TEACH +PLUS

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON THE COLORADO TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Senate passed Bill 10-191, which changed the way educators were evaluated and supported in Colorado. In July 2013, Colorado districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) began implementing an evaluation system that aligns with the educator quality standards and the State Board rules.

We are a group of Teach Plus Colorado Teaching Policy Fellows who teach in public schools across our state, serving a diverse group of students with a range of life experiences and needs that they bring to our classrooms. With at least four years of implementation complete, we wanted to know what teachers across our state thought about the evaluation system. To gather their feedback, we surveyed 266 teachers from across Colorado.[1]

Of the teachers who responded, 91 percent are from traditional, and nine percent from charter schools; 40 perent are rural, 29 percent suburban, five percent town, and 25 percent urban; 58 percent teach in schools with 51 percent-100 percent FRL, 64 percent have 10 or more years experience, and 74 percent use RANDA, 21 percent district system, and four percent were unsure. Our findings are:

1. The current teacher evaluation system does not meet teachers' expectations. Teachers want an evaluation system that is a tool to measure their effectiveness, but also helps them grow as professionals.
2. An overwhelming majority of teachers are dissatisfied with the current system, and have identified the schools not providing appropriate supports to help them improve as one of their top concerns.
3. Teachers want between 20 and 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation to consist of measures of student achievement.
4. Teachers believe that districts and state do not do enough to recognize "highly effective" educators.
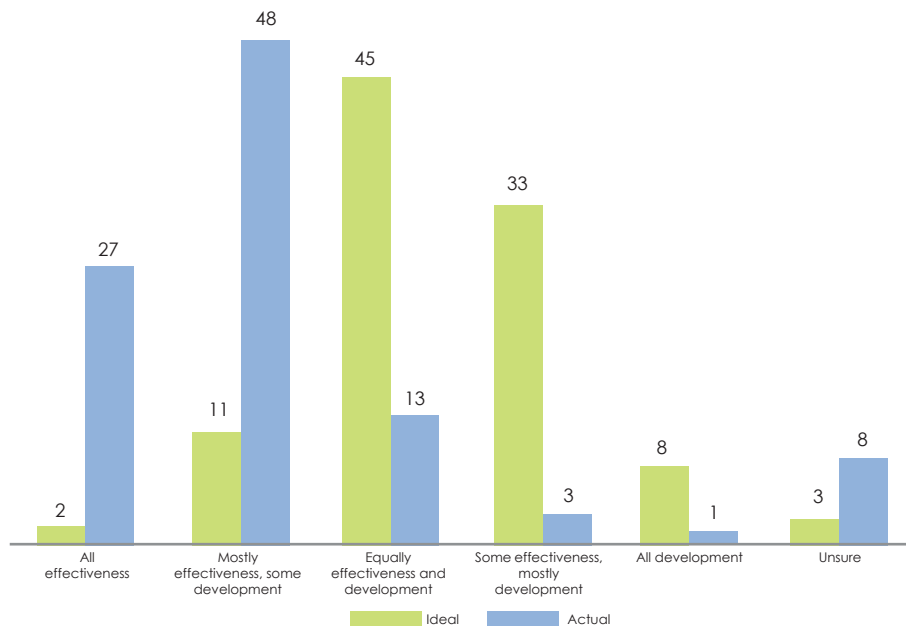
FINDINGS

FINDING 1

The current teacher evaluation system does not meet teachers' expectations. Teachers want an evaluation system that is a tool to measure their effectiveness, but also helps them grow as professionals.

We asked teachers what their ideal evaluation system would look like.[2] Did teachers want an evaluation system that focused primarily on evaluating their effectiveness, or did they want a system that helped them grow and develop? We found that teachers' ideal system should focus at least as much on development as on effectiveness, if not more. However, most teachers feel that the system in place right now focuses more on effectiveness. This suggests to

us that work needs to be done to the current system to ensure teachers get what they need for continuous improvement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

	All effectiveness	Mostly effectiveness, some development	Equally effectiveness and development	Some effectiveness, mostly development	All development	Unsure
Ideal	2	11	45	33	8	3
Actual	27	48	13	3	1	8

RECOMMENDATION 1
The state should ensure that the evaluation system focuses on the development of teachers as well as on identifying effectiveness.

