

The Need for Evaluation Capacity-Building in After-School Programs: Results from the Michigan Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers

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Purpose of Presentation

- Describe annual reporting system intended to contribute to program improvement and build evaluation capacity in Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Report change over three years in program directors' perceptions of:
 - The annual reporting system for building capacity
 - Usefulness of evaluators
 - Usefulness of evaluation



Program Overview

- Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) after-school programs in Michigan
- Funded by MI Dept of Education through U.S. Dept of Education
- 37 organizations, 187-193 sites (range = 1 to 15 sites)
 - Mostly school districts
 - A few community-based organizations and intermediate school districts
- Goals: Increase academic achievement and general functioning for students in low-performing schools in high-poverty areas

Evaluation Evolution

- Original purpose:
 - Assess outcomes
 - Report to federal funder
 - Identify what contributes to a successful program
- Over 5 years, evolved into the above, plus a program improvement model
 - Local evaluators were often not constructed to be helpful
 - Many grantees never saw their results
 - Many programs had no experience with doing or using evaluation for program improvement
 - Program improvement training and technical assistance was sporadic and lacked transfer to program operations



Bounding the Role of State Evaluators

- Not to provide individualized program improvement evaluation to each grantee
- But data collection system positions us provide standardized feedback to programs
- Annual Report Form (ARF)
 - Provide programs with their individualized data results in a form that can be compared within and across programs
 - Standardize annual reporting to the state (versus semi-structured narrative reports) to facilitate comparisons across programs
 - Collect additional information about program processes



Capacity-Building Activities

- **Annual Report Form (ARF)—2004-05 paper; from 2005-06 online**
 - Web-based annual reporting structure
 - Individualized results in eight areas
 - Programs are required to identify specific strategies to meet goals, address problems
 - Programs must address whether and how they addressed the strategies identified in the previous year
- **Trainings—from 2005-06**
 - Completing the ARF
 - Using data for program improvement
 - Using reports from the real-time web-based attendance tracking system for program improvement
 - Using data for sustainability
- **Improved training and technical assistance—from 2006-07 on**
 - High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
 - Youth Program Quality Assessment
- **Revised and defined evaluator roles—from 2007-08**



Sample

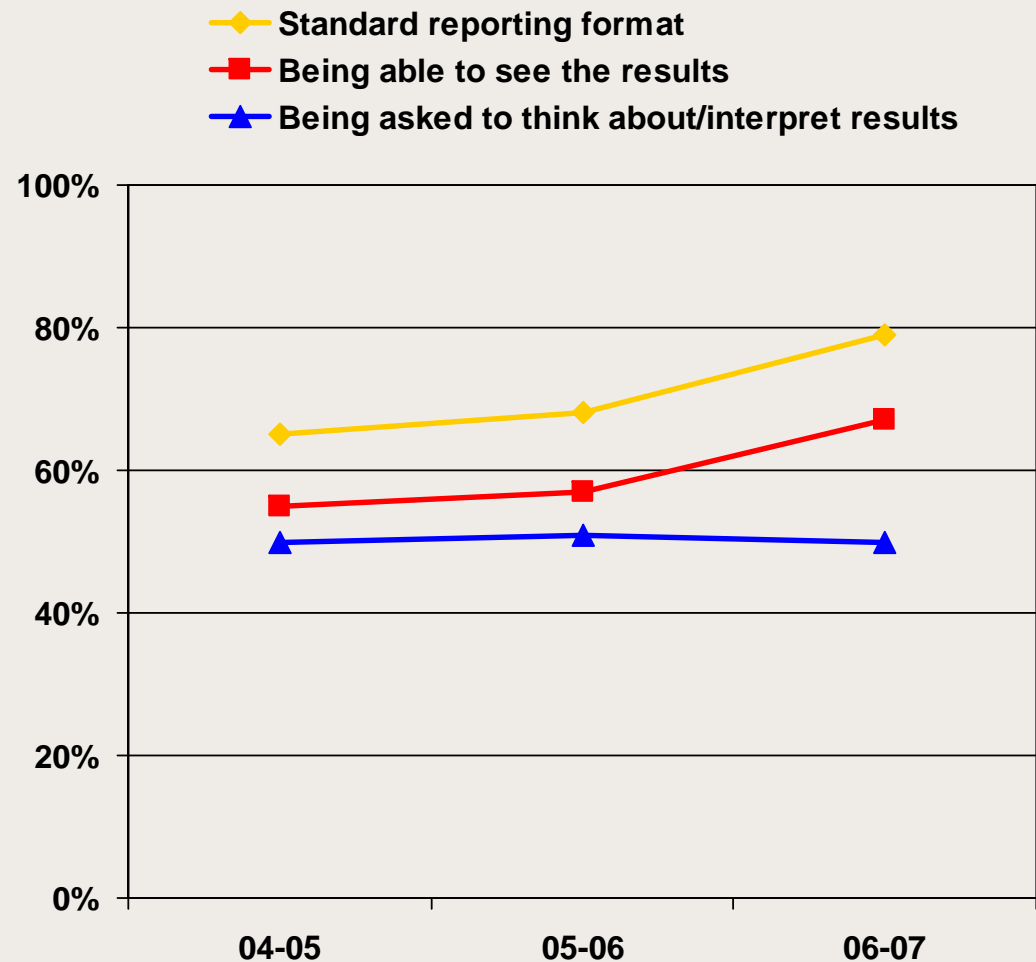
- **2004-05 and 2005-06:** 37 grantees, 187-193 sites
- **2006-07:** 25 grantees so far (data not complete)
- **Grantee form:** Completed by Program Director (and team)
- **Site form:** Completed by Site Coordinator (and team)



