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AUTHOR Tomblin, Elizabeth; Harding, Evelyn  
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ABSTRACT

In a 1979 survey, the majority of the 73% responding superintendents and 38% responding school board chairmen in 269 randomly chosen small school districts across the nation indicated that program evaluation activity occurred in their districts and that evaluation information was generally desired by and available to the school board. Superintendents and chairmen similarly viewed evaluation as: continuous monitoring of ongoing programs (54-65%); assessment of student progress (32-37%); and accountability (23-32%). Just under half of the school board chairmen reported regular curriculum evaluation and 92% reported some. Much of the existing evaluation activity was constituted by standardized testing programs, available in 84% of the districts, and was conducted by district staff personnel such as principals or guidance counselors. Resulting information was used mainly to determine the future of ongoing programs (65%) and the need for new programs (35%). While 44% of board chairmen were satisfied with the amount of evaluation material they received, 51% wanted more although the majority of districts had no policy regarding program evaluations. Although nearly half the chairmen reported spending less than 10% of board time on curriculum, not unlike larger districts, there was nonetheless an overall positive reception of and intended use of evaluation material.

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Small School District Utilization of Program Evaluation:  
A Survey of Board Members and Superintendents

Elizabeth Tomblin, Ph.D.  
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory,  
Portland, Oregon

Evelyn Harding, Ph.D.  
Northern Colorado Educational Board of Cooperative Services  
Longmont, Colorado

January 15, 1980

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Small School District Utilization of Program Evaluation

Surveys were received from 218 superintendents (73 percent) and 113 School Board Chairmen (38 percent) in 296 school districts with student enrollment of 1500 or less across the nation. About one-half of the school board members were from districts of 500 or fewer students.

The survey shows that there is evaluation activity (broadly defined) occurring in small school districts, and that in most cases school boards have access to the information. Superintendents and board members have similar views of the meaning of evaluation: A continuous monitoring of ongoing programs (54 to 65 percent), the assessment of student progress (32 to 37 percent), and accountability (23 to 32 percent). About a third report that their states have laws and regulations about program evaluation.

Seventy percent of superintendents report that evaluations are conducted on title programs in their districts. Approximately half report that evaluations of federal programs, state programs, districtwide programs and individual school programs are conducted. Eighty-four percent of districts have standardized testing programs. Two superintendents report no evaluations are done in their districts. Just under half of the board members report that "regular" curriculum evaluations are conducted; 92 percent report some type of evaluation activity.

Forty-four percent of board members are satisfied with the present amount of evaluation information they receive. Fifty-one percent would like more evaluation information. The majority of school board members (85 percent) feel that the evaluation information they receive is presented in a manner useful to them. Superintendents rate the evaluations conducted in their districts as "good" (54 percent) or "fair" (31 percent). Most superintendents (70 percent) report that the school districts request information relating to program evaluation, and a like percent of board members (73 percent) say they request evaluation information. The superintendents feel that information gathered through evaluations would help them communicate better with their school boards. They listed many additional types of evaluation they would like to conduct if the resources were available.

According to 75 percent of the superintendents, the person conducting the program evaluations is a district staff person. Of those, 40 percent are fulltime, though not necessarily fulltime on evaluation responsibilities. Most often, the responsibilities are handled by a principal (36 percent) or a guidance counselor (33 percent) who may or may not have any specific training in program evaluation. School districts receive evaluation assistance from their state departments of education (59 percent) except in Region 10 of the country (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington), where most often assistance comes from the education service districts.

Sixty-six percent of boards report they do not have a policy for program evaluation. Of the 26 percent who state that they do have policy, they commented that it was a state mandate or a district policy. None were willing to state or enclose a copy as requested.

The two most frequent uses of evaluation information are to determine the future of ongoing programs (65 percent) and to determine the need for a new program (35 percent) as reported by board members. Nineteen percent say that they use program evaluation information to set policy.

Just under half report that they disseminate program evaluation information to patrons, particularly parent groups such as advisory councils; PTOs, school staff and the media. The information is disseminated most often at school board meetings and through the newspaper. The school newsletter and "word of mouth" are also used to provide information about program evaluation.

Those school board members who feel the need for more evaluation information think that the information would be helpful in making program decisions (51 percent).

Forty-two percent of the board members estimate that they spend 0 to 10 percent of their board time on curriculum; 29 percent of board chairmen estimate 11 to 25 percent of board time. Since there are curriculum matters which do not necessarily involve evaluation results, it is assumed that the board time spent on curriculum evaluation is less than the estimates in response to this question.

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Elizabeth Tomblin, Ph.D.  
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## Introduction and Purpose

For a long time, definitions of educational evaluation have stressed the importance of evaluation reports and outcomes to decision makers. Worthen and Sanders, (15), distinguish between research and evaluation quoting Tukey, (14), and Cronbach and Suppes, (2),:

Research seeks conclusions, evaluation leads to decisions. The decision maker believes he needs information to guide his actions and he poses the questions to the investigator.

Who are the educational decision makers? At the top are the local school board and the school district superintendent, referred to in many places as the management team.

In larger districts, administrative staffs in the central office help the superintendent compile information on all topics (including, of course, curriculum or program evaluation). But what happens in the smaller school districts? Those are the districts where the superintendent may also be a part-time principal, or where the school board members may outnumber the number of teachers hired. Does program evaluation exist in these districts? Is it used?

There is some evidence that school board members even from larger districts do not have access to, or do not use, much program evaluation information in making their decisions about programs within the district, (1), (5). And yet they are the districts more likely to have extensive program evaluation, certainly more than small school districts with limited staffs and resources. Although a school district is small, it has no less need for evaluation information. However, its methods for obtaining such data are obviously different.

