



IMPROVING NEW MEXICO'S
EVALUATION SYSTEM
TO MEET THE NEEDS
OF EDUCATORS

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INTRODUCTION



The NMTEACH Educator Effectiveness system was launched in 2012 by the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED).

In 2017, Teach Plus New Mexico teachers made a series of research-based recommendations to NMPED to help create a more balanced evaluation system. Teachers were at the table then. As champion educators and Teach Plus New Mexico Teaching Policy Fellows, we believe that teachers must be at the table today, when New Mexico has a newly-elected state and educational leadership team committed to improving the state's teacher evaluation system.

In Spring 2017, the NMPED changed the components of its teacher evaluation system as follows:

- + Increased the observation component from 25 to 40 percent
- + Decreased the student achievement component from 50 to 35 percent
- + Doubled the teacher absence days from three to six before a point deduction

We are a diverse group of teachers representing traditional district and public charter schools, general and special education, across our state. We are committed to ensuring that all students in New Mexico have access to effective teachers. To achieve this goal, we believe that teachers need a statewide evaluation system that provides them with meaningful feedback for improving instruction.

The updated evaluation system has been piloted for two school years, and we believe there is an opportunity to continue to learn and enhance the system. To better understand how we can improve the current evaluation system, we surveyed over 1,300 teachers from across New Mexico on the system's effectiveness. Our findings and themes that emerged from the respondents' responses follow.

Our recommendations for improvement are:

- 1 Lower the portion of a teacher's evaluation based on growth in student achievement related to state assessments to 25 percent. Introduce the use of various local assessments to measure student learning at an additional 10 percent.
- 2 Bring in additional evaluators, including other teachers, to increase the number of required walkthroughs and informal observations.
- 3 Eliminate deductions for the teacher absences component and create an opportunity for bonus points to be earned for high teacher attendance.
- 4 Require districts to utilize data from the most current teacher evaluations to provide differentiated teacher support through targeted high-quality professional development, additional classroom resources, and team teaching/ observations.

METHODOLOGY



In October and November 2018, we surveyed 1,338 New Mexico teachers about their experiences with NMTEACH. Our goal was to:

- + Identify teachers' perceptions of NMTEACH's overall purpose.
- + Learn what they consider to be the ideal purpose of an evaluation system.
- + Highlight NMTEACH areas that teachers find beneficial to their teaching.
- + Identify specific NMTEACH areas that need improvement.

The respondents are all current teachers at traditional district or public charter schools in New Mexico. Among the respondents, more than half have been teaching for more than 15 years. Geographically, the respondents teach in the following school settings: 32 percent rural, 32 percent city, 25 percent town, 10 percent suburban, and one percent unsure.



FINDING 1

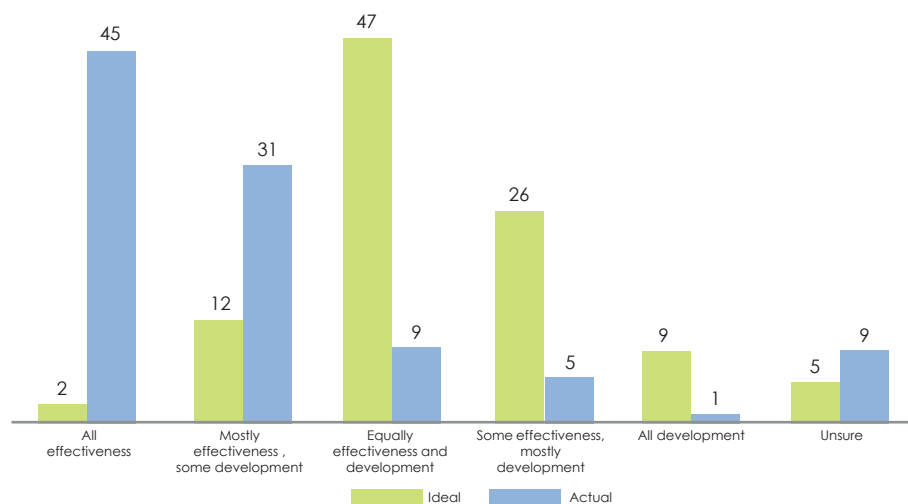
Teachers believe that the current evaluation system is designed to measure their effectiveness but would like the evaluation system to both measure effectiveness and serve as a tool to support their development.

