



*A Union of Professionals*

## **Moving Beyond Compliance**

Lessons Learned from Teacher Development and Evaluation



Randi Weingarten  
PRESIDENT

Lorretta Johnson  
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Mary Cathryn Ricker  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

## **OUR MISSION**

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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# FOREWORD BY AFT PRESIDENT RANDI WEINGARTEN

In education, we devote a lot of time—for good reason—criticizing what doesn't work yet spend less time analyzing what does work or the lessons learned when we try new strategies.

A re-envisioned Elementary and Secondary Education Act is on the horizon—one we hope will maintain a commitment to equity and federal funding for those who need it most and will change the decades-long test-and-sanction policies to policies focused more on supports and improvement. This provides a huge opportunity to think about what it takes to have continuous improvement in teacher quality and student achievement. Many school districts have made strides in building systems with schools where teachers want to teach, parents want to send their children, and students are engaged and excited. Part of the holistic change in many of these districts included creating promising teacher development and evaluation systems that zero in on collaboration and continuous improvement, instead of systems with a punitive, “gotcha” mentality.

With support from the AFT Innovation Fund, unions and district partners in communities in New York state and Rhode Island began creating these supportive systems. Their work was so promising that the AFT decided to apply for a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to continue and expand it.

Teacher development and evaluation systems that are centered on teacher growth instead of punishment and are built and maintained through labor-management partnerships will consistently benefit students. This finding was foundational for the many AFT districts that used i3 grants. They have demonstrated that improving instructional practice and growing professionalism among teachers can and should be the goal of evaluation. They've learned that working together and rigorously training teachers, evaluators and administrators cultivates a shared understanding of high-quality teaching and supports effectiveness, professional growth and student achievement.

This report captures lessons learned from working with educators in the field for the past five years:

- Labor-management collaboration is essential for comprehensive, systemic success, including for the creation of teacher development and evaluation frameworks for continuous improvement.
- Teaching standards are helpful for training and empowering teachers as well as for identifying effective instructional areas and those that need improvement.
- Teacher development and evaluations systems that use multiple measures provide a fuller picture of teaching quality and effective learning.
- Evaluators need to be continuously trained.
- Educators need to receive timely feedback and get professional development tailored to meet teacher needs.
- A differentiated evaluation process enables districts to focus their resources on teachers who need the most support and can empower effective teachers to take charge of their own professional growth.

Students win when school districts employ a culture of collaboration in all they do, including creating and implementing teacher development and evaluation systems.

# 01

## COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

A teacher development and evaluation system provides a framework for learning in which a truly **collaborative professional community** can be built.

### THE RESEARCH

A study conducted by Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1994) concluded that “a school-based professional community can offer support and motivation to teachers as they work to overcome the tight resources, isolation, time constraints and other obstacles they commonly encounter in today’s schools. Within a strong professional community, for example, teachers can work collectively to set and enforce standards of instruction and learning. ... In schools where professional community is strong, teachers work together more effectively and put more effort into creating and sustaining opportunities for student learning.”

In an analysis of teacher reports, David Strahan suggested that the improvement of instruction was rooted in teachers’ abilities to collaborate. “Analysis of 51 original interviews and 28 new interviews indicated that personnel at these schools reported developing supportive cultures that enabled participants to coordinate efforts to improve instruction and strengthen professional learning communities. The central dynamic in this development was ‘data-directed dialogue,’ purposeful conversations, guided by formal assessment and informal observation, which connected the ways adults and students cared for each other and that provided energy to sustain their efforts.” (Strahan, 2003)

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals, (Brough, 2013), effective collaborative leadership practices in schools include (among others) (1) a forum to elicit input (data collection) from all stakeholders and an evaluation system to assess practices, programs and policies; (2) professional learning communities or teams; (3) educators who regularly discuss professional literature; (4) engaged parents; (5) peer coaching; and (6) communication mechanisms that help to keep everyone informed.

In a study of 9,000 teachers, Kraft and Papay (Kraft 2014) reported on the impact of professional context on differing rates of improvement and growth among teachers over time. “In some schools, teachers improve at much greater rates than in others. We find that this improvement is strongly related to the opportunities and supports provided by the professional context in which they work. ... In contrast to a one-time investment in teacher skills, teachers have the potential to benefit from the learning opportunities provided by a supportive professional environment every day.”

### LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

For more than 15 years, the ABC Unified School District in southeast Los Angeles County has capitalized on a long-term labor-management partnership to strengthen professional community. The collaboration is characterized by a set of guiding behaviors. “All negotiations support conditions that sustain teaching and student learning,” wrote Mary Sieu, district superintendent (Sieu, 2015). “We won’t let each other fail. We also work hard to understand the core of each other’s job, and respect each other.”

Structurally, the partnership is ready to meet almost any challenge. By valuing relationships, communication, trust and regular meetings, ABC professionals share the responsibility for focusing on solvable problems, holding one another accountable, and shared decision-making.

One strategy employed by ABCUSD is an annual “PAL” (Partnership with Administration and Labor) retreat. Participants include all district principals and their respective union representatives, other district leaders and members of the board of education. The agenda is set jointly by a PAL committee of district and union leaders.

