

Improving Instruction for All Students Through Meaningful Support in Educator Evaluation

State Reflections From the Collaborative for the Continuous Improvement
of Educator Effectiveness Systems (the Collaborative)



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Introduction

The strongest leverage point to improve any system lies with the people the system is designed to support (LeFloch, Garcia, & Barbour, 2016). Likewise, accountability systems do not move schools out of improvement status; educators do. Assessing educator performance and using that data to guide their professional growth and development holds the potential to build and sustain an educator workforce driven by continuous improvement so that instructional practice is improved, and each student is afforded access to highly effective teachers. (LeFloch et al., 2016) Assessing educators’ performance **and** using that information to understand how best to support

RAND’S RECENT REPORT, A NATIONWIDE LOOK AT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS, STATES THAT:

“Overall, 76 percent of teachers reported that they made improvements to their instructional practices as a direct result of their participation in their schools’ evaluation systems.

Teachers that were observed more frequently were more likely to report that the evaluation system improved their instructional practice. ”

Tuma, Hamilton, & Tsai, 2018, p. 9.

growth and development has the potential to build and sustain a workforce that continuously improves practice so that **all** students have equitable opportunity to learn and achieve. Schools identified as needing improvement simply cannot exit their identified status unless the educators within are provided the knowledge, skills, and supports to successfully engage all learners. Educator evaluation and professional learning systems can provide state, district, and school leaders with essential data to ensure that all students have access to effective teachers and therefore strengthen school improvement efforts.

States are in a unique position to build and implement educator evaluation and professional growth systems that districts and schools can then implement at scale focusing on their specific school improvement needs and context. Educator evaluation and professional growth systems can provide districts and schools with the data and strategies to articulate what effective teaching practices look like, identify areas in which all educators can grow and learn professionally, and provide educators with differentiated supports to improve their practice. Strengthening educator effectiveness is a key component to ensure equity and improvement for all students.

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A Continued Focus on Improving Educator Evaluation and Professional Learning Systems Through the Power of Collaboration

How can states help ensure that their systems are providing schools and educators with the essential data for improvement efforts? One powerful strategy is to collaborate with partners using a continuous improvement approach. Collaborating on continuous improvement efforts can help identify solutions, process strategies, share lessons learned, inspire new ideas, and accelerate learning and productivity. Six states have been doing just that—working together to investigate and address specific, high-priority, high-impact ways to improve their educator evaluation and professional learning systems. [The Collaborative for the Continuous Improvement of Educator Effectiveness Systems \(the Collaborative\)](#), a partnership of the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center), the West Comprehensive Center, and six states (Delaware, Tennessee,

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents new opportunities for states to reaffirm, modify, or improve their educator evaluation and professional growth systems. ESSA does not require these systems but provides opportunities for states to continuously improve. For example, Title II, Part A of ESSA authorizes states to use funds for “improving equitable access to effective teachers” (Section 2101(c)(4)(B)(iii) of Title II of ESSA). These systems are a key component of equitable access by identifying which teachers need support and providing them differentiated professional learning to improve their practice.

Massachusetts, Colorado, Arizona, and Rhode Island), with support from the Northeast Comprehensive Center, have worked together since 2016 to address state-specific design and implementation challenges. Each state focused its Collaborative project on a problem of practice related to either the measures embedded in its educator evaluation system, the use of information from those measures, or overall system implementation. Across the two years, the Collaborative states have worked to continuously improve their systems so that they better assess teacher performance and provide high-quality, differentiated support and development. (For examples of the state problems of practice, see pages 10–21.) These states are continuing this work with the goal of improving teaching and learning for all students and hope to inspire other states and districts to do the same.

Culminating from the work on each state’s individual, context-specific problem of practice, the Collaborative developed a set of guiding principles that the six states consider essential for the continuous improvement of educator effectiveness systems. These principles were created and informed by lessons learned from the participating states as they worked to solve problems of practice and improve their systems. Taken together, the guiding principles have the potential to inspire states and districts to leverage and cultivate their educator evaluation systems so that educator practice is improved.

This brief provides an overview of the six guiding principles and presents short vignettes on each of the six Collaborative states that summarize their problems of practice, highlight their continuous improvement efforts within their existing educator effectiveness system, and draw attention to how the six guiding principles were infused into their work.

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This document is meant to encourage states and districts that aspire to establish and continuously improve education evaluation systems that provide meaningful feedback and support to teachers. States and districts can learn from the guiding principles as well as from the Collaborative states' lessons learned described in this report.

As these states tackled their problems of practice and revised existing educator evaluation systems, the Collaborative was mindful to anchor the work in the evidence-based practices noted within empirical research and promising practices. Appendix A provides a brief overview of the existing and emerging research on educator evaluation systems and the features that promote the use of evaluation results to inform professional learning and demonstrate a positive impact on teacher performance and student learning.

Interested in learning more about The Collaborative? Visit our webpage at <https://www.gtlcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative> or check out our Story Map at <http://bit.ly/CollSM>.

Why Focus on Continuous Improvement of Educator Evaluation and Professional Learning Systems?

Over the past several years, many states and districts reformed educator evaluation and professional learning systems with the goal of improving teaching and learning for all students. The creation of these systems has led to many changes, including a greater understanding and common language concerning instruction (Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016) and teachers receiving more frequent feedback on their practice (Garet et al., 2017; Tuma, Hamilton, & Tsai, 2018). The Collaborative states have experienced similar benefits and have sought to establish a continuous improvement cycle to strengthen their systems' impact on teacher practice and student learning by addressing implementation challenges and by establishing and maintaining credibility and stakeholder buy-in. What if we could identify which aspects of these systems are working or have the potential to work with improvements, and which system weaknesses might need to be eliminated? One way to do this is through focused continuous improvement efforts.