While teachers support using teacher evaluations as an accountability measure related to teacher effectiveness, they also want it to be used as a tool to provide additional support to improve their teaching. We asked teachers two questions concerning their perceptions of what the current evaluation system is designed to do and what they would ideally like the system to do. In the first question, we asked, “When you think about how your current evaluation system is set up, what do you believe the intent is when it comes to the mix between measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development?” Forty-five percent of the survey’s respondents believe that the current system is used primarily to measure teacher effectiveness (often defined as the overall effectiveness of a teacher related to student learning).¹

In the second question, we asked “A teacher evaluation system can be a tool for measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development. When you think about the ideal teacher evaluation system, what do you believe should be the mix between measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development?” Forty-seven percent of respondents believe that an ideal evaluation system should be used to both gauge teacher effectiveness and support teacher development in equal measure (see Figure 1).²

Figure 1

Respondents’ perspectives on the current and ideal evaluation systems.



FINDING 2

A majority of teachers support the use of student achievement in evaluations, but at a lower rate than the current 35 percent.³

Efforts have been made to lower the value of student achievement on evaluations, which was decreased from 50 percent to 35 percent in 2016. Four out of five teachers in our survey support the use of student achievement measures as a component of their evaluation system. When asked about what percent of their evaluations should be comprised of student achievement results, 83 percent responded that it should be greater than zero. While student achievement currently accounts for 35 percent of a teacher's evaluation, the vast majority of respondents in our survey said it should be 30 percent or less (see Figure 2).

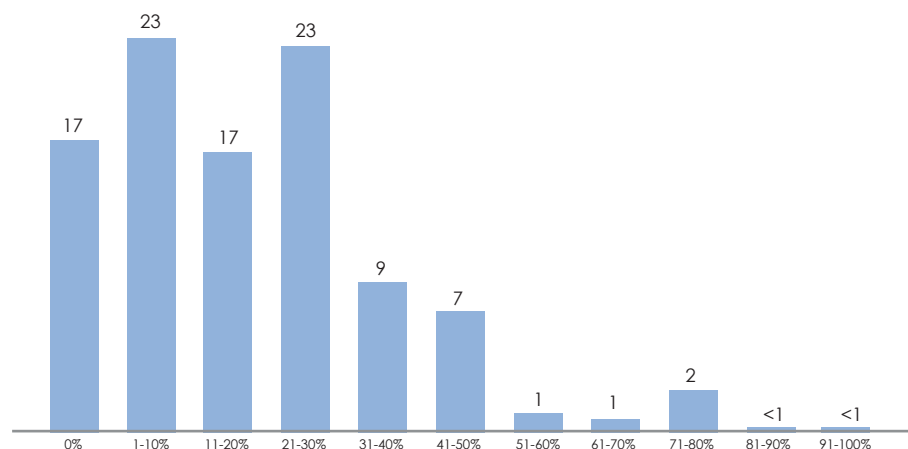
Teachers also demonstrated a desire to include additional assessments to more accurately measure student learning, compared to an annual assessment.

Lower the percentage that standardized test scores count on teacher evaluations. Include district mandated assessments as well as state assessments in that lower percentage. As student GPAs are determined by multiple assessments, teacher's scores that are based on student assessment should do the same.

The evaluation system needs to be based on students' entry levels and their exit levels. If you truly want to put a measurement on what a child is learning while in my class then give them an assessment at the beginning of the year and the end of the year and determine if they made adequate growth.

Figure 2

Respondents' perspectives on the ideal value of student achievement component of the evaluation.



FINDING 3

Most teachers do not believe their school does a good job of using data from their teacher evaluations to provide support that strengthens their teaching.

Only 31 percent of teachers in our survey believe that their school does a good job of providing supports to teachers when their evaluation identifies areas for improvement.⁴ This could be due to the lack of district accountability. While local districts and schools currently determine if and how they will use data from teacher evaluations to support teacher development, there is no system in place to monitor that schools are providing individualized supports for teachers based on evaluation data.