The annual PAL retreat remains a cornerstone of community-building and collaboration in the district. With an emphasis on joint leadership and representation, the retreat functions as “a time to recognize the hard work that educators do in their schools every day, to provide inspiration, and to give school and union leaders a chance to cooperate on a new

project to improve learning at their schools.” (American Federation of Teachers, 2012)

Another PAL committee was tasked in 2011 to create and administer a school climate survey. Data from the survey informed the important 2014 study (Rubinstein and McCarthy, 2014) of the impact of labor-management collaboration on student achievement. One study conclusion spoke to the effect of collaboration on teachers’ everyday work: “High quality teacher-administrator partnerships predicted “denser” school-level collaboration and communication around (a) student performance data; (b) curriculum development, cross-subject integration or grade-to-grade integration; (c) sharing, advising or learning about instructional practices; and (d) giving or receiving mentoring.” All of these factors led to large and significant gains in student performance and improvement, which ABC Federation of Teachers President Ray Gaer repeatedly states “is the main thing.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** contact Ray Gaer at [raygun1966@yahoo.com](mailto:raygun1966@yahoo.com); to learn more about the mission and the principles that guide the ABC partnership, see Appendix B.

# 02

## LABOR-MANAGEMENT COLLABORATION

**Labor-management collaboration** is the most effective mechanism for engaging stakeholders to forge growth-oriented systems for teacher development and evaluation. Together, teachers and administrators must cultivate and nurture a shared vision, values, expectations and investments in improving teaching and learning. MOUs (memoranda of understanding) and other written agreements fortify commitments about teacher evaluation systems and their related activities—such as professional learning, evaluator training, mentoring and induction programs, the use of data, peer assistance and review (PAR), and measures of student achievement—and strengthen the mission of growing teacher quality, and student achievement.

### THE RESEARCH

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education explored the issue of school labor-management collaboration in a conference that brought together representatives from 150 school districts. In its Statement of Purpose for the conference, the department suggested that “the fundamental strength of a constructive labor-management relationship is its reciprocal nature. ... Boards, administrators, and teachers can build on this strength and use it as a vehicle to uphold rigorous academic standards, elevate the teaching profession by advancing teacher quality, drive school and instructional improvement, and *make student achievement the heart of their relationship.*” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011)

In an in-depth study of six school districts, researchers Rubinstein and McCarthy (2011) concluded that “formal union-management site-based teams can effectively share

decision-making around budgets, curriculum, scheduling, professional development, recruitment and hiring, school safety, strategic planning and student performance data analysis to target areas for improvement.”

Finally, describing a case study analysis, authors Futernick, et al., asserted that “labor-management collaboration (LMC) ... leads to improved professional relationships, characterized by increased trust, communication and empowerment among key district stakeholders; ... has been instrumental in the adoption of district policies that are associated with improved student learning, including policies on teacher evaluation, peer assistance and review, leadership improvement programs, and extended learning time; and ... often leads to improved district capacity for collaborative problem-solving, which has been particularly useful in addressing fiscal crises, reducing teacher grievances and solving student achievement challenges.” (Futernick, K., et al., 2013)

### L-M COLLABORATION BUILDS PROBLEM-SOLVING CAPACITY

In Berea, Ohio, the prevailing sentiment is that schools with stronger labor-management partnerships are likely to have more extensive communications networks and exhibit more effective patterns of collaboration. Brian Kessler, president of the Berea Federation of Teachers describes what he calls “true win-win bargaining.”

“Our focus is always on the problem to be solved and not on what we can acquire [through bargaining].” Kessler says that using such an approach has made solving district problems—ranging from districtwide to building-level challenges—possible. “Each time, we are able to come through with a solution that is usually better than either side initially proposed.

“Due to our success,” continues Kessler, “the district does not spend time or energy in adversarial conversations but on meeting the many challenges we face. Often, the district management consults the union leadership prior to

making decisions, many of which are not contract-related. It took time to build that trust, and we often work to honor that trust.”

**TO LEARN MORE** about success in Berea, contact Brian Kessler at [bkessler@berea.k12.oh.us](mailto:bkessler@berea.k12.oh.us).

# 03

## TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS MATTER

### District, school, and classroom contexts

**matter.** Any evaluation of teaching must consider the conditions and environments teachers face every day, including the real-life challenges faced by students both in and out of school. At the school and district levels, important factors in the professional context, school climate, and systems of support must also be considered in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

### THE RESEARCH

Classrooms are complex learning environments. They are filled with learners with their own unique demographic profiles, learning styles, and prior knowledge and abilities. But classrooms also are embedded in broader contexts of communities, state and federal mandates, professional cultures, leadership climates, and physical spaces that bear on teachers' capacity to successfully carry out their professional responsibilities. These contexts are rarely considered in teacher evaluation and development systems; moreover, assessing the impact of these contexts is a difficult but essential task.

The New Teacher Center, a national nonprofit organization, recently published a report (2014) that summarized the opinions of more than 375,000 teachers regarding the conditions of teaching and learning in their schools. Opinions were gathered by a survey that explored educators' experience in the following areas: time, facilities and resources, professional development, school leadership, teacher leadership, instructional practices and support, managing student conduct, and community support and involvement. The study concluded that:

- Educators report the most positive conditions associated with facilities and resources.
- Educators' perceptions of school leadership indicate that, while teachers are held to high standards, an

environment of trust in which teachers can raise concerns does not exist.

