Evaluating Programs to Increase Student Achievement (2nd ed.).

“This, too, shall pass.” These are words school administrators hear from teachers too frequently when initiating a new program. Unfortunately, these words are often true because while schools are often program-rich, they attempt little in the way of evaluation to know if programs are working. Outside of looking at standardized test scores, programs aren’t evaluated because doing so can seem a bit daunting—determining what kind of data to use, where it is to be found, what to do with it, and what it means.

In Evaluating Programs to Increase Student Achievement, Martin Jason offers tools to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs through summative evaluations, ways to evaluate student achievement through formative evaluation, and how to use these evaluations, ways to evaluate student achievement through formative evaluation, and how to use these evaluations to determine necessary curricular improvements. Jason recommends that all stakeholders be involved in program evaluations to ensure buy-in and improve program efficacy.

The first chapter explains reasons to engage in program evaluation. Chapters that follow describe various aspects of using collaborative teams to conduct programmatic evaluation; how to set up program evaluations and measure program outcomes through the development of quantitative and qualitative data; and six step-by-step phases of an effective evaluation. Jason includes a sample program needs assessment as well as sample survey questions for school leaders, teachers, and students.

This book isn’t a particularly easy read, and it delves into some difficult concepts for non-math types, such as validity and reliability, meta-evaluation, and quantitative and qualitative data. While these terms may be intimidating for some, Jason does a decent job of making them understandable and useful for school practitioners.

The last chapter of the book is dedicated to the school leader’s role in evaluation. Jason recommends that principals not take the lead in evaluating programs, as the outcome of teacher-led evaluations will be far more meaningful to school improvement.

For any sincere school leader intent on continuous, meaningful, and effective improvement of student achievement, the second edition of Evaluating Programs to Increase Student Achievement can be an excellent tool for implementing that process.

Reviewed by Robert Heath, Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, heathrr@appstate.edu.


I selected this book with the same motivation I felt as a child when I’d eat a vegetable dish—not because it tasted good, but because it was good for me and would make me stronger. I was in for a surprise because what I found in this small volume was an engaging text that will have a lasting influence on how I view policy and the process I’ll go through with others in formulating and implementing policies in our school.

The authors begin by reminding us that failure to take a proactive approach in shaping how policies are implemented for the benefit of children will result in having policy continually dictated to your school by others. They describe in detail a framework for reasoning through an issue requiring the development of policy by looking at personal values, acquired wisdom, exploration of available knowledge, and moral principles. The framework includes how to act on policies and how to evaluate their effectiveness. A key question threads throughout the process: “Is this policy right for this school in this community?”

The authors provide examples of how five principals navigated the process through actual situations. The descriptions of how educational communities worked through the maze of developing policies on English-language learners and immigrant students are particularly relevant to what many schools are currently facing. The policies they developed included balancing student needs and best practices with the political pressures and racial bias that were sometimes evident in portions of their communities.

In each case, the principals consistently followed the framework for reasoning through these issues with their communities. By observing how each situation is resolved through thinking and acting, readers begin to internalize the process, making it possible to apply it to their own issues.

As an adult, I’ve acquired a taste for vegetables. And because of Leading Dynamic Schools, I’ve acquired a deeper interest in working through issues with our learning community to ensure that our policies, programs, procedures, and practices are supporting just and caring schools for our students and staff.

Reviewed by Jim Warnock, Principal, Alma Intermediate School, Alma, Arkansas, jwarnock@almasd.net.
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