
Policy 2.0

Using Open Innovation to Reform Teacher Evaluation Systems

From the Executive Director:

The national conversation about public education reform is full of great ideas, and unprecedented federal spending is delivering more money into the system aimed at promoting innovative practices. Ensuring that each child has an effective teacher is a critical success metric in the national agenda and is at the heart of Hope Street Group's education platform.

Rigorous and comprehensive teacher evaluations are imperative to a successful education system in America, and the moment for reforming evaluations is now. Significant resources and leadership are being leveraged to dramatically change the face of how we view and support the teaching profession. Congress and the Obama Administration have built education reform into the assurances of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the criteria for the Race to the Top Funds and the Investing in Innovation Funds, requests for annual appropriations, and the President's national education agenda. All feature unprecedented opportunities for improving teacher effectiveness. Hope Street Group's mission requires that we take this opportunity to deliver truly effective education reform.

In 2007, employing the Economic Opportunity Index, Hope Street Group identified education as the lead driver of economic opportunity. We convened a Bipartisan Working Group, bringing together a unique group of leaders from business, government and civil society to develop practical solutions to some of the most pressing challenges in this area. This culminated in a strong paper, "Closing Our Educational Achievement Gaps: Fostering Innovation in K-12 Education," which, among other things, called for the transformation of teaching into an iconic profession where performance data is continuously available, excellence is recognized, and quality is assured for all students.

Using Policy 2.0, Hope Street Group and our community have developed this work, unifying a diverse and dispersed network of those directly impacted by policy. This process has given teachers an added voice beyond traditional channels, and their expertise has been leveraged with our online policy tools to deliver Policy 2.0: Using Open Innovation to Reform Teacher Evaluation Systems.

Our community of dedicated team leaders, advisers, and inspiring contributors has worked tirelessly over the summer to develop recommendations for optimizing teacher evaluation systems. We would like to thank all of the contributors and especially our team leaders Dina Rock, Darcy Moody, Samuel Roe, Douglas Clark, and Lisa Mills, who played an integral role in the project's success.

With this report, we hope to seize the moment and ensure focus on the core issue of the education debate at this critical time. As always, Hope Street Group's goals are to develop good policy based on facts and emerging best practices, create bipartisan support at multiple levels, support successful implementation of the policy (including grass-roots advocacy), and incorporate the unique perspective of practitioners and business professionals in the discussion in a constructive way.

Our work does not stop here. Our policy teams and community will continue to promote reform of teacher evaluation systems and of other critical education areas to national, state, and local leaders. We will continue to use Policy 2.0 and some of the most innovative minds in the country to bring much-needed change to our nation's schools. And we will support the reform of education to increase economic opportunity for all throughout our country.



Monique Nadeau
Executive Director
Hope Street Group

Policy 2.0:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hope Street Group is a new generation of leaders dedicated to building an Opportunity Economy, where anyone who works hard and invests in themselves has the opportunity to succeed and our nation prospers as a result. We convene leaders from business, government, and civil society to develop action plans that expand economic opportunity.

Teacher effectiveness is intimately connected to our mission of building an Opportunity Economy. Knowing what makes teachers effective, understanding how to measure that effectiveness, helping create opportunities for all teachers to improve, and attracting and retaining the most effective teachers would transform our education system. Teaching would become a more attractive — even iconic — profession, student achievement would rise, and America's schools could reclaim their rightful place among the best in the world.

Ensuring a great teacher is at the front of the classroom is a critical step we can take to help students excel academically. However, the reality is that we do not know which teachers are effective because we do not know how to appropriately measure that quality. Our country's current teacher evaluation systems are inadequate.

Hope Street Group believes that new online collaboration tools have an important role to play in surfacing new ideas and voices to make a positive difference on many issues, including teacher effectiveness. To that end, this summer Hope Street Group launched a virtual education policy team using Policy 2.0, our collaborative web platform. We recruited a diverse policy team of educators and professionals from the private and civic sectors across 17 states. Through an in-depth process of discovery and research over three months, the policy team devised targeted recommendations for improving teacher evaluation systems. Policy 2.0 allowed us to connect busy practitioners from across the country to a library of resources, to national experts, and to each other, through a tool that gave them a unique

platform for engaging in education policy, with far-reaching implications.

Working from the premise that teacher evaluations are a meaningful part of ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education, Hope Street Group's policy team developed the following recommendations and principles for teacher evaluations:

- 1) Objective measures of student achievement gains must be a major component of teacher evaluation.
- 2) Clearly defined standards of quality instruction should be used to assess a teacher's classroom performance.
- 3) Teachers, teacher groups and unions should be included in developing and implementing teacher evaluation systems.
- 4) Teacher evaluation systems themselves must be periodically evaluated and refined.
- 5) Teacher evaluation systems should reflect the importance of supportive administrators and school environment to effective teaching.
- 6) Components of teacher evaluation that rely on observation and discussion must be in the hands of instructional leaders who have sufficient expertise, training and capacity.
- 7) Evaluations must differentiate levels of teaching efficacy to identify opportunities for professional growth, and drive rewards and consequences.
- 8) Information from teacher evaluations should be comparable across schools and districts, and should be used to address equity in the distribution of teaching talent.

