

Consultant Interview with Mary Ellen Spector Murphy - April 18, 2003
Referred by Minnesota New Country School

1. What can you do for the school that it cannot do for itself?

I can help them set up an evaluation plan and facilitate its use, design a data collection instrument for analyzing and interpret data, and most importantly, help them interpret the information for decision-making. I try to help the school build their organizational capacity to use the evaluation data to make decisions to improve the school.

2. What was the most positive aspect of working with the school?

They were very committed to the students' learning, and willing to improve using evaluation results in areas such as parent involvement and decision-making.

3. What was the greatest challenge you faced in your experience with the school?

Helping them see the value of evaluation. This is generally a difficult concept for educators – program evaluation and accountability.

4. What deliverables did the school expect? Were you able to produce those deliverables on time?

Initially, I developed and delivered an evaluation plan. Then I designed reports with math and reading test scores. I also presented the information to the board, adding credibility and objectivity to the report. The deliverables were produced on time.

5. Do you feel the school received the services it paid for? How?

Yes, they received the services they paid for. I heard their needs and facilitated many meetings with all the partners (school, board, district), together and separately. I met with board members and staff to find out each area's needs and structured meetings so their needs were met and helped focus meetings to meet the desired outcomes. I gave a clear message about the importance of measures and outcomes, and gave credibility to the process. We had to come to agreement on these areas, since initially there was none. I know they received the services they paid for because the board signed off and continued to recognize the importance of the evaluation plan, and approve it.

6. What did the school want to accomplish via your services?

The school wanted to develop an evaluation plan and use data to produce a report that would help the school retain the charter, and ideally use the information to improve the school.

7. What aspect of your relationship with the school could be improved?

I could have helped them better understand the importance of evaluation as a tool for improving their programs, rather than just producing a report.

8. On a scale of 1-5 [with 5 high], how would you rate your experience with the school?

I would rate the relationship as a "4".

9. On a scale of 1-5 [with 5 high], how do you think the school would rate its experience with you?

I am not sure how they would rate me, but I know they were satisfied, since they used me several years.

10. Why do you think the school chose your firm as its service provider?

They chose me through contacts that knew me. Doug Thomas was with the Center for School change and knew me; Joe Nathan knew me, and a neighbor who was involved with the school knew me. I also added credibility since I was a former teacher and active in education reform.