“Our people are our most important asset, and we want to implement this comprehensive system and educator evaluation is a piece [of] that system. We want to make sure that we give the people in the system everything that they possibly need. So to me there isn't any choice of not continuously improving the system.”

Lori Renfro, Assistant Superintendent
for Human Capital Management Systems, Maricopa County Education
Service Agency, Arizona (a state participating in the Collaborative)

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Continuous improvement is a cyclical approach to problem solving that is data-based. States and districts implementing this approach typically include relevant stakeholders' reflections and input, identifying a problem of practice, making adjustments, piloting and testing potential solutions to a problem, making adjustments again, and then evaluating the intervention. Continuous improvement requires specific measurable goals, the flexibility to test evidence-based solutions, time to research and implement strategies, and collection and use of data (Best & Dunlap, 2014). Continuous improvement is often maximized when pursued in a network or community of practice.

Implementing educator evaluation and professional learning systems has been challenging work, and there is still room for improvement to ensure that these systems reach their full potential. Identifying which aspects of the evaluation and support system are working, or have the potential to work, and system weaknesses that may need to be revised or eliminated can inform state and district efforts to improve and support teacher practice. Establishing a continuous improvement focus not only helps strengthen systems but also sets the foundation for taking a system's change approach to educator evaluation and planning for sustainability along the way.

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states and districts the opportunity to revisit and refocus their educator evaluation and professional learning systems. The Collaborative’s guiding principles seek to empower states and local education agencies (LEAs) to consider strategies to advance their individual educator effectiveness initiatives in ways that truly grow and support teachers’ practice for *all* students. The six guiding principles are as follows:

- GP1** **Embed educator evaluation and professional learning systems within a coherent talent management system.**
- GP2** **Revisit authentic communication and collaborative engagement of stakeholders.**
- GP3** **Use data in decision making and tracking outcomes.**
- GP4** **Achieve consensus and clarity about system non-negotiables and flexibilities.**
- GP5** **Deprivatize the culture of teaching and feedback by making classroom practices, resources, and materials public, sharable, and storable.**
- GP6** **Model continuous improvement and learning in a collaborative setting.**

The [Council of Chief State School Officers \(CCSSO\)](#), the [Measures of Effective Teaching \(MET\) Study](#), and [The Aspen Institute](#) have developed similar recommendations for improving educator evaluation systems (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016; The Aspen Institute 2016). Collectively, these resources as well as the Collaborative’s guiding principles in this document provide states, districts, and other stakeholders a powerful direction and “North Star” for continuously improving educator evaluation systems.

GP1 **GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: Embed Educator Evaluation and Professional Learning Systems Within a Coherent Talent Management System**

Strong talent management systems are based on an understanding of what it means to be effective, the ability to proactively and accurately assess what this practice looks like in the classroom, and the capacity to support teachers in mastering higher levels of practice. Ideally, these systems are designed to cultivate needed knowledge and skills among entering and midcareer professionals and rely on implementation across the career continuum, not as isolated activities (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2014). States should work across structures and organizations to ensure that educator evaluation and professional learning systems inform talent development efforts, from preservice to inservice and from novice teachers to seasoned teacher leaders.

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Within state education agencies (SEAs), divisions such as educator effectiveness, school improvement, licensing, and standards and assessment should work in an interconnected manner. Cross-division activity intersects with the six guiding principles above, sharing data and using what has been learned to drive continuous improvement. As an essential equity indicator, evaluation data can be analyzed to assess student access to highly effective teachers and employment patterns of these teachers. States could consider using evaluation and retention data to forecast teacher needs, particularly in areas where shortages occur. Ultimately, data derived from the educator evaluation system can be linked to human capital reports as an important indicator of the talent management system's successes or needs for improvement.

States also should consider working with higher education institutions and systems to ensure that educator preparation and induction are aligned with and informed by the evaluation system. This effort typically involves data sharing across separate systems.

Finally, states that are modeling use of educator evaluation within an overall talent management system could ensure and support LEAs in undertaking similar work, particularly ways in which educator evaluation systems could support and inform efforts focused on attracting, recruiting, hiring, and leveraging professional learning strategies and career pathways for highly effective teachers.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: Revisit Authentic Communication and Collaborative Engagement of Stakeholders

Well-designed stakeholder engagement is critical to ensure that the evaluation system is designed and implemented to support and develop teachers and leaders (Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Laine, & Friedman, 2013). To achieve this end, states and districts need to engage educators with authentic communication and opportunities to contribute to system refinement, such as cocreating or revising evaluation frameworks, tools, and resources that make up the system. Authentic communication requires that states listen and respond to key stakeholders. States can gather input from stakeholders on what has worked well and what can be improved and create opportunities for stakeholders to co-create and help revise tools and systems. Doing this strengthens the evaluation system, improves implementation, and creates greater buy-in and support from educators. After engaging stakeholders and applying their feedback, states and districts need to be proactive and clear in communicating how stakeholder input was applied to any changes or adjustments to the system.

