

# Implementation of the New Educator Evaluation System in Massachusetts

At both state and local levels, policy makers and educators across the country are reforming their educator evaluation systems. In Massachusetts in 2010, a 40-member task force representing a broad cross section of stakeholders began leading the development of the Educator Evaluation Framework (EEF). By June 2011, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) had approved the EEF and initiated a phased implementation.<sup>1</sup> All Massachusetts districts had begun implementing this new evaluation system by the 2013–14 school year.

The EEF is designed to support educator growth and development through a “five-step cycle of continuous improvement.”<sup>2</sup> The five steps of the evaluation cycle are (1) self-assessment; (2) analysis, goal-setting, and educator plan development; (3) implementation of the educator plan; (4) formative assessment or evaluation; and (5) summative evaluation. Under this new evaluation system, educators will receive a summative performance rating and a student impact rating. Publicly released summative performance ratings from the 2012–13 school year demonstrated that the new system can distinguish between exceptional educators and those needing support and improvement.<sup>3</sup>

This research brief summarizes the findings from a study on implementation of the Massachusetts EEF conducted by SRI International and its research partners Abt Associates, Nancy Brigham Associates, and J. Koppich and Associates. During the 2013–14 school year, the second year of the study, the research team conducted educator interviews and focus groups in 12 Massachusetts case study districts, administered a statewide survey of principals and school staff, and analyzed 110 school staff evaluation files from three districts.<sup>4,5</sup> This research brief offers the following important key findings for other states and districts as they work to improve their educator evaluation systems:

- Nearly all Massachusetts educators have participated in the new evaluation system.
- Principals reported far more positive views of the new evaluation system than school staff. School staff’s mixed opinions of the new evaluation system seemed to hinge on whether they saw the system as focused on support and improvement or on accountability and compliance.
- A majority of educators reported receiving sufficient training on the new evaluation system, although administrators reported having a stronger understanding of it than school staff.
- A majority of educators found the workload required to implement the new evaluation system burdensome.
- Specific implementation challenges with goal-setting, evidence collection, and observations and feedback have resulted in fragmented experiences with the five-step evaluation cycle.
- Most educators perceived their own evaluator’s assessment of their performance as fair, but school staff perceived inconsistencies within and across schools in how evaluators conducted evaluations and expressed concern about the fairness of the system as a whole.
- Districts were implementing the evaluation system along with other complicated initiatives, and most were trying to explicitly integrate the evaluation system with these other initiatives.