This report captures in more depth the recommendations of Hope Street Group's virtual policy team on teacher evaluation. Over the next three years, we intend to expand our Policy 2.0 platform to hundreds of educators and other professionals to adapt and apply these principles to at least 10 education systems in the United States. Visit Policy 2.0 online at www.hopestreetgroup.org to learn more or to join our efforts.



The Opportunity

The evidence is clear: ensuring a great teacher is at the front of the room is a critical step we can take to help students succeed.¹ By providing the most effective teachers possible for all students, we can help make sure disadvantaged students are not “left behind,” and with a focus on teaching excellence, we will overcome twin gaps in the areas of global competitiveness and opportunity. Unfortunately, the reality is that most school systems do not know which teachers are effective because they do not appropriately measure effectiveness. Teacher evaluation is a critical component of any comprehensive teacher effectiveness plan, but current teacher evaluation systems are inadequate in design and implementation. Research shows that the majority of teacher evaluation systems in this country result in nearly all teachers being rated “satisfactory,” despite the fact that many schools are not meeting federal benchmarks for success.² These systems fail to identify excellence and are rarely linked to targeted and high-quality professional development opportunities to support teachers who are struggling. Further, administrators are not always trained to conduct robust evaluations, nor are they held accountable for the poor results of current systems.

Our students deserve better, and so do our teachers. Imagine what could happen if we had a robust teacher evaluation system in place that captured the most important factors for success and could accurately measure teacher performance. Knowing which teachers are effective and helping create opportunities for all teachers to improve would set the stage for powerful reforms. This is a critical element of creating a world in which our students excel academically, teaching becomes an highly competitive profession, and America’s schools reclaim their rightful place as top-ranked institutions for learning.

The Challenge: The Teacher Evaluation Conundrum

Measuring teacher effectiveness is difficult at best. There are competing views on evaluation practices, but we can agree that there needs to be a way to measure the correlation be-

tween teacher performance and student achievement. The only way to capture this impact for individual teachers is through the teacher evaluation process. Currently, there are three broad categories of measures:

- **Performance-based assessment**, which involves observation and is set against performance standards;
- **Portfolios**, which include a combination of performance-based data and evidence of student learning;
- **Value-added analysis**, which look at changes in student outcomes over time.

Each method has its benefits and shortcomings, leading many to believe a combination of all three would be best.

However, figuring out which measures to use is just one challenge—the implementation of teacher evaluations is fraught with difficulties. Evaluations can fail be-

cause of weak measurement tools, lack of time, will, and consistency on the part of evaluators, as well as insufficient oversight of the process. In addition, there is often little incentive for the school to pursue a meaningful, transparent evaluation process, in part due to limits on meaningful actions (e.g., targeted professional development, differential career paths) that can be taken on

