



**STEP THREE:**  
**EVALUATING AND IMPROVING**  
**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

# EVALUATING AND IMPROVING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## OVERVIEW

The award-winning steps for successful professional development evaluation and improvement can be summarized as follows:

1. Use PD design goals to determine evaluation measures and standards for success.
2. Clarify who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data and for facilitating “PD next steps” decisions.
3. Use evaluation findings to make improvements in PD.
4. Ensure that evaluation criteria include at least:
  - a. Improvement in teaching.
  - b. Improvement in student learning.
  - c. Narrowing of student achievement gaps.



The best evaluations are “living” parts of the professional development improvement process, actively helping winners come closer to meeting professional development goals.

## USE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DESIGN GOALS TO DETERMINE EVALUATION MEASURES AND STANDARDS FOR SUCCESS

### *Theme From Award Winners*

**Stick to the plan.** The message here from award winners is simple: Make a plan and stick to it. Award winners were generally meticulous about getting down to brass tacks with PD goals and measures during the planning process. They were equally meticulous about using the plan to evaluate specific PD events and the overall PD effort.

### *Examples From Award Winners*

- In one school, the PD coordinating committee, instruction teams, and the personnel committee each monitor alignment between the original PD goals and actual staff and student outcomes. They ensure throughout the year that they are measuring what they intended and that outcomes are hitting goals.
- Another school uses curriculum standards and individual development plan goals as the litmus tests for PD efforts at the school and individual levels. These are the ultimate measures against which the PD program is assessed.



# CLARIFY WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR COLLECTING, ANALYZING, AND REPORTING DATA AND FOR FACILITATING “PD NEXT STEPS” DECISIONS

## *Theme From Award Winners*

**Consolidate professional development planning and evaluation.** Award winners typically put responsibility for evaluating PD in the hands of the people responsible for organizing PD. This responsibility varied tremendously depending on the school (or district) and on the level of evaluation (individual, team, school, and district).

In many award-winning schools, a formal committee of staff, administrators, and parents was responsible for pulling together all of the data and coming to conclusions about the effectiveness of PD. In others, a small, informal team conducted this process for the whole school. In still others, a significant portion of the PD evaluation and improvement took place at the instructional team level where incremental evaluation and improvement could be made.

## *Example From Award Winners*

- In an award-winning district, campus-based teams and a district-level PD committee jointly analyze evaluation data, develop PD goals, plan professional development activities, and evaluate current programs (beginning the cycle again). When they noticed that special education and gifted students were not performing at the desired levels, they developed educational and PD goals in target areas. They also refocused their data analysis to track improvement in student achievement in target areas.



Clarify how you will use evaluation to improve professional development.





## USE EVALUATION FINDINGS TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### *Themes From Award Winners*

Most award winners took one of two overall approaches to this most critical part of evaluation, and some used both approaches.

**Make small changes frequently.** Some winners took an incremental approach to evaluation, taking frequent measures of progress against goals and making incremental changes in PD in response to data. The value winners saw in this approach was that it kept staff focused on results throughout the year, and it refocused PD time and money to directly and immediately impact student learning results. This approach worked particularly well where PD planning and organizing were integrated into staff team planning and teaching.

**Make big changes annually.** Other winners took measures on an annual basis, analyzed results over this longer period, and made “big” changes in PD on this annual schedule. The value of this approach was that they could draw clear, research-based conclusions about student performance over the longer period; they could more easily publicize results to the broader community (e.g., via “annual reports”); and it was easier to make radical changes in PD. This approach worked well where a central body or team was the primary organizer of PD.

### *Examples From Award Winners*

- In one award-winning elementary school, student performance is already very high, so it is necessary to seek small, incremental improvements. Student achievement progress data are posted in the school hallways throughout the year for all staff, students, parents, and visitors to see. The school also monitors achievement results student-by-student and teacher-by-teacher throughout the year and makes PD decisions accordingly. For instance, if a teacher has five students underperforming in the same area, the principal and teacher try to figure out why. They might focus the teacher’s PD on resolving the specific student performance problem.
- In one school district, all programs, including PD efforts, are thoroughly evaluated every three years and stopped if they are not working. Meanwhile, they make smaller-scale changes by using 26 schools in the district as models. The specific materials and PD processes used in these schools are evaluated, improved, and disseminated on a much more frequent basis.
- In one school, staff used the first-year evaluations to make changes in the evaluation process itself. They found that it was hard to draw clear conclusions about the effectiveness of PD without looking at beginning-of-year and end-of-year data. When they moved to this “action research” approach, they were able to make big changes in their PD approach annually. As a result, big changes were made in student learning.





## ENSURE THAT EVALUATION CRITERIA INCLUDE AT LEAST: (A) IMPROVEMENT IN TEACHING, (B) IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT LEARNING, AND (C) NARROWING OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

### *Themes From Award Winners*

**Focus on important goals.** The message from award winners was simple: The PD goals should include improving teaching, improving student learning, and narrowing student achievement gaps. The evaluation process should include measuring how well PD meets these goals. Award winners didn't just evaluate PD workshops and the like, they looked at whether the overall education goals were being met. They assumed that the quality of professional development drove the successes and failures not just of teachers, but of students, too.

**Use your data.** In addition, award winners consistently tracked student achievement for subgroups within the schools and districts to ensure that all students were benefiting from PD efforts and that achievement gaps were narrowing. If consistent patterns for subgroups appeared, then PD efforts focused on the needs of these students and their teachers.

### *Example From Award Winners*

- One district measures student achievement results teacher-by-teacher and student-by-student using standardized tests. It produces extensive analysis, displayed in tables and charts, to show trends and the impact on subgroups. The district also asks staff members for their subjective assessment of how it affects student learning, using informal observation of students. New PD activities address any problematic patterns.



### *Organizers' Checklist*

#### Evaluation and Implementation

- Ensure implementation of the evaluation plan. (Use Tool 12.)
- Schedule time to review and improve the evaluation process after the first round of evaluation/improvement.