- Educators also indicate that their schools promote community support and involvement as it relates to student learning but also need strategies to ensure engagement.
- Educators perceive they have instructional autonomy in the area of instructional practices and support but lack access to state assessment data in time to affect instructional choices.
- While teachers view professional learning as largely aligned with school improvement planning, they report that PD lacks differentiation and an evaluation component to meet individual needs.
- Educators consistently report that they lack time to collaborate and plan.

In an analysis of teaching and learning conditions in Massachusetts schools, researcher Susan Moore Johnson concluded that "the working conditions that mattered most to teachers were those that shaped the social context of teaching and learning in their school—the school culture, the principal's leadership and the teachers' relationships with their colleagues. Teachers who worked in more favorable work environments reported being more satisfied and less likely to plan to transfer or leave teaching than their peers in schools with less favorable conditions, even after controlling for student demographics and other school and teacher characteristics." (Johnson, Susan Moore, 2012)

### PUTTING SURVEY RESULTS TO WORK

In North Syracuse (N.Y.) Central School District, the input of teachers and principals is highly valued in establishing priorities for school improvement. One mechanism the district has employed is the Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey (see the NYSUT website in Appendix D), administered three times over the last few years. Participation in the 30-minute survey was both voluntary and anonymous.



“We thought it absolutely essential to do the survey more than once,” says John Kuryla, president of the North Syracuse Education Association and i3 coordinator. “We wanted to establish some baseline data in the first administration. In subsequent surveys, it then was possible to see how things had changed over time.”

Teachers and principals both completed the survey, and the data garnered from it have been used across all levels of the district to target school improvement efforts. Each school building planning team (BPT) was co-chaired by a teacher and the building principal who were provided with their building survey results to share and review with their respective staffs. Each BPT disaggregated the data and thoughtfully analyzed it for patterns and insights, in order to identify building-level concerns that might benefit from a targeted improvement effort. Each team set building goals, ranging from access to PD, to support for and consistency of student discipline, to access to collaborative planning time, to increased discussion regarding the building’s budget.

“I believe the greatest success borne from the Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey is found in one of our elementary schools,” says Mary Eidt, third-grade teacher, Cicero (N.Y.) Elementary School. “The staff utilized the survey findings describing a greater need and support for collaborative planning to innovate and redesign their elementary schedule. Now it [the schedule] includes professional learning community time for all staff.”

Results from the survey were of value not only to individual schools, but also to the district as a whole. “At the district level, the Teaching and Learning Survey results have been used to guide our Professional Learning Plan and staff-led Community of Learning Professionals by providing longitudinal data that supports the differentiated professional learning model we’ve adopted,” says Alicia Pizzuto, assistant superintendent, North Syracuse Central School District. “Further, the district and the association have reviewed the information at our district steering committee and have planned visits to sites that, per the survey data, knocked it out of the park. This survey is an amazing tool to quantitatively dig deep into staff

perceptions and utilize the results alongside student assessment data, attendance and discipline data. It reinforces that staff perception is valuable and important.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about success in North Syracuse, contact John Kuryla at [jkuryla@nscsd.org](mailto:jkuryla@nscsd.org).

# 04

## RUBRICS, TRAINING AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

### Rubrics based on teaching standards

are powerful mechanisms for training and empowering teachers. With a shared and transparent understanding of good teaching, stakeholders leverage rubric expectations to identify evidence of effectiveness across the evaluation and development process. Rubrics provide a common language for discussions and encourage reflection.

### THE RESEARCH

The adoption of a teacher practice rubric for use by evaluators and teachers signals a district's intent to hold professionals to teaching standards. The rubric is also a tool for framing discussions, identifying performance strengths and growth areas, preparing for observations, identifying evidence, and fostering collegial conversations.

Kim Marshall, writing in 2014, suggested that rather than using a rubric as a "checklist"... rubrics should inform teachers' work and supervisors' observations throughout the year and serve as a memory prompt and structuring protocol when it's time to evaluate the year's work." (Marshall, 2014)

The use of a rubric also provides the platform for a shared language between teachers and evaluators, and redirects conversations away from "personal" assessments and directly toward strategies for growth in instructional practice.

New York State United Teachers described their work in rubric development: "The rubric extends the [teaching] standards ... through clear and detailed descriptions of effective teaching practices, and provides educators with a vocabulary and structure for articulating the more complex and subtle dimensions of teaching practice. This vocabulary establishes language for teacher self-reflection and goal-setting, and facilitates the essential conversations that must

take place between teachers and evaluators. ... The rubric helps to establish teachers as full participants in evaluation and continual professional growth. It describes specific, measurable and/or observable behaviors in and out of the classroom. The rubric clearly defines the expectations for each element's performance indicators to provide for objective evaluations and fair and consistent ratings of effectiveness." (New York State United Teachers, 2014)

### CULTURE OF TRUST EMPOWERS DEARBORN

Before teacher evaluation became law, and before Race to the Top, Dearborn Public Schools in Michigan were ahead of the curve. In 2007, DPS already was using an early rubric as a framework for teacher evaluation and development. "At that time, of course, only evaluators were trained," says Chris Sipperley, president of the Dearborn Federation of Teachers. "But Dearborn always knew the process was more than a checklist. Early on, we formed a joint labor-management committee on teacher evaluation. Because these conversations started early, involved all stakeholders, and were ongoing, Dearborn has not suffered the 'growing pains' that many other districts have had to endure."

