within the continuous improvement framework. They are responsible for setting statewide evaluation standards, providing guidance on best practices, and ensuring coherence across districts. Their role also includes developing and disseminating evaluation tools and resources that align with state educational goals and priorities.

Additionally, SEAs are instrumental in building local capacity for evaluation by offering professional development opportunities, technical assistance, and funding to LEAs. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability, SEAs help ensure that evaluation practices are not only implemented but also used effectively to drive educational outcomes.

Local Educational Agencies and Schools

LEAs and schools are on the front lines of implementing evaluation practices. They are responsible for adapting state guidelines to fit their schools' and communities' specific needs and contexts. LEAs and schools must ensure that evaluation practices are integrated into their continuous improvement efforts and that the data collected are used to inform instructional decisions, program adjustments, and resource allocation.

LEAs and schools also play a crucial role in engaging educators, students, and parents in the evaluation process. By involving these partners, LEAs and schools can ensure that evaluations are relevant, meaningful, and supported by the community. Furthermore, they are responsible for providing ongoing training and support to educators, helping them build the skills needed to interpret and apply evaluation findings effectively.

Educators and School Leaders

Educators and school leaders are primary users of evaluation data, making their involvement in the evaluation process essential. Their role includes not only participating in the design and implementation of evaluations but also using the data to reflect on their practices, identify areas for improvement, and make decisions that enhance student learning.

Educators are also key players in fostering a culture of continuous improvement within their schools. By modeling data-driven decisionmaking and encouraging collaboration among colleagues,



they can help create an environment where evaluation is a valuable tool for professional growth and student success.

Parents and Community Members

Parents and community members are essential voices in the evaluation process. Their involvement ensures that the perspectives and priorities of the broader community are considered in the design and implementation of evaluations. Engaging parents and community members can also enhance transparency and accountability, as they provide valuable feedback on the relevance and impact of educational initiatives. It is also critical to differentiate between those community members who are responsible for defining policy and legislation, such as state boards of education or legislative bodies, and other concerned parties. Different community members may need tailored information and resources.

Moreover, when parents and community members are informed and involved in the evaluation process, they are more likely to support the resulting decisions and initiatives. This support is crucial for successfully implementing continuous improvement efforts, as it fosters a sense of shared responsibility for student outcomes.

Case Studies/Examples

To demonstrate the practical application of evaluation principles and practices within continuous improvement systems, we can look at examples that Comprehensive Centers and other educational agencies can support. These example case studies highlight how effective evaluation practices can lead to meaningful improvements in educational outcomes and how collaboration between interested and affected parties can enhance the evaluation process.

Example 1: Evaluation in Action - Improving Literacy Outcomes in a Rural District

In a rural LEA, a Comprehensive Center partnered with local educators to implement a new literacy program to improve reading skills among early elementary students. The program's evaluation was designed to assess the implementation process and the program's impact on student outcomes.

Approach:

- » The evaluation team worked closely with teachers to develop a set of formative assessments aligned with the literacy program's goals and curriculum. These assessments were used to monitor student progress and provide immediate feedback to teachers.
- » The evaluation also included a series of partner and user surveys and focus groups to gather qualitative data on the program's implementation and identify barriers to success.
- » Summative assessments were administered at the end of the school year to measure overall improvements in student reading levels and were used to corroborate performance on progress monitoring assessments.



Results:

- » Formative assessment information revealed that students were making steady progress in essential literacy skills, allowing teachers to adjust their instruction in real time to address specific areas of need.
- » Qualitative data highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers, leading to the introduction of additional training sessions focused on effective literacy instruction.
- » Summative assessment results showed a significant increase in reading proficiency among participating students, leading to the expansion of the literacy program districtwide.

Example 2: Collaboration and Capacity Building—Enhancing Evaluation Practices in a Statewide Initiative

In a statewide initiative to improve mathematics instruction, a Comprehensive Center worked with the SEA to develop and implement an efficacy evaluation.¹ The collaboration focused on building local capacity for evaluation and ensuring that the data collected was used to inform continuous improvement efforts.

