

Use research-based teacher evaluation

PSEA supports professional evaluation systems that are based upon clear standards, encourage professional growth across a teaching career, take account of organizational supports and barriers to effective teaching, empower teachers to examine their work, and are based upon multiple sources of evidence and linked to teacher professional development.

PSEA Recommendation

- Develop statewide teacher evaluation policies that are evidence-based, supported by research, and use multiple measures.
- Ensure that teachers have an opportunity to provide meaningful input into the evaluation process.
- Ensure that the evaluation system is designed to improve practice.

Use multiple measures

The art and science of teaching are both complex and multifaceted. As researchers develop a clearer understanding of the many components of effective teaching, experts also have examined research about professional evaluation to make traditional teacher evaluation systems more effective. Current research has defined several components of effective professional evaluation systems that can be applied to teachers.

A set of challenging standards to define appropriate practice. When professional standards form the basis of an evaluation system, administrators know what to measure and teachers know what to demonstrate. Both teachers and administrators are able to reflect on good practice, and teachers are able to revise their work with a clear goal in mind. Consequently, tying evaluation to professional standards produces more positive change than simply evaluating teachers on test score results.¹

The flexibility to relate the teaching standards to local organizational goals. Within the context of statewide standards, effective teacher evaluation systems allow schools and districts to prioritize specific teacher behaviors, knowledge, and skills. These specific teacher characteristics may correspond with district priorities in terms of curriculum and instruction, or may be the result of changing student demographics or policy directives. In evaluation terms, these desired teacher behaviors need to be clearly defined, and teachers need specific supports to help them develop knowledge and skills specific to local needs.

Different expectations for professionals, based upon career stage and the purpose of the evaluation. Effective evaluation systems help professionals grow through the course of their career. This means that effective teacher evaluation systems should hold somewhat different expectations for teachers at the time of licensure and hiring, at the time tenure is granted, and at various points throughout an educator's career depending on the individual's professional development needs.

An understanding of organizational supports and barriers to effective job performance. All professionals require specific supports; a doctor needs access to medicine and a lawyer needs access to evidence. Teachers, too, need resources and materials in order to be most effective. These include instructional materials, small classes, appropriate professional development, effective instructional leadership, and low levels of class disruptions, absenteeism, and discipline challenges. Effective evaluation systems have the capacity to link teacher performance to school climate, materials, the contribution of the principal as an instructional leader, and professional development.²

Employee engagement, self-appraisal and feedback. When employees participate in their own evaluations, the quality and quantity of information increases, and ratings become more accurate and valid.³ Employees frequently set higher goals for performance than managers when employees are also given the requisite autonomy, authority, and resources to improve their work.⁴ Inviting employees into the evaluation process generates higher levels of employee cooperation, encourages the development of coaching relationships, and reduces defensive behavior.⁵ Self appraisal increases the extent to which an employee feels prepared for the evaluation meeting, increases the employee's overall satisfaction, and increases the employee's perception of the fairness of the evaluation.⁶

A strong and diverse body of evidence. Teaching is multifaceted, and the greatest amount of work is often the intellectual planning that leads to a particular teacher behavior or instructional event. Consequently, the evaluation of educators' work needs to sufficiently capture the complexity of the work. In teacher evaluation, this means examining how instructional strategies apply to the curricular content, goals, and student needs as well as examining evidence of planning, parent and student engagement, student work, and other records of teacher work, including multiple measures of student learning.

Link to professional development. The goal of any well-structured evaluation system is to improve professional practice, not simply to punish its absence. Consequently, an evaluation system is only useful to the extent that it can produce actionable, evidence-based suggestions for professional learning. Research has found that when teachers can examine specific data about student achievement and compare these to constructive, detailed, and evidence-based feedback

about their instruction, professional practice can improve substantially.⁷ Most teacher evaluation systems fall short, in large part because principals do not value the evaluation instruments and are prone to inflating the results.⁸ Regular staff development that is directly related to a teacher's job, driven by clear goals, and based on appropriate data and teacher input, is a powerful way to improve teacher effectiveness. The role of evaluation in this system cannot be overstated.⁹

Barriers to comprehensive teacher evaluation in Pennsylvania

The false promise of test score accountability. Some advocates of teacher evaluation reform suggest that student test scores are an appropriate measure of teacher quality. But student performance and teacher performance are not the same thing. The fact that client outcomes and professional practice are related only indirectly has been accepted in other professions: patients' health outcomes may not reflect a doctor's performance; nor can the size of a tax rebate say much about the quality of an accountant. Suggesting that one person's job performance is causally responsible for another person's outcome requires stronger inferences and evidence. This evidence has not been produced to date, nor is it likely to be produced.

Using student outcomes to measure teacher practice is problematic for several reasons: (1) it assumes that the teacher controls all student behaviors that impact achievement, such as attendance, studying, eating well, sleeping well, and not abusing drugs or alcohol; (2) since the focus is on student, rather than teacher, performance, it provides no clear information about ways teachers can improve their practice; and (3) student outcomes may identify teachers who generate a particular test score, but they cannot be used to develop higher levels of effectiveness among *all* teachers. The purpose of any effective evaluation system should be to improve practice, not simply to measure its outcomes.

Lack of resources to support comprehensive evaluation. Effective evaluation requires time and expertise. This means that both teachers and evaluators need to know the evaluation criteria and develop a shared understanding of what proficiency looks like. They need training in how to recognize the standards in practice. Administrators need time to gather and analyze comprehensive information about a teacher's work, and teachers need time to gather evidence of their work to share with administrators. Both teachers and administrators need time to discuss teaching and learning issues that arise during the evaluation process.

Teacher evaluation has not always been effective. For teachers and administrators, the evaluation process is often formulaic. In many cases, the process design maintains the status quo rather than improving it. Most of the time, teacher evaluations are too infrequent to improve teacher effectiveness, and when evaluations do occur, they may be too superficial to lead to

meaningful improvement.¹⁰ Few principals are trained to effectively use evaluations to improve teacher performance, and even fewer principals have time to evaluate every teacher thoroughly.¹¹

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⁸Alliance for Excellent Education (2008). "Measuring and Improving the Effectiveness of High School Teachers," Alliance for Excellent Education. Available online: <http://www.all4ed.org/files/TeacherEffectiveness.pdf>.

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