## Participation in the EEF

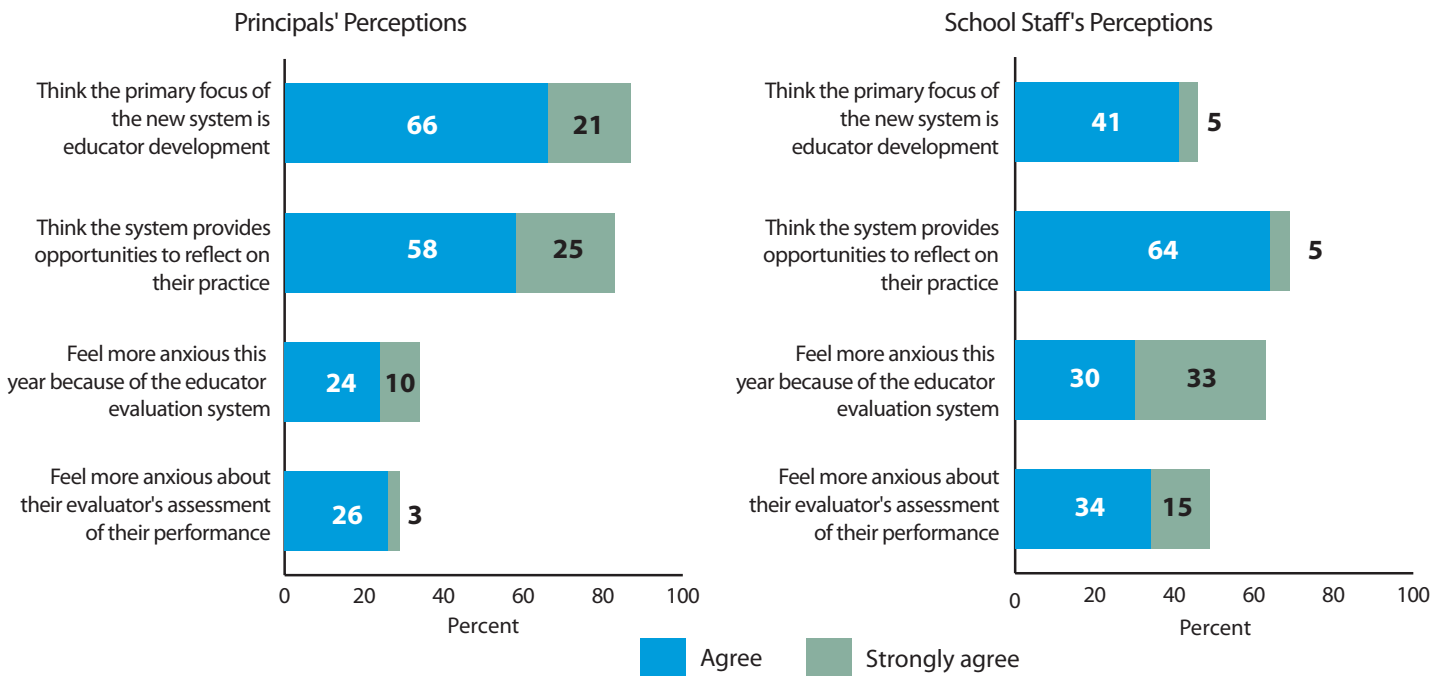
By the 2013–14 school year, all case study districts were implementing most components of the evaluation system. Nearly all surveyed principals and school staff in the Commonwealth reported having developed SMART goals and having conducted a self-assessment (85 to 93 percent).<sup>7</sup> Eighty-one percent of school staff and 76 percent of principals had met with their evaluators to discuss goals. Eighty-six percent of school staff and 59 percent of principals had experienced an unannounced observation of their practice by their evaluator. Fewer school staff and principals reported having experienced announced observations (53 and 60 percent, respectively) and having received a formative assessment (53 and 50 percent). This may reflect the fact that announced observations are less common under the EEF and that educators with Professional Teaching Status receive a formative assessment only every 2 years. Interviews revealed that most school staff in case study districts expected to complete each step of the evaluation cycle by the end of the year. Principals in half the case study districts had participated in all five steps of the evaluation cycle or were on track to complete each step by the end of the year.

## Perceptions of the EEF

Educators' overall perceptions of the evaluation system were mixed, with principals more positive about it than school staff. For example, in spring 2014, 83 percent of surveyed principals and 68 percent of surveyed school staff agreed or strongly agreed that the system provides opportunities to reflect on their practice. In addition, 87 percent of principals and 46 percent of school staff agreed or strongly agreed that educator development is the primary focus of the new system (Exhibit 1).<sup>8</sup> In interviews, school staff's views of the new system appeared to hinge on whether they perceived the system as focused on support and improvement or on accountability and compliance. In districts and schools where administrators emphasized the role of the new evaluation system in supporting educator development, educators expressed generally positive views of it. Conversely, in schools and districts where administrators seemed to emphasize the system's accountability functions, educators had more negative perceptions.

Principals also reported more positive views than school staff about how the new system compared with the previous one. Eighty-two percent of principals and 41 percent of school staff agreed or strongly agreed that the new system evaluates educators more comprehensively than the previous system. Further, 65 percent of principals and 27 percent of school staff agreed or strongly agreed that the new system better distinguishes among exceptional, capable, and weak educator practices than the old system.<sup>9</sup>

Exhibit 1. Perceptions of the EEF



### Promising Strategy for Emphasizing the Evaluation System's Role for Growth and Development

A vast majority of educators in one case study district viewed the new evaluation system as focused on growth and support. They reported that the process led to productive conversations between educators and evaluators. For example, school staff could respond to evaluator feedback through an online platform, which often facilitated a conversation between evaluators and educators. Moreover, the district incorporated the evaluation system into induction trainings for new teachers and focused on ongoing communication through school-based evaluation leaders highly knowledgeable about the system and its purpose. Each of these factors contributed to educators' trust in the evaluation system as one focused on instructional growth, rather than accountability.

