

Teacher Evaluation Playbook Executive Summary

Goal

The Teacher Evaluation Playbook sets out to provide practical advice and guidelines for states and school districts to successfully implement educator evaluation reforms with the input and support of teachers. To help achieve this goal, the Playbook also explains different ways teachers can get involved in the planning process. 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 profession. Teachers are no different—to be successful in the classroom, educators need to be evaluated consistently to receive the support and input necessary to continuously improve and maximize every 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.

“The goal is to improve student achievement.”
– Florida Teacher
Sandy Acosta

Educators such as Sandy 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,” Sandy added.

Hope Street Group interviewed over 30 teachers, policymakers, and state officials to develop best practices for teacher evaluation.

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. HSG have also been engaged in five states that are deep into the process of reforms, primarily Race to the Top states Delaware and Tennessee, to track effective implementation strategies.

Over the past several months, HSG interviewed over 30 stakeholders involved in evaluation reform efforts, including state policymakers, elected leaders, and of course teachers. We have also interviewed private-sector consultants who have designed evaluation systems for businesses and public institutions. 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 states such as Tennessee and Delaware, policymakers could gain insight on how to deal with some of the difficult aspects of planning and implementation in advance.

Based on the interviews and other research into evaluation reform, HSG identified five areas that policymakers should consider as they begin work on evaluation programs in their states. Educator engagement and building the new program alongside teachers is crucial. It is also critical to have means to clearly communicate the

details and goals of the new system to stakeholders from the beginning. Finally, states need to have a plan to design fair and comparable assessments across all grades and subjects.

Five Key Areas for Evaluation Reform

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 a difficult task for states. 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 NTSG 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.

Tennessee and Delaware both established working groups of educators to identify and adapt measures specific to each category that can be conducted and evaluated consistently across the state. Delaware involved more than 400 teachers who broke into 35 content area groups to develop fair and comparable assessments across all subjects and grades. Tennessee identified 12 categories of teachers and involved hundreds of educators from across the state. Despite the efforts, both states delayed full implementation of evaluation reforms because developing measures for the NTSG was more complicated and took longer than expected.

Dana Siegel, a teacher in Tennessee involved in the development of the evaluation for educators who teach in NTSG, said she felt that their timeline was too short, leaving too little time to puzzle through the big issues in person. In the end, she said, a few people were left to do the bulk of the work.

Action Points

- At the very beginning of the planning phase, it is critical to create a team of educators to develop assessments for the NTSG with clear instructions and guidelines. 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 the working group together after implementation to further improve NTSG assessment and to work out any issues that arise.

2 **Communicate with Educators – Educators** – After the infrastructure is built for interaction with educators, a pro-active and comprehensive communication strategy should begin that is aligned with the implementation plan. Educators are more likely to support and feel comfortable with the evaluation reform effort if they understand the new system.

“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.”



Action Points

- Develop large-scale communications strategies 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.
- Implement proactive communications plan targeted at stakeholders incorporating different mediums, such as press releases to traditional media, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, monthly electronic newsletters to educators, booths at community events, etc.

3

Involve Teachers in Reform – Educator engagement is 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 who will be impacted by evaluation reform. Early engagement is a necessary component to building evaluation programs with educator input and to secure teacher buy-in. If teachers believe the new program is based on their needs in the classroom and is there to help them, the new system will have a greater chance of success.

Action Points

- Conduct an inventory on methods to communicate 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 engagement with educators through the planning and implementation

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.

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.

4 **Ultimate Goal: Professional Growth & Educator Improvement** – Teachers want to improve upon their skills and improve classroom instruction. 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.

“This is not about a teacher coming in and being evaluated,” said Amelia Hodges, the Associate Secretary of Education in Delaware. “It is about an evaluator and a teacher coming to a decision about what supports would be valuable to improving their practice.”

Action Points

- Form educator teams to develop professional development models of professional development and how each model will link to individual evaluation results, such as mentoring from master teachers or one-on-one feedback from trained evaluators.
- Where appropriate, bring in third parties, such as education advocacy organizations to act as moderates and to provide feedback to ensure the evaluation program is fair to educators and will accomplish the goal of supporting teachers to improve classroom instruction.

5 **Innovate and Continuously Improve the Evaluation System** New evaluation systems will need adjustments and improvements during their first few years. Stakeholders should be told to expect some issues 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 of the evaluation system. Teacher input after each evaluation cycle will be crucial to building an effective program over the long term that raises student achievement.

“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.”

Word of Caution

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 pay off over time.

Action Points

- Consider making permanent the working groups and committees 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

The bottom line is 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 <http://www.hopestreetgroup.org>