Have Perceptions of ARF Usefulness Changed?

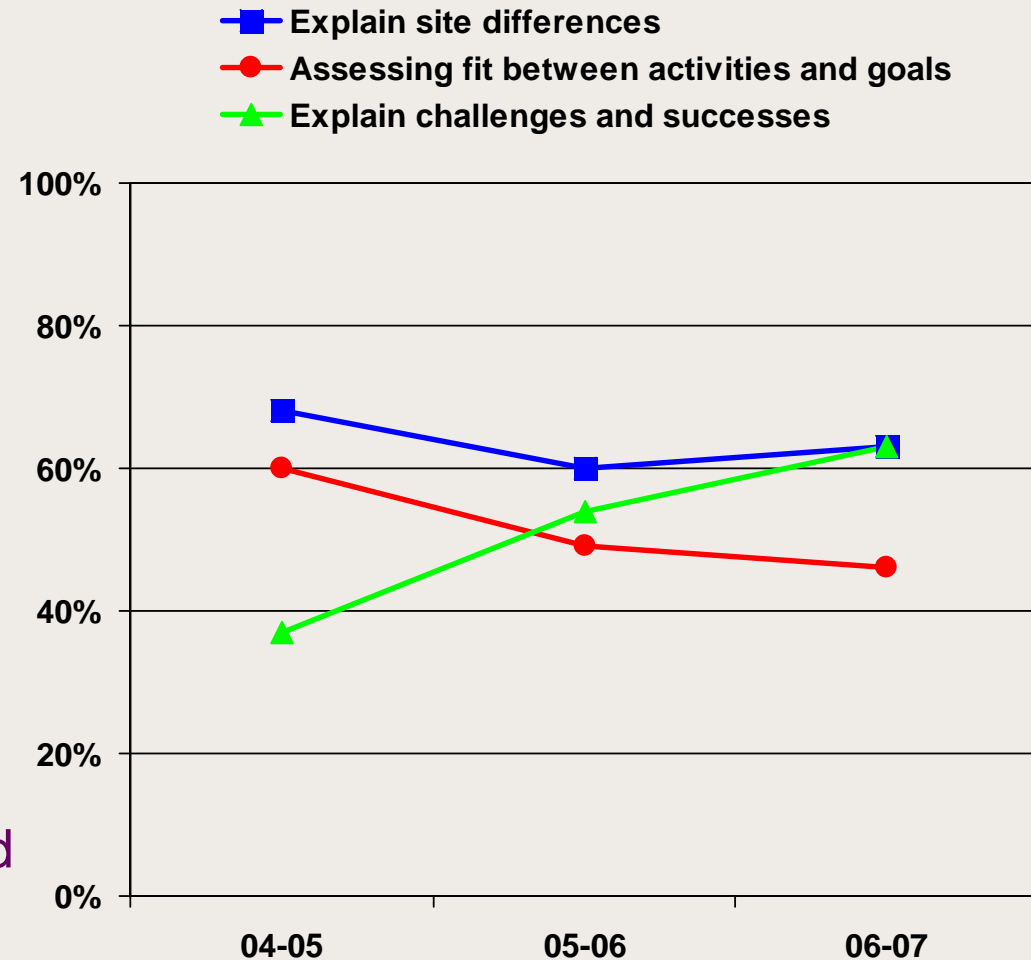
- **Yes.** Percent of grantees who report the ARF is *very useful*:

