

Evaluation and Strategic Research Overview 2012-2013

This document addresses the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) Office of Evaluation and Strategic Research and Accountability's (OESRA) approach to policy evaluation and strategic research by providing guiding principles, priorities and system supports.

Evaluation and Strategic Research - The use of data and information to provide both short-term information and longer-term research findings that support both the development/planning of policy initiatives as well as their successful implementation. This effort is focused on the *strategic* and immediate use of information, while at the same time leveraging long-term rigorous evaluation and research on policy initiatives (i.e., evidence to support consequential validity arguments).

Guiding Principles:

- Evaluation and strategic research is important to MDE because:
 - Policy development is informed by data and analysis
 - MDE's competitiveness for federal grants increases, both in terms of our ability to support our plans with information and with our visibility with potential peer reviewers
 - Provides timely information for legislators to support policy implementation
 - It supports and engages the field which leads to increased buy-in on major initiatives
 - Resources can be allocated most effectively to support both current and coming initiatives
 - We are leaders in educational policy and research and desire to further bolster that reputation among State and research peers

- Forming and using research partnerships for both short-term information and longer-term research findings is a central element to MDE's Evaluation and Strategic Research strategy because it:
 - Leverages research capacity statewide and nationwide
 - Builds MDE's profile on the federal level (particularly with competitive grants)
 - Increases rigor of evaluation and research
 - Provides external evaluation and validation of policies
 - Interacts with research partners and serves as professional development on all sides of the partnership; all parties grow by sharing expertise and information
 - Creates less resistance to policy as it allows more voices to be heard and approaches to be considered

- MDE must be *proactive* and *specific* about forming partnerships and pursuing internal evaluation and strategic research that supports the overriding goals of the Department.

- MDE should increase efforts not only to conduct evaluation and strategic research, but also to *promote* our work in these areas and continue to raise our national and statewide profile by:
 - Combating the sense of a slow-moving bureaucracy
 - Establishing a presence of national expertise in the field; demonstrate the quality and value of work produced by MDE staff
 - Taking credit for work that is being accomplished
 - Supporting MDE’s applications for competitive grants like Race to the Top, as well as things like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility application.
 - Including such results within our public facing documentation to provide transparency to consumers of our data and research in addition to helping shape a research agenda that has both pragmatic and theoretical implications
 - Encouraging the publication of applied research studies in education that is useful for many educational organizations and systems and is not purely theoretical

Priorities:

These policy priority areas relate directly to MDE’s main areas of priority for our work:

- Career and college readiness for all students
- Closing achievement gaps and increasing achievement for all students
- Quality preparation for educators
- Turning around our lowest-performing schools
- Increased flexibility in learning opportunities for students
- Increased accountability for schools, districts and educators
- Educator evaluations as a tool for improving educator practice and ensuring a high-quality educator for every Michigan student
- Early childhood education
- Greater transparency, “light of day” reporting, and open sharing of information and metrics with stakeholders (parents, educators, community members)

Key Activities of OESRA:

- 1) Develop and coordinate for MDE an evaluation and strategic research portfolio to provide rapid-response, short-term information, and longer-term findings on policy and program impacts to MDE leadership, policymakers, stakeholders and the field at large.
 - a. Internal: focused on rapid-response
 - b. External research partners: chosen strategically to evaluate major policy initiatives

- c. Implement project management principles to triage internal and external requests and manage resources; create a master plan for ongoing projects; and developing a schedule of deliverables
 - d. Secure funding from federal research grant competitions whenever possible
- 2) Develop and implement standardized protocols and procedures to provide data in a Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)-compliant manner by:
 - a. Processing research questions
 - b. Producing researcher data files and documentation
 - c. Making choices between projects/requests
- 3) Disseminate findings regularly to a wide audience such as MDE leadership, policymakers, stakeholders, federal grants and the field at large by doing the following:
 - a. Setting interim deliverable schedules with external researchers
 - b. Creating regular communication channels and utilizing them such as at quarterly Superintendent group meetings
 - c. Develop a set of standardized products that all evaluation/research efforts produce (policy brief, executive summary, full report, technical report, technical products, presentations, sound bites)
 - d. Develop a website to showcase current initiatives, present findings and request new research partners
- 4) Build internal capacity within MDE and the Center for Educational Performance and Information to leverage and understand data in appropriate and correct ways, and to ask questions of the data
- 5) Promote Michigan's policies and related evaluation/research efforts in national venues