I recommend that policymakers begin by thinking of teachers as professionals and continuous learners. Set teachers and ultimately, students, up for success by providing PD or effectiveness strategies and ways to implement in the classroom. We all want to directly affect student achievement, but we need the resources to do so.

FINDING 4

Teachers are divided on whether or not their current observers have the expertise to conduct the formal observations, and on whom they consider to be the most qualified observers.

Forty-eight percent of teachers in our survey believe that the person(s) who conducts their evaluation has the expertise to evaluate their teaching practice.⁵ Teachers also believe that although most formal observations are completed by building administrators, the observation can also be completed by an “outside” observer who has received certification from the state. Teachers also indicate a desire for peer observers to conduct the formal observations and offer feedback.

Teachers should be evaluated by other experienced teachers who are either still currently teaching or who have taught a live class within the past 2 years, not by administrators.

Have multiple evaluators, perhaps from a different school, for recording a greater number of ‘snapshots.’



TEACHER VOICE ON IMPROVING CURRENT EVALUATION SYSTEM



We asked the survey respondents to share their views about the current evaluation system.⁶ The following five themes emerged:

1. TEACHERS SUPPORT CHANGES TO THE TEACHER ATTENDANCE PORTION OF THE EVALUATION.

Although the teacher attendance component is worth only 10 percent of a teacher's evaluation, it has created a negative culture around teacher attendance. Many districts offer their teachers more than six days time off during the school year, which is the current measure for teacher attendance in NMTEACH.

Although teacher attendance is crucial for closing the learning gaps and delivering high quality rigorous instruction for student achievement and success, a teacher should not be penalized for an absence from an instructional day.

Change attendance, if we are given 10 days for the school year, penalize us after the 10 days are used.

2. THE OBSERVATION RUBRIC HELPS TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT.

Teachers note that the observation rubric, which consists of a variety of topics to cover during various classroom lessons and school activities, gives detailed descriptions for the five levels of rating. Teachers appreciate having access to the rubric before formal observations and believe it should be used during feedback sessions with administrators after the observations.

The rubric gives me ideas of what best practices to strive for to incorporate into my daily routine.

I believe the evaluation system does well in that it helps teachers identify "look fors" in the classroom. I think it has helped me critique my teaching practice in various ways.

3. SINCE THE ADOPTION OF NMTEACH, ADMINISTRATORS ARE IN THE CLASSROOM MORE AND OFFER FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION.

Prior to NMTEACH, it was not common for school administrators to be in the classroom nor to have feedback sessions with teachers to improve best practices. Teachers note that the observation component requires more classroom observations, increased collaboration between teachers and administrators, and an opportunity for reflection throughout the school year.

Shows feedback from administrators that can be used in the classroom! A good administrator will observe and provide feedback that can be used immediately in the classroom to improve student performance in the classroom.

The evaluation system that the district implements really fits into the professional needs of the teachers. Giving appropriate and effective feedbacks and strategies made teaching-learning more meaningful. The teachers' evaluations gauge how efficient you are as an educator. Moreover, as a teacher, I like to be criticized constructively especially if the one who will evaluate you is approachable and not intimidating and I think they did their job well. I also like that our evaluators are giving necessary recommendations to improve teaching.

4. TEACHERS ARE ABLE TO USE DATA FROM THE EVALUATION PROCESS TO REFLECT ON THEIR TEACHING.

Teachers note that the current evaluation system offers a variety of data points they can use to improve their instruction. These include observation scores, classroom assessments related to learning objectives, and student achievement results.

The evaluation system does make me consider elements of my practice that are proven by research to positively impact student achievement.

This system gives teachers the knowledge about students and their own teaching practices to see what is effective and what is not depending on how the teacher uses it.



1 Lower the portion of a teacher's evaluation based on growth in student achievement related to state assessments to 25 percent. Introduce the use of various local assessments to measure student learning at an additional 10 percent.

A teacher's primary duty is to educate students in a particular subject or grade level, which is often measured by some form of assessment. Although most teachers support the use of student assessments as a measurement of student learning in their evaluations, they want to ensure the data is accurate and is not weighted too heavily. Lowering the state student achievement component from 35 percent to 25 percent will value teacher input and support a balanced evaluation system.