States need to continually and consistently emphasize the purpose of the evaluation and professional learning system in evaluation-related communication. Moreover, they need to make clear linkages between evaluation and the activities that it is meant to support, such as professional learning or opportunities to advance along a career pathway. When states only communicate the details of implementation or compliance, it becomes easy for educators to view these systems as another accountability measure and overlook or lose sight of how the system has been designed to support teachers and improve student learning.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: Use Data in Decision Making and Tracking Outcomes

Using data can help states better understand the distribution of teacher effectiveness and provides a means of conducting continuous improvement on the overall implementation of the evaluation and support system in districts and schools. Most states have made changes to their educator evaluation systems in the past several years, eliminating the binary rating systems of the past in which 99% of teachers were deemed “satisfactory.” Kraft and Gilmour (2017) found that new evaluation systems rate more teachers in categories below proficient, reflecting a better distribution and understanding of effectiveness in the profession. But the study reported wide variability in teacher ratings across states and suggested that further work is needed to improve system design features and implementation practices. A valid distribution and understanding of teacher effectiveness across schools, districts, and states allows for differentiated supports, retention efforts, and identification of teacher leaders, particularly in high-need schools and districts where improvements are most needed.

Given the variability in teacher effectiveness ratings and student growth, a close analysis of the correlation across the educator evaluation system metrics may inform any needed adjustments to both the metrics and their associated measures. For example, refinements to the metrics may be needed if teachers show high student growth scores but poor evaluation ratings. Likewise, an analysis of implementation fidelity is equally important as variability in implementation will impact results. In a review of state evaluation system activity,

the GTL Center (Menon, Berg-Jacobson, Field, & Yorke, 2015) found that just 13 states engaged in studies of implementation. These states analyzed:

- District fidelity to the state or local model,
- Correlation among evaluation system components,
- Whether communication from the SEA had been clearly received,
- Stakeholder satisfaction with the system,
- Effectiveness of training and support to implement the evaluation system,
- Whether unintended consequences had emerged, and
- Impact on teacher and principal practice.

States would do well to analyze multiple data to inform decisions about their evaluation systems, both to refine the system design and to ensure that the system is implemented effectively in the field. In addition, they should consider measuring the system against specific benchmarks that will promote continuous improvement. States also may help LEAs develop the capacity to analyze and use evaluation data to engage in continuous improvement efforts at the local level.



GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4: Achieve Consensus and Clarity About System Non-Negotiables and Flexibilities

As states work with groups of stakeholders during the continuous improvement process, it is vital to specify which aspects of the system are non-negotiable and which aspects have flexibility. States that identify, obtain agreement on, and clearly communicate aspects of the evaluation system

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that are non-negotiable and those that are flexible establish transparency and gain a clearer understanding of expectations, both internally at the SEA and for the LEAs and schools implementing the system. Leadership would do well to ensure that the non-negotiables are clearly understood and to clarify where flexibility is permitted, so that decisions are based on the available evidence base and informed by key stakeholders.

States take a variety of approaches to the state-local relationship in evaluation systems, such as a single state system, a menu of approved systems, a state framework with components for districts to determine, and the ability of districts to establish their own systems (Gandha & Baxter, 2016). Regardless of approach, the state should be clear on a research- and standards-based structure that gives districts enough flexibility to customize the implementation of the system to their context while giving the state meaningful and comparable data to analyze. To determine which approach is appropriate, states need to consider the system's goals and desired outcomes along with feedback from key stakeholders.

GP5 | **Guiding Principle 5: Deprivatize the Culture of Teaching and Feedback by Making Classroom Practices, Resources, and Materials Public, Sharable, and Storable**

For evaluation systems to successfully inform individual and collective improvements in professional practice, local educators must be engaged in sharing, accessing, and analyzing examples of their own work and the work of their

peers. States need to promote and foster the collaborative sharing of effective instructional practices, resources, and materials. States can make practices, resources, and materials shareable and available publicly by providing vetted, curated sets of resources that districts can use, apply, or adapt to meet their local needs. The design and implementation of the evaluation system itself can lead to iterative and action-oriented feedback. To create a culture and system that uses and relies on shared feedback, examples of practice, and resources and materials, states must first analyze current policies, systems, strategies, and tools to assess whether they would support such a system. States could solicit stakeholder input to understand revisions that could be made to the system to make such sharing feasible and usable. States should create and/or revise policies, systems, strategies, and tools that increase effectiveness and growth for educators through the collaborative sharing and storing of effective instructional practices, resources, and materials. States should engage and support LEAs to provide teachers with time to work collaboratively, to create hybrid teacher leader roles, and to observe one another's practice.

AS NOTED BY RICHARD ELMORE,

““ *Privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement.* ””

Elmore (2000). *Building a New Structure for School Leadership.*

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Guiding Principle 6: Model Continuous Improvement and Learning in a Collaborative Setting

States should track the efficacy of their educator effectiveness systems over time and use that data to inform the continuous improvement of these systems. Data should be collected at multiple points in the year to reflect upon short-term outcomes, and states should use those results to drive system improvement. Similarly, states might consider using the data generated by these systems to determine which students are and are not afforded equitable access to effective teachers as part of efforts to ensure equitable access to excellent teachers.

States should model this process for districts and support the use of continuous learning of evaluation and support systems at the LEA level. Furthermore, states should consider it their role to promote continuous improvement and learning in evaluation and to support systems by collaborating across the state and LEAs.

The following section highlights the work of the Collaborative states to improve their evaluation and educator effectiveness systems by depicting how the guiding principles were applied. The six vignettes that follow reflect specific problems of practice with identified strategies related to one or more of the Guiding Principles, with a focus on improving the evaluation and educator effectiveness system.

