# TEACH +PLUS

Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

# RISE to the Challenge: Developing teacher talent through effective evaluation

# INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the State of Indiana passed a Public Law 90, which required significant changes to teacher evaluation. Among the changes, the law required that student achievement data make up a "significant" portion of teacher evaluation scores. The law also linked teacher performance to compensation, preventing teachers who are not effective or highly effective from receiving additional pay. The state created a framework for evaluation called RISE and piloted it in three districts across the state. Three additional districts created their own evaluation frameworks and participated in the pilot. Indianapolis Public Schools adopted a modified version of the state's RISE rubric.

In the years that followed, districts across the state have implemented new evaluation systems. As Teach Plus-Indianapolis Teaching Policy Fellows, we have varied experiences with evaluation in our own schools, and we became interested in how other teachers feel about evaluation implementation throughout Indianapolis Public Schools. We were curious about several things: How do teachers feel about evaluation? From their perspective, is it improving performance? Is the system fair and transparent? How can evaluation implementation be improved? We approached these questions by reviewing research and engaging teachers and principals in focus groups and interviews. The following brief outlines our findings and recommendations for moving forward.

We conducted five focus groups, throughout which 24 teachers identified specific things they did and did not want from evaluations. The four main findings were:

1. Teachers seek greater alignment between their perspectives and those of the evaluators when it comes to the purpose and impact of the evaluation.

2. Teachers view feedback and discussion from their evaluators as a resource and want their professional development to be driven by their evaluation results.
   a. Teachers want feedback – in both a formal and informal manner.
   b. Teachers welcome feedback from their peers and colleagues.
   c. Teachers would welcome student surveys as another piece of the overall evaluation.

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

3. Teachers want accountability where their performance is measured with accuracy, objectivity, and consistency.

   d. Evaluators and the overall evaluation need to be objective so teachers see it as valuable and helpful to improving as educators.

   e. The content of the evaluation needs to accurately capture and measure the reality of the students and teachers in the classroom.

4. Teachers want their evaluation to be part of a larger process that is designed to help them improve their practice.

   f. Teachers think that greater consistency within the evaluation process would make it a more effective and helpful tool.

   g. The process needs to be implemented with fidelity and integrity in order to be effective and helpful for teachers.

From these themes, we have developed recommendations for both principals and district leaders to improve the implementation of evaluation. Those recommendations include:

# Recommendations for Principals:

1. Invest building-level professional development time in deepening teachers' understandings of the evaluation process and its purpose.
2. Incorporate and protect 15-minute pre- and post-conferences for announced recommendations.
3. Allow and encourage teachers to self-assess before and after observations.
4. Utilize the "comments" feature on Standards for Success to give teachers qualitative feedback.
5. Use collaboration time strategically to allow for peer observation and feedback.

# Recommendations for the District:

1. Provide both teachers and evaluators with comprehensive, normed training on the evaluation and its purpose, including a video library of sample lessons to ensure inter-rater reliability.
2. Diversify district evaluators to include instructional coaches to lighten the evaluation load on principals.
3. Create an accountability metric for principals, focused on implementing evaluation with fidelity and consistency.
4. Establish a forum where teachers' questions and ideas on evaluation can be addressed.
5. Incorporate new measures of feedback into the overall teacher evaluation system, including student surveys.

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

By incorporating these recommendations at both the school and district levels, we believe that teacher evaluation in the Indianapolis Public Schools can become a system that successfully supports and improves instruction, leads to greater student success, and increases teacher morale and performance.

# Background and Methods

In 2014, the Center on Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) at Indiana University published *Indiana Teacher Evaluation: At the Crossroads of Implementation*. This policy brief investigated the perceptions of superintendents, principals, and teachers regarding the implementation of new teacher evaluation systems throughout the state.  The report surveyed 65 superintendents, 1586 teachers, and 261 principals on questions about the implementation, equity, and effectiveness of evaluation, among other things.

As Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows, we were drawn to the fact that more than 50 percent of superintendents and principals believed that teaching and learning had improved in their districts since the implementation of the new evaluation system, but only 14 percent of teachers shared the same belief. Most of those surveyed believed that teacher effectiveness affected student achievement and that student achievement could be accurately measured. However, less than 44 percent of teachers agreed that their district's plan allowed for fairly and accurately evaluated instruction.