- Having a standard reporting format **increased**
- Being able to see results **increased**
- Interpreting results remained **stable**



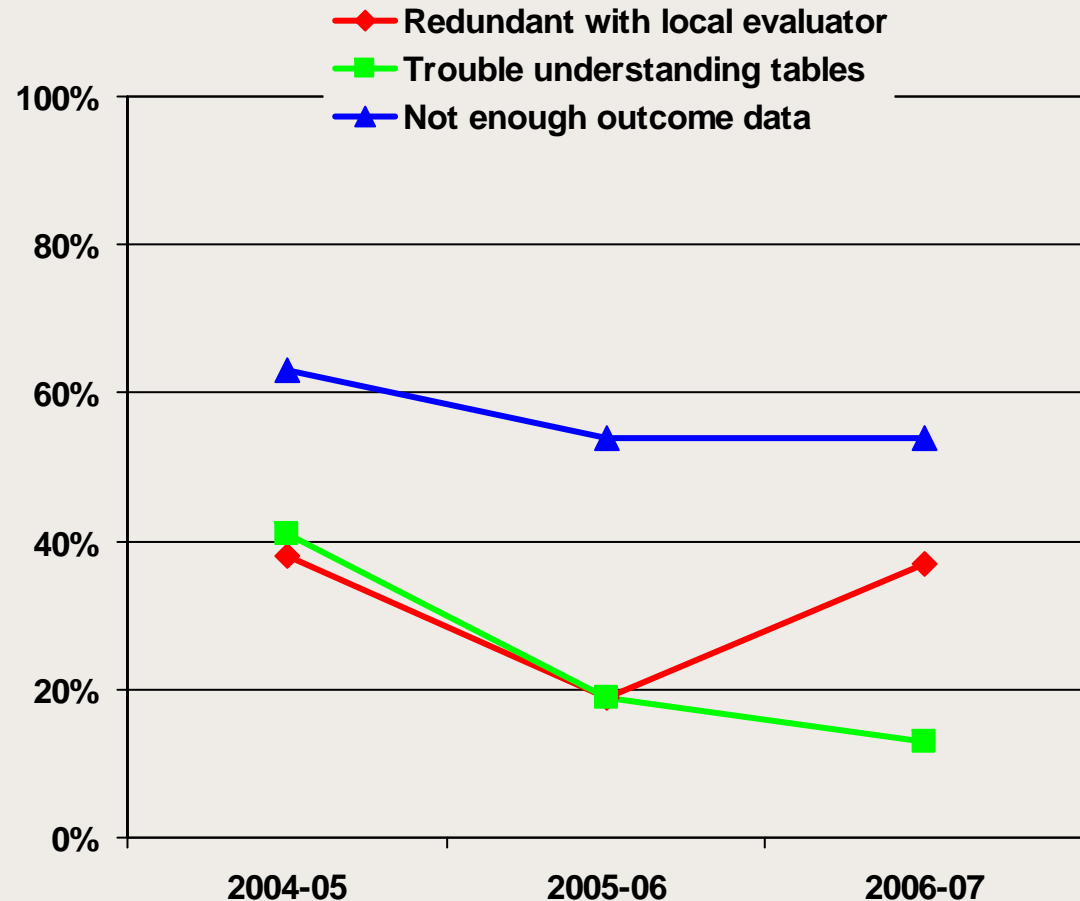
Have Perceptions of ARF Usefulness Changed?

