



REL research digest

WEST

November 2014

Alliance Helps States Map New Terrain in Educator Evaluation

About five years ago, states across the country took on the huge, complex task of developing and implementing new systems to evaluate teacher and principal performance in public schools.

In response to a federal mandate aimed at improving student achievement, especially in the lowest performing schools, state boards of education drafted high-level educator evaluation frameworks that called for the use of multiple evaluation measures, including growth in student achievement. But models of effective systems were scarce, and state and local education agencies were looking for ideas and guidance.

"These evaluation requirements were part of a major shift in federal policy," says Reino Makkonen, a senior policy analyst at WestEd. "While previous policy emphasized *highly qualified* educators, measured largely by certifications and years of experience, the new policy called for evaluating teacher and principal *effectiveness*, as evidenced by job performance and student achievement."

Makkonen leads the REL West team that has provided data analysis and technical assistance services to the West Region states of Arizona, Nevada, and Utah since 2012, through the Educator Effectiveness Alliance. Members comprise state specialists in leadership, instruction, evaluation, and assessment.

"The alliance is looking at evaluation efforts through a couple of lenses," Makkonen says. "First, by regulation, states must be implementing a set of valid, reliable measures for evaluating educators, and we're helping out with technical aspects of developing those measures.

"Second, on the research side, we're supporting states to regularly think through and study how well the implementation structures and procedures are working," he adds.

For example, during the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years, at the request of the Arizona and Utah state education agencies (SEAs), REL West supported pilot testing of the states' new standards-based teacher evaluation instruments and procedures in selected districts.

As testing progressed, state agencies collected data from a variety of sources, including the initial results from principals' observations of teachers' instructional practice, parent surveys, and assessments of student academic progress, as well as feedback on implementation from participating teachers and principals via focus groups and surveys.

REL West Research Digest keeps educators and others abreast of the research, data analysis, and technical assistance carried out by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West), including joint efforts with eight state and regional research alliances of education stakeholders in the West Region states of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. In addition to providing abstracts of selected REL West research reports, the twice-yearly digest may include descriptions of upcoming REL West work, services, and events in the West Region, or publications developed by other researchers.

continued on page 2 >>

Visit the REL West website featuring:

- Collaborative work with Research Alliances
- Free reports on state issues
- Events that connect research, policy, and practice

<http://relwest.wested.org>

Analysis of that data revealed a range of issues, from practical needs such as ensuring parent access to online evaluation surveys, to concerns that teacher observation scores were tending to bunch up at the high end of performance scales.

As REL West begins its third year working with the alliance, Makkonen says the group has made steady progress in establishing a continuous Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA)¹ cycle of data collection and analysis to inform improvement of evaluation instruments and systems. The cycle begins in early summer, when researchers begin analyzing data from the previous year's pilot testing. A few weeks later, at the beginning of the new school year, they meet with alliance members to review their findings, discuss and plan needed changes, and help develop new research questions for the coming year.

Although the idea behind the PDSA cycle is straightforward, the approach is a whole new way of doing business for most state and local education agencies, according to Marie Mancuso, associate director of the West Comprehensive Center at WestEd. "Setting up educator evaluation and support systems requires substantial bolstering of the technical and systems capacity of most states and districts," says Mancuso. "But developing the needed *human* capacity to put effective educator evaluation systems into practice may be the most challenging—and important—effort."

As associate director of what was then the Southwest Comprehensive Center, Mancuso was part of collaborative efforts with REL West in 2010 and 2011 to provide regional educators, researchers, and policymakers a basic grounding in the knowledge base, models, and emerging best practices for educator evaluation. A series of events, convened

across states, offered state and district teams an opportunity to learn from experts and one another, and to start planning first steps toward developing teacher and principal evaluation measures and systems that would be valid, reliable, feasible, and fair.

Mancuso says she is optimistic about the shifts in educator roles and responsibilities she's witnessed over the past four years and its potential to inform practice. "As principals receive training and experience in conducting structured observations of teachers and providing feedback, we're noting that it's building their capacity as instructional leaders," says Mancuso. "And the development of more objective classroom observation tools is prompting teachers to ask principals to observe their teaching more often than the traditional twice a year—to get a more representative view of their skills.

"It's shifting the conversations between principals and teachers, and teachers and teachers," she adds, "which is an indication that we're moving toward the bigger goal of using data to improve instruction and student achievement."

Makkonen echoes that observation. "Many principals have tended to view their role as managerial," he says. "But if, through professional development and support, more school leaders can expand their role to include instructional leadership and coaching, that kind of fundamental shift could have a direct impact on learning."

In 2014/15 the focus of the Educator Effectiveness Alliance research is also shifting toward these larger aims. "Though not perfect, educator evaluation measures have improved and the systems used to implement them have improved," says Makkonen. "The state agencies now want to look at how districts are using these tools to improve learning.