Approach:

- » The SEA provided LEAs with a standardized evaluation framework that included quantitative and qualitative measures. This framework was designed to align with the state's educational goals and ensure district coherence.
- » The Comprehensive Center offered professional development workshops for LEA staff, focusing on data collection methods, analysis techniques, and interpreting evaluation findings.
- » LEAs received ongoing support through regular check-ins and collaborative evaluation meetings, where collaborators could share insights and discuss the implications of the evaluation results.

Results:

- » The professional development workshops significantly increased the evaluation capacity of LEA staff, enabling them to conduct more rigorous and meaningful evaluations of their local initiatives.
- » A standardized evaluation framework supported more comparable data collection across the state to support aggregation across schools, which provided a more comprehensive picture of the initiative's impact.
- » The collaboration between the SEA, LEAs, and the Comprehensive Center fostered a culture of continuous improvement. Users applied evaluation data to refine strategies and improve the monitoring of mathematics instruction and its effectiveness.

¹ This example is intended to highlight the evaluation framework, not the initiative, as the evaluation would be initiative agnostic.



Principled Steps to Practically Support Evaluation Efforts

Evaluation can be defined in different ways. Scriven (1991) describes it as judging the merit of something. Guskey (2000) describes it as a systematic process that determines the worth of a strategy in a specific context. Both of these still relevant definitions are based on judgment and evidence. Any judgment is dependent on not only evidence but also the synthesis of that evidence to determine whether a system or strategy achieved its purpose or aim.

A robust evaluation is based on a well-defined problem, a detailed plan of action, a pre-established measurement infrastructure, and indicators of proof defined a priori. These indicators inform what evidence should be collected, documented, and interpreted. Many of these things are part of a logic model, which is incredibly useful to help build out a theory of action by expanding it into more detailed program logic (see D’Brot, 2019; Region 5 Comprehensive Center, 2024).

A logic model identifies the important components to be aware of when connecting the program to an evaluation. It is helpful to think of a logic model as an organizer for your program that can be used to inform the evaluation. It makes evaluation design much more efficient, in the same way that organizing puzzle pieces by edges and center pieces makes for an easier puzzle-making experience.

Once you have organized your program, you can evaluate it using the 10 steps in Table 2 (see also D’Brot, 2022).

Table 2. 10-step guide to incorporating program evaluation into program design and implementation and connecting large-scale data (D’Brot, 2023)

Step	Considerations
Specify the goal and problem statement	If well defined, the goal and problem statement will help you use root cause analysis to determine the program or intervention needed.
1. Identify the target	Who is the group we are targeting? Specificity is key, as it will help narrow the scope of the program.
2. Develop the theory of action	Detail the program's intended outcomes for the audience and the components that will lead to them. Theories of action tend to be higher-level but will help you build the logic model.
3. Build out the program logic model	The logic model will help identify each activity along the chain of the theory of action and its associated resources, outputs, and outcomes.
4. Connect evidence (measures) to the program logic	How will we measure inputs, outputs, and outcomes? What evidence connects to what outcome(s)? We need to define evidence that helps us prove what we think we know about a program.
5. Collect data and determine evidence quality	Are data (1) complete, (2) consistent, (3) practical, (4) impactful, and (5) coherent? How do data relate to program activities? High-quality evidence can help us evaluate whether intermediate steps work (see D’Brot et al., 2020).



Table 2. 10-step guide to incorporating program evaluation into program design and implementation and connecting large-scale data (D’Brot, 2023)—continued

Step	Considerations
6. Analyze and build a data story	Connect the dots between the activities, evidence, and larger theory of action. Rely on local plan, do, study, and act cycles and study the variation to answer the question: Why is this occurring?
7. Tell the story	Document and communicate the results. Vary communication content and style for those internal to the program (e.g., users) and those external to the program (e.g., funders).
8. Make changes	Adjust the program or initiative to improve your approach to the problem. Consider which intermediate activities or steps were the most difficult.
9. Redeploy and reevaluate	Once changes are made to the program or initiative, redeploy the program and begin evaluating the program again.

Conclusion

Evaluation principles and practices are essential components of educational improvement. However, they are ineffective without understanding the role of partners and how to establish a plan of action. By providing systematic, data-driven insights into the effectiveness of educational initiatives, evaluations ensure that continuous improvement efforts are aligned with educational goals and responsive to the needs of all partners and users. The successful implementation of evaluation practices requires the active involvement of SEAs, LEAs, educators, parents, and community members, each of whom plays a critical role in ensuring that evaluations are meaningful, actionable, and integrated into the broader continuous improvement framework.