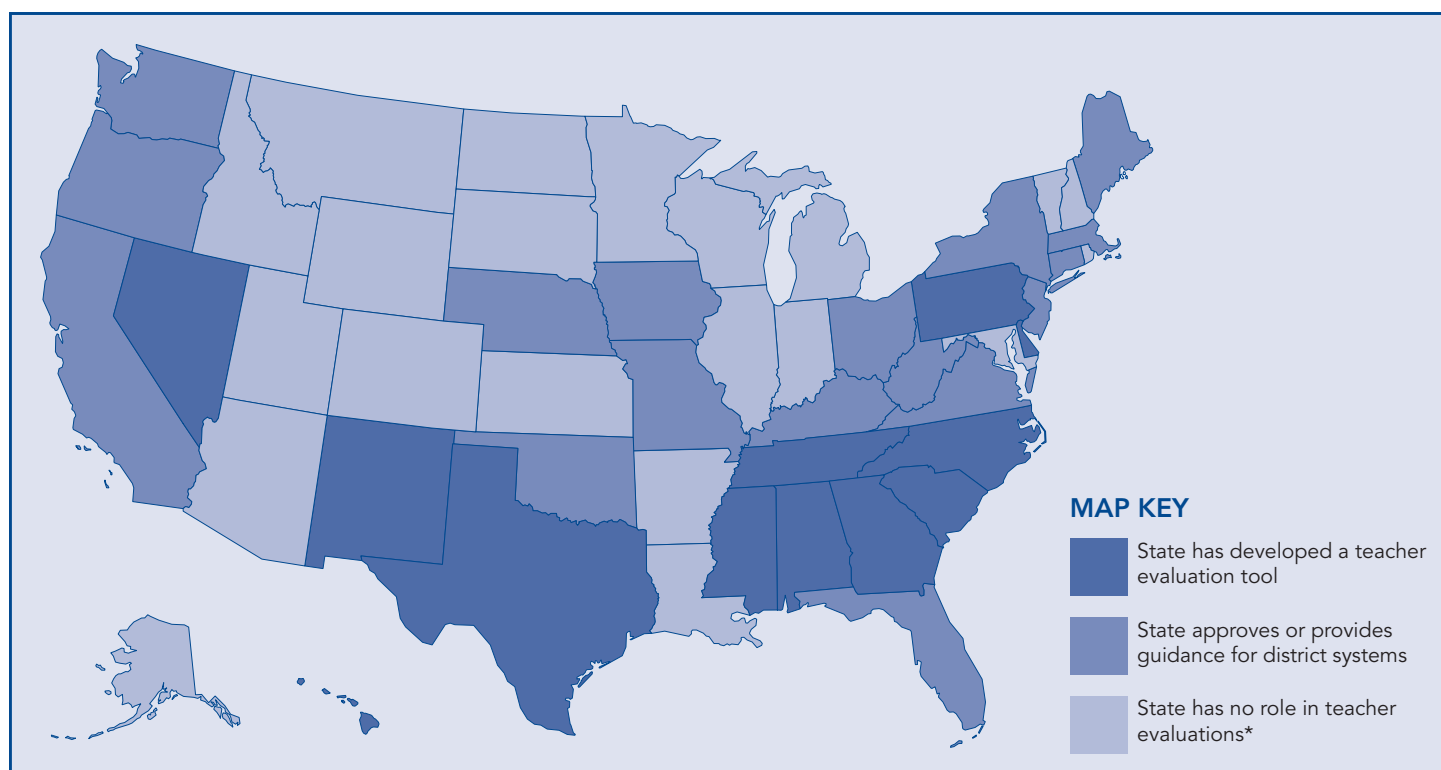
the basis of evaluations, including complicated dismissal procedures that hinder the use of evaluation for that purpose.

When analyzing teacher evaluation systems, it is critical to think about outcomes. The ultimate goal is to increase student achievement, so teachers need feedback that will allow them to better influence student learning. Teachers need to learn from their successes and failures, just like any other professional. At the same time, decisions about teacher career paths - hiring, dismissing, placing, and assuming new roles - should be made with the help of accurate information about effectiveness.

That makes teacher evaluation a policy issue. Although figuring out the right mix of measures, implementation steps and desired outcomes is critical, assigning responsibility and accountability to people at the appropriate policy level is complicated. If incorrectly assigned, accountability

“There is much to do in evaluating teachers. In my school most teachers are evaluated every two years and nothing is done if the teacher is less than stellar. I truly believe in mentoring, but the administrative teams, the unions, the State have to come together to make it a true path to better teaching.” ~ Teacher, Policy Team

Figure 1. State-Level Involvement in Teacher Evaluations



*The District of Columbia (not shown on the map) has no state role in teacher evaluations.

Source: National Council on Teacher Quality. (2009). *2008 State Teacher Policy Yearbook, National Summary*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

for administering policy can undermine even the best designed teacher evaluation systems. Especially in light of current federal funding, states and local education entities are being asked to plan and implement improved teacher evaluation systems. Policy issues are emerging around the following:

- the appropriate roles of districts, states and the federal government in developing and implementing teacher evaluation tools and systems
- the role of teachers unions in negotiating contracts that define the boundaries of teacher evaluation;
- the cost of effective evaluation systems;
- the elements of a high-quality teacher evaluation system.

Current Teacher Evaluation Policy

Currently, only 14 states require school systems to evaluate their public school teachers at least once a year. In some states, evaluations are required for tenured teachers only twice in ten years. Twelve states have a state-developed instrument, two states require that district systems be ap-

proved by the state, 15 states provide guidance, and 22 have no role at all.³ While some districts have the capacity to develop robust evaluation systems on their own, the appropriate role of states bears examining in light of needs such as large scale data systems and research and development.

ARRA/Race to the Top

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 sets the stage for meaningful reform. The State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF), part of the ARRA, requires that states and districts report the distribution of teacher ratings under current evaluation systems. At the same time, the Race to the Top encourages and incentivizes revisions to these systems, and the Statewide Data Systems fund will solve some technical barriers. These unprecedented competitive funding sources represent a major opportunity to drive reform around teacher effectiveness. Educating and engaging practitioners and other stakeholders outside of Washington, D.C., to hold states and districts accountable and to build their capacity to implement new approaches is essential to ensuring that these funds are used to create lasting change.

a thriving learning environment with powerful opportunities to excel, and ultimately to improve student achievement.” TAP has developed their own system for evaluating teachers that rewards them for excellence. Teachers are not only held accountable for meeting the *TAP Teaching Skills, Knowledge and Responsibility Standards*, but also for the continued academic growth of their students.⁶ Charter schools can also provide laboratories for change. Some, like GreenDot Public Schools, have demonstrated innovative teacher contracts that show what might be possible in the context of collective bargaining agreements.

