

OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY	TOPIC: PURPOSE AND DUTIES
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	SECTION: 1.0 (1 of 2) EFFECTIVE DATE: REVISED: 6/16/2016

PURPOSE

The Mississippi Department of Education established The Bureau of Program Evaluation to provide independent, credible, and professional evaluations to the School Performance and Accountability Subcommittee (“Accountability Subcommittee”) of the Board of Education and the Mississippi Department of Education.

The Bureau of Program Evaluation consists of program evaluators who report to the Director of Program Evaluation/Public Reporting under the Office of Educational Accountability.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

§ 37-151-9. Office of Educational Accountability established; director; duties and responsibilities:

1. *The State Board of Education and State Superintendent of Education shall establish within the State Department of Education a special unit at the division level called the Office of Educational Accountability. The Director of the Office of Educational Accountability shall hold a position comparable to a deputy superintendent and shall be appointed by the State Board of Education with the advice and consent of the Senate. He shall serve at the will and pleasure of the State Board of Education and may employ necessary professional, administrative and clerical staff. The Director of the Office of Educational Accountability shall provide all reports to the Legislature, Governor, Mississippi Commission on School Accreditation and State Board of Education and respond to any inquiries for information.*
2. *The Office of Educational Accountability is responsible for monitoring and reviewing programs developed under the Education Reform Act, the Mississippi Adequate Education Program Act of 1994, the Education Enhancement Fund, and subsequent education initiatives, and shall provide information, recommendations and an annual assessment to the Legislature, Governor, Mississippi Commission on School Accreditation and the State Board of Education. Commencing in 1995, the annual assessment of education reform programs shall be performed by the Office of Educational Accountability by December 1 of each year. The Office of Educational Accountability shall specifically monitor the implementation of Level III accreditation in all school districts, and shall make an assessment with recommendations to the 1996 Regular Session of the Legislature.*
3. *In addition, the Office of Educational Accountability shall have the following specific duties and responsibilities:*
 - a. *Developing and maintaining a system of communication with school district personnel;*
 - b. *Provide opportunities for public comment on the current functions of the State Department of Education's programs, needed public education services and innovative suggestions;*

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- c. *Assess both positive and negative impact on school districts of new education programs, including but not limited to The Mississippi Report Card and alternative school programs.*

DUTIES

In order to achieve its goal of conducting credible, professional evaluations of programs and policies administered by the Mississippi Department of Education in a systematic and timely manner, the Bureau of Program Evaluation will have the following duties:

- Submission of an Annual Evaluation Plan to the Accountability Subcommittee for approval;
- Ensuring that the Board of Education is aware of all internal and external evaluations being conducted, the nature of each evaluation, project milestones and timelines, and findings and recommendations;
- Conducting follow-ups to recommendations made by prior evaluations and provide updates to the School Performance and Accountability Subcommittee to ensure reports are being utilized by the department;
- Provision of evaluation progress updates to the School Performance and Accountability Subcommittee;
- Performing special projects in response to requests by the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, and the Mississippi Legislature;
- Serving as the liaison between external evaluation entities such as the Joint Legislative Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review, Legislative Budget Office, and other state and federal agencies.

ACCESS

The Bureau of Program Evaluation will have unrestricted access to all Department records, personnel, and physical properties relevant to the performance of internal evaluations and technical assistance. The office will have full and free access to the Accountability Subcommittee.

LIABILITY AND AUTHORITY

The Bureau of Program Evaluation has no authority or responsibility for activities evaluated, and does not have the authority to require implementation of any recommendations; that authority remains with management.

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Selection of Projects

The Bureau of Program Evaluation will submit an Annual Evaluation Plan to the Accountability Subcommittee for approval. The plan will be subject to revision and approval by the Accountability Subcommittee.

Projects will be limited in scope to policies or programs administered by the Mississippi Department of Education, and specifically to those policies or programs over which the Board of Education has some degree of fiscal accountability.

Programs and policies will be selected for evaluation based on Mississippi Board of Education priorities (as stated in the strategic plan, legislative budget requests, and through discussion with board members), planning meetings with the state superintendent and chiefs, proposals submitted by evaluation staff, and evaluation requests.

Evaluation Requests

Any member of the Board of Education may submit a request to the Director of Educational Accountability for evaluation of a program or policy in verbal or written form. Unless explicitly requested by a member of the Board of Education, originators must submit an Evaluation Request Form available on the Bureau of Program Evaluation website¹. Each Evaluation Request Form must be submitted to the Office of Educational Accountability.