The objectives of this study are to describe existing program evaluation in small school districts and to describe current utilization of available data relevant to evaluation in these districts. It will seek answers to the following questions:

1. Do small school districts perceive a need for program evaluation?
2. What kinds of information do they use for program evaluation?
3. How are program evaluations conducted?
4. How is existing data (which may be collected originally for other purposes) utilized?

## Literature Review

A recent publication, Imaginary Gardens? Real Problems, An Analysis of Federal Information Sources on Rural Education, stated that the "federal effort to coordinate data from various agencies often excludes the collection of data on schools with fewer than 300 students and school districts with fewer than 1000 students," (8). According to 1977 statistics, 54% of all school districts in the nation have 1000 or less students, (12). Since this represents only 6.9% of all students, the federal neglect of rural schools (by nature, also small) which Jonathon Sher, (10) describes is not surprising. It seems a case of economics - utilizing decreasing funds to maximize student benefits - and that includes data collection.

In the last two years, however, there seems to have been a push at the federal level to remedy this neglect, (9). One such effort is the "Keys to School Boardmanship" project which is part of the total Rural Education Program at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. This study concerning the utilization of evaluation in small school districts was conducted as part of that project.

A literature search surfaced accounts of evaluations of specific projects in small or rural school districts, but none addressed the issue of utilization of results. Ten years ago Guba, (4), observed, "evaluation has had little influence on educational decision-making and evaluation information is largely ignored." Efforts are presently underway to determine if time has changed that situation. A project entitled "Evaluation and Decision-Making in School Districts" at the Center for the Study of Evaluation, (13), is studying centralized program evaluation units, identified in school districts enrolling 5000-plus students, in an attempt to understand their development and functioning, as well as to note their irregularities and peculiarities. One area of inquiry is "Who uses evaluation information?"

Recently, Alkin and Daillak, (1), reported on their efforts as part of the project, "Evaluation and Decision-Making at the Program Level." They used a case study method to determine what influence evaluations had on five different school programs - two Title I and three Title IVC. They found that while none of the evaluations had "make or break impact upon the program it assessed," the evaluations did have influence upon the decisions made by local program staff. The information in one case influenced teacher behavior and, in another, was used - very modestly - to identify program strengths and weaknesses. In only one case study did the evaluation information result in a major program decision.

In a study on the role of school boards' involvement in school self-study evaluation, Smith's data, (11), suggested that only about 60% of the evaluation recommendations were subsequently implemented by the school boards. In this case, board members and school administrators rated the quality of the evaluations higher than the quality of the recommendations which the results suggested.

An article by a former school board president, Richard L. Johnston, (6), alluded to the reticence of school boards' "tampering with curriculums, instruction, or personnel matters" due to the difficulty of obtaining relevant information (program evaluations).

In order to learn more about the issue of small district evaluation resources and evaluation utilization, the authors questioned superintendents and school board chairpersons in small school districts (1500 or less students) across the country.

## Survey Development

The survey began with discussion of need and a list of topics to be addressed by questions. A draft of questions was then prepared, discussed by the two developers and revised. The revised list of questions was reviewed by the project staff of the Boardsmanship project and by two evaluators working with different projects within the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

After reviews, the questionnaires were again revised, and put into the Dillman's Total Design Method form. In order to keep the questionnaire to one page folded, it was decided not to use a cover design, but to begin the questions on the first page. Copies of the surveys are found in Appendix A.

Because of limited time and efforts, trying to avoid sending out surveys during a holiday period, the surveys were not piloted. The reviews mentioned above served as a pilot.

A "modified" Dillman technique was used to prepare and send out surveys. Dillman explains in detail how to achieve good response from mail surveys. Points in Dillman's survey method which were used include:

1. Size of survey form.
2. Booklet form.
3. Type format of questions (stem in mixed type, response options in all capitals).
4. Cover letter content.
5. Follow-up postcard one week after original mailing.
6. Mail data early in week (Tuesday).
7. Avoid holiday periods.
8. Follow-up letter and survey mailed out three weeks after original mailing.
9. Follow-up letter plus survey seven weeks after original mailing.
10. Inform respondents of numbering system.

Modifications to Dillman's TDM included:

1. No cover design for survey.
2. No seven-week follow-up mailing.

## Sampling

The number of school districts to be included in the sample was to be determined two ways: The sample had to be large enough to draw some conclusions, but small enough to be affordable for the multiple mailings. Superintendents and School Board Chairs were to be surveyed, so there were two initial mailings for each district. Follow-up mailings were also included in cost estimation. Three hundred school districts were determined to be a sample size which met both criteria--a sufficiently large number and possible within the allowed budget. The actual sample size turned out to be 296 districts.

The ten HEW regions were used to determine regions of the country. From The Public Education Directory for 1977-78, which contained a listing of all school districts in the country by enrollment size, all school districts which had 1500 students or less were identified. From this list, the number of districts in each region was determined. For each region, a percentage of the small school districts in the nation was calculated. Based on this proportion, the appropriate number of districts from the region that should be included in a proportional sample could be determined. Using these figures, a random sample was selected from each region. For the random selection, the Curriculum Information Center, Inc. School Directory was used because it contained data based on 1977-78 enrollment and was the most current directory available.

At the point of constructing the random sample, it was noted that consolidation had taken place in one region of the country using the updated figures. It was then necessary to recalculate the correct proportion for each region. It should be noted that some states were left out originally, such as Hawaii, which has only one district in the state (obviously more than 1500 students). Other states were not included in the sampling process because they had such a small number of districts with fewer than 1500 students that they did not show up using random sampling techniques by region. For example, Florida has five districts with fewer than 1500 students, Delaware two, New Hampshire seven, West Virginia one. Obviously, the way that a state has or has not consolidated its small districts has a bearing on this sample. The proportions were based on the number of small school districts in the state and region, not on the population or proportion of students in a state or region. The number of districts by state and region are shown in Appendix B.