We wanted to use this data to dig deeper into the how's and why's of teachers' feelings on evaluation. Our five focus groups included 24 teachers ranging from four to 34 years of teaching experience, representing eleven different IPS schools and covering elementary, middle, and high school grades. We presented the focus groups with data from the CELL research and we asked open-ended questions to gauge their perspective on evaluation in IPS. From these conversations, the following themes emerged.

## Findings from Focus Groups

**Finding #1. Teachers seek greater alignment between their perspectives and those of the evaluators when it comes to the purpose and impact of the evaluation.**

Teachers want to be evaluated, but often feel like the purpose of the evaluation is lost in the execution. It came out very clearly in the focus groups that some principals navigated the evaluation system as a tool for growth and monitoring progress, while others used it more as a summative assessment for teachers. "The evaluation system ends up trying to place blame rather than looking at how we really fix the problem of what is hindering our kids from learning," said a secondary teacher with 10 years of experience. Another teacher voiced the frustration well when she spoke about the impact she thinks the evaluation has had on her school, by saying:

TEACHING
POLICY FELLOWS

*I was thinking an evaluation plan would be good only if you are going to use it to develop the teachers. My thing is, what is the evaluation really being used for? It's not developing the teacher or using it to help stretch the teacher. I don't see the purpose for it, whether to tell you are a bad teacher or a good teacher. If it's based off individual growth and used to develop then that's good. If not, then it's pretty pointless. - Fifth grade teacher*

The lack of professional development and support in response to the evaluation results makes it difficult for teachers to find the evaluation of much use in their students' and classrooms' daily lives. Other teachers shared that the process was time-consuming for both the teacher and the evaluator and sometimes seemed more bureaucratic than helpful:

*It's an unfair process. There is a lot of paper pushing and numbers; it's not based in reality. I have no administrator come in to offer suggestions. I would welcome evaluation that would help me improve, but these push papers and I'm set up to fail. My kids won't meet the objectives so I'm set up to fail. I don't respect the evaluation. It doesn't do anything to inform my teaching in a positive way. - High school teacher*

Teachers were not necessarily against evaluations, nor did they place the blame for what they believed to be the biggest downfalls of IPS' current system on any one person or group of people. Teachers simply expressed a desire for a clearer, more objective, and more purposeful evaluation system that truly fosters growth in both teacher and student performance.

Teachers are on the front lines of education and have the clearest understanding of what is happening with the students and the classroom. One teacher stated it simply, "Teachers need to have the strongest voice. They [administrators] only see data and the negative with the numbers. We (teachers) are jumping through hoops to get students to achieve and we see a big picture." The teachers want to be viewed as the professionals they are and respected as such. After a colleague shared a story concerning one of his students and his frustration around her score on DIBELs, a pre-school teacher quipped, "and that is where our professional opinion should matter."

### Finding #2. Teachers view feedback and discussion from their evaluators as a resource and want their professional development to be driven by their evaluation results.

Teachers who are motivated to improve their practice know that this is only possible through personal reflection and a variety of feedback. The majority of teachers we heard from welcome feedback from their evaluators as a key improvement strategy, but do not feel that they are receiving adequate or timely feedback. Teachers also expressed a desire for multiple feedback perspectives, including peers, students, and self-reflection.

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

**Teachers want feedback and discussion around their evaluation.** Frustration was voiced specifically around the lack of post-observation debriefs with their evaluators. Many teachers noted that using the Standard for Success (SFS) system to record evaluations made it easy for evaluators to make comments, but not really offer constructive feedback. Several teachers indicated that they have not consistently had post-observation feedback conversations with their evaluator, which made them question the usefulness of the observation in the first place.

When teachers were asked about specific ways to improve the evaluation system in IPS, many raised the post-observation reflection and conversation as an area of weakness that must be addressed:

*If evaluators aren't asking us about what they observed, or having a dialogue with us, then they are missing parts of the overall picture. - Elementary ESL teacher*

Teachers are quick to point out that they do not feel that the lack of follow-up is due to their evaluators' desires to avoid the conversation, but are likely a function of time and capacity.