### Training and Understanding

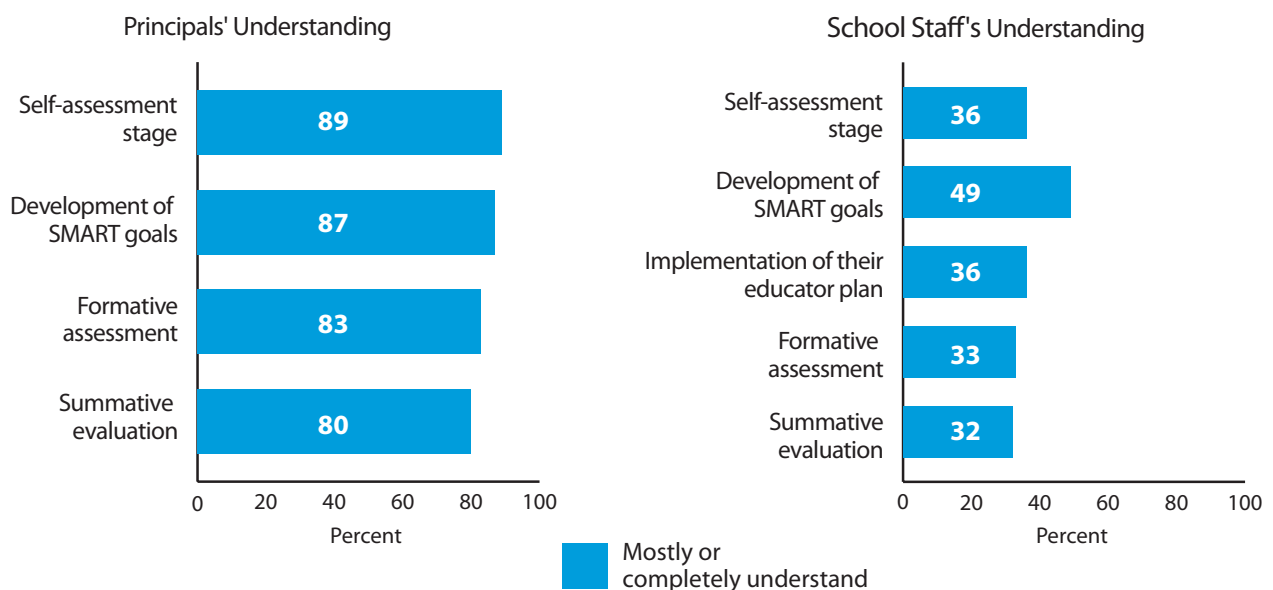
ESE provided extensive guidance documents, trainings, and technical assistance to support districts and educators with EEF implementation. In 2013–14, a majority of surveyed principals and school staff reported that they had received sufficient training in various aspects of the new system. Principals also reported high rates of understanding of key aspects of the evaluation system, but school staff reports were significantly lower (see Exhibit 2).<sup>10</sup> Less than half of school staff reported mostly or completely understanding each of the five steps of the cycle.

### Evaluator Workload

As implementation progressed, most educators, especially evaluators, continued to find the workload required by the new evaluation system to be burdensome. In 2013–14, 65 percent of surveyed school staff reported that their evaluator does not have sufficient time to assess their practice, and 74 percent reported that fulfilling responsibilities related to the evaluation process is too time consuming. Principal responses suggested a slight improvement in their perceptions of their workload. In 2012–13, 27 percent of surveyed principals had reported having adequate time for evaluation, whereas in 2013–14, 38 percent reported that they have adequate time to evaluate teachers in their school. Over time, principals may have developed strategies to better manage their workload.

In 2012–13, a few districts described strategies for easing evaluator workload, such as allowing contributing evaluators (i.e., an educator with expertise in the subject matter being evaluated) to support primary evaluators or having retired principals mentor current administrators. However, 2013–14 interviews in case study districts revealed that most districts have not adopted systematic or long-term strategies to alleviate burden on evaluators. Moreover, districts have yet to fully implement all components of the evaluation system, such as district-determined measures, staff and student feedback, and student impact ratings, which educators acknowledged might further increase the workload.