Outside the education context, there are examples of evaluation systems that prove to be effective not only for the desired outcome of the organization, but also for the person being assessed. With America’s economy increasingly dependent on skills and knowledge and less on machinery, the private sector has been responding to a shift in skill requirements. As a result, companies are paying greater attention toward optimizing this asset through effective performance evaluation systems. Effective leadership and culture of the workplace, including the ability to establish clear strategic intent or standards, is critical to a successful business.

“I tend to think that teaching is like a toolbox. Every tool is important, and when used effectively, can produce fine craftsmanship.” ~ Teacher, Measures Team

The Solution: A New Policy Approach

Hope Street Group has long recognized the importance of improving teacher effectiveness as a key to improving student learning. This will require, among other things, a better picture of the state of the current teaching force. The current national attention on education is a window of opportunity to reform a system so that it will accurately and fairly evaluate the performance of teachers.

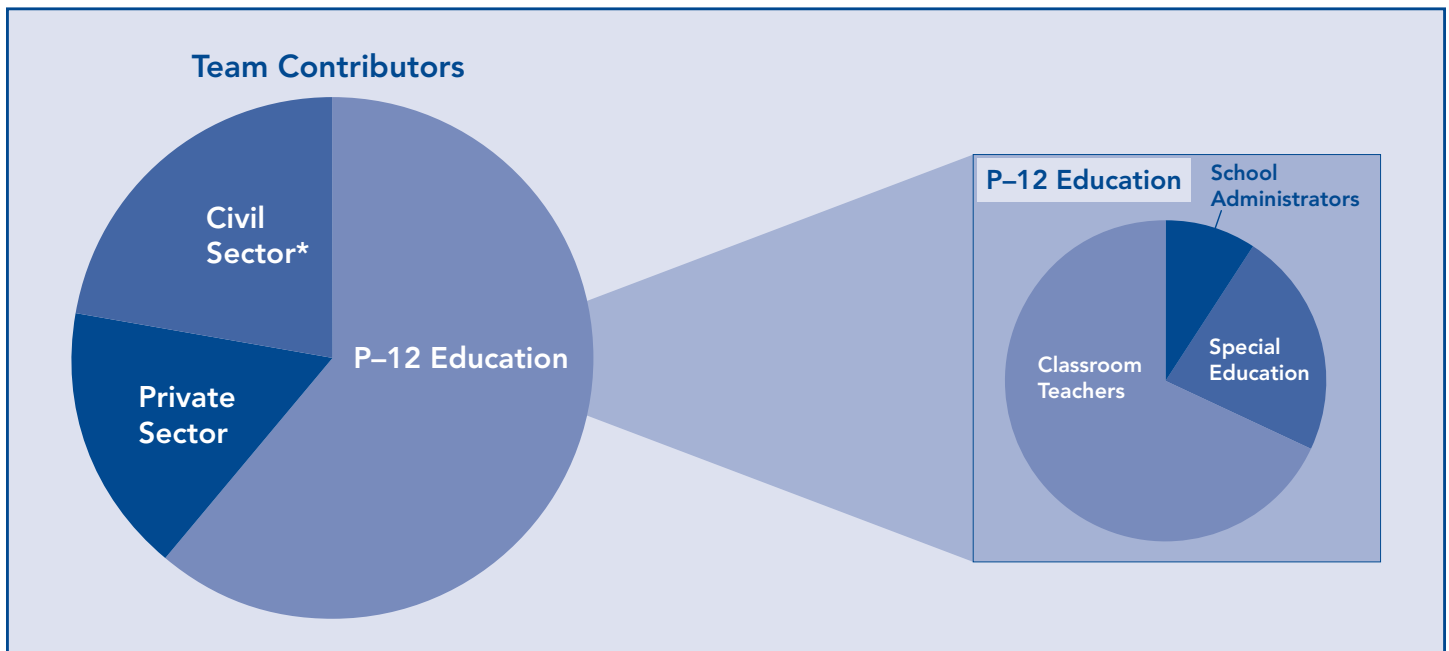
Recommendations of this nature generally come from well-regarded researchers and policymakers and are administered in a top-down approach at the state or district level.

Recognizing that teacher and administrator input is an important component of teacher evaluation system design, Hope Street Group launched a project that would bring these

voices to the policy table, together with other professionals. By including educators as key participants in our policy work, Hope Street Group seeks to ensure that solutions originate from members of the community they are designed to affect.