*It would be nice to have more feedback. I know it's difficult with all they're doing - there is little opportunity for them to give us feedback. I turn in lesson plans every week, but for all I know, nobody is looking at them. - Secondary English teacher*

The same theme was highlighted in a few of the interviews with administrators:

*As a district, if we really value evaluations and feedback to see student growth then we have to do more things to free up administrators' time to do evaluation. - Secondary administrator*

In addition to more constructive feedback from the evaluator, teachers welcome feedback from their peers and colleagues. Teachers know who the other good teachers are, as well as who in their building is not doing well. Several focus group participants suggested that including peer evaluations would benefit all teachers.

*The best way to be accurate and fair is to have several parts. Teacher observations, peer evaluations, and different people with multiple evaluators. –Kindergarten teacher*

*Even your colleagues in the building know who the strong teachers are. - Elementary ESL teacher*

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

Teachers felt that peer observations from colleagues who teach the same grade, subject, or context would be as helpful as, or even more helpful, than the evaluation observations completed by their administrators. The context piece appears to be strongly valued by teachers from all grades and content areas.

**An interesting and enlightening result from the focus groups showed that teachers would welcome student surveys as another piece of the overall evaluation.** More than one educator brought up the idea of incorporating student survey data and feedback into their overall evaluation. Student survey responses would not be taken in isolation from adult feedback and observation, but teachers feel that given the correct parameters, it could be added to the current evaluations with fidelity.

*I would love some of my evaluation to be from my students. I think at high school most of our kids would be pretty fair. I will never forget hearing my son and his friends talking about teachers when they were in high school. They knew who the good teachers and bad teachers were - they would talk about it. It gives me faith that on the whole, students would answer honestly and give evaluations based on fairness. - Secondary social studies teacher*

*And now I have a principal who will go up to the kids during my observation and ask the questions - do you understand, what are you getting? That is the first time I've had a principal do that. It's helped me with my objectives and improves my teaching outcomes. If they can't do that, I have to go back and reteach it. She is the only evaluator who's done that and I've had 11 others. – Second grade teacher*

Teachers value feedback from a variety of sources, including student and adult. While self-reflection was highlighted as a resource, educators were concerned about their ability to be open and vulnerable in their communication about their performance and growth in the classroom. An elementary teacher with seven years of experience said: "I would just like more transparency to be able to reflect honestly without fear of repercussions."

Teachers believe that it is difficult to have meaningful growth-centered conversations surrounding their evaluations with the evaluator since he/she is ultimately the person who gives out the final score. With jobs, reputation, and quite possibly pay/bonuses on the line (this controversial issue is further discussed below), many teachers find it difficult to be honest about seeking help or advice in areas where they may need or want to grow. Teachers believe that there should be more room for open conversations with evaluators without the fear of being "docked" points or of having it "held against us" in a final evaluation. One high school teacher put it well when she said: "There needs to be follow-up and an honest conversation. There has to be, because good teachers do reflect. They are always thinking about it; the bad teachers need to be taught how to reflect."

Teachers voiced the desire to want to grow in their teaching practice. If quality professional development was implemented as a result of evaluation feedback, struggling teachers would have the opportunity to improve.

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

Effective teachers would also be able to sharpen their classroom skills in targeted areas as a result. One special education elementary teacher suggested implementing interventions for teachers over the summer: "I think IPS needs transformation camps. Teachers fall into the old system…If there is one area that the principal sees that you need training on, then [the teachers] need remediation." By applying feedback and creating professional development driven by the evaluation and feedback, both new and experienced teachers can continue growing and developing as professionals.

**Finding #3. Teachers want accountability where their performance is measured with accuracy, objectivity, and consistency.**

As teachers, we understand how crucial objectivity and consistency are with our students. Upholding these values enables us to build meaningful relationships and a positive classroom culture that we know is vital to fostering an environment of growth and achievement. Many IPS teachers who participated in our focus groups expressed concern about the ability for evaluations to be truly consistent and objective across the board.

