

Student and Family Support Office – An Implementation, Project Management and Evaluation Framework

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Introduction

In response to Ministry of Education directives emphasizing integrated student supports, cross-sector collaboration, and evidence-informed decision-making we created a framework to support those tasked with the development and implementation of Student and Family Support Offices in Ontario. The approach presented here allows designers and leaders to meet accountability obligations while generating valid and actionable evidence about implementation and monitoring.

In complex educational systems, programs often fail not because their underlying goals are flawed, but because the conditions, capacities, and mechanisms required for successful implementation are insufficiently understood or assessed. Traditional summative evaluation approaches risk conflating implementation failure with program ineffectiveness, leading to premature judgments and missed opportunities for improvement. Decades of educational reform research similarly demonstrate that change efforts succeed or fail based on implementation conditions rather than policy intent alone. Educational change scholars posit that reform is a nonlinear, socially mediated process shaped by capacity, coherence, and local context, therefore, outcome-focused accountability without attention to implementation undermines both improvement and sustainability (Fullan, 2007).

This model is attentive to broader ministry priorities related to integrated student and family supports, service coordination, and evidence-informed decision-making. Implementation science emphasizes the systematic study of how interventions are introduced, adapted, and embedded within real-world settings, foregrounding feasibility, fidelity, adaptation, reach, and sustainability as legitimate objects of evaluation in their own right. As demonstrated in a recent scoping review, many existing implementation frameworks inadequately address issues of usability, applicability across contexts, and testability, particularly at system and policy levels relevant to education (Wang et al, 2023). A phased approach responds to these gaps by sequencing evaluation questions in alignment with program maturity, ensuring that outcome claims are only made when implementation conditions are sufficiently established.

This approach is consistent with contemporary evaluation theory, which positions program evaluation as a tool for learning and decision-making rather than solely for judgment. As McDavid, and colleagues (2019) argue, effective evaluation in public sector contexts must balance accountability with improvement, attending to program theory, context, and implementation processes alongside

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outcomes. Applying a phased implementation science framework to educational reform supports more valid inferences, more ethical use of data, and more actionable findings for system leaders, practitioners, students, and families.

In response to Bill 33, School Boards are mandated to establish Student and Family Support Offices (SFSO). The timelines are short, and some school boards are without research department staff to rely on (Doan et al., 2020). Therefore, we created this simplified Implementation, Project Management and Evaluation framework for system sharing and use. The purpose of this tool is to assist with the development, management, and monitoring (i.e., analytics, and qualitative data) of the SFSO implementation. We also hope that a concrete framework can help practitioners understand how, for whom, and under what conditions the Student and Family Service Office is implemented as intended; and to inform iterative continuous improvement prior to summative judgments about effectiveness.

If you decide to share or use parts or the entire framework, we'd love to hear about your experiences, feedback or how it was used for your own continuous improvement efforts.