## Schedule

Surveys with cover letter were mailed to total sample of school board members and superintendents on October 16, 1979.

A follow-up postcard was sent to the total sample on October 23rd, one week after the first mailing. A follow-up letter with a copy of the survey was sent to those whose responses had not been received by November 5 (three weeks after the original mailing). Response cut-off date was December 12, 1979. Copies of the letters and post cards are included as Appendix C.

## Response

Of the 296 Superintendent surveys mailed out, 218 completed surveys were received, a 73% return. Of 296 School Board Chair surveys, 113 completed surveys were received, a 38% return. This was about half of the number of superintendent responses. When the sample was compiled, names and addresses of superintendents were available, and surveys were mailed to the superintendents' offices. However, for the School Board Chairs, separate addresses were not available, so they were also sent to the Superintendent's office. This meant that the Superintendent had to contact the School Board Chair, or the survey had to wait until the next Board meeting or until the next time that the School Board Member was at the School District office. It is not known how many of the mailed surveys actually reached the person for whom they were intended. In addition, names of the School Board Chairs were not available for all districts in the sample. Efforts were made by telephone to obtain names, but there were a few for whom no name was available, so that the surveys were mailed to "School Board Chair" in care of the school district. Dillman's Total Design Method emphasizes personalizing surveys whenever and wherever possible. The impossibility of assuring that every school board member's name was correct may have also hindered the return rate for the school board member surveys.

The superintendent returns were distributed by region very closely to the distribution of the survey sample. Ninety percent of the responding superintendents reported four or less schools in the district, with 40% of the returns coming from districts with only one school. Eight-two percent of the respondents reported less than 1000 students in their district.

The board member returns were not proportioned as the original survey sample. Larger proportions were received from Regions 5, 7 and 10, and a smaller proportion from Region 6. Forty-nine percent of the responses were from board members whose districts have 500 or less students. One-third were from districts with 500-1000 students. Survey response by region and state are included in Appendix B.

## Tabulation and Computer Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed by computer using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Superintendents' responses were analyzed as a total group (Frequencies) and by region to note differences, if any (Crosstabs). Board member responses were analyzed as a total group and by region and size of district.

Results were number and percentage of total N responding to each item. The analysis was run on fewer than the total number of responses received. Totals in the computer analysis were 108 board members and 216 superintendents. A few respondents sent the survey back blank; some completed it partially, as the one board member who commented:

"This school district maintains one of the few remaining one-room, one teacher schools in the State of New York - or even in the country. One teacher covers grades 1-4. Consequently, most of the questions are ridiculously inappropriate. Question 16, for example, provides (as a minimum) '500 or less.' We have less than 100 - and in the \_\_\_\_\_ School itself, less than 10. Also, in addition to the fact that there is but one teacher, I am the Sole Trustee. I do not talk to myself, and that, therefore, eliminates several more questions. Kindly remove us from your mailing list. P.S. Note that we do not even hire a secretary!"

One superintendent telephoned to express his disapproval of the survey, then proceeded to answer the questions in detail and express a need for more program evaluation in his district. He was not counted in response or in the computer analysis.

## Results

As mentioned earlier, about one-half of the responding board members were from districts with less than 500 students; and about 90% of the superintendents reported four or fewer schools, with 40% reporting only one school. Comments attached to the survey forms indicate cases where the superintendent is also the teacher. In order to better understand and interpret data about their utilization of evaluation results, information was requested on the survey forms to indicate what evaluation means to these small school district officials and how much evaluation is taking place in these districts.

Results indicate that superintendents and board members hold similar views of what evaluation is. To most of them it means a continuous monitoring of on-going programs (Superintendents - 65%, Board Members - 54%) and, to a lesser degree, the assessment of student progress (Superintendents - 37%, Board Members - 32%) and accountability (Superintendents - 32%, Board Members - 23%) (Table 1).

Thirty-four percent of the superintendents and thirty percent of board members say that their states have laws and regulations about program evaluation. When asked what types of evaluations are conducted in their districts, 70% of the superintendents reported evaluation of title programs. Approximately half indicate that evaluations of federal programs, state programs, district-wide programs, and individual school programs are conducted (Table 2). Most districts (84%) have district-wide standardized testing programs. Half of those districts' testing programs include both elementary and secondary schools (elementary only - 31%, secondary only - 2%). The variety and usage of tests administered is shown in Table 3. Only two superintendents report that no evaluations are done in their districts.

The survey requested board members' perceptions of the amount of curriculum evaluation activity occurring in their districts. Less than half (44%) report that "regular" curriculum evaluations are conducted. However, 92% report some type of evaluation activity - from "regular" to "yes, sometimes." Only one board member reports no evaluation at all (Table 4). Eight percent report evaluation is done "only in unusual circumstances," and 15% only to comply with federal or state regulations.

Forty-four percent of board members are satisfied with the present amount of evaluation information which they receive. About half (51%) would like more evaluation information. The board members who perceived little or no curriculum evaluation occurring in their districts attribute this lack to personnel's having other higher priority responsibilities and lack of resources (Table 5).