The cultural fixture of positive labor-management relations is to be credited for making Dearborn's capacity to adjust its system, and to "grow" it without hitting too many bumps in the road. "We have a long-standing culture of trust in Dearborn," notes Superintendent Glenn Maleyko. "Our Teacher Evaluation Committee—which is comprised of representatives from the union, from the administration and from human resources, as well as grade-level reps—is hard-working and perceptive, and demonstrates great agility in responding to new ideas, changes and innovations. This agility, in particular, means that when new ideas affecting teacher development and evaluation arise in Dearborn, the whole committee mobilizes to ensure that every stakeholder is informed. This transparency, achieved through information-sharing and training, makes implementation a much smoother process."

In 2015, Dearborn Public Schools adopted a new rubric and moved data/evidence collection to an electronic platform.

Training is ongoing for every person in the system; to date, all principals have been trained in a train-the-trainer model, and workshops are offered for all staff (at a variety of times to accommodate schedules) during the busy first quarter of the school year.

Superintendent Maleyko is justifiably proud of Dearborn's accomplishments, but knows the work is far from done. "In the spirit of continuous improvement, our labor-management collaboration insists on embracing the notion of teacher evaluation and development as 'a work in progress.' We make every effort to keep the lines of communication open, and we require that meetings substantively address questions about teacher evaluation and development and keep us focused on making decisions that ultimately are right for our students."

Union President Christine Sipperley agrees. "Reminding everyone that a 'work-in-progress' attitude can foster creativity goes a long way to strengthening our members' eagerness to provide a continuous stream of feedback, whether that's about shifting priorities or changes to the evaluation system. Our district culture values trust, honesty, openness and transparency. Our teachers have genuine buy-in and trust the evaluation process because they know they have a voice in it, because they know their concerns will be acted upon."

**TO LEARN MORE** about success in Dearborn, contact Christine Sipperley at [csipperley@dft681.org](mailto:csipperley@dft681.org).

# 05

## THE USE OF MULTIPLE MEASURES

**The use of multiple measures** ensures that the picture of teaching that emerges from evaluation processes points to multiple opportunities for professional growth, not only for individual teachers, but also for the entire school community. No single measure can capture the multidimensional sets of skills and talents displayed in effective teaching and learning.

### THE RESEARCH

Innovative teacher development and evaluation systems incorporate the use of multiple measures as an essential strategy for capturing the rich and complex activity of teaching. Moreover, multiple measures increase confidence in evaluation systems, and provide data and perspectives that can identify unique sources of information about a teacher's instructional capacity and specific areas for professional growth.

Summarizing trends in teacher evaluation systems across the United States, the Center for Public Education (Center for Public Education, 2014) reported that "41 states require or recommend teachers be evaluated on multiple measures as a more complete and accurate gauge of performance. No state evaluates teachers on test scores alone."

Goe, Biggers and Croft (Goe, 2012) reported that "multiple measures paint a more complete and elaborate picture of a teacher's strengths and weaknesses, ensuring better alignment with professional growth opportunities. The evidence-collection tools and scoring rubrics associated with different measures then serve to define expectations, justify scores and create the opportunity to 'diagnose' and target areas where professional growth is desired."

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's MET (Measures of Effective Teaching) Study, which engaged more than 3,000 teachers, concluded that "multiple measures also produce more consistent ratings than student achievement

measures alone. Estimates of teachers' effectiveness are more stable from year to year when they combine classroom observations, student surveys, and measures of student achievement gains than when they are based solely on the latter." (The MET Project, 2013)

### MULTIPLE MEASURES AND SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

The six Rhode Island "Innovation" districts, supported by the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) recognize that collaboration between support professionals—such as library media specialists, school nurses, reading specialists, counselors, psychologists, social workers and language and speech pathologists—and teachers and administrators is an essential component of a highly effective learning community.

While the Rhode Island Department of Education required all teachers to be evaluated through a state-approved evaluation system by 2011, this requirement did not go into effect for support professionals until 2013, and there were no tools available to guide SP evaluations and provide them with the feedback they desired. Realizing that the teacher evaluation tool was not appropriate for evaluating support professionals, the RIFTHP brought together representatives of the SP disciplines to create an Innovation Model Rubric based on the standards of their specific professional practice. Each professional is evaluated in three areas:

- Professional practice, which includes collaboration with colleagues and the quality of services delivered.
- Professional responsibilities, which includes fulfilling school responsibilities, communications and professionalism.
- Student learning.

"Because the rubrics developed for teacher evaluation neither reflected the scope nor the nature of our work," says Mare Zamminer, a speech pathologist from Woonsocket, RIFTHP knew that defining our work and developing our own rubric was an essential step in 'owning our profession.'

I really appreciate that the RIFTHP convened this working group made up of support professionals to identify the essential skills and competencies that a performance rubric should address.” Calculating an effectiveness score for support professionals derives from multiple measures of collaboration, service delivery, professional responsibilities and student learning, which derive from observations; review of data, records, and artifacts; professional growth goals; and student learning objectives.

“Being academically prepared for college and career is only one part of educating the ‘whole child,” says Principal Keith Remillard. “There’s no doubt that the support professionals in our school contribute to our students’ readiness, health and the social-emotional well-being that is a cornerstone of the ability to learn. Support professionals want and deserve to be held to high standards.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about success in Rhode Island, especially about working with support professionals, contact Colleen Callahan at [rftcol@aol.com](mailto:rftcol@aol.com).

