



A Union of Professionals

Teacher Development and Evaluation

COVID-19 CLOSURE WORKING PAPERS

The 2020-21 school year, like so many aspects of our lives, will be significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing response. This is an unprecedented event in the history of U.S. schooling, and our response will need to be rooted in reality and require ingenuity. Our response for teacher development and evaluation must be built on the tradition of years of work educators, their unions and willing partners did as documented in [Moving Beyond Compliance: Lessons Learned from Teacher Development and Evaluation](#).

Teachers and students are being forced to learn in new ways, using modalities like distance learning and asynchronous learning to achieve results that maximize the safety of our students and our communities while preserving the rights of students to a high-quality education. For now, we must stop the rush to use new data for accountability and instead use the data in a way that will be most beneficial to teachers and students alike—to guide instruction, identify and share best practices, and help solve mutual problems. Systems that don't adapt, build in flexibility, and retool for learning about what works and what doesn't will inevitably fail the people they are designed to help.

What Schools Should Consider

- Schools should forgo summative teacher evaluation for 2020-21 and instead focus on teaching and learning to adjust to the changing context of schooling to keep people safe during this pandemic.
- This means that systems designed to evaluate teachers for accountability and job action decisions should be retooled and repurposed to provide the best information administrators, coaches and teachers need to help guide instructional improvement in this new educational environment.

Best Practices

Schools should focus on teaching and learning in this new context. This means schools should:

- Adopt high-quality, just-in-time diagnostics to establish a new baseline for all students. This is a best practice in good times, but during a pandemic, it's crucial to assess for learning loss and meet students where they are academically. This will allow teachers to target gaps, differentiate and individualize instruction where needed.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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- Expand social emotional learning and curricula to accommodate the myriad mental health needs arising from the pandemic and its social and economic impact.
- Collect data on blended, distance and asynchronous learning to inform best practices for all teachers as they adapt to these modes of teaching.

Recommendations

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the new reality; but if school systems don't act immediately, they will fail to identify what students will need to continue their learning at such a critical time for our nation.

The first step should begin as soon as possible. **Create a labor-management committee on teacher development and evaluation, and pair it with a student diagnostics and assessment committee** (see [Student Assessment and the Use of Data Working Paper](#)). The committees should begin their work under the assumption that any [teacher evaluation waivers](#) enacted at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis should continue into school year 2020-21; where waivers were not enacted, new ones should be adopted.

Questions the committees might start with include:

1. The school year will bring enormous flux and change and present unprecedented challenges for students' academic and social emotional needs. How will school systems ensure fairness for all of their teachers as they adapt to enormous challenges? Consider adopting a code of expectations that acknowledges the enormous challenges educators face.
2. Will there be a high-quality diagnostic in place at the beginning of the school year to assess student learning on a just-in-time basis to establish a baseline for student growth and student learning needs going forward? Ensure these diagnostics are administered early and often for all students given that [the risks for learning loss are high](#).
3. How will teachers be supported to integrate the new teaching and learning modalities? Consider targeted professional learning opportunities for all teachers.
4. How will schools accommodate for social emotional learning, behavior management, and mitigating trauma caused by and exacerbated by the pandemic? Enact a plan for ensuring teachers have training in social emotional learning and trauma-informed practices as well as access to SEL resources; the plan should call on school leaders to establish clear guidelines for dealing with trauma.
5. How will measures of student growth be used to inform teaching and learning? Remember, student growth will be used solely for the purposes of providing the teacher with information to assist student learning.
6. How will the various roles in schools (administrators, coaches and educators) be optimized toward improving teaching and learning? The roles of instructional support professionals have never been more important.

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