

Interim Progress Assessment: Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Guidance

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In the spring of 2021, President Biden and Congress approved an unprecedented infusion of federal funds into our public education system to safely reopen schools, address pre- and post-pandemic unfinished learning, and build lasting, equitable systems of teaching and learning. While these resources were badly needed, it was clear that the new funding would test the ability of school systems to properly manage and allocate the money in ways that most effectively address student needs.

To provide guidance and support in this endeavor, the [Council of the Great City Schools](#) assembled a high-level task force of urban district leaders to develop and release a toolkit entitled [Investing American Rescue Plan Funds Strategically and Effectively](#). School districts are now one year into their federally funded relief and recovery efforts. As we reach the anniversary of the release of the Council's initial investment guidance, district leaders should take the opportunity to step back and assess their investment planning and implementation.

Purpose and Audience

This document aims to provide a framework for this assessment process, specifically designed for research directors and their teams.

- The document first sums up the guiding principles and considerations provided last year.
- We then provide a series of questions aimed to help districts assess their work to date, and to suggest potential next steps for research and evaluation of the district's investments. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Rather, these questions are designed to prompt discussion about current initiatives and to suggest potential next steps.
- The document ends by identifying a set of "warning indicators"—problematic approaches or developments based on guidance from last year on what to avoid. If the district's research and evaluation efforts meet any of these criteria it should signal to district leaders the need to rethink or refine their strategy.

Guiding Principles for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment

Research, Evaluation, and Assessment departments have a critical role to play in helping monitor and assess investments and their impact. Data and reporting on student progress will be critical in the coming months and years, as districts are called on by their communities, lawmakers, and the general public to provide evidence that federal funding has led to improved student outcomes. The Council's [investment guidance](#) underscored the importance of including the research team in the planning, implementation, and reporting for investments. Additionally, districts should ensure they have a theory of action or improvement

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that connects expenditures to tangible outcomes, along with clearly identified metrics and assessments to analyze the impact of investments and determine which ones have the greatest potential to track student and district progress on a variety of key academic and social-emotional outcomes. Districts must ensure they have a plan and timeline for sharing these evaluation and assessment reports with various stakeholders and the community at large. Finally, districts should have a plan in place to use findings from evaluations to inform future investments and planning.

Interim Progress Assessment Questions for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Directors

1. How are you supporting investment planning, implementation, and reporting?

- Ensured research, evaluation, and assessment staff are included in initial and ongoing planning discussions.
- Provided district leadership with insight into the gaps in student performance and engagement including the root causes of problems and articulated expected outcomes to inform district investment strategy.
- Worked as part of cross-functional teams to analyze potential investments and establish metrics to track outcomes.
- Developed a timeline for interim reporting of progress made in developing, implementing, and evaluating investments.
- Other: _____



2. How have you identified expected outcomes for proposed investments?

- Developed a theory of action for connecting proposed initiatives to expected outcomes.
- Transformed the theory of action into a **logic model** that connects expenditures and investments in staff, materials, services, and facilities (*Inputs*) to their anticipated district activities and support systems (*Processes*); intermediate changes (*Outputs*); and short-, intermediate-, and long-term effects (*Outcomes*).
- Ensured that the logic model reflects equity considerations for project plans and outcomes, with the goal of ensuring students in need receive higher per-unit support.
- Ensured that all parts of the investments are connected to the theory, action, and logic model to provide guidance for department-level work.
- Collaborated with district leaders to establish the process of setting investment priorities that start with a comprehensive assessment of student academic and social-emotional needs based on a clear vision of how the district defines student success.
- Identified qualitative and quantitative measures to be collected and analyzed to establish the effectiveness of projects and programs.
- Identified an evaluation plan, with clear metrics, for determining investment impacts on student outcomes.

- Implemented a continuous improvement process to allow for adjustments in investment strategies or initiatives as needed.
- Analyzed data and evidence to identify and expand effective existing and new initiatives and redesign or curtail ineffective initiatives.
- Determined causes and alternatives when initial efforts to advance major initiatives, programs, and projects are not successful.
- Other: _____

3. What metrics and assessments are you using to analyze the impact of investments and help determine those that have the greatest potential to track student and district progress?

- Developed plans to assess the fidelity of implementation of programs, services, and materials across classrooms and schools.
- Assessed the effectiveness of programs, services, and materials on all students, ensuring you include students with disabilities, English learners, low-income students, homeless students, and other student groups who traditionally underperform compared to their peer group.
- Reviewed, upon request, budget requests from schools and departments to ensure they include a description of successful implementation; how key stakeholders will be engaged; identification of potential barriers and how they will be addressed; and timeline for implementation and expected outcomes.
- Other: _____



4. What metrics have you identified that will enable you to track and demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) of these federal funds?

- Coordinated data sharing with the finance department to connect expenditure of funds to investment outcomes, including development of dashboards or other systems that make these connections.
- Ensured there are cross-functional working groups to coordinate plans, goals, priorities, major initiatives, programs, and projects.
- Other: _____



5. How are you communicating outcomes from the investment of these federal funds to various stakeholders and the community at large?

- Ensured close collaboration with the superintendent and communications team on a plan that includes gathering stakeholder feedback and providing periodic updates.
- Provided routine reports to the school board and public on implementation efforts, metrics, and outcomes.
- Communicated timelines for reporting outcomes of investments, clarifying that some investments will yield short-term results and others will take longer.
- Established an investment and outcomes dashboard on the district website to ensure transparency in sharing activities and results with the public.
- Other: _____





STOP

WARNING INDICATORS

- The research, evaluation, and assessment directors are not involved from the outset of investment planning.
- Research offices not properly staffed or supported with the capacity or skills needed to properly evaluate and monitor investments.
- Investments are made without a clear plan for tracking student engagement or measuring impact.
- The research department works in isolation from other district departments.
- New programs, materials, or resources are abandoned too quickly—without first ensuring adequate implementation and without measuring key outcomes on the established timelines.
- Programs, materials, and resources continue to be supported despite a long-term lack of measurable impact on student outcomes.
- The district relies on single measures of progress to gauge effectiveness of investments.

If any of these statements describe your district's research, evaluation, and assessment plans, you should rethink your strategy.