A component consisting of other assessments, determined by each district, could be utilized to provide additional data points related to student learning. Local assessments could consist of district formative measurements and teacher created assessments. The use of the locally-created assessments will help provide specific feedback related to student learning at a local level.

2 Bring in additional evaluators, including other teachers, and increase the number of required walkthroughs and informal observations.

Incorporating additional evaluators in the process helps to increase how often teachers are observed and can thus work towards improving their practice through additional opportunities for feedback and support. Highly-effective teachers who are in leadership positions in their schools are particularly effective evaluators because they understand the content and best practices related to the lessons being taught. The state could achieve this by certifying highly-effective teachers to become evaluators for formal observations.

3 Eliminate deductions for the teacher absences component and create an opportunity for bonus points to be earned for high teacher attendance.

An opportunity for teachers to earn bonus points for high attendance underscores accountability and improves the culture of the overall teacher evaluations. Introducing bonus points would continue to highlight teacher attendance as a valuable component of student success.

4 Require districts to utilize data from the most current teacher evaluations to provide differentiated teacher support through targeted high-quality professional development, additional classroom resources, and team teaching/observations.

The teacher evaluation system should be a tool for improving educational practices and strategies that will increase student learning. School leaders should create an action plan that would include a detailed description of individualized, data-driven supports that a teacher rated below "effective" or "average" will receive. Districts should be held accountable to ensure that the planning and support are consistent for teachers around the state.

CONCLUSION



Educators in New Mexico support a teacher evaluation system that both provides support for teachers and rates teachers effectiveness. We call on our state leaders to establish a high-quality teacher evaluation system that supports teacher development, empowers teacher voice, and maintains accountability, and to consider teachers' perspective throughout the revision process to the current system.





¹ Question: “When you think about how your current evaluation system is set up, what do you believe the intent is when it comes to the mix between measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development?” Responses (n= 1326): “All measuring teacher effectiveness” (45 percent), “Mostly measuring teacher effectiveness and some supporting teacher development” (31 percent), “Equally measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development” (9 percent), “Some measuring teacher effectiveness and mostly supporting teacher development” (5 percent), “All supporting teacher development” (1 percent), “Unsure” (9 percent)

² Question: “A teacher evaluation system can be a tool for measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development. When you think about the ideal teacher evaluation system, what do you believe should be the mix between measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development?” Responses (n= 1329): “All measuring teacher effectiveness” (2 percent), “Mostly measuring teacher effectiveness and some supporting teacher development” (12 percent), “Equally measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development” (47 percent), “Some measuring teacher effectiveness and mostly supporting teacher development” (26 percent), “All supporting teacher development” (9 percent), “Unsure” (5 percent)

³ Question: “What percent of a teacher’s evaluation should consist of measures of student achievement?” Responses (n= 1203): “0 percent” (17 percent), “1 to 10 percent” (23 percent), “11 to 20 percent” (17 percent), “21 to 30 percent” (23 percent), “31 to 40 percent” (9 percent), “41 to 50 percent” (7 percent), “51 to 60 percent” (1 percent), “61 to 70 percent” (1 percent), “71 to 80 percent” (2 percent), “81 to 90 percent” (<1 percent), “91 to 100 percent” (<1 percent)

⁴ Question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My school does a good job of providing appropriate supports to teachers when their evaluation identifies areas for improvement.” Responses (n= 1336): “Strongly agree” (10 percent), “Somewhat agree” (20 percent), “Neither agree nor disagree” (13 percent), “Somewhat disagree” (19 percent), “Strongly disagree” (29 percent), “Unsure” (8 percent)

⁵ Question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The person(s) who conducts my evaluation has the expertise to evaluate my teaching practice.” Responses (n= 1333): “Strongly agree” (21 percent), “Somewhat agree” (27 percent), “Neither agree nor disagree” (14 percent), “Somewhat disagree” (14 percent), “Strongly disagree” (21 percent), “Unsure” (3 percent)

⁶ Question: “What do you believe your evaluation system does particularly well?” and “What advice do you have for policymakers as they consider ways to improve the evaluation system?” (open-ended responses)