Each request form must be signed by the chief of the division submitting the request prior to submission to the Office of Educational Accountability. The Bureau of Program evaluation will assess the request and provide a justification on action taken. This response will provided to both to the requesting division and the Director of the Office of Educational Accountability. In order for a request form to be considered for review, it must address each of the following components:

- Requesting Office
- Office Contact
- Policy or program to be evaluated
- Whether the program has been evaluated in the past five years;
- A detailed description of the policy or program;
- A detailed description of the need to evaluate the policy or program;
- Total cost/amount of grant award for program;
- Source of funding;
- Any regulations or policies mandating evaluation;
- Request for Internal (Bureau of Program Evaluation) or External (Contractor) Evaluator (if External, state estimated cost and budget codes to cover expenditure);

¹ <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/OEA/program-evaluation/>

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- If the program is the result of a grant, whether grant monies allow funding for evaluations, and if so, the amount allowable; and,
- Requested timeframes for evaluation and due date of the evaluation report.

Requests that are approved by the Director of the Office of Educational Accountability will be submitted to the Accountability Subcommittee for consideration. All modifications to the Annual Evaluation Plan must be approved by the Accountability Subcommittee.

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FRAMEWORK FOR CONDUCTING EVALUATIONS

Evaluation staff will provide regular updates on the progress of each ongoing evaluation to the Accountability Subcommittee in terms of specific phases and provide initial and adjusted timeframes for completion:

- Development Phase
- Evaluability Phase
- Evaluation Phase
- Analysis Phase
- Writing Phase
- Release Phase

Each evaluation shall incorporate the following steps to ensure consistency in method, analysis, and documentation of findings:

- Entrance letter sent to department management
- Entrance Conference with program staff
- Establish program context
- Establish program theory
- Identify stakeholders
- Clarify purpose of evaluation
- Statement of evaluation questions and criteria
- Evaluability assessment
- Methodology / Design
- Fieldwork / Data collection
- Analysis
- Documentation of limitations of study
- Documentation of evaluative findings
- Write-up of evaluative findings
- Validation of findings with program staff and MDE leadership
- Report writing
- Recommendations
- Draft report reviewed by department management
- Presentation of final report to the Accountability Subcommittee
- Report release

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DEVELOPMENT PHASE

ENTRANCE CONFERENCE WITH PROGRAM STAFF

Evaluation staff shall provide a letter to program or policy director stating purpose of evaluation and formally enter into evaluability phase of project. The purpose of the entrance conference is to ensure that all parties necessary to ensure successful completion of the evaluation are afforded an opportunity to meet with evaluation staff for questions and to provide evaluation staff with contact points for requesting data and interviews during future phases of the evaluation.

ESTABLISH CONTEXT OF PROGRAM

Phase shall consist of collecting background information on program that may be necessary for informing evaluation or clarifying evaluative intentions including, but not limited to, development of organizational chart, program target population, analysis of prior research on program or policy, and environmental context of program (related research, demographics, budget, legal requirements, reporting requirements, etc.).

ESTABLISH PROGRAM CONTEXT

Phase shall consist of creation of a logic model that maps all necessary preconditions or requirements that must be met to achieve the program outcome(s) or goals. Additionally, identification of performance indicators (e.g., inputs, efficiencies, outputs, outcome measures, goals, objectives, program premise, mission, target population, etc.) will be collected during this phase to assess progress towards desired outcomes and overall performance. Contingent upon the time sensitivity of each project, evaluation staff may also work with program staff during this time to ensure that performance budgeting data is integrated into the Board of Education FY 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan.

IDENTIFY PROGRAM STAKEHOLDERS

Phase shall consist of identification of who (besides the direct target population the program intends to serve) holds a stake in the substance of the evaluation; additionally, this phase will allow evaluation staff to identify sources for gathering information on program priorities, expected program accomplishments, problems facing the program, and other various data elements.

ESTABLISH PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

Phase will establish the type of evaluation taking place (e.g., implementation evaluation, needs assessment, process evaluation, cost-benefit analysis, efficiency study), which will in turn drive the scope of the evaluation and findings statements.

