

Research & Evaluation Brief

Department of Accountability, Research & Planning

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Introduction

- Bob Rodosky

Greetings from the JCPS Research & Planning Department. We are proud to present the 2nd issue of our Research and Evaluation Brief. Our aim is to communicate the research & evaluation activities that are occurring in JCPS, and in the wider educational research world.

In this brief, you will find:

- ◆ evaluation results of various JCPS programs such as CARE for Kids and the reconfigura-

- tion of the Olmsted Academies;
- ◆ problems with using ACT results as part of accountability systems;
- ◆ information about analyzing disaggregated discipline data; and
- ◆ practical evaluation tools for practitioners to learn how to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs (2nd in series).

Stay tune to upcoming issues where you can learn about the impact of other district initiatives such as elementary

magnet programs, Developmental Design, Facing History, Freshman Academies and much more.

Our Research & Evaluation Briefs are published three times per year (January, June, and September) and are available on our website.

Please feel free to contact the Research Department if you have any feedback about the briefs or would like to learn more about any of the topics we cover.

Using Focus Groups for Planning and Evaluation: A CARE for Kids Example

- Florence Chang

Focus groups with students or teachers can be a powerful way to obtain participants' understanding and perspective of a program. Although it should not be the only source of data, focus groups provide an opportunity to understand whether a program is being received in the way it was intended to be received. For example, focus groups were conducted at the CARE for Kids schools this past April. It helped to answer questions such as "Can students articulate why they are doing the activities they are doing, such as Morning Meeting?", "Do students understand the meaning (the 'why') behind what they are doing?", and "Do students perceive they are in a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment?".

Below is a sample of quotes from students who participated in the CARE for Kids student focus groups:

- ◆ "I'm not good at math, and my partner helps me learn it better"
- ◆ "It helps to share the work"
- ◆ "Our school is a happy place"
- ◆ "Students help each other learn"
- ◆ "Students solve problems using I-messages"
- ◆ "Our school uses different learning techniques so everyone fits in no matter what"
- ◆ "The teachers gets us started, but we do it ourselves...we run the classroom"
- ◆ "Our class is like brother and sisters- we live in 1 house and have to work together"
- ◆ For elementary schools, select from intermediate (or P4 and intermediate classes) in order to obtain students old enough to articulate or elaborate on their experiences or have separate focus groups for primary and intermediate.
- ◆ Have a note-taker or tape recorder in addition to the facilitator.

Tips for running a focus group include:

- ◆ Ensure confidentiality
- ◆ Limit the groups to 5-8 participants and the time for the focus group to 1 hour.
- ◆ Select from a cross-section of classrooms with attention given to having a fair distribution of race and gender.

After the focus group, summarize the responses and ask questions like 'Did answers vary widely across participants?', and 'Were participants able to articulate the principles expected?'. Share the focus group data with interested parties such as the principal, teachers, and leadership team. Discuss areas where participants demonstrated strengths and areas where there could be improvement.

For more information on focus groups see: <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/>

Did you Know?

Jefferson County Public Schools have 94 Nationally Board Certified teachers as of June 2009.

43 JCPS students are National Merit Scholarship Program Semifinalists for the year of 2009.

ISSUE EDITOR:
DEVEN VAUGHT

2009 Results: Whole-Child Comprehensive School Survey

- Marco Muñoz and Tamara Lewis

In JCPS, we want our students to be prepared to achieve their goals, follow their dreams, and help create a more just society. We want to not only develop student minds and teach students to be personally successful in postsecondary education or employment, but also teach them to be contributing members of the community. We want to help our students become well-rounded individuals by educating the whole child. In JCPS, our students will graduate with a high level of academic performance, strong character, and a sense of social responsibility.

Overall results of our way to measure our new leadership vision –our Comprehensive School Surveys- indicate that JCPS schools are strengthening their organizational culture. JCPS is creating caring, respectful, and responsive school communities that empower students and employees to have a voice and opportunities to develop in multiple facets of the whole child framework. As reflected by items in our Comprehensive School Surveys associated with our Theory of Action, JCPS is advancing character development as well as social and emotional growth of students and employees by creating caring school communities

that nurture respectful relationships among students, teachers, support staff, and parents.

The Comprehensive School Surveys are a wonderful resource for (a) needs assessment (to uncover concerns before issues become overwhelming problems), (b) strengthening your organizational culture (and student outcomes that follow), and (c) to measure your progress toward positive change (as expressed in our JCPS vision). Be sure to check the results in our interactive website at: www.assessment.jefferson.k12.ky.us/survey2009/

Preliminary Findings on the Reconfiguration of Two JCPS Middle Schools

-Beverly Winsch

During the 2008-2009 school year, two JCPS middle schools were reconfigured into same gender schools now known as Frederick Law Olmsted Academy South and Frederick Law Olmsted Academy North. In addition to becoming same gender schools and introducing CARE for Kids this year, the following improvement strategies began in 2007-2008: Embedded Professional Development via Master Teachers; Enhanced Technology; Reduced Class Size; Extended Service Days for Staff; and Extra Co-Curricular Involvement.