Hope Street Group planned and carried out the project on Policy 2.0, our online policy collaboration tool, with the objective of connecting practicing educators with other professionals to identify essential elements of teacher eval-

Figure 3. State-Level Involvement in Teacher Evaluations



*Civil Sector includes non-profits and institutes of higher education.

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uation systems. Policy 2.0 has allowed us to bring professionals with diverse skill sets and varied perspectives from across the country into an engaged online community that shares experiences, gathers relevant information, and contributes policy recommendations for reforming teacher evaluation systems. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage at least 10 systems to adapt and adopt these essential elements by 2012. This will be accomplished through a volunteer-led advocacy campaign with help from our network of political, business, and civic leaders.

Through an in-depth process of discovery and research over two months, the Policy 2.0 teacher evaluation team devised targeted recommendations and highlighted relevant innovative programs and practices that policymakers can look to for specific, practical ideas for improvements. Our hope is that this effort will ultimately benefit both educators and students, and create new spaces for Hope Street Group's network of engaged professionals to be part of adapting and tailoring these solutions at the state and local level.

The Teacher Evaluation Systems Policy Team: A Unique Combination of Contributors

From classrooms in California, to a school district in Kansas, to conference rooms in New York City, the policy team represents a truly devoted group of citizens focused on bettering education for students everywhere. Through professional networks and broader outreach, Hope Street Group recruited over 60 interested people, and then narrowed it down to a highly committed final team of 36 active contributors, including 22 K–12 educators, six private sector professionals, and eight participants from the civil sector, representing 17 states.

The team's K–12 educators included a speech language pathologist from Virginia, the principal of a charter school in Washington, D.C., and a special education teacher from Texas, among many others.

The Process

With the objective of discovering what makes an effective teacher evaluation system, the project was broken down into

“As a practitioner, researcher, parent, and advocate my goal for the youth that I serve is to challenge, encourage, motivate, and inspire each one of them to take hold of the opportunities before them. I know that I am a good teacher and although according to evaluations I am effective in the classroom it’s something of which I am less sure.” ~ Teacher, Policy Team

four sub-teams derived from the research about teacher evaluation — Measures, Outcomes, Implementation, and Policy. Breaking the issue down into smaller topics and sub-teams allowed for a richer, more in-depth approach to the nuances and complexity of teacher evaluation systems, and for closer collaboration within each sub-team.

Contributors were recruited through an extensive

professional network that spans a variety of industries and political beliefs. However, all of the participants shared the common goal of bettering educational opportunities for the children of this country. Once recruited, contributors signed up to focus on one of the four discussion areas that would serve as a smaller sub-team/community. Team Leaders and co-leaders, selected from an application process, guided the team by setting goals, distributing tasks, and facilitating discussion within the team. It was an intense process for volunteers.

Hope Street Group provided the initial framework for the project. After exploring the major issues and research, team members engaged in a few weeks of in-depth discussion about specific questions and problems. Team Leaders ensured that the spectrum of issues relevant to each discussion area was covered and that general consensus was reached as to the statement of major problems and challenges. The Team Leaders skillfully moved their teams from discussion to action, even as each individual's participation ebbed and flowed through the unpredictable days of summer.

Teams utilized an index of dozens of resources developed by Hope Street Group.[†] Links to reports, blogs, and articles were readily accessible and were loosely organized by discussion area. Teams were encouraged to use our Hope Street Group Policy 2.0 forum moderator as a resource but to also add their own suggestions to the indices for their own sub-teams and for others.

Lastly, Hope Street Group organized “expert drop-in discussions.” The online exchanges with experts provided targeted information regarding a specific aspect of the teacher evaluation issue that was not otherwise easily accessible through general research. Team participants voted on which expert drop-in discussions would be useful as well as

[†]Please visit www.hopestreetgroup.org for a complete list of resources.

provided suggestions for new ones. For example, contributors benefited from expert drop-in discussions with both the union leader of Green Dot Public Schools and a leader of TAP regarding innovative answers to particular challenges. In addition, a human resource professional served as an expert about lessons from private sector practices.

No Teacher is Effective Unless Students Achieve: Defining Effective Teaching

What do we mean by effective teaching? Effective teaching leads to student success. But how can it be observed, measured, and recognized?

Though the definition of effective teaching may vary, it is generally agreed that effective teaching is the combination of characteristics that produce growth in student achievement.⁷ Paramount to the mix of characteristics are high expectations for all students: great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the learning process.⁸ Some researchers point directly to affective characteristics, noting that, for example, fostering an atmosphere of trust, not judgment, helps students feel safe to take risks and do their best.⁹

More than 10 years ago, Charlotte Danielson, a prominent education researcher, wrote *Framework for Teaching*, in which she details the components of instruction that can “help teachers become more thoughtful practitioners.”¹⁰ Danielson’s framework is grounded in the notion that clear standards of practice enable both students and teachers to perform their best. Many systems across the country have adopted her standards, and associated observation rubrics, as a definition of good teaching.

