

Teacher Evaluation Playbook

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The goal is to improve student achievement.”

Sandi Acosta
Florida Teacher



Hope Street Group compiled over 200 pages of interviews with teachers, policymakers, and state officials to develop best practices for teacher evaluation.

GOAL

The **Teacher Evaluation Playbook** sets out to provide practical advice and guidelines for states and school districts to successfully implement quality educator evaluation reforms by working with teachers to design and build the new programs. To help achieve this goal, the Playbook also explains different ways teachers can become part of the initial planning process, implementation, and continual improvement of the new evaluation system. The main objective of an evaluation program should be to support teachers with constructive feedback and quality professional development to increase student achievement.

BACKGROUND

No matter the career path, all employees need regular, ongoing feedback to grow, improve and advance in their professions. Teachers are no different—to be successful in the classroom, educators need to be evaluated fairly and consistently to receive the support and input necessary to continuously improve and maximize each student’s potential to achieve at high levels. The primary goal of any evaluation should be to help teachers become inspiring, effective, and capable of leading the academic growth of diverse learners.

Educators such as Sandi Acosta, a teacher from Florida, see new evaluation programs as having a “huge impact” in elevating her profession. If implemented correctly, evaluations that support teachers through constructive feedback and professional development will result in better classroom instruction. “The goal is to improve student achievement. The way we do that is to raise the profession to a higher level and get everyone to be on their best game, all the time,” Sandi added

Hope Street Group (HSG) has been advocating for teacher-based evaluation reform as a path toward improving public education for the past several years.

- In 2009, for example, HSG convened teachers across 30 states to determine the characteristics of an effective evaluation program with teacher input.
- HSG has been engaged in states that are deep into the process of reforms, primarily Race to the Top states Delaware and Tennessee, to track effective implementation strategies.
- HSG assisted in the effort in Delaware to establish working groups of more than 400 teachers to develop assessments across all grades and subjects.
- In 2010, HSG convened a group of experts from states including Tennessee, Delaware, New York, Colorado, Washington, and Maryland to explore ways to measure student growth and how to get teachers involved in the planning process.



Building on its previous work around evaluation reforms, HSG interviewed teachers, policymakers, elected officials, private-sector consultants, and more involved in evaluation reform efforts resulting in over 200 pages of notes to create the Teacher Evaluation Playbook. The interviews have provided insight into the efforts currently underway in the states that could help other states in earlier stages of evaluation reform. By highlighting some of the challenges in reform states such as Tennessee and Delaware, policymakers can gain insight on how best to approach some of the difficult aspects of planning and implementation in advance.

FOCUS ON TEACHERS FROM THE BEGINNING

It is critical that teachers contribute and help design new educator evaluation programs. Teachers interviewed by HSG reported that they were proud of the contributions they made shaping what the evaluation program would look like and participating gave them “pride in ownership” in the new system. As such, the Teacher Evaluation Playbook provides information to teachers on what evaluation programs will mean to them as educators and how they can get involved and contribute. State policymakers should make it a priority from the beginning to involve and engage teachers, and teachers should do whatever possible to participate and contribute.

CREATE A BUDGET

At the beginning of the planning process, policymakers should also consider all of the costs and expenses associated with evaluation reform and create a comprehensive budget. Developing student growth measures, for example, may require hiring substitutes to provide release time to teachers so they can help in the design of the new program. States may also need to hire additional personnel to coordinate large-scale communications efforts to share the details and goals of the new evaluation program. Engaging and involving teachers will also bring about costs by sending out surveys by mail, holding forums and roundtables, and more. The key is to determine how to use financial resources as effectively as possible.

Five Key Areas for Evaluation Reform

Based on the interviews and other research and work on evaluation reform, HSG identified five areas that policymakers should consider as they begin work on evaluation programs in their states.

1 NON-TESTED SUBJECTS & GRADES (NTSG)

The Critical Step for Success – Developing tests that are comparable across all grades and subjects has proven to be an extremely difficult task. Some states have delayed full implementation of new evaluation programs because designing assessments across all subjects and grades has taken more time and resources than expected. Delaware and Tennessee are both working hard to launch new student growth measures by the 2012-2013 school year. Questions include how to measure growth in areas such as the arts and how to fairly assess growth of teachers of special education students and English Language Learners.

