

# **A Guide for Evaluating the Impact of Professional Learning**



**Kentucky Department of Education**

**Division of Next Generation Professionals**

**Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Branch**

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Evaluation of professional learning is necessary to ensure the coherence and impact of a professional learning plan. Thomas Guskey (2000), University of Kentucky education professor and expert in the field of professional development, determined that there were a number of reasons for the growth in interest of evaluating professional learning. These reasons include: an increased understanding and recognition of professional learning as both a *dynamic* and *intentional* process, successful reform efforts must be guided by accurate and detailed information, and the ever increasing pressure for greater accountability.

The task of evaluating professional learning is just as complex as it is important. Guskey (2000) also discusses three major mistakes that can occur in the evaluation of professional learning:

1. They focus on “documentation” rather than evaluation.
2. They are too shallow and do not address meaningful indicators of success.
3. They are too brief and extend over too short a time period.

This guide helps schools and districts overcome the challenges which can lead to Guskey’s “three major mistakes” in professional learning evaluation. It contains adaptable documents and tools for the evaluation and planning of professional learning.

---

## Contents:

- [5 Critical Levels of Professional Learning Evaluation](#): guiding questions, evidence suggestions, and intended purpose for improvement efforts in each of Guskey’s 5 critical levels of PL evaluation
- [12 Guidelines for Evaluating Professional Learning](#): 12 steps, divided into “Planning Guidelines” and “Formative and Summative Guidelines,” to help think through each step from planning to reporting of PL
- [3 Participant Reflection Questionnaires](#): guidance on collecting participant reflections on professional learning, outcomes of the professional learning, and supporting continuous use

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## 5 Critical Levels of Professional Learning Evaluation

<i>Evaluation Level</i>	<i>What questions are addressed?</i>	<i>How will information be gathered?</i>	<i>What is measured or assessed?</i>	<i>How will information be used?</i>
<b>1. Participants' reactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did they like it?</li> <li>• Was their time well spent?</li> <li>• Did the material make sense?</li> <li>• Will it be useful?</li> <li>• Was the leader knowledgeable and helpful?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires administered at the end of the session</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Personal learning logs</li> </ul>	Initial satisfaction with the experience	To improve program design and delivery
<b>2. Participants' learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper-and-pencil instruments</li> <li>• Simulations and demonstrations</li> <li>• Participant reflections (oral and/or written)</li> <li>• Participant portfolios</li> <li>• Case study analyses</li> </ul>	New knowledge and skills of participants	To improve program content, format, and organization
<b>3. Organization support and change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the impact on the organization?</li> <li>• Did it affect organizational climate and procedures?</li> <li>• Was implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported?</li> <li>• Was the support public and overt?</li> <li>• Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently?</li> <li>• Were sufficient resources made available?</li> <li>• Were successes recognized and shared?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District and school records</li> <li>• Minutes from follow-up meetings</li> <li>• Questionnaires</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Structured interviews with participants and school or district administrators</li> <li>• Participant portfolios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organization's advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To document and improve organizational support</li> <li>• To inform future change efforts</li> </ul>

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

<i>Evaluation Level</i>	<i>What questions are addressed?</i>	<i>How will information be gathered?</i>	<i>What is measured or assessed?</i>	<i>How will information be used?</i>
<b>4. Participants' use of new knowledge and skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questionnaires</li> <li>Structured interviews with participants and their supervisors</li> <li>Participant reflections (oral and/or written)</li> <li>Participant portfolios</li> <li>Direct observations</li> <li>Video or audio recordings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Degree and quality of implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To document and improve the implementation of program content</li> </ul>
<b>5. Student learning outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the impact on students?</li> <li>Did it affect student performance or achievement?</li> <li>Did it influence students' physical or emotional well-being?</li> <li>Are students more confident as learners?</li> <li>Is student attendance improving?</li> <li>Are dropouts decreasing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student records</li> <li>School records</li> <li>Questionnaires</li> <li>Structured interviews with students, parents, teachers, and/or administrators</li> <li>Participant portfolios</li> </ul>	Student learning outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive (performance and achievement)</li> <li>Affective (attitudes and dispositions)</li> <li>Psychomotor (skills and behaviors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To focus and improve all aspects of program design, implementation, and follow-up</li> <li>To demonstrate the overall impact of professional learning</li> </ul>

Source: Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

## Important Implications

- Each of these five levels is important.
- Tracking effectiveness at one level tells you nothing about the impact at the next.
- In planning professional learning to improve student learning, *the order of these levels must be reversed*.
  - First consider student outcomes (Level 5), then what practices and policies will achieve those outcomes (Level 4). Next, what supports would need to be in place to implement those practices and policies (Level 3). Followed by, the knowledge and skills participating professionals would need (Level 2), and the set of experiences that will help participants learn those (Level 1).