The case studies presented in this paper exemplify how evaluation practices can potentially support meaningful improvements in educational outcomes. Whether through targeted literacy programs or statewide initiatives, evaluations provide the evidence needed to inform decisionmaking, refine strategies, and enhance student learning. Moving forward, educational leaders must continue to prioritize evaluation practices, investing in the capacity-building and collaboration necessary to sustain continuous improvement efforts and achieve lasting success.



References

- Brandt, W.C., Dadey, N., & Evans, C. (2024). *Designing and Evaluating Innovative State Assessment Programs: A Framework for State Education Agencies*. National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. <https://www.nciea.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EvaluatingInnovativeAssessmentPrograms-FINAL.pdf>
- D'Brot, J. (2022). *Theories of Action Aren't Enough: An Argument for Logic Models*. National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. <https://www.nciea.org/blog/theories-of-action-arent-enough-an-argument-for-logic-models/>
- D'Brot, J. (2023). *A 10-Step Guide for Incorporating Program Evaluation in Education into the Design of Educational Interventions*. National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. <https://www.nciea.org/blog/a-10-step-guide-for-incorporating-program-evaluation-in-education-into-the-design-of-educational-interventions/>
- D'Brot, J. & Brandt, W.C. (2024). *Key Characteristics and Principles to Support the Development of Continuous Improvement Systems*. Rockville, MD: Region 5 Comprehensive Center at Westat. <https://region5compcenter.org/resource/key-characteristics-and-principles-to-support-the-development-of-continuous-improvement>
- D'Brot, J., Gong, B., Keng, L., & Landl, E. (2022). *The Burden of Proof: A call for Validation Plans and Evidence in Educational Programs*. National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. <https://www.nciea.org/blog/the-burden-of-proof-a-call-for-validation-plans-and-evidence-in-educational-programs/>
- D'Brot, J., Landl, E., Domaleski, C., & Brandt, W.C. (2022). *Outlook on Assessment and Accountability: Opportunities and Challenges in the Changing Landscape of State Assessment and Accountability Systems*. Center for the Collaborative Support of Student Outcomes. <https://753a0706.flowpaper.com/CCSSORROutlookAccountabilityv4>
- Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Corwin Press.
- Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE). (2018). *Checklist of the Program Evaluation Standards Statements*. Retrieved from <https://wmich.edu/evaluation/checklists>
- Region 5 Comprehensive Center (2024). *Networked Improvement Communities Learning Modules*. Rockville, MD: Region 5 Comprehensive Center at Westat. <https://region5compcenter.org/r5cc-products/nic/#/>
- Russell, J. L., Bryk, A. S., Peurach, D., Sherer, D., Khachatryan, E., LeMahieu, P. G., Sherer, J. Z., & Hannan, M. (2019, April). *The Social Structure of Networked Improvement Communities: Cultivating the Emergence of a Scientific Professional Learning Community*. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Toronto, ON. https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/The_Social_Structure_of_Networked_Improvement_Communities.pdf
- Yarbrough, D.B., Shula, L.M., Hopson, R.K., & Caruthers, F.A. (2010). *The Program Evaluation Standards: A guide for evaluators and evaluation users* (3rd. ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.



Appendix A: Program Evaluation Standards Checklist

Program Evaluation Checklist

From the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation

The Program Evaluation Standards identify and define evaluation question[s] and guide evaluators and their users in the pursuit of evaluation quality (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The Standards include thirty statements defining five dimensions of program evaluation quality: utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and evaluation accountability. Each standard has a name and is expressed in a statement, which is then explained in more detail in The Program Evaluation Standards book (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The standards' names and statements are reproduced in checklist form by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE, 2018).

The purpose of this checklist version of the Standards is to provide evaluation practitioners, clients, users, and students with an accessible overview of the Standards. We encourage users to read The Program Evaluation Standards in full, and then use this checklist as a quick reference.

Utility Standards

The utility standards are intended to increase the extent to which program [partners and community members] find evaluation processes and products valuable in meeting their needs.