Review our self-assessment to help determine which guiding principle may be the best entry point for continuously improving your educator evaluation and professional growth system. Find the self-assessment at https://www.gtcenter.org/sites/default/files/Collaborative_Selfassessment.pdf

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ARIZONA: Strengthening Evaluator Feedback



Passed in 2011, Arizona’s educator evaluation law requires districts and charter school entities to align their evaluation systems with the Arizona State Board of Education’s adopted framework. This framework provides LEAs with the flexibility needed

to design their own evaluation models, adopt existing models, or implement the optional model designed by the Arizona Department of Education’s Effective Teachers and Leaders Unit.

Over the past 3 years, ADE collected and analyzed aggregate teacher evaluation scores and compared them with student performance data, uncovering a disconnect between the two. The data showed that 94% of teachers were rated *Effective* or *Highly Effective*, yet only 39% of students passed the English language arts and math portions of the state assessment. Many states have experienced a similar challenge of little differentiation in teacher evaluation results; most teachers were rated *Effective* or higher (Doherty & Jacobs, 2015).



Using these data in decision making and tracking outcomes, ADE adopted two strategies to address this problem of practice:

- **Increased the capacity of principals to conduct meaningful observation and feedback cycles through the development of ADE’s Qualified Evaluator Academy.**

To strengthen teacher feedback from principals or supervisors of teachers, ADE developed the [Qualified Evaluator Academy \(QEA\)](#) in 2016–17. The goal was to strengthen the practice of teacher evaluators to obtain a more accurate review of teacher performance to



better align teacher evaluation summative scores with student academic progress. In Year 1 of the Collaborative, six cohorts, with approximately 200 participants, successfully completed the 5-day academy. Using a pre- and post-assessment with a Likert scale from 1 to 5, participants increased their knowledge of evaluations, from an average of 3.0 to 4.25 after completion of the academy. In addition, 98% of the participants responded that the QEA either “Met” or “Exceeded” their expectations. To continue addressing the problem of practice, three additional cohorts were added for Year 2 of the Collaborative. ADE is in the process of assessing the impact of the QEA on educator evaluation through a case study with past LEA participants.

- **Aligned ADE efforts across the agency on joint projects pertaining to educator evaluations.**

A concerted effort across divisions and programs within ADE has been made to “break down the silos.” The QEA included cross-agency planning and implementation, specifically addressing areas in special education, English language learners, arts, physical education, Title I, career and technical education, and early childhood education. Participants conversed with specialists from each area, focusing on student engagement, instructional strategies, and the collection of evidence. **Talent management has become a focus area in the state’s school improvement and turnaround efforts.**

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For the second phase of the Collaborative, ADE plans to focus on supporting evaluators of principals. Using a survey, the agency has collected data on the level of interest and need for a similar training for evaluators of principals.



Throughout the Collaborative, ADE focused on continuously improving its evaluation and professional growth system by improving principals' capacity to conduct observations and provide high-quality feedback to teachers through the QEA.

Other states seeking to strengthen their systems may consider similar strategies of using data in decision making and modeling continuous improvement in a collaborative setting.

PRINCIPAL QUOTES

““ *I cannot imagine evaluating teachers without this training.* ””

““ *This is the most I've learned about evaluations...* ””

““ *I feel so much more prepared and knowledgeable about the whole process.* ””

To see the latest updates about Arizona's project, visit <https://www.gtcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative/arizona-profile>.

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COLORADO: Continuous Improvement on the Teacher Rubric



In 2010, Senate Bill 10-191 passed, changing the way all educators are evaluated in Colorado with the goal of improving educators' practice and student learning. The

GP3

Colorado Department of Education (CDE) conducted a 5-year pilot of the evaluation system and collected and **examined system data for decision making and tracking outcomes.**

CDE analyzed qualitative and quantitative data in a variety of ways: a general inbox to collect information broadly, baseline and end-of-year surveys, and an analysis of ratings that identified high correlations between elements, confirming the qualitative evidence of redundancies in the instrument. The data collection and analysis highlighted that the lack of quality feedback to educators was a significant barrier to implementation by showing that the length and redundancy of the evaluation instrument was problematic.

CDE's problem of practice for the Collaborative was to ensure that evaluators have time to provide teachers with quality feedback and instructional coaching supports. CDE adopted the following strategies:

- **Revised the teacher rubric through the analysis of data with stakeholders.** During the 2016–17 school year, CDE formed a technical working group (TWG) comprised of district, school, and teacher representatives to lead the rubric revisions. This group examined data to make informed decisions about needed revisions to reduce redundancies and add clarity within the rubric.

In addition, CDE conducted 36 focus groups across the state to share the intended changes and learn whether practitioners thought these revisions would result in more meaningful feedback to educators. The input gained from focus groups went back to the TWG for further revisions. The revised rubric was piloted during the 2017–18 school year in 50 districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) with feedback loops on the revisions to determine whether the updates allowed more time for meaningful feedback due to clarification of language and reduction of redundancies.

- **Learned from districts piloting the newly revised rubric.** CDE has five regional specialists based throughout the state who are charged with introducing the new rubric locally and providing support to the pilot districts and BOCES, and eventually to all districts and BOCES in their region. These regional specialists do not provide training but instead coach districts to think about how best to support educators with the shift in the revised

“*These changes were about the field, they weren't just about CDE just deciding to make the change. They were not only pushed by the field, but generated by the field and then confirmed by the field.*”

Courtney Cabrera, Educator Effectiveness Manager,
Colorado Department of Education

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rubric. In addition, during a meeting of pilot districts, CDE organized district teams by region to discuss and share challenges and solutions related to implementing the revised rubric. The regional organization ensured that smaller rural districts could brainstorm solutions together to address similar implementation challenges.