The survey attempted to discover who conducts evaluations in these districts whose size prohibits large staffs. Three-fourths of the superintendents report that there is a staff person in their district responsible for evaluations. In 40% of those cases the staff person is fulltime; this does not necessarily imply full time on evaluation. Where the person responsible for evaluations has other responsibilities, he/she is more often a principal (36%) or guidance counselor (33%). Classroom teachers are responsible for

TABLE 1

What does school or program evaluation mean to you?	Responses to Meaning of Evaluation	
	Superintendents	Board Members
ACCOUNTABILITY?	32.4%	23.1%
CONTINUOUS MONITORING OF ON-GOING PROGRAMS?	65.3%	<del>53.7%</del>
DECISIONS FOR CONTINUATION OR TERMINATION?	22.7%	14.8%
ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PROGRESS?	36.6%	32.4%
COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROGRAMS?	9.3%	7.4%
OTHER?	7.4%	3.7%
(All of the above)		(3.0%)

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TABLE 2

Superintendent: Types of Evaluation Conducted in District?	Percentage Responding
Federal Programs	54%
Title Programs	70%
State Programs	56%
Accreditation	48%
District-Wide Programs	57%
Individual School Programs	56%
None	1%
Other	5%

TABLE 3

Do you have a district-wide standardized testing program?

Test	Number Districts Using Test	Test	Number Districts Using Test
Achievement	5	MAT	3
ACT	2	MBS	1
ASUAS	1	Metropolitan	12
ASVAB	2	N-Abels	2
BSA	1	NEDT	2
CA Reading Test	1	NMSQIT	1
CAP	1	Otis-Lennon	5
CAT	23	Peabody Achievement	1
College Test of Mental Ability	1	PMA	1
CRT	1	PSAT	8
CPBS	29	SARI	1
DAT	4	SAT	36
Diagnostic Test	1	SCAT	1
ETS	1	Several Tests	1
Gates-MacGinitie	1	SFTAA	2
GVR	1	SRA	37
ICRT	1	STAS	2
LND	1	State Test Only	1
IQ	4	STEP	11
ITBS	35	Statewide Assessment	1
ITED	15	TAP	2
List of Broadminded Progress	1	Vocational	1

N=210

TABLE 4

Board Member: Does your district conduct curriculum evaluation?	Percentage
Yes, regularly	44%
Yes, to comply with federal/state regulations - only	15%
Yes, sometimes	33%
Only in unusual circumstances	8%
Not at all	1%
Don't know	2%

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Does the school board want more or less curriculum evaluation information?	More	Less	Satisfied With Present Amount	No. Answer
	50.9%	1.9%	43.5%	3.7%
If you do not have curriculum evaluation in your district, what are the principal reasons?	Lack of Resources		Personnel Have Other Higher Priority Responsibilities	
	10.2%*		12.0%	
	No. Federal/State Programs With Required Evaluation		Other	
	9%		9.3%	

\*These are percentages of total N.

TABLE 5

Superintendents: Do you receive Evaluation Assistance from agencies?	Percentage Reporting
State Department of Education	59.3%
BOCS or Intermediate Agency	6.5%
Regional Educational Laboratory	6.5%
Private Evaluation Agency	5.6%
Educational Service District	17.1%
Other	11.1%

evaluations in only two percent of the cases. "Other" persons are partially responsible 28% of the time. However, "others" are not identified by the superintendents.

As shown in Table 6, school districts more often get evaluation assistance from their state departments of education (59%). This is true for all regions of the country except Region 10 (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington) where 75% of the responding districts receive help from their educational service districts most often. It is not clear from the survey responses, but these assisting agencies may account for some of the "others" who are partially responsible for evaluations.

Most superintendents rate the evaluations conducted in their district as "good" (54%) to "fair" (31%). In like manner, the majority of school board members (85%) feel that the evaluation information they receive is presented in a manner which is useful to them.

When superintendents were asked what additional types of evaluation they would like to conduct if sources were available, the list was long. Generally, the types fall into these categories - curriculum (basic skills and specific subjects), staff effectiveness, student achievement, graduate success, and business management procedures. Not all superintendents responded to this item. Of the 65 who did, 12 said that no additional evaluation is needed. One said, "more of all kinds." More time and personnel for evaluation and better knowledge of evaluation techniques were also mentioned.

Most superintendents (72%) feel that information gathered through evaluation would help them communicate better with their school boards. Two comments are representative - "The Board has to have information to make good decisions," and "It would give the school board a clearer picture of how our staff is teaching and how well the students are doing." Many superintendents who responded negatively to this item commented that their communication is quite good at present and additional evaluation information would probably make very little difference.

The preceding data indicate that there is evaluation activity (broadly defined) taking place in small school districts. There is evidence that, in most cases, school boards have access to the information.

Most superintendents (70%) report that their school board requests information relating to program evaluations. The exception to this is in New England, where only one out of the six school boards make requests. These requests range from various kinds of student achievement data demonstrating the effectiveness of programs or instructional techniques to comparisons of one's own district to others in the state. Some are formal requests; others are casual, such as, "Well, how are we doing in math?"

As shown in Table 6, approximately the same percentage of school board members as superintendents report that they request evaluation information from school district officials (73%). Also, about 77% of board members report that they receive information without requesting it - 23.1% receiving it "often" and 53.7% receiving it "sometimes." Sixty-six percent of boards report they do

TABLE 6

Question	Percent Responding				
Does your school board request information that relates to program or program evaluation?	<u>Superintendents</u>				
	Yes				70.0%
	No				26.4%
Does your school board request program evaluation from school district officials?	<u>Board Members</u>				
	Often	18.6%			} (Yes) 73.1%
	Sometimes	54.6%			
	Seldom	19.6%			
	Never	4.6%			
Do you receive program evaluation information from your school district without requesting it?	Often 23.1%	Sometimes 53.7%	Seldom 13.0%	Never 7.4%	
Is the information from evaluations presented in a way that the Board finds it useful?	Yes 85.2%	No 5.6%	No Answer 9.3%		

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not have a policy for program evaluation. According to comments, some have delegated the responsibility to a curriculum review committee or to the school administrators (Superintendent and/or others and/or faculty). Of the 26% who do have policy, they comment to the effect that it is a state mandate or a district policy. None was willing to state or enclose a copy of the policy as the survey requested.