JCPS is evaluating the impact of the reconfiguration initiatives beginning with the 2008-2009 school year by addressing the main research question: ***“To what extent does school reconfiguration relate to educational success at the school level?”***

Discussion of academic data is limited until the CATS 2009 test scores are released. However, 2009 CASCADE benchmarking data for the two schools ***predict*** CATS 2009 growth for most NCLB groups in reading and math. Student behavior data for both schools shows an overall decrease in student rate for disciplinary actions and the

2009 CATS PREDICTED IMPROVEMENTS VIA CASCADE	All	White	African American	Free/Reduced Lunch	ECE
Olmsted South Reading	YES	YES	YES	NO	*
Olmsted South Math	YES	YES	YES	YES	*
Olmsted North Reading	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Olmsted North Math	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES

*Olmsted South does not have NCLB requirements for this group.

number of out of school suspensions decreased at both schools while the number of out of school suspensions for middle schools increased by more than 20% this year.

The following Comprehensive Survey items show positive changes for both schools:

- ◆ My principal provides effective leadership (staff)
- ◆ My school is effectively implementing a plan to close the achievement gap (staff)
- ◆ Teachers at my school provide effective instruction (staff)
- ◆ I am very satisfied with my school (student)
- ◆ I am very satisfied with JCPS (student)
- ◆ My principal provides effective leadership at my school (student)
- ◆ My teachers provide academically

- challenging content (student)
- ◆ Teachers at my school provide effective teaching (student)

Teacher retention at the Academies was above 90% and teacher attendance data show that at least 10% of the teachers had perfect attendance. Parental and community engagement data show that the Olmsted Academies hosted events with a total attendance of 7200 parents and community members. PTSA Membership substantially increased at both schools this year.

In summary, preliminary indicators show positive gains on student, parent, and staff measures. Results from the 2009 CATS assessment will be closely examined when released.

The Dilemmas of Disaggregated Discipline Data

-Judi Vanderhaar

Recently, our department conducted analyses of school level discipline data to identify areas where racial disparities may exist. These areas include frequency of discipline referrals, types of sanctions used (suspension, detention, etc.) and recidivism (repeat incidents). The examination of the data differs from previous analyses of disaggregated data in that it included only incidents coded as disruptive behavior, and, it isolates first incidents to control for the impact repeat offenses have on sanctions applied to students.

Throughout this process, three critical issues came to light that, once addressed, will help us develop a deeper understanding of the issues so we can move towards implementing and refining policies and practices to tackle them. The key challenges we identified include (1) inconsistency in data entry, (2) wide variation in the definition of disruptive behavior and (3) the tenuous nature of the topic itself.

Currently, data entry of both disciplinary referrals and sanctions are inconsistent across our schools. It is expected that data quality will be greatly improved this school coming school year as a result of the district leadership's providing a consistent clear message to school administrators on the importance of streamlining the data entry process of discipline referrals into Infinite Campus.

What disruptive behavior means in one school or classroom does not mean the same thing in other schools or classrooms. Administrators and teachers have large amounts of discretion when it comes to coding behavior. The ambiguous nature of the defini-

tion of disruptive behavior has been shown in several studies to increase the likelihood of large racial disparities. Providing clear unambiguous definitions and protocols for incidents will be essential towards reducing gaps and increasing validity of the data.

The nature of the topic itself often generates dialogue that can quickly become intense and uncomfortable. Illuminating any disparities in discipline can cultivate a desire to understand more fully the myriad of issues perpetuating the problems or it may reinforce negative views of groups with high rates of incidents. As we move along, it is critical that we guard against the common reactions sparked by dialogue such as defensiveness or the need to quickly explain away the data. The institutionalization of ongoing frank dialogue around these issues will help address the other "gaps" we have committed to tackle – those of achievement and empowerment.

One thing is clear – the analysis of disaggregated discipline data will continue at JCPS as we work towards addressing these disparities. With the guidance of the discipline committee that Dr. Berman formed, JCPS is committed to monitoring data and especially the efforts made towards increased data quality, communicating clear definitions, and encouraging the sometimes difficult discussions necessary to substantively address these issues.

We have created a data review guide packet to aid in the interpretation and discussions of the data. This includes research literature on the topic, data caveats, guiding questions to consider when reviewing the data, and approaches that are used in other schools and districts to address these issues. If you would like a copy of the data review guide please contact our department.

The Problems with Using ACT Results in Accountability Systems

-Marco Munoz

All states have test-based accountability systems to support inferences about the effectiveness of their schools. In many states across the nation, ACT test scores are now included in their accountability systems. In fact, some consider the ACT as the core measurement of the state testing system for high school students.