For the second phase of the Collaborative, CDE plans to revise the State Model Evaluation System for Principals/Assistant Principals. The goals of this revision are to ensure greater quality of feedback provided to principals, boost instructional practices for teachers, and improve alignment with the revisions to the teacher evaluation system. CDE plans to adopt similar strategies for revisions to the principal evaluation instrument using **authentic stakeholder engagement** through a TWG and focus groups.



Throughout the Collaborative, CDE focused on strategies to improve the quality of feedback teachers received by revising the evaluation rubric and providing support and coaching on the new rubric. States and districts interested in continuously improving their evaluation systems may consider a similar strategy of using data for decision making and engaging stakeholders to help identify areas to continuously improve their evaluation and professional growth systems.

To see the latest updates about Colorado's project, visit <https://www.gtlcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative/colorado-profile>.



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DELAWARE: Communication and Stakeholder Engagement 2.0



Based on perception data from a statewide educator survey, educator interviews, and regular monitoring, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) learned that there was misinformation and confusion surrounding the evaluation system, its purpose, and how it can support teacher professional growth. The survey also illustrated that there was a lack of buy-in from educators on the evaluation system. DDOE staff identified that less-than-effective communication from the department perhaps led to weak communication from administrators to educators. This miscommunication led to poor understanding and negative perceptions of the evaluation system by educators. In addition, department staff recognized during monitoring visits that communicating the correct information and clarifying the evaluation system's ability to support professional learning increased teacher buy-in. This direct feedback from stakeholders in the field helped identify that Delaware needed to **revisit authentic communication**. When Delaware rolled out its teacher evaluation system, the communication strategy focused more on the details of the new appraisal process and did not emphasize how the system could improve educator practice and student learning.

GP2

As part of the Collaborative, DDOE's problem of practice was how to strengthen and improve communication strategies so that educators would receive accurate information and increase

educator buy-in. Delaware adopted three strategies to improve communication on the evaluation system:

- **Offered an administrator refresher training focused more on improving practice and less on ensuring compliance.** DDOE provided a 1-day training to all administrators in the state during the summer of 2017. The training not only revisited policy updates but also highlighted the intent of the system and showed how improving educator practice is evident throughout all the practices in the system. Administrators learned how to use evaluation data to drive professional learning and quality goal-setting strategies.
- **Established quarterly Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS II) lead meetings that include an assigned lead liaison for the evaluation system from each district.** DDOE communicates regularly with this group of liaisons through e-mail on major changes, events, and training. In addition, DDOE meets with this group in-person and virtually to share and clarify information and teach best practices for monitoring the quality of evaluations, collecting and analyzing data, calibrating, and providing training. The group has opportunities during these meetings to share helpful tips, successes, and strategies to address problems of practice. For new teachers and as a refresher for experienced teachers, DDOE created a "Student Improvement Component" and a "DPAS II: Laying the Foundation" professional development session that the liaisons could deliver.

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■ **Launched a monthly newsletter on the evaluation**

system framework and processes. Each edition of the newsletter¹ contains research behind selected criteria from the teacher evaluation rubric and notices and links to professional development sessions that administrators can use to dig deeper into the criteria by examining the elements of the criteria, identifying common “look-fors,” and observing effective performance of the criteria.

For the next phase of the Collaborative, DDOE plans to examine whether the current evaluation tool clearly reflects rigorous teaching practices aligned to the InTASC standards and shifts in the Common Core State Standards. DDOE plans to address whether there are opportunities to streamline the rubric, eliminate redundancy, and focus on the critical indicators of performance that can improve teaching. In addition, department staff plan to explore how to improve

the system so that educators receive frequent, timely, and targeted feedback on their practice. To address these issues, **GP2 DDOE plans to engage a group of diverse stakeholders from across the state** to work on continuously improving the evaluation system.

GP6 Over the course of its work during the Collaborative, **DDOE engaged in authentic communication with stakeholders, addressed misconceptions of the educator evaluation system to improve buy-in and implementation, and plans to further authentically engage stakeholders to continuously improve the teacher evaluation rubric.** Other states and districts may consider modeling similar strategies to improve communication and engage stakeholders to continuously improve their educator evaluation and professional growth systems.

To see the latest updates about Delaware’s project, visit <https://www.gtcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative/delaware-profile>.

¹ For examples of monthly newsletters, see <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/3742>.



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MASSACHUSETTS: A Commitment to Student Learning as One of Multiple Measures in the Evaluation System



The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework originally included a Summative Performance Rating of a teacher's effectiveness across

four standards of practice, as well as a separate Student Impact Rating based on multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement. Through conversations with a variety of stakeholders, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) found that the separate Student Impact Rating was a concern for many districts. To identify the specific challenges, DESE collected self-reported data from districts on the barriers to establishing Student Impact Ratings for educators. The data showed that some districts were struggling to implement the Student Impact Rating due to a lack of data and assessment literacy, particularly in non-tested grades and subjects, making it difficult to ensure rigor and parity for all educators. In addition, the state faced pushback from educators on having a significant portion of a teacher's evaluation comprised of this separate rating.