The survey asked board members how their board uses evaluation information. Results are presented in Table 7. The two biggest uses are to determine the future of on-going programs (65%) and to determine the need for a new program (35%).

When asked whether the information was disseminated to particular groups of patrons, slightly less than half (47%) respond "yes." Most of the dissemination is to parent groups, such as advisory councils, PTO's, and booster clubs, school staff and the media.

Results indicate that information is disseminated most often at school board meetings (32%) and through the newspaper (27%). The school newsletter is also a popular method for transmitting evaluation information. In some small districts, it is simply "word-of-mouth."

Those school board members who feel the need for more program evaluation information respond that the information would be helpful in making program decisions (51%). Very few (2%) feel that it would be helpful in communicating with the community.

Board members' estimates of the amount of time spent on curriculum matters is presented in Table 8. Forty-two percent estimate they spend 0% to 10% of their board time on curriculum; 29% spend 11% to 25% of board time on matters of instructional program. Less than 10% of the board members estimate their board spends more than 26% of time on curriculum matters. Twenty percent did not answer the question. The distribution of response is almost bimodal with 24% estimating 10% of board time on curriculum and 20% estimating 20% of board time on curriculum. Since there are curriculum matters which do not necessarily involve evaluation results, it is assumed that the board time spent on curriculum evaluation is less than the estimates in response to this question.

Although 19% of school board members say they use program evaluation information to set policy (presumably in curricular areas), about two-thirds of the board members (66%) say they do not have a policy to assure program evaluation.

TABLE 7

Board Use of Evaluation Information	Percentage
Determine Future Of Ongoing Programs	64.8%
Determine Need For a New Program	35.2%
Progress Report to Community Patrons	17.6%
School District Personnel Decisions	17.6%
Set Policy	18.5%
Other	4.6%

TABLE 8

What percent of its time do you estimate your board spends on curriculum matters?

Percent of Time	Percent of Board Members Responding
1 to 3%	3.7%
5%	13.9%
10%	24.1%
15%	4.6%
20%	20.4%
25%	3.7%
30%	4.6%
33%	.9%
40%	.9%
50%	1.9%
60%	.9%
No response	20.4%

## Discussion

Definitionally, superintendents and board members tend to see evaluation of programs as a monitoring of on-going programs and student testing. Most programs evaluated, as reported by superintendents, are Title programs, which are often based only on student assessment. Other programs mentioned included state programs, federal programs, accreditation, district programs and individual school programs. The extent of overlap is unknown. Standardized testing programs account for much program evaluation. For a survey such as this one, it was not possible to probe how those test results are used. One may surmise a range of possibilities from saying "yes, we do it," (and the results are somewhere in a file collecting dust) to extensive examination of scores for students and for program-wide implications. Due to reports by less than half of responding board members that regular evaluations are conducted, a likely probability is that few small school districts do extensive examination of test scores for program implications or revision.

Personnel in small schools are limited in time and have to perform many duties. Seventy-five percent of the reporting superintendents reported a person responsible for evaluation. Only 40% reported a full time person responsible for evaluation, and that person does not necessarily devote full time to evaluation. Often a principal or guidance counselor also has responsibility for the district's program evaluation. In most university preparation programs for administrators and for counselors, evaluation methodology receives little or no attention and testing very little (even though counselors are often expected to interpret test score information). Only 59% of superintendents reported that the person in charge of evaluation had training in evaluation and it is not known what type of training that might be. This paragraph does not intend to cast doubt on the competence of personnel responsible for evaluation in small school districts nor to ignore the value of learning by on-the-job experience. But it does intend to point out the realities of a small school district situation, with few people whose responsibilities extend, of necessity, to many areas.

An indicator that curriculum or its evaluation is not high priority to school boards and superintendents is the amount of time board members estimate spending on curriculum matters. Forty-two percent of responding board members say their boards spend 10% or less of their time on curriculum matters; at 20% or less time, the percentage of board members goes to two-thirds (67%). These results are consistent with an NSBA survey published in spring of 1979 in which board members from districts of all sizes estimated spending about six percent of board time on curriculum. Data gathered informally in workshop situations with board members in the Pacific Northwest states during 1979 would also support the time estimates given in the survey. In addition, at workshop sessions, school board members from some small school districts reported they feel less need for evaluation information on a formal basis because they were in the schools often; they evaluate subjectively themselves. They also are in close touch with a small community and know how their community feels about the schools.

While school board members and superintendents agree that they "need" evaluation information, apparently program evaluation is a fairly low priority, because their personnel have other, more important responsibilities and the amount of time given to program evaluation of curriculum matters. As noted in the preceding paragraph the amount of time spent by boards on curriculum is not restricted to small school districts. The largest proportion of evaluation conducted in small district, according to the superintendents are the title programs, that is, those which have mandated evaluation.

It must be remembered that school board members are voluntarily contributing a great amount of time and effort to serve on the school board without pay (in most states).

Going back to the survey data, not quite half of the responding board members are satisfied with the situation of program evaluation. Slightly more than half want more evaluation information. The board members say that those in charge of evaluation have higher priority responsibilities or there are no resources. It is the School Board, however, that allocates resources. Most states' laws, codes, or constitutions state that a primary responsibility of the governing board of a school district is to provide a course of study or curriculum or educational program for the students in that district. School districts can and do receive assistance on evaluation, including state departments and intermediate agencies of various types.

Board members indicate that information is provided to them in ways which are useful. Their uses of evaluation are mainly those concerned with decisions about programs; whether to continue or change existing programs (65%) and determining need for new programs. Decisions about personnel (presumably addition or reduction in general rather than individual) are another type of decision which program evaluation aids. School board members make progress reports to their community and disseminate information through various means, but primarily through school board meetings and newspapers. Two representative comments made by school board members are as follows:

"I feel evaluation is an important tool to be used by the administration and board to help promote and further good education in a school district. I also believe that it is the responsibility of the administration staff to handle this matter and to give the board that information which they feel is of importance - unless specifically asked by the Board for information. A Board of Education cannot have the time available to access evaluations in depth and must depend upon a responsible administrative staff to keep them informed of problems or good points concerning on-going evaluation programs."