# 06

## EVALUATOR TRAINING

### The continuous improvement of evaluators

is critical to ensure fairness, objectivity and rigor. New evaluation and development systems not only strengthen teachers, but also evaluators. As rubrics change or standards are updated, evaluators must be conversant with new rubric content, changing curricula and the needs of special populations, such as English language learners and students with disabilities. They must understand the types of evidence that meet the criteria for specific performance expectations. Inter-rater reliability should be assessed frequently across evaluators and schools in the district.

### THE RESEARCH

The evaluation of teachers by their principals, peers or others requires extensive training in the use of rubrics, an understanding of the alignment of teacher performance to teaching standards, the use of multiple measures, observation protocols, score calculation, and preparation and delivery of feedback. Regardless of the quality of the initial training used to prepare evaluators, periodic refreshers are necessary to ensure accuracy, to support understanding through practice, and to confirm calibration among evaluators.

Researchers Carrie Mathers and Michelle Oliva were clear on this point: “Lack of training can threaten the reliability of the evaluation and the objectivity of the results. Not only do evaluators need a good understanding of what quality teaching is, but they also need to understand the evaluation rubric and the characteristics and behaviors it intends to measure. Without adequate training, observers may be unaware of the potential bias that they are introducing during their observations. ... All evaluators should be trained on the evaluation instruments and methods. Part of the training should focus on ensuring inter-rater reliability (i.e., all evaluators come to the same conclusion after using the same

rubric for the same teacher).” (Mathers, 2008)

Charlotte Danielson described the ongoing challenge of proper training: A credible system of teacher evaluation requires higher levels of proficiency of evaluators than the old checklist, “drive-by” observation model. Evaluators need to be able to assess accurately, provide meaningful feedback and engage teachers in productive conversations about practice. (Danielson, 2011)

To fortify the calibration of (agreement among) evaluators, some districts have turned to “master coding,” in their training programs. Master coding is the use of videos of teaching practice that have been correctly scored by professionals trained in the use of rubrics as it applies to the observation of classroom instruction. “...The engagement of principals, teachers and peer observers in a master coding

**“While educators receive a ‘final effectiveness rating,’ the true take-away from the process results from conversations that turn into actionable and powerful steps for improvement.”**

— KEITH REMILLARD, principal, Wakefield Hills Elementary School, West Warwick, R.I.; District Evaluation Committee member, Innovation Consortium master scorer, peer evaluator

process can help foster a shared agreement about what effective teaching looks like, which is essential to the buy-in and success of any feedback and evaluation system. Master coding can help clarify a rubric’s language, and it can help those who code provide better feedback when they work with teachers.” (McClellan, MET Project, 2013)

Perhaps no lesson regarding the training of evaluators is more important than this: Evaluators need continuous support, development and training to maintain a high degree of competency in their roles. “Because the task [of observation] is complex, observers can continuously make small improvements in their application of the rubric, their skills in collecting evidence and assigning it to the appropriate scale, their ability to follow and dissect complex

classroom interactions, and their ability to translate an accurate scale-level assignment into useful and actionable feedback. ... As classroom observation becomes a key aspect of job performance, a system of rewards for continuous improvement in observation skills must be created as well.” (McClellan, Atkinson and Danielson, 2012)

## **EVALUATOR TRAINING SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

“The Innovation Consortium model for teacher evaluation has dramatically changed the experience for educators and evaluators. ... The old evaluation model left too much room for subjectivity and judgment while the Innovation model is based purely on evidence to support clear criteria. This change significantly aided in transforming teacher evaluation into a true system of feedback and support,” says Keith Remillard, principal, Wakefield Hills Elementary School in West Warwick.

“While the old system provided rudimentary and generalized guidance around evaluation indicators, the Innovation rubrics are founded in research and outline specific practices that apply to 21st-century teaching. The evidence the evaluator collects through observation is factual and clearly connected to the rubric indicators. Hence, conversations between evaluators and educators during the process have become objective and grounded to the rubrics. ... The Innovation model provides clear criteria by which evaluators can provide specific feedback resulting in supportive and productive conversations.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about success in Rhode Island, especially about evaluator training, contact Colleen Callahan at [rftcol@aol.com](mailto:rftcol@aol.com).

# 07

## TIMELY FEEDBACK

**Timely feedback** provided by evaluators should focus on evidence from observations and other measures grounded in the language/expectations of the rubric, and the evidence should provide the basis for judgments, recommended adjustments to teaching practice, and professional learning and interventions designed to support professional growth.

### THE RESEARCH

Feedback mechanisms are powerful and specific ways of communicating with teachers about the ways in which they excel in the classroom and how their instructional practice achieves learning goals. Quality feedback focuses on the effectiveness of an effort to achieve a specific goal (“goal-referenced”); according to researcher Grant Wiggins (2012), it should also be tangible, transparent, user-friendly, timely, ongoing and consistent.