Objectivity is paramount to helping teachers feel that the evaluation is an effective tool rather than a waste of time. To ensure objectivity is accomplished, many teachers suggested having evaluation teams rather than individuals do the observations:

*I'm thinking it should be teams who should evaluate and they need to be consistently trained across the board. All the subjectivity should be taken out of the evaluations. It should be used as an instrument that is purely objective.* – Sixth grade teacher

Implementing evaluator teams would help address consistency among evaluators, as well as increase objectivity by offering multiple perspectives on how the teacher can improve. Another suggestion was to have external evaluators come in and evaluate the class. This would free up time for building administrators as well as decrease the subjectivity and possible conflict of interest in evaluating their own teachers. If a teacher feels they are evaluated poorly because of a relationship with the evaluator, these changes can help mitigate those factors. Teachers acknowledged that human bias and subjectivity will never be completely neutralized, but hoped that by implementing change moving forward the evaluations can become more objective in future.

In addition to objectivity, teachers wanted the content of the evaluation to accurately capture and measure the reality of the specific classrooms. Some teachers felt that the evaluation did not truly portray what was going on in the classroom:

*We have to differentiate our instruction for our students. Administrators should be differentiating for our schools and for us. At my school, we have a high transiency rate; that should be factored in. If your school has a high SPED rate, that needs to be considered. It needs to be changed for the school's needs.* - Kindergarten Teacher

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

*We have different roles. We have different expectations of a 6th grader and a kindergartener. I have a different job than a home room teacher, yet I am evaluated like a homeroom teacher.* - 1st grade ESL Teacher

*If you place evaluations on growth rather than numbers it would be more beneficial to all of us. I have a student reading at a 4th grade level and he's now at an 8th grade level; that is HUGE growth. But by the system, I still fail because he isn't where he's supposed to be yet. No matter how much movement there is, there is no credit. My kids are way behind the start line in a track race. It isn't fair to expect them to reach the finish line with the rest of the kids.* - High School Teacher

If the evaluation is not a true measure and does not acknowledge the realistic abilities and progress of the students or teachers being evaluated, how can educators value it as a tool for improvement?

Teachers at every level are very aware of the need to track student data and progress toward mastery of the content they are teaching. Most teachers want to know whether their students are learning what they are supposed to be learning and most welcome the chance to have student achievement measured in some way. However, as we discussed the current state law mandating that student achievement data play a "significant" role in teacher evaluations, some very strong themes emerged.

**Teachers do not feel that district-created (or mandated) standardized tests accurately measure student achievement or their effectiveness as a teacher.** Over and over again, we heard teachers voice their frustration over the many factors that a standardized test score does not take into consideration. Student attendance, parental involvement and investment in a student's education, and the level of achievement with which the students start the school year, were all cited as potentially significant levers in a student's ability to pass the end-of-year standardized test at what is considered "mastery level."

*I had kids who stopped coming to school and I was still held accountable for things I can't control. We should factor in behavior, grades, attendance, etc. If they aren't doing their part, how can we do ours? - High school teacher*

*We have no baseline. We have mixed ability groups every year: high-achieving students with low-achieving students, but you have to get everyone to the same level. It doesn't work out. - Elementary special education teacher*

*Teachers can be effective and still struggle with low-performing students. - Secondary science teacher*

**Teachers do want student achievement data to be part of their overall evaluation.** Across several focus groups, teachers unanimously agreed that student achievement data *should* be included in a teacher's evaluation. Teachers welcomed the accountability of their students' performances on assessments that

accurately reflect the content and context of their classrooms, but they want that data to reflect growth, and not just a single snapshot of where a group of students is on any given day.

*I would be ok with it if it looked specifically at the time spent and progress of my students and was based on IEP goals that I wrote because I know my students' needs and those are the goals I am actually working with them on. I'm not preparing them for 3rd grade ISTEP - I'm working on word sounds and sight words.*

*- Elementary school teacher*

**Because of this, teachers <u>strongly</u> prefer using student achievement data based off of a growth model as opposed to data based on a set score that students are expected to meet on a given test.** Specifically, many of the teachers who participated in the focus groups highlighted dissatisfaction with the current Student Learning Objective (SLO) and Targeted Learning Objective (TLO) goals. Most felt that basing their effectiveness on a pass rate determined at the district or school level is unfair and provides an inaccurate view of their teaching practice.