FINDING 2
An overwhelming majority of teachers are dissatisfied with the current system, and have identified the schools not providing appropriate supports to help them improve as one of their top concerns.

We asked a series of questions to get a sense of the teachers' overall satisfaction with the current system and with how their schools are implementing it. An overwhelming majority of teachers in our survey (61 percent) were dissatisfied with the current system.[3] Teachers also pointed to concerns around the expertise of their evaluator and the level of supports in place for those with areas of need. While 55 percent of teachers agree that their evaluator has the proper expertise, only 35 percent feel that their schools provide the supports necessary to help them improve.[4,5]

Teachers commented extensively on the issue of their evaluator and offered a range of solutions.

Make sure those that are doing the observing know something about what they are observing, i.e. principals who have no background in performing arts are a little clueless when it comes to evaluating performing arts teachers.

TEACH
+PLUS

RECOMMENDATION 2

Districts should ensure that evaluators are properly trained and that schools provide the appropriate resources to help struggling teachers improve.

FINDING 3

Teachers want between 20 and 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation to consist of measures of student achievement.

While teachers believe that student data should play a role in a teacher's evaluation, they clearly feel that it should be less than 50 percent. Teachers believe that test results provide a momentary look into a student's academic achievement, as compared to observations, coaching, and other means to evaluate a student's progress towards academic and social standards. The sweet spot for teachers who participated in our survey was a range of 21-30 percent. (See Figure 2)[6]

Figure 2

	0%	1-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%
	13	12	10	28	12	19	2	2	2
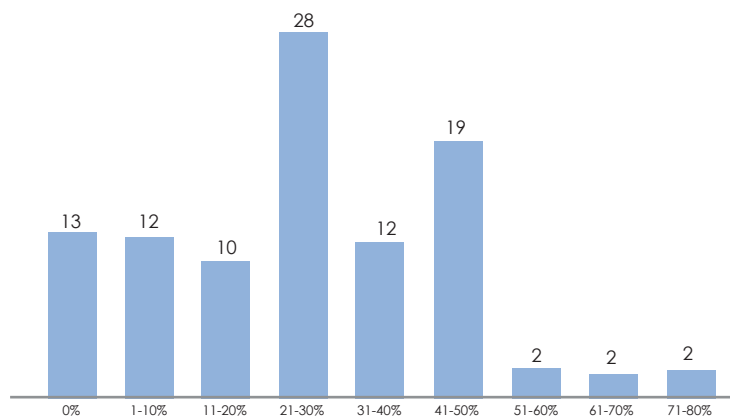
Teachers in our survey cautioned against relying too much on tests as the measure of student achievement.

The focus should be less on testing, because there are additional factors in how well students test besides teacher effectiveness or lack thereof. A teacher should not be penalized because some of his or her students do not test well. It should be based more on observations by people who will be honest and helpful, and who have expertise."

Because student performance on a test on a given day is somewhat out of our control, due to family situations, home life, etc., don't place so much value on the student achievement, but more on the daily interaction and teaching methods.

Student data is important. However, it should not be worth half of the evaluation. New teachers should be given the opportunity to have their students' data included while having the majority of the evaluation of effectiveness be in growth toward pedagogical goals with observations and coaching.

RECOMMENDATION 3
The state should use this survey as a springboard to gain consensus among stakeholders on the percentage of student data used in the evaluation system.

FINDING 4
Teachers believe that districts and state do not do enough to recognize "highly effective" educators.

We wanted to know what teachers thought about teachers who were rated "highly effective," and if the evaluation system should recognize and leverage their abilities. Teachers in our survey supported recognition through stipends (50 percent)[7] and fewer classroom observations (58 percent)[8], as well as leveraging "highly effective" teachers through mentoring (77 percent)[9] and leadership opportunities (67 percent).[10]

I believe that other teachers should be promoted to instructional coaches and evaluate other teachers. I feel the unofficial feedback I get from my colleagues is more relevant and informed than the feedback I receive from my administrator.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Teachers who have been rated "highly effective" should be recognized by the state and districts in a variety of ways, including stipends and leadership opportunities.

