

Minnesota New Country School
In-person Interview with Dee Thomas March 21, 2003

1. Why did you choose to use an outside evaluator?

To obtain valid results, add credibility and accountability to what the school would report to the board. Results were provided in the fall and spring of each year. Worked with two different consultants; changed consultants when the first one got too busy,(and was also charging too much). After start-up, they didn't need as much guidance.

2. How long did you contract with the consultant?

Contracted year by year.

3. Did the consultant provide you with a service no one else in your school could?

The school could have completed the evaluation but it would not have been considered as credible by the board. It also helped when the consultant could attend the board meeting with them to present the report and answer questions.

4. What was the most positive aspect of working with the consultant?

Especially at first, when the school was still new, the consultant could attend the school board meeting with them (see #3). The consultant was a recognized expert in the field, someone that the board would take seriously.

5. What was the greatest challenge you faced in your experience with the consultant?

Providing data in the form it was needed, and to gather it in the beginning and to meet the semi-annual deadlines. [refer to #11].

6. What did you hope to accomplish via the consultant services?

They hoped to identify some meaningful results from the data that the school could use for making improvements.

7. What deliverables did you hope to receive?

The product was a final report that included results and possible recommendations for improvement. There was also a responsibility to present the results to the board and answer questions about them, so that the board would be supportive in keeping the school's sponsor. Also the school was able to pull pieces of data from the report to use for different purposes.

8. Did the consultant meet your expectations regarding services and deliverables in a timely manner?

All deadlines were met, but the consultants depended on the school for the data they needed to produce the report. Especially in their early experiences the consultant was helpful in helping them figure out what data would need to be collected in order to produce the results.

9. On a scale of 1-5 [with 5 the best], how would you rate your experience with your consultant?

“5”, especially with start-up. The money was worth it, but then she got busy and \$3500 was too expensive.

10. On a scale of 1-5 [with 5 the best], how do you think the consultant would rate its experience with you?

The school would likely be rated somewhere less than a “5” since they were not timely with providing their data. They had to scramble to get it together every six months.

11. What aspects of your relationship with the consultant could be improved?

They could probably work out a system with the consultant to provide them with data more frequently so they wouldn't always be in a rush every six months, and have trouble meeting the deadline.

12. Why did you choose the consultant you chose?

Asked other schools who they had used, and chose the two they had worked with based on the recommendations from others.

13. Do you think you will continue to utilize consultant services in the future?

They will continue to use the services of a consultant at least for reporting some evaluation results to the school board.

Best practice suggestion from interviewee:

Advise other schools to set up a system based on submitting data more often than every six months, perhaps do it on a regular monthly basis.