*The SLO & TLO process has caused resentment.  They are artificial numbers that aren't based on growth. It seems that these goals don't have anything to do with how well I teach, but rather WHO I teach. - Secondary social studies teacher*

*If you get a year's growth in your students, but they are still below the pass rate cut-off, then you aren't considered effective. That's not fair... You go out of your way to reach those students where they are and that should be something included in your evaluation - not just whether the students could pass the test. - Secondary English teacher*

This one point may have been the strongest theme highlighted in our focus group sessions. When questioned about the appropriate weight of student achievement data in teacher evaluations, the first type of question asked was: "Are we talking about growth data or just whether the students got a specific score?" Teachers are very comfortable with including growth data whether or not a student improved over the course of a year, but very uncomfortable with specific score data even if a student has achieved a 75% score on a test written by the state or by the district.

**Finding #4. Teachers want their evaluation to be part of a larger process that is designed to help them improve their practice.**

Teachers think that greater consistency within the evaluation process would make it a more effective and helpful tool. Having a consistent evaluator(s) allows teachers to feel that someone is invested in their development and wants them to improve. One teacher shared the success she has seen because she has had the same evaluator for two years. Together, they have been able to see the teacher improve after implementing feedback from the evaluator.  Teachers want someone who knows where they are coming from

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

and encourages their improvement: "Since being at my school, I've had six different evaluators in eight years, and in the last five it's changed every year." In order to help teachers feel valued, the district needs to create collaborative relationships rather than have teachers feel unsupported. One teacher compared the relationship to that of a supervisor in the corporate world who wants their employee to grow and develop. If the evaluation can be framed as a tool for collaboration and growth and if it is implemented with fidelity, teachers can use it as a great resource.

Multiple teachers throughout the focus groups voiced the frustration that the evaluation system and the standards that guide it are not consistent across districts, schools, or even classrooms.

*It needs to be consistent and carry over from district to district. I was in Hamilton Southeastern and now I'm in a completely different system. I did a great job there, it should carry over and now I'm not sure. Nothing I'm doing has changed just a different school and district. So a 3 should be a 3 across the board.* - *Kindergarten teacher*

Teachers think evaluators need to be well trained and have consistent standards on how to evaluate a teacher, taking into consideration different teaching styles, unique class make-ups, and differentiated instruction. Many teachers expressed concern that they did not feel like they were trained or developed enough to truly understand the process, creating anxiety and apprehension around the rubric. Teachers want to know how they were being evaluated and the standards to which they are being held. The focus group participants wanted clear, consistent expectations and guidelines when it came to their evaluation. If we are to create an equitable and clear system of teacher evaluations in IPS, teachers and evaluators district-wide must be operating from the same guidelines and understandings.

Understanding the classroom and different teaching styles was also noted as important. For example, a science teacher who had a record of excellent student achievement gains was marked down in her evaluation, with the evaluator citing student behavior and discipline as the major issue. The evaluator indicated that students were out of their seats a lot throughout the observed portion of the lesson. The teacher believed in hands-on learning and had planned for the students to be up and moving around the room in order to be authentically engaged in the lesson. Furthermore, the evaluator did not see the entire lesson up until the end, where students were in fact able to demonstrate mastery and learning as a result of the class activities. An experienced secondary Spanish teacher was also criticized in her evaluation for using performance-based assessments even though she believed from her experience and success in student achievement and growth that this was the best way to assess language students.

An underlying tension present at each of the focus groups was a lack of trust in the district leadership and administrators. This tension was perpetuated by the lack of follow-up and consistency shown by the district. When asked about compensation, all teachers voiced frustration at not receiving promised bonuses and raises. IPS has not increased the pay of its teachers in six years, regardless of evaluation. Although this past school year (2014-15), effective and highly-effective teachers were awarded a $1500 bonus, teachers are

concerned about depending on this as a consistent source of additional income. Teachers voiced concern and mistrust about what they felt to be an extreme lack of communication from and transparency at the district level when the evaluation system was rolled out four years ago. Teachers still feel that it is unclear if positive evaluations will lead to increased compensation in the future.