TEACH +PLUS

CONCLUSION

Many teachers in our survey provided constructive feedback and advice to districts and state on how to improve Colorado's evaluation system. We believe that this survey should serve as a foundation for gathering teacher input and ensuring that teacher voices are included throughout the decision-making process. We call on policymakers to provide opportunities for teachers to research, collaborate with their schools and districts, and provide specific recommendations to the current system. We hope that any policy changes to the teacher evaluation system also include opportunities for teachers to provide evidence-based solutions and to pilot some of their ideas. Teachers deserve the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues from around the state to ensure any changes to the system meet their needs and the needs of their students.

+++++++++++++ ENDNOTES ++++++++ +++++++

[1] Question: "Of the 266 teachers who responded, 91% are from traditional 89% are from district and 9% 11% from charter schools; 40% are rural, 29% suburban, 5% town, and 25% 26% urban; 58% 59% teach in schools with 51%-100% FRL, 64% have 10 or more years experience, and 74% 73% use RANDA, 21% 23% district system, and 4% 5% were unsure."

[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 = 266): "All measuring teacher effectiveness" (2%), "Mostly measuring teacher effectiveness and some supporting teacher development" (12%), "Equally measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development" (45%), " Some measuring teacher effectiveness and mostly supporting teacher development" (32%), "All supporting teacher development" (7%), "Unsure" (2%). 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 = 266): "All measuring teacher effectiveness" (26%), Mostly measuring teacher effectiveness and some supporting teacher development" (49%), Equally measuring teacher effectiveness and supporting teacher development" (12%), "Some measure teacher effectiveness and mostly supporting teacher development" (4%), All supporting teacher development" (1%), "Unsure" (8%).

[3] Question: "To what degree are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the evaluation system?" Responses (n = 265): "Very satisfied" (1%), "Somewhat satisfied" (20%), "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" (17%), "Somewhat satisfied" (30%), "Very dissatisfied" (31%), "Unsure" (<1%).

[4] Question: "The person(s) who conducts my evaluation has the expertise to evaluate my teaching practice." Responses (n = 265): "Strongly agree" (24%), "Somewhat agree" (31%), "Neither agree nor disagree" (7%), "Somewhat disagree" (16%), "Strongly disagree" (20%), "Unsure" (1%).

[5] Question: "My school does a good job of providing appropriate supports to teachers when their evaluation identifies areas for improvement." Responses (n = 266): "Strongly agree" (5%), "Somewhat agree" (32%), "Neither agree nor disagree" (12%), "Somewhat disagree" (18%), "Strongly disagree" (24%), "Unsure" (8%).

[6] Question: " What percent of a teacher's evaluation should consist of measures of student Achievement?" Responses (n = 231): "0 percent" (13%), "1 to 10 percent" (12%), "11 to 20 percent" (10%), "21 to 30 percent" (28%), "31 to 40 percent" (12%), "41 to 50 percent" (19%), "51 to 60 percent" (2%), "61 to 70 percent" (2%), "71 to 80 percent" (2%).

[7] Question: "To what degree do you support or oppose the following proposals about the evaluation process for those teachers who have been rated highly effective? Provide a stipend to teachers who are rated "highly effective" Responses (n = 266): "Strongly support" (30%), "Somewhat support" (21%), "Neither support nor oppose" (12%), "Somewhat oppose" (9%), "Strongly oppose" (26%), "Unsure" (3%).

[8] Question: To what degree do you support or oppose the following proposals about the evaluation process for those teachers who have been rated highly effective? Reduce the number of classroom observations as part of the evaluation process for teachers who are rated "highly effective." Responses (n = 265): "Strongly support" (32%), "Somewhat support" (26%), "Neither support nor oppose" (15%), "Somewhat oppose" (17%), "Strongly oppose" (8%), "Unsure" (1%).

[9] Question: "To what degree do you support or oppose the following proposals about the evaluation process for those teachers who have been rated highly effective? Create peer mentorship opportunities for teachers who are rated "highly effective" to support other teachers." Responses (n = 266): "Strongly support" (39%), "Somewhat support" (38%), "Neither support nor oppose" (15%), "Somewhat oppose" (2%), "Strongly oppose" (4%), "Unsure" (2%).

[10] Question: "To what degree do you support or oppose the following proposals about the evaluation process for those teachers who have been rated highly effective? Provide leadership opportunities for teachers who are rated "highly effective." Responses (n = 265): "Strongly support" (33%), "Somewhat support" (34%), "Neither support nor oppose" (18%), "Somewhat oppose" (6%), "Strongly oppose" (6%), "Unsure" (2%).