Exhibit 2. Reports on Understanding of the Five Steps of the EEF



Note: Principals were not asked to report their understanding of step 3, "Implementation of their educator plan."

---

## Views of Fairness

Seventy-eight percent of principals and 88 percent of school staff perceived their own evaluator's assessment of their performance as fair during the 2013–14 school year. Eighty-three percent of principals reported that the system as a whole is fair, but only 43 percent of surveyed staff agreed. Moreover, while 65 percent of principals reported that the EEF evaluates educators consistently across grades, subjects, and schools, only 37 percent of school staff agreed with this statement. Interviewed educators in all case study sites identified at least some inconsistencies in evaluation activities within their respective schools or districts, such as processes for setting SMART goals, the number of observations per educator, what evaluators look for during observations, evaluators' guidance to educators about the steps of the five-step cycle (particularly evidence collection), and the ratings the evaluators assigned. Inconsistencies perceived in any one step of the process seemed to lead educators to question the system overall.

### Districts' Strategies for Calibrating Evaluator Practices

Most case study districts did not have comprehensive approaches for calibrating evaluators, but a few demonstrated promising practices.

- In one district, administrators participated in in-house and external trainings during which principals rated and discussed videos of teacher instruction, examined the quality of authentic examples of feedback from the district's online platform, or focused on how to facilitate difficult conversations with staff about instruction.
- In two districts, administrators organized monthly or bimonthly learning walks with groups of district and school building administrators to observe instruction collectively, followed by discussions about what they observed.
- Another district organized extensive training for all administrators during either the 2012–13 or 2013–14 school years. Strategies included (1) 15 hours of interrater reliability training for principals led by an external technical assistance provider in 2012–13, (2) external training for assistant principals on feedback quality and a streamlined version for principals in 2013–14, and (3) another external technical assistance provider's analysis of the quality and consistency of observations and feedback in 2012–13, which led to the development of a rubric disseminated to all evaluators for their own use in assessing the quality of their feedback in 2013–14.

## Experiences with the EEF

The core of the EEF is the five-step cycle of continuous improvement, in which each step is intended to lead to the next coherently and cumulatively, with all steps contributing to improvement in instructional practices.<sup>11</sup> According to the 2013–14 survey data, educators' perceptions of the helpfulness of each of the five steps on instructional practices varied. Further, educator interviews in the 12 case study districts revealed that most districts prioritized school staff evaluations and concentrated less on principal evaluations. According to interviewed educators, many school staff perceived and experienced the five steps of the evaluation as isolated components rather than a continuous cycle, in part because of specific implementation challenges with goal-setting, evidence collection, and observations and feedback.

**SMART goals.** Forty-eight percent of principals and 62 percent of school staff surveyed reported that setting SMART goals has led them to alter classroom or administrative practices, respectively. However, interviews with educators revealed that not all school staff had the freedom to develop goals. Some districts and schools allowed educators to set their own goals; others assigned or recommended goals for school staff. Educators with the freedom to choose goals tended to view SMART goals as more useful and relevant to their classroom instruction.

**Evidence collection.** Eighty-eight percent of principals and only 43 percent of school staff surveyed reported understanding the types of evidence that inform their evaluation. Fifty-five percent of school staff surveyed reported that it is clear how evidence collected is used for their evaluation. As in 2012–13, interviewed school staff reported inconsistent guidance on evidence collection (e.g., required number of pieces of evidence, what types of evidence to submit) and confusion about how evidence would contribute to their evaluation. While some interviewed educators saw evidence collection as a reflective practice, the majority of interviewed staff found it time consuming and irrelevant to their practice and noted a need for additional clarification on the process.

**Observations and feedback.** Sixty-nine percent of principals and 81 percent of school staff found feedback timely, and 72 percent of surveyed school staff found feedback from their evaluator to be helpful.<sup>12</sup> However, an analysis of 2012–13 school staff evaluation files from three districts revealed that feedback often praised positive practice but generally lacked actionable strategies for improvement. Files also rarely built on findings from previous evaluation activities or referenced school staff's progress over time on targeted areas. In fact, only 43 percent of surveyed principals and 48 percent of surveyed school staff reported that feedback from observations led them to alter their classroom practices.