- **Yes.** Percent of grantees who report the ARF is *very useful*:
 - For explaining challenges and successes **increased**
 - For explaining site differences remained **stable**
 - For assessing fit between activities and goals went **down**.*



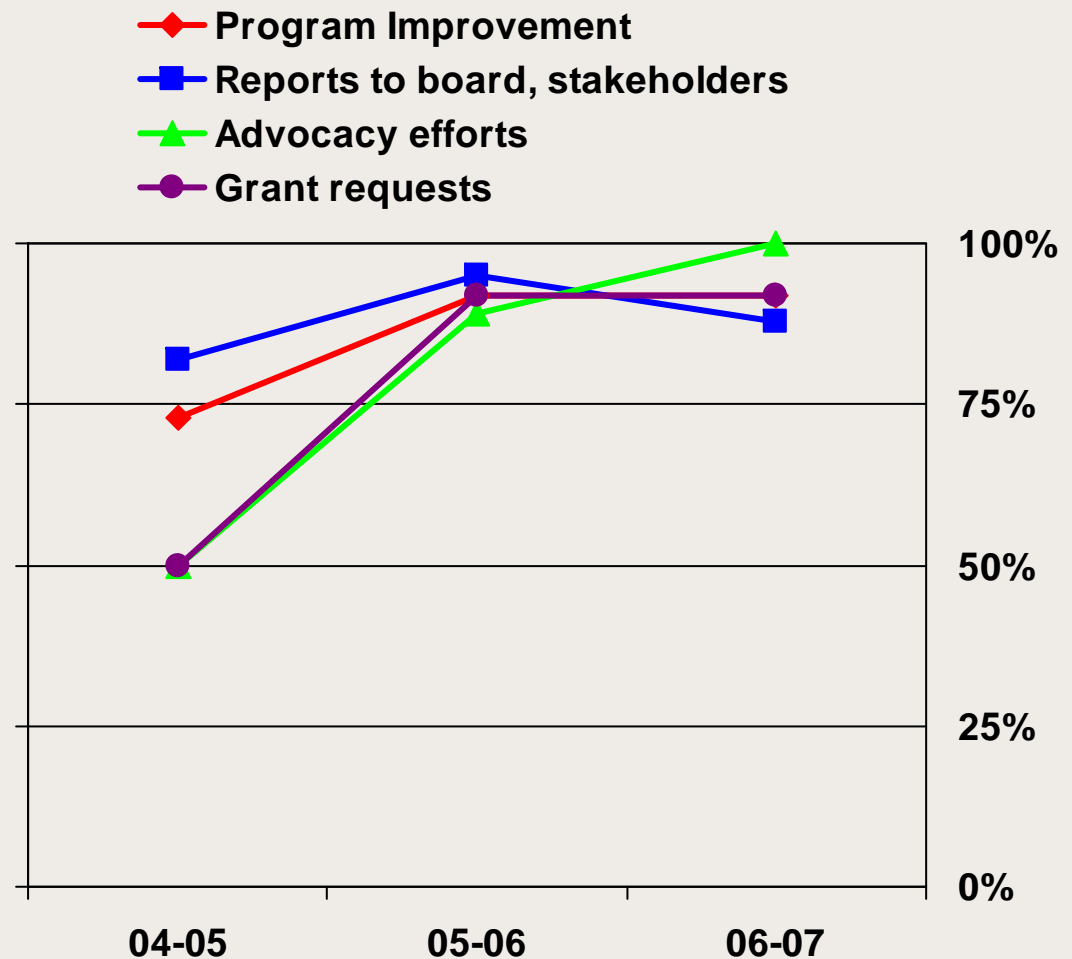
Have Perceptions of ARF Problems Changed?