The problem that we see is that using a norm-referenced test like ACT --with scores ranked on a bell curve-- is contrary to the NCLB and state accountability systems' aspiration of all children reaching proficiency. A bell curve measurement, by design, ranks children. It is not appropriate to use norm-referenced tests to assess educational programs in high-stakes accountability environments due to their lack of instructional sensitivity. Any inference about educational quality based on students' standardized achievement test performance is invalid by the norm-reference nature of the test.

It is not that the standardized achievement tests are, by themselves, invalid. ACT does have a purpose, a sorting purpose. Rather, it is the second-level inference about educational quality that is wrong. The function of a norm-referenced achievement test is to permit inferences about the knowledge and/or skills students possess, in a given content area, in relationship to knowledge and/or skills possessed by other students throughout the nation.

“Standardized achievement tests also have a different mission than indicating how good or bad a school is. Standardized achievement tests should be used to make the comparative interpretations that they were intended to provide. They should not be used to judge educational quality.” (Popham, 2000, p. 400).

To further complicate the norm-referenced issue, in subjects ACT does

test, many questions are not aligned with the state assessment. For example, ACT does not test biology, chemistry, physics or other fundamental areas of science. In subjects that ACT does not test, the problem is graver still. For example, ACT ignores history, civics, geography, economics, and cultures.

In summary, there is a clear testing-and-teaching mismatch when it comes to the ACT because the content measured by the test is not necessarily aligned with the content taught (i.e., limited instructional sensitivity). Furthermore, from a psychometric perspective, the quest for score variance in a norm-referenced framework requires to eliminate items with high p values (i.e., easy items) and, as result, important topics teacher teach will not be assessed by standardized achievement tests. The mismatch and the psychometric properties of norm-referenced tests should probably prohibit using ACT scores as an indicator of educational effectiveness in accountability systems.

How Will You Know if your Program is Really Working ?

- Dena Dossett

In the last series, we discussed how to set a frame of reference for your evaluation project by thinking about how you define evaluation and what the goals of evaluation should be. Now that you have considered the benefits and challenges posed by evaluation work, you are better prepared to move into Step 1 – developing evaluation questions.

When you develop evaluation questions you need to take into account several factors, such as the structure of the program, any existing research and available resources. Ideally, the program was designed keeping the goals and outcomes at the forefront and with evaluation built in from the beginning.

A clear program planning model shown here will help keep your evaluation questions focused.

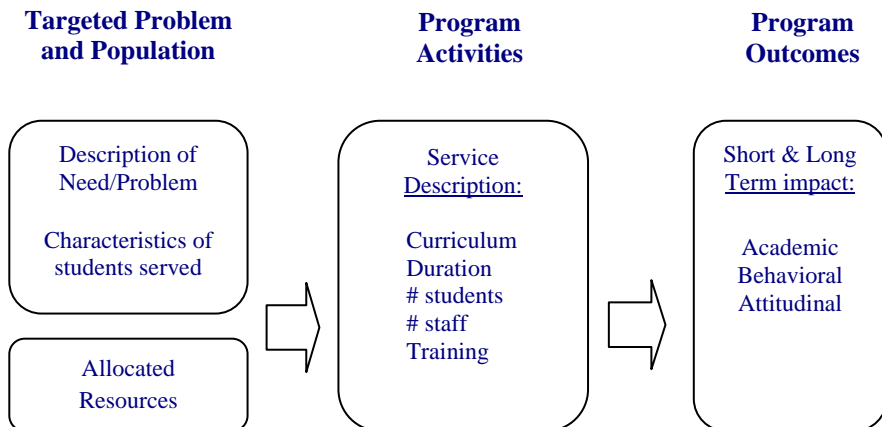
By completing the program planning model, you will have generated several evaluation questions: (1) Does the program actually address identified problem/need? (2) Does program serve members of targeted population? (3) Is it implemented as planned? and (4) Did it achieve its expected outcomes?

Your questions will also be guided by whether you are conducting a formative or summative evaluation. Formative evaluations answer the questions of “how can the program be improved or made more

efficient?” whereas summative evaluations focus on “what are the outcomes of the program and is the program worth continuing or expanding?”

As you develop your questions, you may find it helpful to review the research to learn about any previous studies of the program and identify possible data collection tools. In addition, it is important to calculate what resources (time, people, money) are needed to answer the questions. This is a crucial activity in order to avoid a common pitfall of creating too many questions. When narrowing or prioritizing questions, you should keep in mind whether the question would be of interest to key stakeholders, yield new or important information, and have a future impact.

In the next series, we will cover Step 2 – Selecting an Evaluation Approach. In the meantime, please feel free to contact the JCPS Research Department if you have any questions about program evaluation.



Accountability, Research and Planning

The Accountability, Research & Planning Department produces research & program evaluations of numerous federal, state and local grants as well as district initiatives. Please check our website for reports on these programs: <http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Departments/Planning/ProgramEvaluation/ProgramEvaluation.html>



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Our Mission Statement

In support of the District's Vision and Goals, the Research and Planning Department will enhance the utilization of data-driven decision making, quality indicators, programmatic evaluation and district wide accountability measures that will lead to continuous student, school and district improvement.