Guskey, T. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership*, 59 (6). Retrieved from: <http://www.ascd.org/>

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

12 Guidelines for Evaluating Professional Learning		
Planning Guidelines	✓	Notes
1. <i>Clarify the intended goals</i> – results driven, begin with the end in mind		
2. <i>Assess the value of the goals</i> – clarify relationship to the school’s mission		
3. <i>Analyze the context</i> – identify critical elements affecting needed change and impact on implementation		
4. <i>Estimate the program’s potential to meet the goal</i> – explore research base, validity, program strengths and shortcomings		
5. <i>Determine how the goals can be assessed</i> – decide up front what evidence would determine goal attainment		
6. <i>Outline strategies for gathering evidence</i> – How? Who? When? Formative? Summative?		

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

12 Guidelines for Evaluating Professional Learning		
Formative and Summative Guidelines	✓	Notes
7. <i>Gather and analyze evidence of participants' reactions</i> – combination of items/methods, anonymous		
8. <i>Gather and analyze evidence of participants' learning</i> – develop indicators of learning		
9. <i>Gather and analyze evidence of organization support and change</i> – determine characteristics for success		
10. <i>Gather and analyze evidence of participants' new knowledge and skills</i> – indicators of degree and quality of implementation		
11. <i>Gather and analyze evidence of student learning outcomes</i> – information most directly related to program's goals		
12. <i>Prepare and present evaluation reports</i> – clear, meaningful, and comprehensible for stakeholders and decision makers		

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## 3 Participant Reflection Questionnaires

### Participants' Reflections on Professional Learning

- Initial reflections: short, focused questionnaire **(Tool #1)**
- Follow up reflections: within the first six weeks to determine if participants are using the skills and knowledge they acquired, any challenges/successes, and positive impact on student learning **(Tool #2)**

### Participants' Reflections on Outcomes of Professional Learning

- Gather evidence from a variety of sources about the quality of participants' use of new knowledge and skills and the difference in their practices. **(Tool #3)**

### Participants' Continuous Use of Professional Learning

- Support participants' during the initial implementation of professional learning to help overcome obstacles and avoid abandoning skills and strategies learned.
- Implement learning designs that are on-going and embedded into instructional practices so teachers at different stages of use can continue to learn.
- Use information gathered from on-going formative assessments to make relevant revisions and support participants as they implement.
- Use designs that foster teacher collaboration while they integrate new knowledge, skills, and strategies.
  - Peer Collaborators
    - conduct model or demonstration lessons
    - observe implementation of professional learning
    - coach and mentor
  - One-to-one guidance from instructional leaders and coaches
  - Professional Learning Communities and/or faculty meetings – with strategic application of protocols to focus discussion on effective implementation, impact, and outcomes of the professional learning

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## Professional Learning Initial Reflections - Tool # 1

Circle the letter that corresponds to your initial reactions to this professional learning experience and include a short written response in the space provided with each question.

A = strongly positive B = positive C = negative D = strongly negative

1. There is clearly a connection between the content of this professional learning experience and the potential for improved student learning.      A B C D

Comment on one connection that was especially relevant for you.

---

---

2. What I learned can be immediately applied in my classroom.      A B C D

Identify something you will use with your students when you return to your classroom.

---

---

3. I clearly understand the content because of this professional learning experience.      A B C D

Indicate one strategy, concept, or idea that is clearer for you now and/or an area where you still have questions.

---

---

4. The approaches used in this professional learning experience provided instructional models I can adopt as a part of my own instructional practice.      A B C D

Identify a practice you will adopt.

---

---

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## Professional Learning Follow-up Reflections - Tool # 2

Circle the letter that corresponds to your initial reactions to this professional learning experience and include a short written response in the space provided with each question.

A = strongly positive B = positive C = negative D = strongly negative

1. There is clearly a connection between the content of the professional learning experience and improved student learning.     A B C D

Comment on one connection that has been made between the professional learning and student learning.

---

---

2. What I learned has been applied in my classroom.     A B C D

Identify something you have used with your students.

---

---

3. The content continued to be clearly understood following the professional learning experience.     A B C D

Indicate any area where you still have questions that have not been resolved.

---

---

4. The approaches used in this professional learning experience provided instructional models I have adopted as a part of my own instructional practice.     A B C D

Identify a practice you have adopted.

---

---

# A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## Professional Learning Outcome Reflections - Tool # 3

Estimate the degree of success:            (Not at all)    1    2    3    4    5    6            (Entirely)

1. As a result of this professional learning experience I was able to:

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

2. When I implemented what I learned in my classroom, my students were able to:

A. \_\_\_\_\_

B. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe strategies you implemented to make application of what you learned in the professional learning experience easier or more successful.

---

---

4. List sources of evidence of implementation or evidence of impact on your instruction and on student outcomes.

---

---

---

5. Describe any barriers that still need to be addressed for you to successfully and consistently implement what you learned.

---

---