The Department of Education is tackling the definition of effective teaching and the connection to student growth through its qualifications for the Race to the Top fund and the State Longitudinal Data Systems fund. Previous efforts focused on defining a “qualified teacher” as attained through formal preparation and experience, while current work represents a shift towards defining the characteristics that indicate the presence of effective teaching. In the proposed priorities for the Race to the Top Fund, the Department of Education states that an effective teacher is, “a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates (e.g. at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth.”¹¹

Endnotes

- ¹ Ferguson, R. (1998). Can schools narrow the black-white test score gap? In C. Jencks & M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.; Goldhaber, D.D., Brewer, D.J. and Anderson, D. (1999). A three-way error components analysis of educational productivity. *Education Economics*, 7(3), 199–208.; Jordan, H., Mendro, R., and Weerasinghe, D. (1997). *Teacher Effects on Longitudinal Student Achievement*. A paper presented at the CREATE annual meeting, Indianapolis, IN.; Sanders, W., & Rivers, J. (1996). Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center.; Wright, S.P, Horn, S.P, & Sanders, W.L. (1997). Teacher and classroom context effects on student achievement: Implications for Teacher Evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 1(1), 57–67.
- ² Weisburg, Daniel et al. (2009). *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*. Brooklyn: The New Teacher Project.
- ³ National Council on Teacher Quality. (2009). *State Teacher Policy Yearbook, National Summary*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- ⁴ Ferguson (1998); Goldhaber, Brewer, and Anderson (1999); Jordan, Mendro, and Weerasinghe (1997); Sanders and Rivers (1996); and Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997).
- ⁵ Donaldsen, M. (2009). *So Long Lake Wobegon? Using Teacher Evaluation to Raise Teacher Quality*. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress.; Toch, T., & Rothman, R. (2008). *Rush to judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education*. Washington, DC: Education Sector.; Weisburg, Daniel et al. (2009). *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*. Brooklyn: The New Teacher Project.
- ⁶ See <http://www.tapsystem.org>.
- ⁷ Goldhaber, Daniel, and Emily Anthony. (2003). *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement*. ERIC Clearinghouse Document ED477271. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.
- ⁸ Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House.
- ⁹ Bloom, B.S. (1980). *All Our Children Learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- ¹⁰ Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*. Alexandria: ASCD.
- ¹¹ Race to the Top Fund Notices. 74 Fed. Reg. 37811.

The Team's Recommendations

The team gathered by Hope Street began by wrestling with the challenge of defining effective teaching and agreed that “no teacher is effective unless students are growing.” Academic growth is the foundation of student success. But teachers have an impact on more than test scores. From being intellectually active to possessing critical thinking skills, student growth encompasses many factors. Specifically, the policy team decided that effective teachers:

- Ensure all students meet high academic standards;
- Teach their students to problem-solve, perform research, and wrestle with the challenges of discovery;
- Adapt their teaching to the needs of students;
- Spend time developing the strengths of individual students;
- Have high expectations for students and find the right balance between pushing students too far and nudging them to go beyond their comfort zone to the next level of learning;
- Use engagement strategies and stimulating approaches to motivate and excite students to learn;
- Use techniques to bridge the distance between students and teacher;
- Respect that the unique and individual relationship between teacher and student determines the learning dynamic;
- Encourage students to have fun and be comfortable with learning and taking risks.

The team also agreed that teacher evaluation should be a meaningful part of a successful effort to provide all children with the education they need to succeed in the Opportunity Economy. Based on their work online and their commitment to ensuring access to a high quality education for all children, the team makes the following recommendations:

1 Objective Measures of Student Achievement Gains Must Be a Major Component of Teacher Evaluation.

The Policy Team quickly established that effective teachers have an impact on student achievement; therefore, evidence of student achievement should be a major part of teacher evaluation. Measuring gains in student achievement, and then relating it to individual teachers, is a significant challenge.

The use of objective measures of gains in student achievement from very different starting points throughout the school year holds teachers accountable to a complete picture of student growth. The policy team concluded strongly that a single, one-time measure of student achievement, such as state-level accountability test, would not be enough to provide a fair and accurate picture of student achievement gains and the impact of effective teaching. Additionally, such test data is not available for teachers in many subject areas and grade levels.

“I know student-level measures are an important component for gauging what is happening in the classroom... and we need a comprehensive approach to capturing student growth.” ~ Teacher, Measures Team

For all teachers, the Team discussed several appropriate, objective measures of student achievement to be used in teacher evaluations throughout the year, including:

- value-added data from standardized tests (where available);
- student work, including performance criteria and evidence of student growth;
- teacher-generated information about student goals and growth;
- formative assessments;
- objective performance-based assessments;
- assessments of affective engagement and self-efficacy.

