Introduction

The Purpose of This Guide and How to Use It

This guide is intended for use by teachers and administrators in elementary and secondary school systems to help them evaluate their school programs. Evaluation is a complex process, and there is always the danger of oversimplification in a guide such as this. Please remember, evaluation is not a mechanical process; it is a human endeavor, and it carries with it all of the complexities and challenges of any human undertaking, including education.

There are two things above all else that one should remember about evaluating school programs. First, not everyone will see the program in the same light, and it is important to be informed about how those around you view it—its purpose, its approaches, who is involved and excluded, its costs and trade-offs, its accomplishments, its short-term and long-term future, and other things of interest to those who care about and are affected by the program. Second, one must always consider three aspects of good program evaluation—communication, communication, and communication. As long as you listen and respond, share information, discuss your intentions and obtain feedback, clarify expectations, provide clear and useful reports in a timely manner, and maintain an open evaluation process, the evaluation seas should be smooth.

This guide was written to provide basic program evaluation principles and procedures to aid educators in planning and conducting evaluations of school programs. Examples will help the reader to develop competence and confidence in program evaluation. Beyond this guide, however, indispensable experiences will be gained by undertaking evaluations and sharing your experiences with a nearby group of people with whom evaluation issues can be discussed. In addition, there are other evaluation resource materials that go into greater depth on many of the topics covered here. It is not possible to provide in this volume all of the detailed coverage of evaluation topics that some would like. For this reason, references to more advanced or specialized resources are provided (see Resource A and References).

This is a general guide that can be used to help plan any school program evaluation. The evaluation approach we have taken is one of many

that could be used. This approach, however, is one that in our experience has worked well for school staff. Other approaches to school program evaluation that may be familiar to educators, such as accreditation and objectives-based evaluation, are described in reference works published by Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2004), Patton (1997), and Stufflebeam (2001).

The general principles in this guide are based on the advice of Daniel Stufflebeam (1969), who suggested that we must always attend to five tasks when conducting program evaluations:

1. Focusing the evaluation (see Chapter 2)

2. Collecting information (see Chapter 3)

3. Organizing and analyzing information (see Chapter 4)

4. Reporting information (see Chapter 5)

5. Administering the evaluation (see Chapter 6)

This guide will take you through the five tasks of school program evaluation, providing examples along the way. Use the guide as a reference book; it should not be read as a novel and then discarded. Program evaluation does not need to be complex or inordinately time consuming. It does not require extensive technical training. What it does require is *a desire* to improve one's school, *a willingness* to work collegially, careful *attention to detail*, and *basic knowledge* of how school program evaluations should be carried out. This guide provides the last of these key elements.