

The Problem of Demonstrating
Effectiveness in Program Evaluation in
School Systems

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Competing Interests in the School System

Internal Stakeholders

Teachers: Security of tenure

Resources for instruction

Disciplined students

Recognition for effort

Parental support

Building Administrators:

Organizational stability

Engaged teachers and students

School meets AYP

Resources to support instruction

Competing Interests in the School System

Internal Stakeholders

- **School Board:** Re-election to board
 - Financial accountability to taxpayers
 - Economies in school operation
 - Employment and commercial opportunities
 - Schools meet AYP

Competing Interests in the School System

External Stakeholders

- **Parents:** Safe and secure environment for children
Instruction to meet demands of standardized tests
Schools have resources needed for instruction
Equity in treatment of children and schools
Qualified and accessible teachers and administrators

Competing Interests in the School System

External Stakeholders

- Commercial Entities:

Successful schools – high student achievement

Disciplined students

Trained workforce

Supportive, facilitating board

Political Manipulation of Program Evaluation

- What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- What is the dependent variable?
- Choosing the type of assessment
- What are included in/excluded from the independent variables?
- How are instruments selected for data collection?
- Who are the respondents?
- How are they selected to respond to surveys?
- How are findings interpreted and presented?

The Case of the Reading First Program

- Results of initial evaluation on ITBS tests
- Interpretation of results – sensitivities regarding gender, ethnicity, SES, teaching quality, identification of individual student, class, school.
- Continuing search for evaluation of program effectiveness
- Need for non-threatening approach to teachers and administrators
- New dependent variable – teachers rating of student performance
- Independent variables: Usefulness of program directed methods, student behavior, student discipline, staff development on Reading First methods.
- Collaborative approach to evaluation development.
- Findings presented as group data, not disaggregated.

Results of the Evaluation: Academic Achievement

- Low achieving students now earning A and B grades -36%
- Low achievers effectively reading 25 books –27%
- Students improving 5 percentile points on ITBS – 37.7%
- Students improving enough to reach 50th percentile rank – 31.8%
- Students improving enough to score 100% on basic literacy test – 17.2%

Results: Impact on Discipline and Motivation

- Students improving on discipline –32.1%
- Low achievers improvement on completing tasks on time –74%
- Office referrals declined –37.3%
- Low Achievers enjoyed reading assignments – 93%
- Low achievers improved in self-concept in reading – 92%

Results: Teaching Methodology

- Effectiveness of activities for phonetics skill treatment – 91.3%
- Effectiveness of process activities in impact on time-on-task – 77-83%
- Effectiveness of activities on reading comprehension – 87%
- Effectiveness of staff development on Reading First methods– 78-83%

Observations on Results

- High levels of achievement as perceived by teachers not related to ITBS results
- Teachers likely not teaching for higher order thinking skills
- Program allowed teachers to keep students more fully engaged improving discipline and time-on-task
- Observers not allowed to observe process of teaching to determine extent of higher order thinking skills being taught.
- In absence of experimental design, teachers can be asked to make judgments on student achievement and student discipline based on their knowledge of students' baseline performance before program began, but more valid results would need direct observation of instruction.

Conflict Avoidance in Program Evaluation

- Need for collaborative approach in developing evaluation method
- Objectivity in evaluation system
- Validity of instruments
- Limited scope of evaluation
- Mapping the field of likely causative variables- defining the problem