Teachers also cited instances where administrators claimed that they would take action to create standardized ratings, but no one could verify that they followed through.

> *Didn't they say they'd do walk-throughs together to make sure they were on the same page? I'm not aware that they ever did that. - High school teacher*

This lack of consistency and follow-through has helped bolster the perception that teachers cannot trust administrators to have their best interests at heart in the evaluation. Consistency in regards to length, time of day, and time of week were also important to teachers so they could be confident that the evaluator truly understood what was going on in the classroom and could give effective feedback.

Throughout the entirety of the evaluation process, all components and pieces need to be implemented with fidelity and integrity in order for it to be effective and helpful for teachers. If evaluators are not giving due service to the process, they are cheating not only themselves, but the students in their schools, districts, and the state. Teachers shared that they would like evaluators to spend more time in the classroom, both in formal observations and in informal walk-throughs, in order to really understand how they were doing.

And because some observations are currently not implemented with integrity, teachers voiced concern about their observation playing a significant part of their evaluation. They didn't feel that the evaluator had a full-enough understanding of the classroom and student context to be able to give valuable feedback. One teacher shared that she didn't have a single evaluation for an entire year, but her administrator gave her a check plus because of the concern about retaining teachers.

> *I don't believe the principal or dean should be the evaluator. There is too much of a conflict of interest. If you evaluate a teacher too low then people want to know why you aren't getting rid of that teacher so they can't do it too low, but you can't give them all 4s either. I had a principal, when they did the bussing there was about 8 of us. We had the most awesome evaluations that year but he had never been in my room. We had all check pluses but he'd never been in. Every math teacher got all 4s because they didn't want them to lose their jobs - High school teacher*

This kind of lapse in carrying out the evaluation leads to apathetic teachers who resent the evaluation rather than see it as a tool for development. IPS teachers are concerned about how effective an evaluation can be if administrators (who primarily conduct the formal evaluations in IPS) are only in the teacher's classroom three

TEACHING
POLICY FELLOWS

or four times a year (which is currently all the system and process require). If evaluators spent more time in the classroom speaking to and observing students, teachers agreed that they would be more comfortable and feel supported because administrators know what is going on and are invested in helping them learn and grow. One teacher felt that the administrator's presence helped her achieve teaching objectives and outcomes because the administrator was able to give timely constructive feedback, not just in an official observation, but on walk-throughs and pop-in visits.

While teachers expressed their frustration with the infrequency of evaluations and feedback, most did not completely place the blame on the evaluators. Many teachers felt that the current system does not realistically allow for principals and assistant principals to be more hands-on in the evaluation process. Most teachers said that they believed their evaluator would be in their classroom more if they could and were not busy with other tasks throughout the day such as student discipline, parent meetings, and other administrative duties. This raised the question of whether or not principals should be the primary evaluators, and if the process would be more objective and hands-on if other staff members such as instructional coaches or teacher leaders and mentors were given more responsibility in the evaluations. This is discussed in more detail later on in the recommendations section of this paper.

# Recommendations for Principals

As primary decision makers, principals have the capacity to make a significant and immediate impact on the process and perception of evaluation in their buildings.  By setting a positive tone from the beginning of the year, including teachers in the learning process, and taking additional quality control steps, we believe principals can create a proactive and productive atmosphere surrounding evaluation. We specifically recommend the following:

### Recommendation 1: Invest building-level professional development time in deepening teachers' understandings of the evaluation process and its purpose.

Many teachers seem to lack knowledge on the finer points of the rubric, which directly translates to confusion and frustration when receiving feedback from evaluators.  Investing time in exposing teachers to the rubric early on can lead to gains in both confidence and morale as the evaluation process unfolds throughout the school year.