"At some point in the future we hope these findings may also inform evaluation policy."

For further information, contact Reino Makkonen at rmakkon@WestEd.org or 415.615.3356.

Endnote

¹ Concept developed by Walter Shewhart (1891–1967), an American physicist, mathematician, and statistician.

Educator Effectiveness Publications from REL West and other RELs

REL West

Principal and Teacher Perceptions of Implementation of Multiple-Measure Teacher Evaluation Systems in Arizona

This study found that teachers and principals in districts that piloted new teacher evaluation models view standards-based teacher observations as the most credible form of evaluation but are open to incorporating student performance and stakeholder survey measures. (November 2014)

For further information, contact Reino Makkonen at rmakkon@WestEd.org or 415.615.3356.

Properties of the Multiple Measures in Arizona's Teacher Evaluation Model

This study of Arizona's pilot teacher evaluation model explored the relationships between component measures (teacher observations, student academic progress, and stakeholder surveys) and investigated how well the model differentiated between high- and low-performing teachers. Key findings indicated that most teachers were rated "proficient" on most observation items, that observation scores correlated with student academic progress primarily in domains outside the classroom, and that the strength of correlation between observation items and student academic progress differed for higher and lower scoring teachers. (November 2014)

For further information, contact Reino Makkonen at rmakkon@WestEd.org or 415.615.3356.



follow us on Twitter @REL_West

REL Mid-Atlantic

Using Alternative Student Growth Measures for Evaluating Teacher Performance: What the Literature Says

This report describes two alternatives for incorporating measures of student achievement growth in teacher evaluations: applying statistical value-added methods to outcomes other than student standardized test scores and using student learning objectives. (September 2013)

Alternative Student Growth Measures for Teacher Evaluation: Profiles of Early-Adopting Districts

This report features the comments of administrators in eight districts that were early adopters of alternative measures of student growth about how they used value-added models and student learning objectives to evaluate teacher performance. (April 2014)

Professional Practice, Student Surveys, and Value-Added: Multiple Measures of Teacher Effectiveness in the Pittsburgh Public Schools

This study found that each of three measures of educator effectiveness—professional practice measures derived from the Danielson Framework for Teaching; Tripod student survey measures; and value-added measures—has the potential to differentiate the performance levels of different teachers. The three types of measures are also positively but modestly correlated with each other. (July 2014)

REL Northeast & Islands

How States Use Student Learning Objectives in Teacher Evaluation Systems: A Review of State Websites

This report provides an overview of how states define and apply student learning objectives in teacher evaluation systems. (March 2014)

Promising Practices from Alliance Work Featured in New REL West Publications

Some useful findings and promising practices are emerging from REL West's work with state and regional alliances of educators and others committed to data-based decision making to improve teaching and learning. The toolkit and reports described below were published in the summer and early fall of 2014.

Speak Out, Listen Up! Tools for Using Student Perspectives and Local Data for School Improvement

Listening closely to what students say about their school experiences can be beneficial to educators for understanding and addressing school-related topics and problems and rethinking policies and practices. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide educators with a purposeful and systematic way to elicit and listen to student voice to inform school improvement efforts. It was developed through the collaborative efforts of the Washoe County School District (Nevada) and REL West. (July 2014)

For further information, contact BethAnn Berliner at bberliner@WestEd.org or 510.302.4029.

The Appropriateness of a California Student and Staff Survey for Measuring Middle School Climate

This study examined the appropriateness of using student and staff self-report surveys—the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS)—to assess school climate in middle schools. The results suggest that the

Cal-SCHLS student survey can be used to validly and reliably assess climate at school and teacher levels. (September 2014)

For further information, contact: Tom Hanson at thanson@WestEd.org, or 562.799.5170.

Using Assessment Data to Guide Math Course Placement of California Middle School Students

This report offers findings from a study of algebra I placements based on different test scores for middle school students in California. The study found that placement into grade 8 algebra I based solely on students' grade 6 California Standards Test proficiency status results in some students taking the course who have less than a 40 percent chance of success. The study also finds that a newly available assessment developed by the Math Diagnostic Testing Project makes a valuable contribution to decisions about algebra I placement. (September 2014)

For further information, contact Neal Finkelstein at nfinkel@WestEd.org, or 415.615.3171.

ASK REL WEST

Ask REL West is a reference desk service that functions much like a technical reference library. Submit your education-related question and REL West will respond with information from IES research projects, publications, and reports; references for and bibliographies of other existing education research; referrals to federally funded education organizations and websites; and regionally specific educational information. To ASK REL West, go to <http://relwest.wested.org/contact>

CONTACT INFORMATION

REL West at WestEd
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
866.853.1831
relwest@WestEd.org
relwest.WestEd.org

This digest was prepared under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, by the Regional Educational Laboratory West, administered by WestEd. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.