In order to provide more efficient services and a stronger end product, the Department of Research and Development (R & D) began tracking all research requests that R & D staff members received. This document summarizes all R & D requests for service that were received during the 2013–14 school year. The department worked with 22 external agencies and 24 internal departments.

Breakdown of MPS Departments and External Agencies Who Used R & D Services

Research

Boston University

UW-Madison

UW-Milwaukee

Stanford

Tulane University

American Institutes for Research

Consulting Office for Research and Evaluation

Fight Asthma Milwaukee

Johns Hopkins University

Medical College of Wisconsin

Community Partners

Children's Outing Association

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee

Neighborhood House   Interfaith

Neu Life Community Center   Journey House

Northcott Neighborhood House   UMOS

Silver Spring Neighborhood Center

MPS Colleagues

Office of the Superintendent

  Community Engagement

  Family and Student Services

Office of Human Capital

Office of Innovation

  Organizational Development Office

    Educator Effectiveness

    Induction and Support

    Professional Development

  Grants Development Services

  Contracted Schools

Office of School Administration

  District and School Improvement

  Hamilton High School

Office of Academics

  Assessment

  Career and Technical Education

  College and Career Readiness

  Curriculum and Instruction

  Early Childhood Services

  Extended Learning Opportunities

  Specialized Services

  Student Information Services

  Title I

  Wellness and Prevention Office

Office of Recreation and Community Services

Office of Finance

  Payroll Department

Government

U. S. Department of Education

Department of Public Instruction
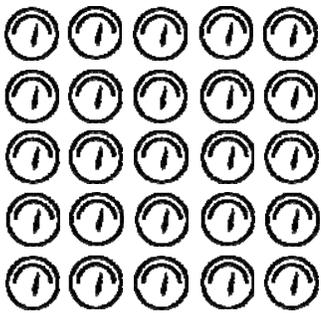
Other

Denver Public Schools

CIE International

Research

Research requests may not answer how well a program or policy is working. Instead these questions may simply describe or help us better understand how various policy and program levers are impacting the district's work. For example, a study examining teacher retention in the new context created by Act 10, understanding how MPS teacher diversity compares to other districts, and a survey of religious holiday policies in other districts are examples of these kinds of requests.
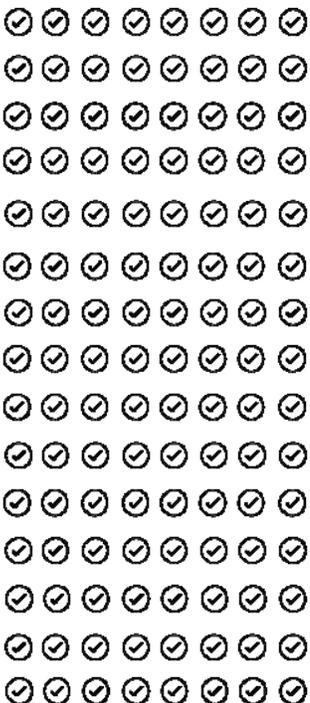
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Program Evaluation

These projects focus on specific MPS programs, including traditional academic programs, after school and summer programs, and intervention and supplemental programs. The degree of difficulty regarding the analysis of these programs is as varied as the scope and focus of the programs themselves. Some projects were completed in a day or two, while others required a week or more.

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Surveys

Surveys come in many sizes and serve many purposes. Surveys can also be recurring, like those focusing on the Principal's Institute, other professional development sessions, or other MPS programs. Some requests asked for help with survey design or for a review of questions, while other requests required a full design and analysis, which were more complicated and time-consuming to complete. While much of the survey work was completed electronically, some surveys, like those that asked parents to complete the survey at school, required paper and pencil, and that data entry needed to be completed after the survey window closes. In addition, the department is responsible for annual administration of the Climate, Youth Risk Behavior, and Senior Exit Surveys.

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To better ensure that surveys would be administered in a timely and efficient manner and provided the department time to best design surveys that meet the needs of those in the district who requested these services, the department investigated and updated the survey software used in MPS. This new software ensured that more question formats could be used, QR codes could be easily assigned to surveys, and multiple survey designers could access the software from any computer. In addition, new uses for the tool were found. For example, the tool was used to gather quantitative information for the School Quality Reviews and it is used in the research application process.

Research Applications

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The department engaged in a review of the research application process. As a result, new research application protocols for internal and external applications were developed. The department met with local universities to explain the district's research agenda as well as the new process for applying for approval of research projects. The department approved 80% of the 93 projects submitted in the 2013–14 school year.

Data Extracts

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Requests for data extracts come in many sizes and serve many purposes. Requests can be simple, such as reviewing the District Data Sheet or fulfilling a request for graduation data. At other times, these requests can be more complex, such as compiling metrics for partnership and charter school contracts. Other projects, like the Degree Project evaluation, require the same data set be extracted at different times in the year.

Requests may be completed using the data warehouse, student information system, or other existing data files, like the results from the Climate Survey or Senior Exit Survey.

Approximately 20 data requests were completed for our external research partners.

Additional Projects

Comprehensive Evaluation Plan

With approximately 80,000 students in more than 160 schools, MPS faces steep difficulties in meeting the needs of students academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition to "regular" curriculum and services provided to all students, MPS has contracted (both formally and informally) with numerous service providers to deliver additional programming to meet service gaps. However, a mindful, unified accounting of all of these efforts, and a consistent system to evaluate the effectiveness and value of these efforts, is not currently in use. The R & D Department proposes to coordinate a district-wide process to develop an evaluation plan for all programs, projects, and initiatives delivered by outside service providers.

Research Briefs Series

The department attempted to present district research findings in the Research Briefs series, which was scheduled before the monthly board meeting. The presentations were cancelled as additional board meetings were scheduled at that time in each of the months the presentations were scheduled. As a result, the R & D Department will schedule the Research Review series in the 2014-15 school year as a separate meeting, unconnected to board meetings.

School Quality Reviews (SQR)

In the spring of 2014, the R & D Department evaluated the 16 lowest-performing schools in the district. Traditionally, much of the analysis conducted by the district has focused on quantitative data. This evaluation included an extensive qualitative component, including focus groups with teachers, students, parents, and community partners. In an analysis for a Six Sigma project, it was determined that the district invested more than 1900 hours (equivalent to almost 48 work weeks) in this project. The SQR process will be reviewed to find places to make the process more efficient. The department will work with others involved in the Commitment School effort to ensure that the process evaluates the schools in a manner that is aligned with other evaluation work in the district.

Grant Proposals

The department supported grant development and worked with the Grants Development Services office to ensure that the evaluation component of the grant is strong. The R & D Department assisted with development of the logic model, development of the evaluation plan for the grants, and data support.