References

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Phase	Evaluation Question to be Satisfied (Before moving on to next phase. Proposed timelines)	Type of Evidence – Outputs (Activities and the respective data indicating presence and how they will be monitored)	Outcomes and Impact (What we expect to see happen to move on to next phase)
Inputs - Prior and existing knowledge to support decision-making such as:			
0	Are we ready to implement? Backwards design question - what are the timelines? If implemented September 1 st 2026, then this phase should be complete no later than May 2026. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the support model clearly articulated and shared? • Do staff have role clarity, training, and procedural guidance? • Are referral pathways and data systems viable? Decision pathway: go/no-go to next phase.	Capacity and readiness – plan in place with short-term and long-term outcomes. Establish a functional Working Group to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff engagement/communication occurred • Policy analysis and updates. • Analysis and synthesis of likely known issues that would most likely be addressed by this office from various stakeholder groups (e.g., list is not exhaustive: existing student and parent survey data, Trustee voice, Safe and Caring/Positive School Teams, Inclusive Services, student affinity groups, Human Rights Officer input, senior administration, union groups, mental health leads, Principal concerns, parent groups, business department input such as transportation/facilities). • Community engagement if time and capacity exists. • Business modeling to ensure costs/benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working group staff report confidence and readiness to defend and execute plan (staff touchpoint data). • A draft plan complete by working group. • Working draft articulates both assumptions, constraints and contingencies. • Draft plan is approved.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing models that include job analyses and succession plans • Communication plan created. • Analytics/evidence plan created. • Risks and mitigation strategies identified. In sum, a draft plan is created for approval with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, data and expected outcomes for students, families and staff.	
1	Is the model being implemented as designed? Projected timelines Dec 2026, Apr 2027 (quarterly until 1 year implementation). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are core components being delivered as intended? • What adaptations are occurring — and why? • What barriers are emerging in real-world conditions? <p>Decision pathway: Adaptation ≠ drift. This phase documents necessary contextual tailoring, the program is operating as planned.</p>	Fidelity and feasibility assessments – the working group becomes a steering committee during subsequent implementation phases. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office is established and staffed. • Communication plan implemented. • Time to serve benchmarks established. • Nature of adaptations – are they planned vs reactive? • Analytics - Early data collection from support office providers are able to demonstrate consistency of intake, triage and follow-up processes, the length of time for staff to engage with the support service request, the ability to track timelines, types of support requested, and satisfaction follow up data (surveys) with respectable response rates of the surveys. In addition, other metrics can include quality of support service logs/case records (non-clinical), staff reflective logs, brief/pulse surveys of office staff, observational walk-throughs, Implementation interviews • Problems and Issues are identified and tracked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early issues identified and resolved. • Staff feedback demonstrates a change in perceptions about the office's fidelity and feasibility to address service complaints and access. • Data gathered from students and families demonstrate a positive trajectory (an implementation dip in this data may be expected as services and support become more known). • Monthly internal briefing reports indicate progress and performance.

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2	<p>Is the service reaching the intended students and families equitably?</p> <p>1 year of implementation: September 2027.</p> <p>Decision Gate: If analytics of program data demonstrate equity of outputs.</p>	<p>Reach and access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most problems have been encountered and are now part of the procedures (expected with known remedy or action). Deeper analysis of data across different socioeconomic groups to support equitable access and support. Who is accessing support services? Who is not? Are there any structural barriers in referral or uptake? As per Anti-Racism Act (2017) conduct disproportionality analysis where possible and appropriate. That is, how consistent is the data among groups before establishing continuous improvement baselines? Analyses could focus on group differences by referral sources, differences in time-to-access, differences in drop-off points in the service pathways, differences in self-reported accessibility and trust. 	<p>First year report shared with system “<i>How its Going</i>” demonstrating transparency with implementation and evaluations.</p>
3	<p>A) Do stakeholders perceive value and relevance?</p> <p>B) Are services reducing strain or increasing navigation capacity?</p> <p>Early outcomes → do not make causality claims.</p> <p>Decision Gate: If reach is inequitable, do not proceed to outcome claims</p>	<p>Validation of Measurement framework of Short-Term Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final agreement on what data demonstrate change from baselines. Infrastructure and reporting structure (cost, staffing, types of data, analysis on what may be missing or redundant). Pre/post service snapshots Short outcome scales (validated or pragmatic) Qualitative outcome narratives Case exemplars (ethically anonymized) 	<p>Iterative report establishing program baselines and reporting of early outcomes. If inequities exist – plan to adapt programming.</p> <p>Possible Early Outcomes could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved family understanding of systems Increased service coordination Reduced crisis escalations Improved school–family communication <p>Evidence-informed refinement.</p>

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4	<p>Is the program effective and sustainable?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the program associated with meaningful outcomes? • Are outcomes sustained over time? 	<p>Effectiveness and Sustainability</p> <p>Data show consistency in outputs iteratively over time including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative and equity analyses (where feasible) demonstrate consistency. • Cost–benefit or cost–consequence analysis • Continuous improvement cycles established strengthened by sustainability interviews 	<p>Comparative reports year over year from baseline as outputs can answer two defensibility questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is anyone better off? 2. What is the impact?