"We as a Board, do our curriculum studies, or evaluation, through our Educational Needs Committee. This group meets once a month (in addition to our regular monthly Board meetings) to discuss curriculum and evaluation of same. Our middle/high school opened in 1972. The school was evaluated by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in 1974 and was accredited for five years, receiving an up-date and extension of this past year. These procedures ensure constant watchfulness on part of school and Board regarding

evaluation. We have a close working relationship between our Board and Administration - and staff members meet with the Ed. Needs Committee frequently and willingly as we delve into the various aspects of the program on a regular basis. I hope this has been helpful."

Superintendents, however, rate the evaluations as good to fair, and make many suggestions as to additional types of evaluation needed by the district, most relating to curriculum, but some going beyond the survey questions about program evaluation into areas such as certified and non-certified personnel evaluation, and board self-evaluation.

Many school board members want more program evaluation information (51%); they feel it would be useful to them in making program decisions and to some extent communicating with their community. They find evaluation information presented to them to be useful, particularly in monitoring programs. Yet, almost two thirds do not have a policy for program evaluation. Policy setting has long been extolled as a primary responsibility and vehicle for the school board to accomplish its goals for the school district. Certainly, if board members want evaluation, they can set policies to assure that program evaluation will occur.

## Summary and Conclusions

This study confirms the need and desire for program evaluation information by school boards and superintendents in small school districts. Program evaluations are conducted in most of the districts surveyed, although the depth and/or regularity with which they are conducted varies widely. Program evaluations in small districts rely greatly on student test/achievement data, and they also receive help from outside agencies in conducting or compiling the information. The board receives the information in most cases; they may request the information in a majority of districts, or they may receive information unsought. In either case, they welcome the information and use it to monitor ongoing programs, and to make program decisions. Many school board members are satisfied with the amount of program evaluation in their districts; more than half want more program evaluation. However, curriculum and its evaluation does not command much board time, and many boards do not have policies to assure the program evaluation they say that they want. Boards and superintendents disseminate the information they have on program evaluation at board meetings and through newspapers and newsletters. In many respects these results are not surprising. They are not greatly different from larger districts who likewise do not spend much board time on curriculum. They wish had more program evaluations and the time to utilize student test data to monitor continuing programs.

Many questions are left unanswered by a survey of this type. Even though the school districts were identified on a random sample basis, their representativeness of small schools across the country is not known. Many probing questions to follow responses from survey forms must be left unasked. The hindsight with which one clearly sees ways to ask better questions or to add another pertinent question cannot now be incorporated into this particular survey.

Overall, there seems to be a positive reception of and at least intended use of what program evaluation information is available. From authors whose bias values program evaluation for the decision-makers of school district, congratulations to those districts who, in spite of limited resources, time and number of personnel, find ways to carry out and use program evaluation. One hopes that others will find creative ways to gather and the interest in using program evaluation for the improvement of the districts. A final note of author bias would say to those developers of evaluation methodology, that in the quest for ever more sophisticated ways of analyzing and designing evaluations, it is hoped that the needs of the small and/or rural school districts are not forgotten.

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Appendix A  
Copies of Surveys

If your State has laws or regulations about program evaluation, please attach copies if available. If you do not have copies, but know that such laws exist, please check here:

Please use this space to make any additional comments about evaluation or the survey.

### PROGRAM EVALUATION SURVEY FOR BOARD MEMBERS

We are trying to determine the evaluation needs and/or uses of evaluation information of school boards in small school districts. Your help in completing this questionnaire is greatly appreciated. Please circle the number of your response.

Q-1. What does school or program evaluation mean to you?

- 1 ACCOUNTABILITY?
- 2 CONTINUOUS MONITORING OF ON-GOING PROGRAMS?
- 3 DECISIONS FOR CONTINUATION OR TERMINATION?
- 4 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PROGRESS?
- 5 COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROGRAMS?
- 6 OTHER? \_\_\_\_\_

Q-2. Does your district conduct curriculum evaluations?

- 1 YES, REGULARLY
- 2 YES, TO COMPLY WITH FEDERAL/STATE REGULATIONS ONLY
- 3 YES, SOMETIMES
- 4 ONLY IN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES
- 5 NOT AT ALL
- 6 I DON'T KNOW AT THIS TIME

Q-3. Does your school board request program evaluation from school district officials?

- 1 OFTEN      2 SOMETIMES      3 SELDOM      4 NEVER

Your contribution to this effort is very greatly appreciated. If you would like a summary of results please print your name and address on the back of the return envelope (NOT on this questionnaire). We will see that you get it.

**KEYS TO SCHOOL  
BOARDSMANSHIP**



Northwest  
Regional  
Educational  
Laboratory

Q-4. Do you receive program evaluation information from your school district without requesting it?

1 OFTEN    2 SOMETIMES    3 SELDOM    4 NEVER

Q-5. Is the information from evaluations presented in a way that the Board finds it useful?

1 YES

NO

Q-6. How does your school board use the evaluation information?

1 DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF ON-GOING PROGRAMS.

2 DETERMINE NEED FOR A NEW PROGRAM

3 PROGRESS REPORT TO COMMUNITY PATRONS

4 SCHOOL DISTRICT PERSONNEL DECISIONS

5 SET POLICY

6 OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Q-7. Do you disseminate the program evaluation information to particular groups of patrons?

1 YES

2 NO

Q-8. If yes, to what groups? \_\_\_\_\_

Q-9. If yes, how is the information disseminated?