Across the United States, new teacher evaluation and development schemes that provide valuable feedback to their teachers do so in the context of a standards-based rubric. Rubrics point to specific classroom and professional skills, knowledge, abilities and dispositions that are observable. When an evaluator observes a teacher, the rubric provides a shared point of reference—replete with specifically described performance-related criteria—as the basis for the actionable feedback teachers and evaluators will discuss. Most important, this discussion will drive the type of support offered to teachers. Teachers in need of improvement may receive an evidence-driven program of support such as weekly mentoring; a teacher performing at a higher level of effectiveness may be empowered to determine a professional growth plan with more independence and latitude, although the plan is still evidence-based.

Synthesizing data from 17 states and the District of Columbia, Chad Aldeman and Carolyn Chuong (Aldeman

and Chuong, 2014) reported that “schools are providing teachers with better, timelier feedback on their practice. ... With most of the attention on teacher evaluation reform focusing on student growth, it’s easy to forget about the importance of actually observing teacher and principal performance. But qualitative data offer valuable feedback on teacher performance, helping educators make real-time changes to their instructional practices. A teacher’s overall evaluation rating cannot help a teacher improve unless it is accompanied by formative, actionable feedback based on observations of practice.”

### FEEDBACK SHAPES TEACHING PRACTICE FROM PREK-12

Building evaluation systems that keep the practice of feedback front and center requires supportive training for teachers and administrators. To address this issue, the AFT pulled together a number of teacher-administrator teams from across the country. The goal of their meetings was to develop guidance that would define and promote the optimal use of feedback for schools and districts.

The guidance tool that the teams developed provides background on the best practices that support effective feedback. Importantly, guiding questions help labor-management, PD, school, classroom and district teams explore their preparation and strategies to ensure that the feedback they provide supports teaching and learning for all students and contributes to the professional growth of instructional staff.

In Cincinnati, the trusting and open relationships between evaluators and teachers have yielded opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice: “Timely feedback has been extremely helpful and informative in facilitating reflective evaluation of my practice,” says Juanita Johnson, a teacher at Dater Montessori in Cincinnati. “I find it helpful to have additional ideas and recommendations that can be implemented with ease. Immediate feedback gives me the opportunity to incorporate supplementary strategies that improve both my competency and more importantly my students’ instructional experiences. I invest



a lot of energy in creating engaging lessons and ensuring student success, but I understand that every lesson has room for improvement,” adds Johnson.

“Consequently, feedback from my evaluator allows me to enhance my practice in ways I hadn’t considered,” Johnson points out. “This creates a sense of partnership with my instructional leader, and I deeply value this aspect of the process.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about success with feedback in Cincinnati, contact Juanita Johnson at [johnsju@cps-k12.org](mailto:johnsju@cps-k12.org).

**Professional development** must be tailored to meet **teacher needs identified through evaluation results**. Growing the effectiveness of the teacher workforce depends on connecting research-based professional learning to instructional practice.

Districts should have policies and practices in place to ensure systematic review, analysis and use of evaluation data in order to target professional development and other supports at the district, school and individual levels.

## THE RESEARCH

The professional development of educators—targeted, meaningful, and appropriate—should be the result of an integrated system of teacher evaluation. This professional development may take many forms, ranging from traditional models to newer, job-embedded designs that emphasize collaboration, common planning, peer feedback and professional practice.

In a report that summarized findings from *Chicago's Excellence in Teaching Pilot*, the authors concluded that "... a successful evidence-based teacher evaluation system must ensure that these tools, ratings and systems are supported by professional development that helps principals and teachers to re-conceptualize teacher evaluation as a process intended to promote and support teacher development. ..." (Sartain, et al., 2011)

The report further identified that in order to leverage the evaluation process for instructional improvement, it was essential to "link evaluations to professional development."

Laura Goe, et al., (2011) also identified the importance of linking evaluation results with PD: "Using evaluation results to support professional learning is likely the most significant

phase of the evaluation cycle. ... Evaluation results can then be used to identify individual, school, and districtwide needs; target professional learning; gauge teacher growth; and identify potential mentors."

Linda Darling-Hammond's 2012 report identified "aligned professional learning opportunities that support the improvement of teachers and teaching quality" as a critical element. "These [opportunities] should link both formal professional development and job-embedded learning opportunities to the evaluation system. Evaluations should trigger continuous goal-setting for areas teachers want to work on, high-quality professional development supports and coaching, and opportunities to share expertise."

## CHANGING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE CONNECTED TO EVALUATION RESULTS

The goal of connecting evaluation results to professional learning has spurred a sea change in Cranston, R.I. The district has committed a full-time position to ensuring that teachers' professional development (mandated by law) is directly related to their jobs. The position, coordinator of Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development, is supported by a union-district collaboration in the form of a district evaluation committee (DEC). In 2014 alone, participation in evaluation-related professional learning opportunities increased from 200 to more than 600 teachers.

"Prior to the RIEESS (Rhode Island Educator Evaluation and Support System), my district was using a checklist of skills based on Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 2011) with limited feedback, except at an end-of-year conference to review the already completed document," says Kathleen Torregrossa, coordinator of Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development for the Cranston, R.I., Public Schools.

"The implementation of the RIEESS rubric and accompanying local policies to support it has increased collegial conversations between teachers; increased specific

meaningful evaluator feedback on educator practice based on evidence; improved the design of professional development sessions to meet the explicit educator needs in order to improve practice; ensured equity due to the high-quality training evaluators receive; and includes data review to determine supportive needs for practitioners,” she notes. “This evaluation system truly encompasses all the research-based aspects of a teacher support system: evaluation, feedback, professional development, and goal setting.”

