



# Program Evaluation

Research and evaluation play vital roles in helping policy-makers, program funders, and education leaders understand the impacts of specific education policies or programs on children and the adults who serve them. In an era of scarce available resources, leaders more than ever need access to reliable, objective data to understand how they can most effectively invest time, energy, dollars, and staffing.

APA's priorities for research and evaluation are to: 1) tailor and customize evaluations to meet the particular needs of clients; 2) gather input from multiple sources to create a broad perspective; and 3) provide clear and understandable findings for clients.

## Mile High United Way Evaluations

*APA is the evaluator of four multi-year programs currently funded through Mile High United Way's Social Innovation Fund (SIF). The SIF program leverages \$1.8 million each year in federal funds to create up to \$6.6 million in literacy investments. In particular, Mile High United Way supports a series of innovative programs designed to improve literacy outcomes for children from birth to age eight.*

## Approaching Evaluations

APA uses a tailored approach to advise clients on which outcome measures and research designs make the most sense for client needs. As one of three organizations in the federal Regional Education Laboratory for the Central region of the U.S. (REL Central), APA is also able to build alliances, or networks, of stakeholders interested in particular areas of education data and research.

APA has expertise in a wide range of evaluation and research activities, from rigorous randomized control trials to quasi-experimental study designs to

a mix of quantitative and qualitative data-gathering methods like surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

## Studying Program Implementation, Impact, and Return on Investment

With more than 30 years of experience studying education policies and programs, APA has found that policy leaders and education program leaders can both benefit from several types of evaluation data. In particular, APA can work with clients to gather:

- Implementation data, to ensure programs are implemented with fidelity to the program model, and to identify where programs are most effective and where they can be improved
- Impact data, to help clients understand how their programs impact students, teachers, or whomever their target population might be
- Return on investment, to help clients understand and explain costs and benefits associated with their programs

## The Denver Preschool Program (DPP) Evaluation

*Voters approved DPP in November 2006 and reauthorized the sales tax in 2015. DPP connects Denver-area families with high-quality preschools. Since 2007, APA has led the DPP evaluation, helping the program understand how parents, children, and preschool providers access DPP, and helping the program assess the strengths and weaknesses inherent in its current design.*

When these types of data are combined effectively and findings are clearly explained, education leaders are empowered to take action to modify, improve, eliminate, or expand existing programs and policies. With data on program costs and return on investment, clients can better plan to sustain their programs over time.

### Evaluating Programs Around the Country

APA has conducted numerous evaluations across the country for school districts, state departments of education, and national and local foundations on a variety of topics.

Some examples of APA's evaluations include:

- An analysis for Louisiana's State Department of Education of schools that are "beating the odds" in terms of student demographics and performance
- A formative evaluation of a program in Mississippi designed to improve student performance in one of the poorest areas of the state
- A multi-year analysis of a taxpayer-funded preschool program in Denver, Colorado
- An evaluation of teacher turnover in high-need elementary schools in Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Georgia, and California, to help school and district leaders identify root causes of teacher turnover, and to recommend strategies to address such turnover
- An evaluation of a state-level program designed to work with targeted school districts to close student achievement gaps.
- Multi-year implementation and impact evaluations of four programs to improve literacy outcomes for children, financially supported through the Mile High United Way
- An analysis of a school district's modification of its existing teacher evaluation system
- A return on investment analysis of dual and concurrent enrollment programs



### About APA

Denver-based Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) has more than 30 years of experience analyzing education systems and policies. APA has worked with hundreds of clients—including legislatures, education agencies, boards of education, state and county leaders, business leaders, and foundations—to provide in-depth, policy-oriented analyses to help improve our country's education systems.

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