EVALUABILITY PHASE

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STATEMENT OF EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND CRITERIA

Evaluation staff will frame specific questions that are central to the evaluation that will be answered over its course and used to direct the storyboarding process. Evaluation questions are the most important part of the evaluation phase since the questions determine the methodology. Examples of these types of questions are “*Has there been a gain in scores on relevant assessments?*”, or “*Has Student Engagement Improved?*”, or lend themselves to more qualitative aspects that may not be answerable with indicators, such as “*What obstacles to student learning exist in a particular classroom?*”

EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

Upon completion of the entrance conference, evaluation staff shall conduct an evaluability assessment to determine if necessary data and elements are in place with the program or policy to ensure an evaluation can be conducted. Such criteria may include, but are not limited to, criteria set forth in the *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (Wholey, 2004):

- The program goals and priority information are well-defined.
- Program goals are plausible.
- Relevant performance data can be obtained at reasonable cost.
- Intended users of the evaluation results have agreed on how they will use the information.

If evaluation staff believe that other criteria are better suited due to the nature of a specific evaluation, such criteria will be defined and published in the “Scope of Evaluation” section of the report mentioned in Section 4.3.1 of the Policy and Procedures Manual.

METHODOLOGY

Evaluators will determine the following critical information for completing the evaluation:

- Primary participant population to be studied
- Appropriate study design (e.g., survey, pre-post analysis, randomized controlled trial, interviews, etc.)
- Procedures for collecting data

EVALUATION PHASE

This phase will consist of applying the procedures stated in the Methodology section to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. Interviews, focus groups, and other methods will be used for collecting qualitative data on program staff, target populations, and other stakeholders. Quantitative data will be collected through the request or acquisition of survey data, assessment data, and other data sources.

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ANALYSIS PHASE

The analysis phase will consist of the following steps:

- Data entry (if necessary; i.e., not entered through online survey)
- Data checking / cleaning
- Statistical analysis (if data collected is quantitative rather than qualitative)

WRITING PHASE

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Evaluators will document, for transparency and validity, any limitations on the availability of data, resources, timeframes, or other factors which impacted the evaluation.

DOCUMENTATION OF EVALUATIVE FINDINGS

Evaluation staff will cross-reference working papers to the report / findings statements and ensure that all documentation is available for third-party review or for future replicability for similar projects (or follow-ups to prior projects).

WRITE-UP OF EVALUATIVE FINDINGS

Evaluation staff will produce finding statements to respond to each of the evaluative questions that will inform the report writing process.

VALIDATION OF FINDINGS WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND MDE LEADERSHIP

Evaluation staff will provide embargoed copy of findings to relevant stakeholders to ensure factual accuracy of analysis and findings.

REPORT WRITING

Phase will consist of storyboard and content creation resulting in a rough draft of report for internal discussion with Director of Educational Accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation staff will provide recommendations to ameliorate conditions in findings statements (if such conditions exist), including, but not limited to, policy and procedural adjustments, program implementation adjustments, refinement or creation of data reporting requirements, or legislative remedy.

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RELEASE PHASE

PRESENTATION OF FINAL REPORT TO SUBCOMMITTEE

Evaluation staff will conduct a presentation of major findings of report during the Accountability Subcommittee monthly meeting, and a final report draft shall also be submitted prior to the meeting for review, coupled with an agenda item requesting approval of the report during the meeting.

REPORT RELEASE

The Bureau of Program Evaluation shall make available physical and/or digital copies of each evaluation report upon presentation to the Subcommittee on School Performance and Accountability, which can be accessed either via the Office of Educational Accountability website (<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/oea>) or by written request to the Office of Educational Accountability, Attn: Bureau of Program Evaluation.

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FRAMEWORK FOR REPORT WRITING

In order to provide information to the Accountability Subcommittee in a format that allows for both summary and in-depth understanding of the project and its findings, the Bureau of Program Evaluation shall adopt a consistent format for each report issued, including, but not limited to, the following elements:

- Executive Summary of Report (Background / Findings / Recommendations)
- Purpose of Evaluation
- Program Description
- Scope of Evaluation
- Evaluation Questions
- Methodology of Evaluation
- Analysis
- Findings of Evaluation
- Limitations of Study
- Recommendations

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BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION’S ROLE IN EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

All offices or divisions must submit an *Evaluation Request Form* to the Bureau of Program Evaluation prior to engaging in a process of procurement. Failure to submit this document early in the procurement process may result in the delay of procurement. The Bureau will review the form to ensure that an external evaluation is warranted and coordinate with the originating division to complete the contractual elements required for an RFP, Independent Contractor, Grant Agreement, or other document that may be necessary to secure an external evaluation.