Furthermore, some interviewed educators perceived and experienced feedback as disconnected from the self-assessment, evidence collection, and goal-setting processes. As one staff member noted, “Everything in the evaluation system feels very isolated. Unannounced observations are different from evidence collection ... none of them meet up.”

## Implementation of Multiple Initiatives

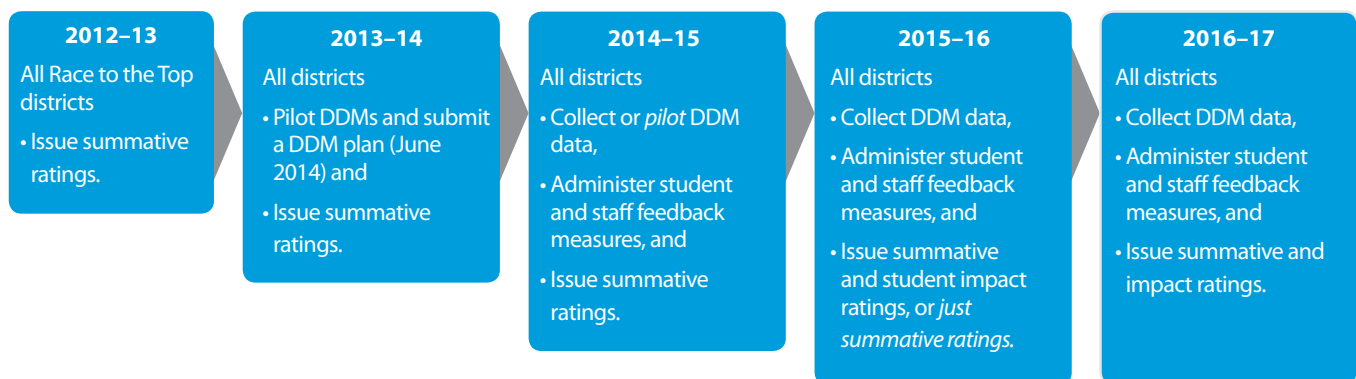
Districts are implementing the evaluation system along with multiple large initiatives, including the Commonwealth’s curriculum frameworks (which incorporate the Common Core State Standards) and RETELL (Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners). ESE suggests that districts integrate other ongoing initiatives into the EEF as a way of supporting and aligning implementation of each individual initiative toward improving teaching and learning. To support districts, ESE has produced several guidance documents that exemplify integration of initiatives.<sup>13</sup> In the 2013–14 school year, two-thirds of case study districts explicitly integrated the evaluation system with other initiatives, typically by integrating the Commonwealth’s curriculum frameworks into the goal-setting process. One case study district explicitly encouraged evaluators, in training sessions, to look for Common Core-aligned instruction when conducting observations. In the 2014–15 school year, this district plans to create a list of Common Core “look fors”—Common Core-aligned practices corresponding to each rubric indicator. Despite these efforts, school

administrators and staff in case study districts generally did not perceive the evaluation system as integrated with the various other initiatives in their state and district and felt overburdened by what they viewed as multiple reform efforts.

## Additional Evaluation Components

Moving forward, the EEF will incorporate at least three additional components: district-determined measures (DDMs), student and staff feedback measures, and student impact ratings. Beginning in the 2014–15 school year, districts will fully or partially implement DDMs. DDMs are developed or selected by districts for assessing student learning.<sup>14</sup> Also in 2014–15, districts will implement student and staff feedback measures, which will provide additional evidence contributing to an educator’s summative performance rating. While the type of feedback measures remains at each district’s discretion, ESE published model staff and student survey instruments on its website for districts’ use.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the 2015–16 school year, districts will assign the first student impact ratings to educators. These student impact ratings will be based on trends in state assessment data, where available, and DDMs over 2 years (2014–15 and 2015–16) (Exhibit 3).<sup>16</sup> The student impact rating, along with the educator’s summative performance rating, will determine the type and duration of educator plan for that educator for the next school year. Districts’ implementation of these remaining evaluation components will be addressed in future research.