- Change in ratings of *somewhat* or *very*:
 - **Decrease** in trouble understanding tables
 - **Decrease** in insufficient data
 - **Inconsistent change** in redundant with local evaluator*



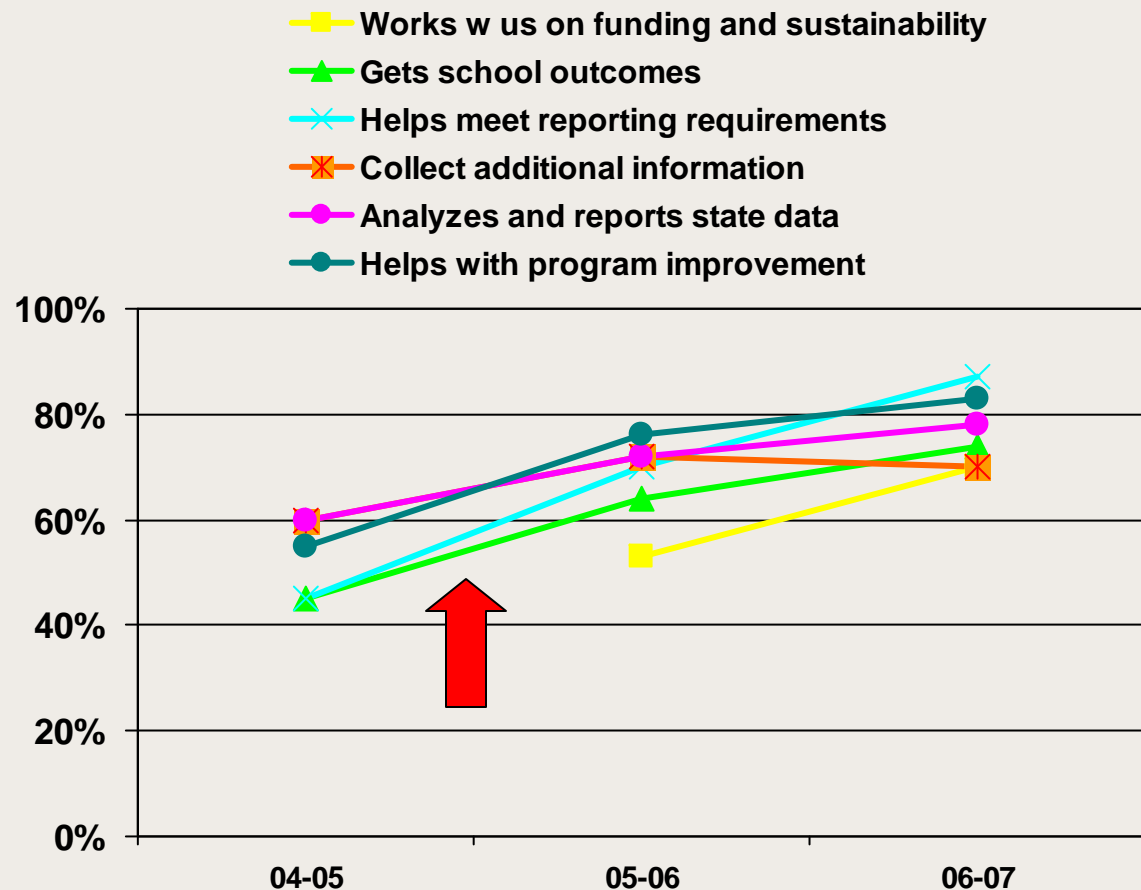
Have Intentions to Use ARF DATA Changed?

- Most PDs are more likely to use the ARF data
- All categories improved except *Reporting to Stakeholders*, which has generally been stable.



How Helpful are Local Evaluators?

- Assistance from evaluators **improved** between 04-05 and 05-06
- Between 05-06 and 06-07, new scale on items to give continuous ranking; here, from *slightly* to *very helpful*; hard to compare



A culture for using data for program improvement is spreading...

- When program directors reported that using evaluation data was *very important* for making program improvement decisions, site coordinators were **significantly more likely** to report the same ($p < .001$).



Implications

- One problem in large evaluations is getting data back to grantees
- Online interactive reporting with questions designed to enhance understanding (priming) seems to build capacity to use data
- Building capacity at higher administration can potentially support a culture of evaluation at the lower levels
- Training and policy changes increase likelihood of use and understanding



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