EVALUATION ELEMENTS REQUIRED IN REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

In the event an evaluation is selected for external evaluation, the originating office must define the following areas for inclusion into an RFP, in order to ensure the scope of work, activities, and timeframes are sufficient to meet the needs of the department:

- Statement of Work Tasks and Subtasks: This section should include evaluative questions to be answered by the evaluation and any specific (discrete) deliverables that must be addressed by the contractor.
- Schedule of Deliverables: This section will list tentative dates for providing updates, reaching project milestones, providing a final report, and other critical timeframes.

The originating office must also require that the Offeror provide the following:

- An Entrance Conference, in which the Offeror will present and provide written information to division staff, including project scope and objectives, planning approach and methodology, anticipated timelines for data gathering and analysis, timelines for key project milestones and deliverables, and an introduction to the project manager and staff;
- Provision of monthly hard copy status reports suitable for dissemination to the Board of Education;
- Full, written reports of findings and recommendations, and a separate concise report that provides an executive summary, background, findings, and recommendations;
- A presentation of the final report to stakeholders, including representatives of the program being evaluated and the Accountability Subcommittee;
- Assurance that evidence of findings are reproducible and recommendations are well-documented and thorough;
- Traceability between report and work papers to reconstruct sources or logic; and,
- Assurance that models, graphs, flowcharts, and tables in the report are free-standing and require minimal consultant explanation to lay readers.

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BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION APPROVAL OF FINAL RFP EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS AND ASSISTANCE TO DIVISION OVER THE COURSE OF EVALUATION

The Bureau of Program Evaluation must approve final contract element language as stated in this section for RFP, contract, or grant documents seeking an external evaluation. Upon approval of the Evaluation Request Form, the originating division and the Bureau of Program Evaluation will coordinate to develop evaluative questions, statements of work, and a schedule of deliverables for insertion into external evaluation procurement documents.

The Bureau of Program Evaluation will provide assistance to divisions in regard to external evaluations in forming contractual agreements with external evaluators, meeting with external evaluators at various intervals throughout the evaluation lifecycle, and reviewing final external evaluation reports.

INCLUSION OF EXTERNAL PROGRAM EVALUATIONS INTO THE ANNUAL EVALUATION PLAN

Based upon the annual program evaluation plan that is approved by the Accountability Subcommittee, the Bureau of Program Evaluation will determine which evaluations will be conducted internally and externally based upon capacity and resources available.

OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY	TOPIC: SHORT-TERM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO DEPARTMENT STAFF
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	SECTION: 5.0 (1 of 1) EFFECTIVE DATE: REVISED: 6/1/2016

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION ROLE IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO DEPARTMENT STAFF

The Bureau of Program Evaluation will assist in departmental technical assistance in the areas of evaluation methodology creation or review, contract language for evaluation elements, performance budgeting information, or other areas that will promote improved effectiveness of programs. Staff availability to assist with requests will be at the discretion of the Director of the Office of Reporting/Program Evaluation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Requests for technical assistance, internal evaluations, or assistance in crafting external evaluation document language may be denied if such work would pose a conflict of interest to evaluation staff due to work from a previous evaluation or assistance, ongoing work, or future planned evaluations or due to roles or relationships held previously/currently by the evaluator in relation to the program or policy that is the subject of the request. If a conflict of interest is found, it will be stated as the cause for disapproval in either the BPE Technical Assistance Request Form or the BPE Evaluation Request Form.

BPE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REQUEST FORM

Any Bureau Director position (or above) may submit a request to the Director of the Office of Reporting/Program Evaluation under the Office of Educational Accountability. Originators must submit a BPE Technical Assistance Request Form that can be found on the Bureau of Program Evaluation website.

Upon receiving the request and affirming its validity and need, the Director of Reporting/Program Evaluation will assign personnel to assist with the request and an internal completion date, and the request will be kept on file with the Bureau of Program Evaluation. In order for a request form to be considered for review, it must address each of the following components:

- Requesting Office
- Office Contact(s)
- Technical assistance request name (short title)
- Description of technical assistance request
- Estimated duration of assistance from the Bureau of Program Evaluation (with due date included)