Exhibit 3. Revised Implementation Timeline for Additional Evaluation Components



*Note: Italicized text applies to districts that received an extension on DDM implementation in particular grades and subjects.*

---

## Implications

The Massachusetts EEF represents an important shift in the culture of educator evaluation to one that prioritizes educator growth and development above accountability. Districts are expending significant time and effort to implement the system with fidelity, and their experiences provide valuable lessons for the field. Our research findings suggest the following strategies for successful implementation:

- Redouble efforts to help all educators understand that the primary purpose of the new evaluation system is educator support and improvement.
- Provide ongoing training and resources to enhance educator understanding of specific aspects of the new evaluation system.
- Incorporate feedback mechanisms throughout implementation to address any ongoing educator concerns.

- Promote district adoption of strategies for ensuring calibration of evaluator practices and consistency of expectations for goal-setting, evidence collection, observation protocols, and ratings.
- Highlight and disseminate strategies for reducing the time burden on evaluators and educators as they implement the new evaluation system.

Data from the second year of this research study show continued signs of promise for the evaluation system, as well as some challenges. As all districts continue to implement the EEF and as other states transition to new evaluation systems, they might leverage the lessons learned in Massachusetts thus far in their own implementation strategies. SRI and its research partners will continue their study of implementation throughout Massachusetts in the 2014–15 school year.

### Additional Resources on the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework

- For general information and guidance documents on the Educator Evaluation Framework: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/>
- To receive the monthly Educator Evaluation e-Newsletter, subscribe at <http://eeval-newsletter-signup.org>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thirty-four early-adopter districts began piloting the new system during the 2011–12 school year, all Race to the Top districts began implementing it during the 2012–13 school year, and all non-Race to the Top districts began implementing in the 2013–14 school year.

<sup>2</sup> For information on the evaluation system and the five-step cycle, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/> and <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/model/PartI.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/educatorevaluationperformance.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/educatorevaluationperformance.aspx).

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this research brief, we refer to two groups: (1) educators refers to the entire educator population (district and school administrators, teachers, and school staff), and (2) school staff refers to just teachers and noninstructional staff.

<sup>5</sup> The research team administered an online survey to a statewide representative sample of school staff and principals during April, May, and June 2014. The response rate was 62 percent for school staff (901 respondents) and 48 percent for principals (63 respondents). The spring 2014 survey focused on respondents' experiences during the 2013–14 school year. In addition, the research team analyzed 110 school staff evaluation files in winter 2014. Files were randomly selected and included a mix of Professional Teacher Status (PTS) and non-PTS teachers from 30 different evaluators (10 per district). Analysis focused on SMART goals, observations and feedback, and contents of formative and summative evaluation reports.

<sup>6</sup> As part of the five-step cycle, Massachusetts educators develop at least two goals: a professional practice goal and a student learning goal.

<sup>7</sup> As part of the five-step cycle, Massachusetts educators develop at least two goals: a professional practice goal and a student learning goal.

<sup>8</sup> Another 10 percent of school staff reported that it is too soon to say.

<sup>9</sup> Another 27 percent of school staff reported that it was too soon to say.

<sup>10</sup> According to the survey, 62 percent of surveyed school staff and 45 percent of surveyed principals were evaluated under the EEF for the first time in 2013–14 and thus most likely had not completed all steps of the evaluation cycle at the time of the survey.

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/model/PartI.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Surveyed principals were not asked whether the feedback they received was helpful.

<sup>13</sup> ESE released guidance for districts on integrating initiatives with the evaluation system: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/resources/implementation/EdEvalandCF.pdf> <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/resources/implementation/AlignedActivities.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/resources/QRG-Measures.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> To access ESE's resources on staff and student feedback measures, including sample instruments, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/feedback/>.

<sup>16</sup> Some districts may have received extensions on DDMs for specific grades and subjects. Student impact ratings dependent on those DDMs will be delayed at least 1 year, until 2016–17.

---

## Contact SRI Education

SRI International  
333 Ravenswood Avenue  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Phone: 650.859.2995  
Email: [education@sri.com](mailto:education@sri.com)

[sri.com/education](http://sri.com/education)

SRI International is a registered trademark and SRI Education is a trademark of SRI International. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.