**TO LEARN MORE** about success in Cranston, R.I., contact Kathleen Torregrossa at [kat97teach@aol.com](mailto:kat97teach@aol.com).

# 09

## A DIFFERENTIATED EVALUATION PROCESS

### A differentiated evaluation process (DEP)

is an alternative approach to the idea that in evaluation, “one size fits all.” Instead, a DEP recognizes and considers appropriate expectations for each individual’s role, an individual’s unique needs identified by the process, and then recommends and provides support tailored for each educator’s professional growth.

### THE RESEARCH

In districts where teacher development and evaluation systems both honor teachers’ work and support professional growth, many implementers are turning to strategies of differentiation.

Differentiation strategies are used for several specific purposes: (1) to personalize professional growth planning, (2) to ease the extraordinary administrative burdens placed on evaluators, peer evaluators and principals responsible for carrying out observations and related activities, (3) to efficiently direct resources to teachers most in need of support, (4) to recognize teachers’ individual capacities to build upon their professional strengths through customized, teacher-directed professional growth activities and (5) to meaningfully connect all teachers’ evaluation results to targeted support.

In the context of teacher evaluation and development, “differentiation” refers to the latitude some districts leverage to carry out the specifics of the evaluation process. For example, some districts elect to vary the number of observations of teachers (although still meeting minimum state regulations); others vary the frequency/cycle or the format (formal vs. informal) of observations or the type of observer; still others vary options in professional development (independent vs. directed).

In 2014, the Carnegie Foundation (White, 2014) reported

that in a study of school systems that employed a differentiated process, “evidence ... suggests that they [differentiation strategies] have helped districts deploy their resources more strategically.” Even where system leaders have added new components (e.g., training for new types of observers) to their evaluation systems, they report that their investment in more adaptable evaluation systems has allowed them to better match teachers with the supervision and support they need.”

Differentiation provides opportunities for all teachers: Those who are high performing are rewarded with more autonomy and a wider range of choices for professional growth; those in need of growth receive the support they need.

In 2013, Rachel Curtis, writing on behalf of the Aspen Institute wrote: “Once we draw distinctions in teaching quality, we can create differentiated, dynamic roles for the most effective teachers to maximize their impact on both their students and their colleagues. ... The promise lies in defining the processes that are most critical to student learning and then designing teacher leadership in service of them, rather than defining teacher leadership roles first and then figuring out how they can support the most important work.” (Curtis, R., 2013)

“When we combine best teaching practices with real-time, differentiated professional development, magic happens.”

— MARY LOU MEGARR, teacher and president, Plattsburgh Teachers’ Association

### IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICES SUPPORTS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In Plattsburgh, N.Y., an emphasis on best practices is driving student achievement. Superintendent James “Jake” Short says, “When we started building this plane [the teacher evaluation system]—and realized we needed

to build it, paint it and fly it at the same time—we had to force ourselves to think everything through, look at the student impact and the impact on our faculty and staff, and carefully choose which best practices would work in our schools. It hasn't been perfect, but at least we've been thoughtful about the process."

**TO LEARN MORE** about Plattsburgh's success, contact Mary Lou Megarr at [mmegarr@plattscsd.org](mailto:mmegarr@plattscsd.org).

These best practices, or high-leverage indicators (also known as HLTPs: high leverage teaching practices), as they are sometimes described, include diving into student data to drive instruction and taking a closer look at how students learn best; working on vertical and horizontal teams within each building and across the district; utilizing the expertise of the peer evaluators (PAR consultant teachers); and a willingness to think outside the box. Some of the biggest surprises were the levels of student engagement teachers now incorporate into their daily lessons and the professional collaboration taking place to improve teaching and learning.

"Best practices" may vary from school to school based on data analysis, feedback, instructional practice and scheduling, as well as a variety of other factors.

HLTPs (those most likely to have an effect on student learning), identified by Jim Knight, research associate at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, (Frank, 2008) are classroom management, content planning, instruction and assessment for learning. Still other researchers from Teaching Works at the University of Michigan (Teaching Works, 2015), offer a longer list of 19 HLTPs.

Plattsburgh Teachers' Association president and second-grade teacher Mary Lou Megarr, a 33-year teaching veteran, describes it this way: "Very few education reforms or initiatives have had the effect this has had on student achievement. When we combine best teaching practices with real-time, differentiated professional development, magic happens. But making this magic happen takes strong labor-management teams, a willingness to tackle the tough questions, and leaving egos at the door so teaching and learning can remain the focus."

## CONCLUSION

The lessons presented here compellingly illustrate the myriad ways in which teachers and their allies are taking charge of their professions. From building and fortifying strong labor-management partnerships, to engaging teachers as peer evaluators, to recognizing that differentiation strengthens our ability to see teachers as professionals, innovative districts have embraced new strategies that reflect the changing culture of determining teacher effectiveness. With an evaluation system's emphasis centered on teacher growth, students will consistently and progressively benefit from the skilled, competent and caring attention of an increasingly accomplished workforce capable of meeting the instructional demands of 21st-century classrooms.