Massachusetts's problem of practice as part of the Collaborative was how to revise the separate impact rating in a way that addressed stakeholders' concerns yet still yielded information about a teacher's impact on student learning, growth, and achievement. For Massachusetts,



the balance of non-negotiables and flexibility included

maintaining evidence of student learning as a non-negotiable, while allowing for flexibility in the process used to incorporate these measures into an educator's evaluation. DESE adopted two strategies to address this problem of practice:

- 1. Identified core principles of including student learning in educator evaluation via authentic stakeholder engagement.** The state convened a group of superintendents and union representatives to provide feedback and ideas on how to measure student learning and how to integrate that information into an educator's evaluation. Some of the superintendents' feedback was that the separate Student Impact Rating was redundant and that teachers were already examining student data in the other standards within the Massachusetts educator evaluation framework.
- 2. Revised regulation language on the student impact rating.** With input from stakeholders and support from the Collaborative, DESE drafted revised regulation language that eliminated the Student Impact Rating and embedded evidence of impact on student learning into the second standard of the performance evaluation. Having a separate impact rating meant that educators and districts were looking at teacher practice and the impact on student learning separately. This revised model streamlined the process while reinforcing conversations on how *practice* can impact student *learning*.

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During the next phase of the Collaborative, DESE will focus on how to support districts in making good human capital decisions. The Educator Evaluation Framework can support every stage of the human capital process, including preparation, recruitment, induction, professional learning, and recognition. DESE plans to examine what the state is doing in each stage, what is and not working within LEAs, what could be done to improve coherence within each stage, and how the Educator Evaluation Framework can be a driver of effective talent management.

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Throughout its work with the Collaborative, **DESE identified its non-negotiable policies and engaged stakeholders in continuously improving the measurement of student learning**

within its teacher evaluation system. Identifying what policy areas are non-negotiable or flexible for a state education agency is a great early step for other states and districts to consider prior to soliciting stakeholder feedback on how to improve the evaluation system.

To see the latest updates about Massachusetts' project, visit <https://www.gtcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative/massachusetts-profile>.

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RHODE ISLAND: Reimagining Student Learning as Part of the Educator Evaluation System



The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) identified student learning objectives (SLOs)—the state’s measure of student learning—as an area to work on improving within the educator evaluation system. RIDE collected feedback on the teacher evaluation system from educators across the state for 6 years. The feedback from educators showed that the SLO process may not be as well connected to what teachers are doing instructionally and, therefore, may not have the intended impact of improving instructional practice. In addition to the survey, RIDE held a summit with a variety of stakeholders focused on the evaluation system. At that summit, multiple stakeholders came together to propose a set of weights and scoring bands that could be used across all state-approved teacher evaluation models. Unfortunately, participants were not yet prepared to move toward a common set of weighted points and cut-score ranges. Instead, they indicated the more pressing need to address the concerns with SLOs.

Based on this feedback, RIDE’s problem of practice for the Collaborative was to evolve the measurement of student learning to reflect a more authentic and accurate experience for educators across Rhode Island. RIDE adopted the following strategies:



- **Engaged in authentic communication and collaborative stakeholder engagement.** RIDE staff

wanted to ensure that the new models of measuring student learning would help improve instructional practice and gain buy-in from educators. To do this, RIDE launched a collaboration with one of the state’s teacher unions and two teacher representatives from the two most widely used evaluation models. State leadership and teacher union representatives have participated in every meeting and all stakeholders have provided feedback throughout the reimagining process. Employing authentic communication to the field was critical, so that all educators, not just those participating in the meetings, were informed on the upcoming changes. Some of the communication strategies included entries in the Commissioner’s weekly field memo to inform educators of RIDE’s commitment to reimagining student learning through evaluation. Each message to the field, whether through the Commissioner’s field memo, information sessions, or support sessions, was vetted with the collaborative stakeholder group and modified accordingly. By using multiple communication and engagement strategies, RIDE intends to increase transparency regarding the improvements and shifts made to the evaluation system.

- **Conducted a SWOT analysis.** RIDE did not want to completely disregard all the work and lessons learned from implementing SLOs. The Rhode Island team conducted a SWOT analysis in the fall of 2016 to

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identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to determine what about SLOs was working well and what was not working. This analysis helped Rhode Island build upon the previous work and focus on continuous improvement.

- **Developed guiding principles.** Based on the SWOT analysis and data collection, the Rhode Island team developed a list of guiding principles that would help frame the new models of measuring student learning and established the non-negotiables and flexibilities.

The guiding principles included:

- Students: A representative class or group of students is included.
- Standards: Content standards are appropriate and prioritized to the course.
- Time frame: Both long-term and short-term cycles are encouraged.
- Evidence: Multiple, varied sources of standards-aligned evidence are used.
- Strategies: Instructional strategies are planned for and supported.
- Expectations: Student learning expectations are articulated and monitored.

From this work, RIDE selected [three models of measuring student learning](#) to pilot and collect feedback in the 2017–18 school year to determine the viability of formally offering these models statewide. The three models were initially described as follows:

- **Embedded Practice Model:** This model prioritizes teachers using measures of student learning that are

already in use in a teacher’s day-to-day classroom. The teacher has ongoing data discussions with colleagues and evaluators to drive instructional decisions related to the prioritized content area.

- **Portfolio Model:** The teacher submits work samples from three students representing varied skill levels to provide evidence of student learning over time.
- **Student Learning Goals Model:** Similar to SLOs, teachers create a long-term or short-term student learning goal but have the flexibility to adjust instruction based on student data collected throughout cycles of instruction.

RIDE plans to continue to engage stakeholders, particularly educators participating in these pilots, to gather feedback on how to strengthen and improve the three models and ultimately determine each model’s viability as a future statewide model for measures of student learning.