### Recommendation 2: Incorporate and protect 15 minute pre- and post-conferences for announced recommendations.

Teachers universally crave meaningful feedback. Objections to the evaluation process tend to be more rooted in the lack of follow-up and purpose than in the evaluation itself.  By mandating that a 15-minute pre/post conference accompany a teacher's formal observation, the opportunities for meaningful, formative feedback would be far easier to come by.  In the event that a teacher needs to improve aspects of his or her instruction, these conferences will be essential components in the process of improvement and accountability.  Holding a

pre-conference affords the teacher the opportunity to explain to the evaluator the nuances of the lesson that will be observed.  While it is difficult to overcome the barrier that any observation is "just a snapshot" of a teacher's instruction, this extended window for input and, potentially, defense, is invaluable to a teacher of any age or experience level. Post-conferences allow for meaningful debriefing and time to foster more understanding as the evaluation unfolds. Conferences should last no more than fifteen minutes and should follow a strict, rubric-based protocol that allows for time for both the evaluator and the teacher to be heard.  We believe that making the time for these individual conferences is crucial to creating a positive, constructive discourse on evaluation.  We stress that without these conferences, the evaluation process largely becomes an empty gesture, with no back-and-forth and no room for constructive feedback.

### Recommendation 3: Allow and encourage teachers to self-assess before and after observations.

In our focus groups, we commonly heard that teachers didn't have the opportunity to reflect on their self-identified strengths and weaknesses in order to improve. Teachers cherish the opportunity to have their voices heard at each step in this process; the most logical, comprehensive way to accomplish this is to ask teachers to complete a rubric-based self-evaluation in advance of their scheduled post-conference.  Beyond the increased teacher engagement, this will also serve as a means to discuss discrepancies between teacher and evaluator, which can be a great jumping-off point for more meaningful discussions.  At the very least, self-evaluation provides teachers with an additional opportunity to make their voices heard; potential exists for this exercise to improve teaching by enhancing self-reflective practice and creating more opportunities for authentic conversations about teacher performance.

### Recommendation 4: Utilize the "comments" feature on Standards for Success to give teachers qualitative feedback.

Teachers crave targeted, qualitative feedback from their evaluators. Current digital infrastructure enables IPS evaluators to provide teachers with significant feedback without requiring face-to-face conferencing.  The infrastructure can be used in advance of a conference to refine talking points and help ensure that the in-person time is used effectively. Taking advantage of qualitative feedback opportunities will move evaluation results beyond "just a number" to a useful, growth-oriented process for the teacher.  We recommend that all evaluators explore the comments tool on Standards For Success as a means to provide teachers with more meaningful, directed, qualitative feedback.

### Recommendation 5: Use collaboration time strategically to allow for peer observation and feedback.

Recognizing that principals have limited capacity to provide ongoing, rigorous feedback to all teachers, school leaders should use collaborative time more creatively to allow for peer observation and feedback between teachers. Scheduling Professional Learning Communities strategically, for example, to allow peer teachers to observe classes one to two times per week would increase the amount of feedback teachers receive, and it would also provide an additional set of eyes on classrooms. These should be non-evaluative and low stakes for teachers. The teacher being observed may identify a RISE rubric area for growth, and ask for feedback on a new strategy or effort to improve. Observing teachers should complete 10 - 15 minute observations of their

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

peers and a small portion of the rubric, providing formative, evidence-based feedback to their colleagues.  These observations should be rolled out to teachers in a positive, uplifting way that underscores their purpose, i.e. cultivating a school-wide understanding and embracing of the evaluation process.  Teachers should also be given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions before beginning these peer observations.

We believe in the power of the building principal as an effector of change.  By considering the recommendations outlined above, we are confident that positive change will be evident as the evaluation process takes its course over the next school year.

# Recommendations for the District

Based on the data from the CELL survey as well as the themes identified through our focus groups with IPS teachers, we believe that the following recommendations would help raise the level of understanding for both teachers and principals about the current evaluation system; help teachers feel supported as opposed to penalized; and become a sustainable growth tool for teachers.