State accountability tests and other standardized assessments should be used for teacher evaluation where they can provide robust value-added estimates of teacher's contribution to student academic progress. That requires that states have the capacity to link data from students to their teachers and to maintain and connect student data across several years. States also have an important role to play in continually testing the validity of value-added formulas and improving assessments to capture student growth as accurately as possible across a diverse population of students.

2 Clearly Defined Standards of Quality Instruction Should Be Used to Assess a Teacher’s Classroom Performance.

Teacher evaluations cannot rely on measures of student learning outcomes alone. Teachers need feedback during the school year on their daily practice, and assessments of student achievement are insufficient to capture all of the work, leadership, and skill that a teacher needs to be effective.

The team identified the implementation of classroom observations as inadequate in many current teacher evaluation systems, noting that they typically rate criteria that do not focus directly on the quality of instruction. Under this system of evaluation, teacher effectiveness is often about arbitrary activity and not targeted to student outcomes.

The team agreed that to be fair, standards of classroom practice must be clearly defined by the district or state. Teachers’ work includes the tasks of lesson planning, instruction, classroom management, parent communication, school leadership, and collaboration with peers. The use of robust and careful measures of classroom practice is essential to identifying effective teachers and creating opportunities for improvement.

The team identified possible measures of classroom practice as:

- classroom observations
- teacher portfolios
- videos of teacher practice
- lesson plans
- evidence of professional development
- evidence of school leadership
- successful action research
- parent, student and peer surveys

“The evaluators need to focus on... the level of student engagement and the ways the teacher is involved as an educator throughout all of his or her classes.” ~ Teacher, Outcomes Team

3 Teachers, Teacher Groups and Unions Should Be Included in Developing and Implementing Teacher Evaluation Systems.

Teacher involvement in developing and implementing evaluation systems is inconsistent. But teacher input is essential to ensure quality and fairness. Unfortunately, complicated collective bargaining agreements, sometimes poor relationships between teachers and school system administrations, and union resistance and lack of trust can preclude important elements of a good evaluation system, or make meaningful outcomes harder to realize.

“Teacher input...is invaluable.”
~ Measures Team

In comments submitted to the Department of Education regarding the Race to the Top Fund, for example, the National Education Association called linking student and teacher data at the state level (as described in Recommendation 1) “inappropriate.”

After examining promising models, including the innovative contracts of Green Dot Public Schools and the TAP program, the policy team recommends that teacher groups be involved in developing defined standards, a clear process for improvement plans for teachers not meeting those standards, and an appropriate structure to deal with tenure and dismissal issues. The team highlighted peer review as a compelling way to include teacher input while ensuring meaningful outcomes.

Implementing this recommendation will require leadership at many levels. By providing the positive incentive of the Race to the Top fund, the Department of Education has taken a good step. Engaged teachers and other informed stakeholders can provide a key layer of accountability for both school systems and unions to engage productively on this critical topic if they make their voices heard.

4 Teacher Evaluation Systems Themselves Must Be Periodically Evaluated and Refined.

It is important that teacher evaluation systems not be static tools, taken out of the box and not changed until a new system is implemented. Measures and standards must be periodically re-evaluated and improved to ensure quality and fairness. The implementation of teacher evaluation systems is complicated and multi-faceted. Carefully examining the entire system — including student assessments, training of evaluators, and the timeliness of evaluations and feedback — is essential to ensure that appropriate adjustments are made in the course of implementation.

“We should evaluate the evaluation system — hold mentors accountable for the extra services they are providing. Require that records be kept in a way that benefits both current and future participants.”
~ Implementation Team

As teacher evaluation systems are implemented, the team recognizes continual opportunities to refine and improve those systems by studying their outputs and results. Teacher evaluations result in information related to student growth and classroom practice. These measures should be compared to each other and analyzed for a connection to key student outcomes. Where an element of classroom observation is unrelated to student achievement, for example, it bears re-examination and refinement or possibly elimination from the evaluation system.

The policy team calls for a broad investment in collaboration and research to identify and share best practices and innovative ideas. The state’s role is to leverage capacity and improve assessments and data systems. The state should also be involved in identifying and highlighting best practices. Universities and individual districts, schools and teachers can also leverage the Internet to document and share master teacher behaviors and effective implementation of robust evaluation systems to help ensure quality across the country.

5 Teacher Evaluation Systems Should Reflect the Importance of Supportive Administrators and School Environment to Effective Teaching.

Even a teacher who is potentially highly effective can be expected to struggle where basic supports and consistency are not present. Effective teachers thrive where supportive administrators maintain a positive school environment. In order for teacher evaluations to be meaningful and effective, administrators must be held accountable as well for undertaking them with consistency and acting as “instructional leaders” — providing the coaching and support for teachers to improve their practice.