Over the course of the Collaborative, RIDE engaged in authentic communication and stakeholder engagement to identify its problem of practice and to develop new models of measuring student learning. Other states may consider a similar approach of engaging stakeholders to identify areas of improvement within their educator evaluation and professional growth systems and to develop new strategies or approaches within their systems.

To see the latest updates about Rhode Island’s project, visit <https://www.gtlcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative/rhode-island-profile>.



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TENNESSEE: Deprivatizing the Culture of Teaching and Feedback Through Student Growth Portfolios



In 2011, Tennessee implemented a statewide teacher evaluation system,

the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), which consists of frequent observations, feedback, and student growth measures. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) collects feedback on TEAM and its implementation using an annual educator survey. According to survey results, teachers in Tennessee wanted more frequent and specific feedback on their performance. To address this response, TDOE developed the student growth portfolio model—a student growth measure for teachers in nontested grades and subjects. This measure helps **deprivatize the culture of teaching and feedback by making content-based practices, materials, and resources public, shareable, and storable.**

GP5

Teachers upload their student work samples onto an online platform where they are reviewed, scored, and given feedback by a peer evaluator. In addition, there are tools, resources, guidance documents, and videos accessible to teachers through this platform. The models are currently available for teachers of physical education, fine arts, world languages, prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade.

During the 2016 legislative session, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Pre-K Quality Act, which requires all districts to utilize a student growth portfolio model for their prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Tennessee was faced with 5,500 teachers and their districts needing training

to implement this new requirement. How to address expanding the student growth portfolio model became Tennessee’s problem of practice for the Collaborative. TDOE implemented three key strategies to address this problem:

- **Ensured alignment between what the portfolios capture and the revised English language arts and mathematics standards.**
- **Developed and facilitated district trainings on the new standards and the portfolio model.** For Tennessee, it was not possible to train all 5,500 prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers on the new standards and the portfolio model. Providing district trainings using a train-the-trainer model allowed the state to have a consistent message and give districts increased ownership in the process.
- **Communicated changes within the student growth portfolio model, such as implementing the new online platform.**

GP4

To implement the student growth portfolio model successfully, TDOE focused on **balancing policies that were non-negotiable and flexible** for districts. For example, one non-negotiable is that every district is required to provide a specific number of peer evaluators who are trained to review and score the portfolios. However, districts have the flexibility to determine who will serve in this role. Often, the non-negotiables are determined by statute or stakeholder input. For the student

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growth portfolios, TDOE established a statewide portfolio council comprised of teachers currently using portfolios, district portfolio liaisons, and prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers who helped inform which items were non-negotiable or flexible. For Tennessee, stakeholder input from a statewide council was helpful to drive the development of the separation between non-negotiables and flexible items and to gather feedback for any midcourse corrections. In addition, it is important that the non-negotiables are critical items that connect to achieving the state's outcomes to avoid micromanaging districts.



For the second phase of the Collaborative, **TDOE's Office of Educator Effectiveness plans to examine strategies to prompt leadership at the department to integrate initiatives such as response-to-intervention, professional learning systems, human capital management, and accountability for the TEAM model with a group of pilot districts during the 2019–20 school year to build greater coherence.**

Over the course of the Collaborative, TDOE expanded a student growth measure that strengthened feedback provided to teachers and supported deprivatizing the culture of teaching and learning. Other states considering how to continuously improve their teacher evaluation and professional growth systems may want to identify strategies for storing and sharing resources related to high-quality teaching and how to provide teachers with specific feedback.

To see the latest updates about Tennessee's project, visit <https://www.gtlcenter.org/state-collaborations/collaborative/tennessee-profile>.



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Evidence of Impact Research

Although district and state teacher evaluation reform has been under way for nearly a decade, the number of definitive studies on the impact of these systems on teacher practice or student learning is limited. Dee and Wyckoff's (2013) study examined the District of Columbia's IMPACT evaluation system and found that linking multiple measures of teacher performance with substantial incentives can improve the performance of the teaching workforce. A 2012 study of Cincinnati's Teacher Evaluation System found that teacher performance and student outcomes improved as a result of the system, which used a practice-based assessment relying on multiple, highly structured classroom observations conducted by experienced peer teachers and administrators (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

One of the most significant studies of teacher evaluation was the 3-year Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study by the Gates Foundation (2010–13; Cantrell & Kane, 2013). Findings from the Gates Foundation MET study include the following:

- Observations and student surveys can provide teachers with useful feedback on practice.
- Strategies to increase teacher trust in evaluation data include rigorous observer training and certification, the use of multiple observers, and student confidentiality when administering student surveys.
- Multiple measures are important; value-added, observation, and student survey data can provide important information about teacher practice.

- Multiple measures should be combined in a balanced way to be most reliable and provide the most useful information.
- Videos can provide teachers with information on practice and can provide observers with training and certification opportunities.

Evidence From Implementation Research

Several states and districts have evaluated the implementation of their teacher evaluation systems. Reports from these studies provide information on the elements of teacher evaluation systems that have been successful as well as lessons learned. Some common themes emerged across these reports, highlighting possible attributes of successful teacher evaluation systems across three areas: implementing strong measures to assess teacher performance, enhancing the observation and feedback process, and using evaluation results to inform professional development and support.