The NTGS areas also give policymakers and educators the opportunity to collaborate to build the evaluation system together – ultimately building trust between stakeholders.

ACT NOW

Hope Street Group recommends acting immediately to create quality assessments at the very beginning of the planning phase.



Delaware

Over 400 teachers in Delaware have helped design student growth measures and have praised the process for giving them input and ownership. The goal of the work was to create “rigorous” and “comparable” assessments across all grades, subjects, and non-teaching professions.

- Delaware involved more than 400 teachers who broke into 35 content area groups to develop fair and comparable assessments in areas including math, English, social studies, fine arts, health, music, physical education, speech pathologists, social workers, and more.
- Team members met to share concerns and strategize either in person or through online space hosted by Hope Street Group.
- In addition to teachers, participants from a wide range in and outside the education field contributed, including administrators from the state, district, and school levels, school board members, union representatives, community members, students, and parents.
- Participants have met on a regular basis, every 4-6 weeks. As of March 18, 2012, the educators have met in person for at least five sessions.

Tennessee

The effort in Tennessee also involved hundreds of teachers to design student growth measures in the NTGS areas. In fact, a Hope Street Group Teacher Fellow, Dru Davison, led an effort to create an assessment using student portfolio work in the fine arts that Tennessee is piloting. Education Secretary Arne Duncan cited the pilot as an example of how to involve teachers in reform efforts.

- Tennessee formed 12 Educator Development Teams that included teachers to develop and recommend ideas and possibilities for fair and comparable assessments.
- Depending on area of expertise, each team was assigned one NTGS area or non-teaching occupation to design a growth measure, such as world languages, fine arts, computer technology, health, school social workers and librarians.
- The pilot programs are taking place now. Tennessee policymakers are still considering many possibilities and plan to make final decisions on its assessments by July of 2012 for the next school year.

ACTION POINTS

- At the very beginning of the planning phase, it is critical to create a team or teams of educators to develop assessments for the NTGS areas with clear instructions, guidelines, and deadlines to ensure the work is done in a timely manner.
- Involve as many teachers as possible across all of the non-tested subjects to ensure expertise in each.
- Examine various methods to assess NTGS, such as student portfolio work, student-learning objectives (SLOs), or school-wide data.
- Leave time to pilot and test new assessments before full implementation to work out issues beforehand.
- Keep working groups together after implementation to further improve NTGS assessments after each evaluation cycle and to work out any issues that arise.

2 COMMUNICATE WITH KEY AUDIENCES



A pro-active and comprehensive communication strategy should be developed in the beginning and aligned with the planning and implementation approach. Stakeholders who are not directly involved in the reform conversations are more likely to support and feel comfortable with the evaluation reform if they understand the new system and understand how they will be affected by implementation. Teachers will need to know how their classrooms will be impacted by the new plan, parents will want to know what it means for their children, and principals will need to know what the evaluation program means for their schools.

“The only thing that I would’ve changed going back to 2010 is simply making a much larger commitment to statewide stakeholder engagement from Day 1,” said Will Pinkston, a communication consultant in Tennessee who has closely followed reform efforts in his state. “When you take on this kind of large-scale change, you don’t necessarily need consensus, but there needs to be transparency and significant communication around what’s going on.”

The large-scale communication effort is different from individual teacher engagement in the next section because it is trying to reach all key stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, leaders, education advocates, and more – to keep each group apprised of the effort.

ACTION POINTS

- Develop a large-scale communication strategy to pro-actively communicate the goals and details of the new evaluation system and how it will be developed. The communications campaign should align with the planning and implementation schedule. Communicate with not only educators but other stakeholders, such as parents, school boards, and elected leaders.
- Incorporate different mediums to communicate, such as press releases to traditional media, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, monthly electronic and print newsletters to educators, booths at community events, mailers, etc.
- Plan and budget for the costs associated with executing a communications campaign, such as hiring additional staff, buying advertising, travel costs for school visits, etc.

3 INVOLVE TEACHERS AS PARTNERS IN REFORM

Educator engagement is the key to teacher-based evaluation reforms and must be a priority from the beginning. Policymakers should start by building the infrastructure needed for effective collaboration with educators. The engagement effort targets educators specifically with the goal of getting them involved and contributing to the design and improvement of the evaluation system.