1 NEWSPAPER

2 COMMUNITY MEETINGS

3 SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

4 OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Q-10. If you do not presently have access to program evaluation information, would this kind of information be helpful to you

1 IN MAKING PROGRAM DECISIONS?

2 IN COMMUNICATING WITH THE COMMUNITY?

3 \_\_\_\_\_

Q-11. Does the school board want more or less curriculum evaluation information?

1 MORE

2 LESS

3 SATISFIED WITH PRESENT AMOUNT

Q-12. If you do not have curriculum evaluation in your district, what are the principal reasons?

1 LACK OF RESOURCES

2 PERSONNEL HAVE OTHER HIGHER PRIORITY RESPONSIBILITIES

3 NO FEDERAL/STATE PROGRAMS WITH REQUIRED EVALUATION

4 OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

Q-13. What percent of its time do you estimate your board spends on curriculum matters? \_\_\_\_\_

Q-14. Do you have a policy for program evaluation?

1 YES

2 NO

If yes, please state: \_\_\_\_\_

Q-15. State in which school district is located: \_\_\_\_\_

Q-16. Approximate number of students in school district.

500 or less \_\_\_\_\_ 500-1000 \_\_\_\_\_ 1000-1500 \_\_\_\_\_ More than 1500 \_\_\_\_\_

If your State has laws or regulations about program evaluation, please attach copies, if available. If you do not have copies, but know that such laws exist, please check here:

Please use this space to make any additional comments about evaluation or the survey.

### PROGRAM EVALUATION SURVEY FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

We are trying to determine the evaluation needs and/or practices of small school districts in the region. Your help in completing this questionnaire is greatly appreciated. Please circle the number of your response.

Q-1. What does evaluation mean to you?

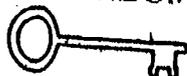
- 1 ACCOUNTABILITY
- 2 CONTINUOUS MONITORING OF ON-GOING PROGRAMS?
- 3 DECISIONS FOR CONTINUATION OR TERMINATION?
- 4 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PROGRESS?
- 5 COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROGRAMS?
- 6 OTHER? \_\_\_\_\_

Q-2. What types of evaluation are conducted in your district?

- 1 FEDERAL PROGRAMS?
- 2 TITLE PROGRAMS
- 3 STATE PROGRAMS
- 4 ACCREDITATION
- 5 DISTRICT-WIDE PROGRAMS
- 6 INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL PROGRAMS
- 7 NONE
- 8 OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Your contribution to this effort is very greatly appreciated. If you would like a summary of results please print your name and address on the back of the return envelope (NOT on this questionnaire). We will see that you get it.

KEYS TO SCHOOL  
BOARDSMANSHIP



Northwest  
Regional  
Educational  
Laboratory

Q-3. Do you have a district-wide standardized testing program?

1 YES

2 NO

IF SO, WHAT TESTS ARE ADMINISTERED? \_\_\_\_\_

TO WHAT GRADES? \_\_\_\_\_

Q-4. Do you have a staff person in your district responsible for your evaluations?

1 YES

2 NO

If yes, is he/she

1 FULL TIME

2 PART TIME

If part time, is he/she:

1 CLASSROOM TEACHER?

2 PRINCIPAL?

3 GUIDANCE COUNSELOR?

4 OTHER? \_\_\_\_\_

Is the person trained in measurement and evaluation?

1 YES

2 NO

Q-5. How effective do you consider the evaluations conducted in your district?

1 EXCELLENT

2 GOOD

3 FAIR

4 POOR

5 VERY POOR

Q-6. Is there an agency from whom you get evaluation assistance?

1 STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2 BOCES OR OTHER INTERMEDIATE AGENCY

3 REGIONAL EDUCATION LABORATORY

4 PRIVATE EVALUATION AGENCY

5 EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICT

6 OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Q-7. If sources were available, what additional types of evaluation do you feel your district needs?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q-8. Does your school board request information that relates to programs or program evaluation?

1 YES

2 NO

Give an example: \_\_\_\_\_

Q-9. If you had information gathered through evaluation, would it help you communicate with your school board?

1 YES

2 NO

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State in which School District is located: \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Schools \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Teachers \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Students \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

Number of Districts

NUMBER OF DISTRICTS BY STATE & HEW REGION  
WITH STUDENT POPULATION OF 1,500 OR LESS

STATE	#Dist.	# Dist. in REGION	% of Total	# Dist. in Sample	Random Sample #
Connecticut	60				
Maine	202				
Massachusetts	149				
New Hampshire	122				
Rhode Island	9				
Vermont	248				
<b>REGION I TOTAL</b>		<b>790</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>
New Jersey	321				
New York	303				
<b>REGION II TOTAL</b>		<b>624</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>30</b>
Delaware	2				
Maryland	18				
Pennsylvania	70				
Virginia	18				
West Virginia	1				
<b>REGION III TOTAL</b>		<b>109</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>27</b>
Alabama	13				
Florida	5				
Georgia	24				
Kentucky	32				
Mississippi	30				
North Carolina	8				
South Carolina	16				
Tennessee	32				
<b>REGION IV TOTAL</b>		<b>160</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>32</b>
Illinois	716				
Indiana	90				
Michigan	182				
Minnesota	314				
Ohio	187				
Wisconsin	284				
<b>REGION V TOTAL</b>		<b>1773</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>30</b>
Arkansas	312				
New Mexico	54				
Oklahoma	564				
Texas	817				
<b>REGION VI TOTAL</b>		<b>1747</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>30</b>