Implementing Strong Measures to Assess Teacher Performance

Everyone involved in the evaluation process should feel confident in the quality of the data and the capacity of the system to successfully capture the complexity of teaching (Milanowski et al., 2014). It is generally understood that to accurately assess teachers' performance for the purposes of providing feedback to improve, multiple measures are needed

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(Cantrell & Kane, 2013). The two most commonly used and examined measures include student growth data and observations of teacher practice, although researchers and practitioners also have examined measures such as lesson plan reviews, teacher self-assessments, measures of professional learning, student artifacts, teacher portfolios, and student surveys, which all can provide a reliable source of data on classroom climate, more reliable than classroom observation in some cases (Cantrell & Kane, 2013; Hull, 2013). Student growth data, through value-added measures and/or SLOs, provide important information on student learning (Hull, 2013; Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Mello, 2014). Goe, Wylie, Bosso, and Olson (2017), in their recent report based on State Teachers of the Year survey data, say that states should consider ways to measure teachers' contributions to student learning rather than focusing on the results from a single standardized assessment. That assessment data can help educators identify in what areas students need additional support instead of serving as a weighted percentage of an evaluation score. Similarly, some teacher respondents from the 2016 teacher evaluation implementation study and principal respondents from a 2017 study criticized the use of student achievement data to evaluate their performance—they expressed concern that the selected tests (especially the state assessments) do not fully capture their students' actual growth or are not aligned with the school curriculum (Anderson, Butler, Palmiter, & Carcaira, 2016; Derrington, 2017).

Observations of teacher practice provide the opportunity for teachers to receive ongoing and actionable feedback on their practice. According to a recent study by Goe, Wylie, Bosso, and Olson (2017), educators trust in and want to continue

classroom observations for both teacher evaluation and professional development, and they value both formal and informal observations as well as walk-throughs. Multiple observations should be part of a teacher's evaluation cycle, performed by more than one observer for increased reliability (Cantrell & Kane, 2013; Curtis, 2012; Donaldson et al., 2014; Kane & Staiger, 2012). Ideally, at least one observation should be conducted by a trained observer from outside the teacher's school (Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2014).

Measuring student growth has been the most challenging aspect in implementing teacher evaluation systems. For many states and districts, statewide assessments are applicable only to teachers in certain grades and subjects. Valid and reliable alternative assessment options for teachers of nontested grades or subjects are limited, and alternative growth measures, such as SLOs, are time-consuming and require stronger data and assessment literacy skills for teachers (Lachlan-Hache, Cushing, & Bivona, 2012; McCullough, English, Angus, & Gill, 2015). Seven districts in the 2016 teacher evaluation implementation study used SLOs for measuring teacher impact on student performance and highlighted challenges, such as setting realistic and consistent goals for measuring student growth and ensuring that principals give teachers fair and consistent advice on what the SLOs should be and how to measure them (Anderson et al., 2016).

Districts should continuously collect and analyze data on teacher evaluation scores and the scores of teachers on each measure to monitor reliability (Kane & Staiger, 2012) and to analyze connections between teacher scores and student characteristics (Jiang & Spote, 2016; Whitehurst et al., 2014).

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Enhancing the Observation and Feedback Process

There are certain teaching practices, such as structuring, planning, asking lower and higher order questions, and providing feedback, which have been shown to account for significant improvements in student learning (Araujo et al., 2016; Bold et al., 2017; Cantrell & Kane, 2013). To continuously support teachers' ability to practice these and other high-quality instructional strategies, observation and feedback systems must improve, including the depth and quality of training and support that evaluators receive. Studies suggest that principals and teachers need significantly more training and support than they have had in the past to learn how to have meaningful conversations about improving instructional practice (Curtis, 2012; Donaldson et al., 2014). Teachers from Goe et al.'s study (2017) stressed the importance of focusing more on targeted feedback for professional growth and improving instruction and deemphasizing the evaluation "score." They also suggested the importance of providing time and resources for informal peer observation and discussion, not only the formal process (Goe et. al., 2017). Gandha and Baxter (2016) suggested three strategies to support better feedback to teachers: (1) encouraging teacher-led dialogue, such as asking teachers to share examples of their impact on student learning; (2) creating opportunities for teachers to practice feedback with each other during, for example, peer observations or professional learning communities; and (3) linking feedback to collective goals.

Using Evaluation Results to Inform Professional Development and Support

Improving professional learning systems for teachers is essential. TNTP's 2015 Mirage report states that, "School systems are not helping teachers understand how to improve—or even that they have room to improve at all" (TNTP, 2015; p. 2). Systems designed to assess teacher performance—precisely where teachers' instructional practice is strong and where it could use improvements—should be linked to professional learning clearly and consistently. Individual evaluation conversations should include opportunities for useful feedback and coaching (Curtis, 2012; Shakman, Zweig, Bocala, Lacireno-Paquet, & Bailey, 2016). The overall system should have clear links for individual and group professional development opportunities based on evaluation system results (Milanowski et al., 2014). Still, research from TNTP (2015) concluded that it may be difficult to identify professional learning opportunities that improve teacher practice. Yet, states and districts may be able to learn from others who have already tied evaluation results to professional development and support (see Shakman et al., 2016, for example). Furthermore, the Goe et. al. (2017) study recommends that schools, districts, and states lean on professional development that is differentiated and individualized for teachers, such as online self-paced study opportunities, watching and discussing videos of excellent teaching with colleagues, and collaborating with teachers who have similar interests and needs for professional growth

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or who are from the same content or grade level. States have the opportunity to provide resources and support to districts to help them connect how to use evaluation data to inform professional learning opportunities. For example, states can provide in-person trainings for principals or evaluators on evaluation feedback and coaching for professional growth,

create an online portal that provides professional learning resources aligned to specific teaching practices in state standards or observation rubrics, or develop online or blended learning professional learning modules (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

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