New teacher evaluation and development systems are an important element in ensuring that every student is taught by a highly effective teacher. Schools, districts, unions and the government must work collaboratively with this goal in mind, and build partnerships that advance the research, practice and integrity essential to supporting teachers in the work they do every day.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### A NOTE ON THE USE OF TEST SCORES

A classroom is a dynamic environment in which much more than subject matter content is taught. Still, in many states, an emphasis on test scores compromises teachers' abilities and opportunities to attend to the complex developmental and learning challenges each student brings to school; an emphasis on test scores creates environments where teachers feel compelled to "teach to the test."

Many teacher evaluation schemes require the inclusion of test scores as one of the multiple measures utilized to compute an effectiveness rating. Disentangling any individual student's achievement from the multiplicity of factors that contribute to success is a daunting and ultimately impossible task. "Test-based teacher evaluation methods too often measure the life circumstances of the students teachers have, not how well they teach." (FairTest, 2014)

The use of value-added models (VAMs), though utilized by some states, has been widely discredited. "Using VAMs for individual teacher evaluation is based on the belief that measured achievement gains for a specific teacher's students reflect that teacher's 'effectiveness.' This attribution, however, assumes that student learning is measured well

by a given test, influenced by the teacher alone, and independent from the growth of classmates and other aspects of the classroom context. None of these assumptions is well supported by current evidence." (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2012)

Given the limitations of test scores to accurately measure the instructional performance of teachers, they should never be the sole or even the predominant indicator of student growth or teacher effectiveness. Moreover, test scores provide little if any actionable information to help teachers improve their practice. This is why any teacher evaluation system that hopes to increase student achievement must incorporate multiple measures of both instructional skill and student growth.

**State tests often do not measure what's being taught in the classroom.** Test scores should be used for the purposes for which they were intended. Student test scores are not a sufficient indicator of teacher effectiveness. An overemphasis on test scores encourages teachers to "teach to the test"; test scores fail to capture the complexity of teaching and the influence of other factors on learning, and may drive teachers from the profession if they perceive that testing—and not learning—is at the center of a school's culture.

## APPENDIX B

### AN EXCERPT FROM “THE ABC’S OF PARTNERSHIP: CREATING A LABOR-MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP FOCUSED ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT”

#### **The Partnership’s Mission Statement**

The ABC Partnership is a collaborative effort to improve student achievement and to enhance the teaching and working environment for faculty, staff and administration through the institutional partnering of colleagues in the ABC Unified School District and the ABC Federation of Teachers. Faculty and administration should have a voice in those decisions that reflect the collaborative efforts and goals of the partnership emphasizing a common understanding of the issues, joint research, sharing of information, mutual respect and working together to ensure each other’s success.

#### **The Partnership’s Guiding Principles**

- All students can succeed, and we will not accept any excuse that prevents that from happening in ABC. We will work together to promote student success.
- All needed support will be made available to schools to ensure every student succeeds. We will work together to ensure that happens.
- The top 5 percent of teachers in our profession should teach our students. We will work

together to hire, train and retain these professionals.

- All employees contribute to student success.
- All negotiations support conditions that sustain successful teaching and student learning. This is the MAIN THING!
- We won’t let each other fail.

#### **The Partnership’s Guiding Principles—Behaviors**

- We will work hard to understand the core of each other’s job.
- We will respect each other.
- We will be honest with each other.
- We will not “sugar coat” difficult issues.
- We will disagree without being disagreeable.
- We will reflect on each other’s comments, suggestions and concerns.
- We will seek clarification until we understand.
- We will maintain confidentiality.
- We will both “own the contract.”
- We will solve problems rather than win arguments.
- We will laugh at ourselves and with each other.

**FIND MORE INFORMATION** about ABC’s unique partnership at [http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/if\\_abcsofpartnership\\_2012.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/if_abcsofpartnership_2012.pdf).

## APPENDIX C

Changing attitudes about growth-oriented teacher development and evaluation are evident in system innovations:	
In the “olden” days	In innovative, smart TDE systems
One observer (once/ year)	Multiple observers at multiple points in time
A simple checklist	A standards-based rubric
Student outcomes ignored	Student outcomes included (as appropriate)
PD is “one size fits all”	Customized, targeted PD aligned to teacher needs
A singular measure	Multiple measures
Administrator as evaluator	Administrators, peer evaluators and master coders
Goal to sort good/bad teachers	Professional growth is the goal for every teacher
Vague, inconsistent feedback	Feedback is actionable, supportive, specific

## APPENDIX D

### RESOURCES

#### **New York State United Teachers**

<http://www.nysut.org>

#### **Rhode Island**

<http://www.rifthp.org>

#### **Lessons from AFT Labor-Management Case Studies**

<http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/lmclessons03-06-14.pdf>

#### **Cultivating Collaboration**

[www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Anrig.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Anrig.pdf)

#### **Teacher Feedback and Continuous Improvement**

<http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/feedbackbrochure.pdf>

#### **Evaluations That Help Teachers Learn**

<http://otheroptions.cmswiki.wikispaces.net/file/view/Evaluations+that+Help+Teachers+Learn.pdf>

#### **It’s Elemental: A Quick Guide to Implementing Evaluation and Development Systems.**

The challenging process of implementing a teacher evaluation system is described in this widely disseminated AFT publication.

[http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/tde\\_ie\\_itselemental\\_2012.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/tde_ie_itselemental_2012.pdf)

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*A Union of Professionals*  
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.  
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