Teachers may be the single most important factor in improving student achievement, but they do not exist in a vacuum. Ensuring accountability for school administrators will help prevent teacher effectiveness from suffering because of a poor working environment, in which collaboration and continuous learning is not valued, encouraged, or rewarded. The team emphasized the critical role school administrators play in creating a school environment conducive to effective teaching.

“It is important to recognize the fact that teachers who have limited access to strong administrative support and the proper training and tools are at risk of becoming ineffective.” ~ Teacher, Measures Team

A school environment conducive to effective teaching is one where high expectations are clear and firm; teaching staff is high quality and a culture of teamwork and accountability prevails; and required resources are present. As one team participant put it, “teachers teach better because of their peers. I feel accountable to them. I’m learning from them.” Such an atmosphere cannot exist where administrators do not cultivate one.

Districts must be committed to careful selection, meaningful evaluation, and high standards of performance for school administrators.

6 Components of Teacher Evaluation That Rely on Observation and Discussion Must Be in the Hands of Instructional Leaders Who Have Sufficient Expertise, Training and Capacity.

Too often, teacher evaluation involves infrequent “drive-by” observations by harried administrators or evaluators without sufficient content knowledge and training to assess a given subject or class. In order to observe and discuss teaching practice, the evaluator must be an instructional leader. This person must have the time, training, content knowledge, instructional skill, and leadership to help all teachers improve their practice.

“Master and mentor teachers help everyone, not just struggling teachers. Even strong teachers can improve their game.”

~ Speech Language Pathologist, Implementation Team

The team recommends that evaluators have the opportunity to observe a teacher several times during the course of the year. This requires significant capacity and time.

Further, the evaluators should receive significant training and be externally accountable for the proper

implementation of evaluation tools. The capacity to provide this training and accountability might come from districts, states, and outside partners.

Evaluators must have sufficient content knowledge and instructional skill to provide meaningful criticism and feedback for all teachers being evaluated. A master educator can provide targeted feedback and continual support to teachers as part of the evaluation process.

This recommendation will only have weight if it is made a policy priority and standards for evaluators are set high and monitored aggressively. The team suggests that the cost of training instructional leaders might be addressed by redirecting funding away from ineffective professional development programs.

7 Evaluations Must Differentiate Levels of Teaching Efficacy to Identify Opportunities for Professional Growth, and Drive Rewards and Consequences.

In many cases, teacher evaluations are not tied to meaningful outcomes. Evaluation systems must serve dual purposes as both a performance measure and a tool for feedback, learning, and professional growth. Evaluation systems must elicit insights into unique strengths and development needs, and to allow appropriate differentiation among teachers’ performance profiles and professional trajectories, in order to accomplish these goals.

The team recommends that evaluation result in targeted opportunities for professional development and improvement for all teachers, including those who are already effective. Supports for novice and struggling teachers — including high-quality mentoring by experienced and effective mentor teachers — should be provided along with leadership opportunities and rewards for excellent teachers.

“I think teachers need opportunities both to grow and lead as professionals.”

~ PhD Student, Policy Team

The team suggests the use of a review body including teachers and administrators to handle recommendations for dismissal. Where incentives such as pay or differentiated career paths are tied to evaluation and student achievement data, the team suggests combining individual, team and school-based incentives to ensure fairness and cooperation within a school. Tenure decisions should be based on a rigorous review of teaching performance and impact on student achievement, including peer review and feedback from mentor teachers.

8 Information From Teacher Evaluations Should Be Comparable Across Schools and Districts, and Should Be Used to Address Equity in the Distribution of Teaching Talent.

Since teachers are among the most important factors in determining student success, they are an integral part of the fight against educational inequity and the achievement gap. Evaluation systems that don't allow the comparison of teaching quality across schools and districts may mask inequitable distributions of teaching excellence. Ranking individual teachers is impractical, but a broader look at schools and districts with an eye to equity could be an important weapon in the battle for equity.

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, states and districts have been required to ensure that all students have teachers who are highly qualified. While qualifications are important, the team identified teaching effectiveness as paramount.

Using evaluation data to address this policy concern requires that evaluations be, at least in part, comparable across schools and districts.

State-level student achievement data is a good place to start and should be used to assess the distribution of effective teachers. States that are involved in developing and/or approving teacher evaluation systems need to consider comparability of ratings across districts. Within a district, high standards for observation and ratings will make evaluations more reliable and comparable across schools for use in addressing equity issues.

“Without any state involvement, there is no baseline standard, which can be difficult to measure, apply, and compare.”
~ Attorney, Policy Team

Hope Street Group would like to sincerely thank all of our volunteer participants and the experts who made time to share their knowledge with the policy team. Interested in learning more about the team or our process? Check out the complete teacher evaluation systems project from start to finish, including discussions, as well as much more (including our Economic Opportunity Index tool) in Policy2.0 at www.hopestreetgroup.org.