**Recommendation 1: Provide both teachers and evaluators with comprehensive, normed training on the evaluation and its purpose, including a video library of sample lessons to ensure inter-rater reliability.**

A common concern among IPS teachers is an apparent lack of uniformity and consistency amongst evaluators. Inter-rater reliability is a fairly simple yet hugely proactive and effective means of maintaining integrity throughout the evaluative process. By utilizing district-wide or building-wide professional development time, evaluators can work together to establish clear norms and rubric-based definitions on what they will be observing in the classroom. Viewing teaching videos, evaluating the practice displayed in the clip, comparing ratings, and settling on common scores are great tools for accomplishing this.  We further recommend that evaluators make it known that these inter-rater reliability measures have been put in place.  This will boost teacher confidence in the evaluation process and will lend more validity to the entire experience.  Inter-rater reliability will be a crucial ingredient in the future success of teacher evaluation in IPS.

Evaluation training for principals is critical to limit subjectivity in the evaluations.  Evaluation training should include: clear examples and understanding of the RISE rubric; protocol for pre- and post- conferences; and practice through observing video lessons and scoring them on the rubric.  Finally, the training should conclude with an assessment to ensure understanding and inter-rater reliability.  Principals would review the same video lesson and score it using the RISE rubric.

**Recommendation 2: Diversify district evaluators to include instructional coaches to lighten the evaluation load on principals.**

The current IPS evaluation system limits the evaluators to building principals.   IPS teachers have voiced that principals have so much on their plates that they have very little time to observe and offer feedback through

post-conferences. A presence of additional evaluators in each school would lower the ratio of observations per evaluator.  We propose that IPS schools elevate the responsibility of some of their coaches to encompass teacher evaluations.  With a purpose of growth for evaluations, a coach would have insight to promote this culture of growth.  We propose that one coach per 20 teachers be hired to assist the principal in conducting observations and pre- and post-conferences.  This would free up some time for principals, while allowing teachers more opportunities for development.  More evaluators in each school would also increase the level of accountability.

### Recommendation 3: Create an accountability metric for principals, focused on implementing evaluation with fidelity and consistency.

Evaluation is the accountability system for teachers, and teachers believe that principals should be held accountable for their implementation of evaluation in their schools. One way to implement this metric may be to create a series of training modules that evaluators must pass before becoming independent evaluators. Additionally, teachers could be surveyed regarding their experience being evaluated. This survey data could provide valuable feedback to principals about how they could better implement evaluation in their schools. If evaluation is the key accountability metric for teachers, it should be a large part of the consideration of whether or not a principal is effective in his building.

### Recommendation 4: Establish a forum where teachers' questions and ideas on evaluation can be addressed.

IPS teachers were happy to have a platform to share their concerns and questions in regards to the evaluation system through the Teach Plus evaluation focus groups.  An online forum could allow IPS teachers a central location to ask their questions about the evaluation system.  As described in the previous section, there are many misconceptions among teachers about evaluations.  An online forum could offer regular feedback for principals about the views of their teachers, once again creating a level of accountability for principals in regards to the evaluation system.

### Recommendation 5: Incorporate new measures of feedback into the overall teacher evaluation system, including student surveys.

To elevate objectivity within the evaluation system, feedback about teachers should come from multiple sources.  This would raise the level of accountability among principals.  One action step toward raised accountability is through student surveys. Through focus groups, multiple IPS teachers voiced that they wished their administrator could hear from the students when considering their effectiveness.  Once a semester students should complete a short survey about their current teachers.  The data collected from these surveys will act as a window into the classroom community that is often missed during a formal observation.

TEACHING POLICY FELLOWS

# Conclusion

A strong evaluation system is key to improving the teaching profession in Indianapolis. To date, Indianapolis Public Schools has made strides in implementing the RISE model, but there are many improvements to be made. Teachers must have a voice in the transformation of the evaluation system, in order to create a strong culture of buy-in, feedback, and development.

## 2014-2015 TPF Cohort

Daniel Allen

Susan Brennan

Dane Butts

Nicholette Corn

Erin Currie

Chelsea Easter

Robbie Foote*

Carlota Holder

Rebecca Johnson*

Monique Keck

Megan Kuehl

Rebecca Maiki*

Madeline Mason*

Julie Metcalf

Andrew Pillow

Edward Rangel

Elizabeth Retana

Nicole Russell

Brittany Scherer

Melissa Scherle

Ronak Shah

Courtney Singleton*

Sadie Stevens

Eve Stipes*

David Wheeler

* Denotes Lead Author