Engagement is a necessary component to building evaluation programs with educator input and to secure teacher buy-in and support. If teachers believe the new program is based on their needs in the classroom and is designed to help them, the new system will have a greater chance of success.

METHODS OF INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

TEACHERS

Online & Postal Surveys
Twitter | Webinars
Conference Calls
Online Work Space
Program Trainings
Forums Mailers
Skype Meetings

POLICYMAKERS



ACTION POINTS

- Conduct an inventory on methods to interact with educators. For example, does the State Department of Education have teacher e-mail addresses for broad communication? Do policymakers have the ability to provide talking points, informational material, etc. to school principals to share with teachers?
- Develop a plan for regular interactions with educators through the planning and implementation stages using various methods, such as forums, roundtable discussions for face-to-face discussions and by using technology, such as Skype, online work spaces, webinars, e-mail, etc.
- Involve as many teachers as possible across different grades and subjects and provide. If possible, include release time or extra pay for vacation or weekend work to encourage participation.
- As a general rule, try to involve at least 10 percent of the state's teacher force in contributing to the design of the new evaluation program.

Tips for Teachers to Get Involved and Contribute to Reforms

- **Sign up** to learn more about the importance of teacher engagement in evaluation reform.
- **Voice** your desire to be involved in teacher engagement efforts to school/district administrators.
- **Talk** with other teachers about why and how new evaluation systems will support your work in the classroom.
- **Share** clear, concise, and constructive feedback and/or comments about the evaluation system with your administrators.
- **Demand** professional development that corresponds to the areas of need highlighted in your individual evaluation.
- **Write** about support for teacher evaluation to your state representatives or to the local newspapers.

4 ULTIMATE GOAL: GROWTH & IMPROVEMENT

Teachers want to advance professionally and they want their students to succeed. The central goal of an evaluation program should be to provide constructive feedback and professional development opportunities based on the needs of individual teachers to help them improve classroom instruction. A vast majority of teachers desire an evaluation system that will help elevate their craft. "It is about an evaluator and a teacher coming to a decision about what supports would be valuable to improving their practice," said Amelia Hodges, the Associate Secretary of Education in Delaware, stressing that the purpose of evaluation program is to support teachers with constructive feedback and professional development.



FROM THE BEGINNING

Policymakers should brace teachers, the public and other stakeholders for challenges in the first few years of implementation as issues are resolved. Evaluation programs are a long-term investment that should payoff over time.

ACTION POINTS

- Form educator teams to structure professional development models that link to individual evaluation results, such as receiving mentoring from master teachers or one-on-one feedback from trained evaluators.
- Require rigorous training of evaluators so they know how to provide individualized constructive feedback to teachers.
- Build professional develop models that are research-based and proven to result in better classroom instruction.

5 INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THE EVALUATION SYSTEM

New evaluation systems will need adjustments and improvements during their first few years. Stakeholders should be told to expect challenges especially in the beginning. States need to have a plan in place for permanent interaction with educators for purposes of obtaining the feedback necessary for continuous improvement. Teacher input after each evaluation cycle will be crucial to building an effective program over the long term that raises student achievement with educator buy-in.

“The first year is a learning process requiring patience as there will be technical and other glitches,” cautioned Elaine Rigas, a private-sector consultant who has designed new employee evaluation programs for businesses and public agencies. “The second year, it gets better since the implementation team will have conducted a lessons learned review to improve. By the third year, you have worked out the glitches and are heading more towards a steady state.”

ACTION POINTS

- Consider making permanent the working groups that were used in the planning and implementation stages.
- Put into place permanent means of interacting with a large percentage of educators to collect thoughts and feedback on what is not working in the evaluation program, what is helping teachers, and what could be improved.
- Utilize the feedback and input from educators to make adjustments an annual basis after each evaluation cycle.

Conclusion

Planning and implementing a new educator evaluation program is an investment. States should be prepared for some speed bumps and challenges during planning and during the first few years of implementation. Evaluation programs have the potential to elevate the work of educators in a state and are well worth the effort. Educator engagement is crucial to building a program that will help improve classroom instruction and win teacher support and “buy-in” necessary for success.

Please visit the Hope Street Group’s website at: www.hopestreetgroup.org