STATE	#Dist.	# Dist. in REGION	% of Total	# Dist. in Sample	Random Sample #
Iowa	361				
Kansas	249				
Missouri	419				
Nebraska	397				
REGION VII TOTAL		1426	15.8	47	30
Colorado	132				
Montana	383				
North Dakota	306				
South Dakota	172				
Utah	14				
Wyoming	35				
REGION VIII TOTAL		1042	11.5	34	30
Arizona	160				
California	635				
Nevada	8				
REGION IX TOTAL		803	8.9	26	30
Alaska	23				
Idaho	79				
Oregon	262				
Washington	198				
REGION X TOTAL		562	6.2	19	30
GRAND TOTAL		9036	99.9	298	

SURVEY RESPONSE FROM SUPERINTENDENTS

Region I		Region VI	
Connecticut	1	Arkansas	8
Maine	1	Oklahoma	13
Massachusetts	2	Texas	14
New Hampshire	1	New Mexico	<u>2</u>
Rhode Island	<u>0</u>	Total	37
Total	5		
Region II		Region VII	
New York	10	Iowa	9
New Jersey	11	Kansas	9
Vermont	<u>1</u>	Missouri	9
Total	22	Nebraska	<u>12</u>
		Total	39
Region III		Region VIII	
Pennsylvania	2	Colorado	4
Virginia	<u>1</u>	Montana	10
Total	3	Utah	0
		North Dakota	7
Region IV		South Dakota	4
Georgia	1	Wyoming	<u>2</u>
Kentucky	0	Total	27
Mississippi	1		
South Carolina	0	Region IX	
Tennessee	0	Arizona	4
Alabama	<u>0</u>	California	<u>16</u>
Total	2	Total	20
Region V		Region X	
Illinois	19	Idaho	3
Indiana	2	Oregon	7
Michigan	5	Washington	<u>8</u>
Minnesota	9	Total	18
Ohio	6		
Wisconsin	<u>4</u>	Total for All Districts: 218	
Total	45		

SURVEY RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRS

Region I		Region VI	
Connecticut	1	Arkansas	6
Maine	0	Oklahoma	5
Massachusetts	0	Texas	7
New Hampshire	0	New Mexico	1
Rhode Island	0	Total	19
Total	1		
Region II		Region VII	
New York	9	Iowa	2
New Jersey	2	Kansas	1
Vermont	0	Missouri	5
Total	11	Nebraska	3
		Total	11
Region III		Region VIII	
Pennsylvania	0	Colorado	1
Virginia	0	Montana	5
Total	0	Utah	0
		North Dakota	4
Region IV		Region IX	
Georgia	1	Arizona	2
Kentucky	1	California	9
Mississippi	1	Total	11
South Carolina	0		
Tennessee	0	Region X	
Alabama	0	Idaho	1
Total	3	Oregon	6
		Washington	6
Region V		Total	
Illinois	10		13
Indiana	2	Total for All Districts: 113	
Michigan	2		
Minnesota	6		
Ohio	5		
Wisconsin	6		
Total	31		

Appendix C

Letters and Post Card

NWREL REP,

50

6891A  
2/28/80

October 25, 1979

Dear :

As part of a project to develop continuing education materials for school board members (KEYS TO SCHOOL BOARDSMANSHIP), I am involved in developing workshops about the school board's role in program evaluation. Looking at program evaluation, I find that very little information is available about what evaluation information small school districts have, need or use. In order to build a set of materials which are really useful for school boards and superintendents, I need to know if you conduct evaluations in your district, what types of evaluations you do, and how that information is used.

The two key people whom we feel would be most knowledgeable in this area are the School Board Chair and the Superintendent. Your district is one of a small number of school districts in 10 regions of the entire country which has been selected at random. In order for the survey results to accurately reflect the thinking of school boards and superintendents across the country, it is important that you complete the enclosed survey.

You may be assured of complete confidentiality. The survey has an identification number for mailing purposes only. This is so that we may check your name off of the mailing list when your questionnaire is returned. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire. The information will be compiled from the total sample, and there will be nothing in the results which would identify you or your district.

The results of this research will be made available to state school board associations, to our project staff, and to other groups or organizations interested in small school districts. You may receive a summary of the results by writing "copy of results requested" on the back of the return envelope and printing your name and address below it. Please do not put this information on the survey itself.

I would be very happy to answer any questions you might have. Please write or call. The telephone number is (503) 248-6844. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Tomblin, Ph.D.  
Keys to School Boardsmanship Project

ET:lb

NWREL

51

5645A  
10/4/79

Last week a questionnaire seeking your opinions about program evaluation in your school district was mailed to you. Your name was drawn in a random sample of school districts throughout the country.

If you have already completed and returned it to us, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. Because it has been sent to only a small, but representative sample of superintendents and School Board Chairs, it is extremely important that yours also be included in the study if the results are to accurately represent the opinions of each group.

If by some chance you did not receive the questionnaire, or it got misplaced, please call me right now, collect (503-248-6844) and I will get another one in the mail to you today.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Tomblin  
Keys to School Boardmanship

November 5, 1979

Dear:

About three weeks ago I wrote to you seeking information about program evaluation in your district. As of today we have not received your completed questionnaire.

The Keys to School Boardmanship project is doing this study, because there is such a scarcity of information about program evaluation in small school districts. We are trying to develop materials about curriculum and its evaluation for school board members in small school districts. The survey information is vital to the development of appropriate materials in these areas.

Our sample was drawn randomly from small school districts in the nation. The number of small school districts in each region is so small that your survey may be the only one, or one of very few, from your state. In order for the study results to be representative of those superintendents and school board chairs in each area, it is essential for each person to return his or her survey. If your directory did not give us your correct name, but you presently fulfill the position of superintendent or school board chair (or were school board chair during the previous year), please complete the survey. If you are requesting results, please be sure your correct name and address is on the envelope.

In the event your questionnaire has been misplaced, a replacement is enclosed. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Tomblin, Ph.D.  
Keys to School Boardmanship Project