- » **U1 Evaluator Credibility:** Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context.
- » **U2 Attention to [Partners and Community Members]:** Evaluations should devote attention to the full range of individuals and groups invested in the program and affected by its evaluation.
- » **U3 Negotiated Purposes:** Evaluation purposes should be identified and continually negotiated based on the needs of [partners and community members].
- » **U4 Explicit Values:** Evaluations should clarify and specify the individual and cultural values underpinning purposes, processes, and judgments.
- » **U5 Relevant Information:** Evaluation information should serve the identified and emergent needs of [partners and community members].
- » **U6 Meaningful Processes and Products:** Evaluations should construct activities, descriptions, and judgments in ways that encourage participants to rediscover, reinterpret, or revise their understandings and behaviors.
- » **U7 Timely and Appropriate Communicating and Reporting:** Evaluations should attend to the continuing information needs of their multiple audiences.
- » **U8 Concern for Consequences and Influence:** Evaluations should promote responsible and adaptive use while guarding against unintended negative consequences and misuse.



Feasibility Standards

The feasibility standards are intended to increase evaluation effectiveness and efficiency.

- » **F1 Project Management:** Evaluations should use effective project management strategies.
- » **F2 Practical Procedures:** Evaluation procedures should be practical and responsive to the way the program operates.
- » **F3 Contextual Viability:** Evaluations should recognize, monitor, and balance the cultural and political interests and needs of individuals and groups.
- » **F4 Resource Use:** Evaluations should use resources effectively and efficiently.

Propriety Standards

The propriety standards support what is proper, fair, legal, right, and just in evaluations.

- » **P1 Responsive and Inclusive Orientation:** Evaluations should be responsive to [partners and community members]and their communities.
- » **P2 Formal Agreements:** Evaluation agreements should be negotiated to make obligations explicit and take into account the needs, expectations, and cultural contexts of clients and other [partners and community members].
- » **P3 Human Rights and Respect:** Evaluations should be designed and conducted to protect human and legal rights and maintain the dignity of participants and other [partners and community members].
- » **P4 Clarity and Fairness:** Evaluations should be understandable and fair in addressing [partners and community members]needs and purposes.
- » **P5 Transparency and Disclosure:** Evaluations should provide complete descriptions of findings, limitations, and conclusions to all [partners and community members], unless doing so would violate legal and propriety obligations.
- » **P6 Conflicts of Interests:** Evaluations should openly and honestly identify and address real or perceived conflicts of interests that may compromise the evaluation.
- » **P7 Fiscal Responsibility:** Evaluations should account for all expended resources and comply with sound fiscal procedures and processes.

Accuracy Standards

The accuracy standards are intended to increase the dependability and truthfulness of evaluation representations, propositions, and findings, especially those that support interpretations and judgments about quality.

- » **A1 Justified Conclusions and Decisions:** Evaluation conclusions and decisions should be explicitly justified in the cultures and contexts where they have consequences.
- » **A2 Valid Information:** Evaluation information should serve the intended purposes and support valid interpretations.



- » **A3 Reliable Information:** Evaluation procedures should yield sufficiently dependable and consistent information for the intended uses.
- » **A4 Explicit Program and Context Descriptions:** Evaluations should document programs and their contexts with appropriate detail and scope for the evaluation purposes.
- » **A5 Information Management:** Evaluations should employ systematic information collection, review, verification, and storage methods.
- » **A6 Sound Designs and Analyses:** Evaluations should employ technically adequate designs and analyses that are appropriate for the evaluation purposes.
- » **A7 Explicit Evaluation Reasoning:** Evaluation reasoning leading from information and analyses to findings, interpretations, conclusions, and judgments should be clearly and completely documented.
- » **A8 Communication and Reporting:** Evaluation communications should have adequate scope and guard against misconceptions, biases, distortions, and errors.

Evaluation Accountability Standards

The evaluation accountability standards encourage adequate documentation of evaluations and a metaevaluative perspective focused on improvement and accountability for evaluation processes and products.

- » **E1 Evaluation Documentation:** Evaluations should fully document their negotiated purposes and implemented designs, procedures, data, and outcomes.
- » **E2 Internal Metaevaluation:** Evaluators should use these and other applicable standards to examine the accountability of the evaluation design, procedures employed, information collected, and outcomes.
- » **E3 External Metaevaluation:** Program evaluation sponsors, clients, evaluators, and other [partners and community members] should encourage the conduct of external metaevaluations using these and other applicable standards.

