

Changes in Indiana law have led districts around the state to adopt new teacher evaluation systems and tools, or to revise existing models. This paper is written by teachers for district leaders to identify some of the most common concerns and questions that teachers have about these changes. While some of the questions we raise in this paper are addressed by the RISE or TAP models used by a majority of districts in the state, we pose them to guide your communication with your teaching staff. We believe that effective communication is the key to a successful transition to a new evaluation system.

We are a group of teachers, all of whom have been involved in evaluation this year, many in districts piloting new teacher evaluation tools. We believe in the value of receiving actionable feedback that will help us to develop our practice and better achieve our mission of educating our students.

Our experiences fall into two very different categories. For some of us, evaluation has been implemented to create a culture of accountability and support. For those of us with this experience, evaluation has become a helpful tool to promote continuous improvement. For others, however, evaluation has occurred in a culture of compliance and bureaucracy that does not support professional growth.

While American students routinely lag behind their counterparts in other countries,¹ 99 percent of teachers are rated as “satisfactory” in districts that use traditional binary scales.² This data suggests the urgent need for meaningful evaluation reform. Many new evaluation models represent significant progress over the outmoded checklists and rubber-stamps of the past. As with any new system implementation, we have experienced challenges and frustrations that could have been avoided. We hope that these recommendations will help to guide proactive communication between districts and teachers and enable a positive transition to the new evaluation system.

Six Principles

- 1. The basics of the evaluation should be laid out clearly at the start of the school year and should not change.*
- 2. The student assessments that will be used in the evaluation need to be identified by the start of the year.*
- 3. The tests that will be used in the evaluation must measure the growth that occurs in a teacher’s classroom.*
- 4. Evaluations and observations must be linked to meaningful professional development.*
- 5. Evaluators should be trained to ensure inter-rater reliability, and teachers should know how evaluators are selected and assigned.*
- 6. Teachers should know how evaluations will impact their careers.*

1 The basics of the evaluation should be laid out clearly at the start of the school year and should not change.

Teachers need to know in advance what criteria will be used in their evaluations and how they will be conducted.

Questions that must be answered include:

- Which rubric will be used in classroom observations?
- What portion of my overall rating will be based on observations?
- What portion of my rating will be based on student performance?
- Does student performance refer to anything more than test scores?
- Are there additional components of evaluation on which I will be rated such as student or parent feedback or administrator walk-throughs?

"I was observed with three different rubrics over the course of one year."

"I was told I would be observed twice. Late in the year it changed to three times."

Teacher Perspectives

"Depth of Knowledge was one of the key areas of my observation rubric, but I was never told what it meant and it was unclear on the rubric."

Suggestion for District Leaders

Districts should communicate evaluation plans to teachers and we encourage you to be as transparent as possible. E-mail the evaluation rubric that your district will use to all teachers before the first day of school.

2 The student assessments that will be used in the evaluation need to be identified by the start of the year.

Teachers need to know which tests will be administered and what measures will be included in their evaluations. Whenever possible, teachers should be involved in the process of selecting which tests will be used for evaluative purposes.

Teacher Perspectives

"I teach an elective subject that does not have a standardized test. I do not know what assessments will be used in my evaluation."

"I was told that my students' scores on a reading test will be the only data used in my evaluation, even though I teach history."

Questions that should be answered in advance include:

- Which standardized test or tests will factor into my evaluation?
- For what portions of those tests will I be responsible? (For example, if I teach reading, will I be responsible for just the reading section, or writing sections also?)
- Is there shared accountability for student performance in certain subject areas, and if so, how will the results impact each teacher?
- How will student test scores translate into my professional rating (what percent of my rating is attributable to student test scores)?
- Is this a test that I will give more than once a year?

3 The tests that will be used in the evaluation must measure the growth that occurs in a teacher's classroom.

Teachers should be evaluated based on students' growth from the beginning to the end of the year. Additionally, teachers should be responsible for growth in their subject of instruction.

Questions that should be answered in advance include:

- How will student growth be measured?
- Will students who enter or exit my class during the school year factor into my performance calculation?
- Does absolute achievement count in my rating, or only student growth?

- If content overlaps between multiple classes or if multiple teachers team teach a subject, how will each teacher’s contributions be assessed?

Suggestion for District Leaders

Many of the questions raised in this section are answered by the RISE and TAP models used by a majority of Indiana districts, but we believe that clearly explaining this system up front will reduce the anxiety of many teachers. We suggest that you take time to show teachers how assessment data will impact their effectiveness rating by conducting a training with sample data. Teachers should be able to understand why this data source is fair and accurate.

Suggestion for District Leaders

Make time in the schedule to allow teachers to observe their peers. Observing colleagues will help teachers to better understand the new rubrics, facilitate sharing of best practices, and help teachers identify areas for professional growth.

Enlist teachers as leaders in designing and delivering new professional development modules to address instructional weakness areas that exist across the district.

4 Evaluations and observations must be linked to meaningful professional development.

If the purpose of evaluations is to provide actionable feedback, professional development plans should be linked to observations and evaluations so that teachers can improve their professional practice.

Questions that should be answered in advance include:

- How will my professional development be differentiated to reflect the areas of growth identified in my evaluations?
- What coaching for continuous improvement will teachers rated “Highly Effective” or “Effective” receive?
- Will subsequent evaluations track my progress on these areas for growth? If so, how?

5 Evaluators should be trained to ensure inter-rater reliability, and teachers should know how evaluators are selected and assigned.

Since professional trust and collegiality impact school culture and teacher morale, teachers should know their evaluators’ qualifications. Teachers should be confident that each evaluator was assigned purposefully and thoughtfully to provide the best analysis of a teacher’s practice.

Questions that should be answered in advance include:

- What teaching experience and background does my evaluator have?
- How was my evaluator selected to perform my observation and/or evaluation?

Teacher Perspectives

“Our principal explained to us some of the ways that she will be evaluated under our new system of accountability. It is good to know that we are all working together towards the same goals.”

“My evaluation noted several areas for growth, but none of the PD my school offered was related to developing my skills in these areas.”

Teacher Perspectives

“I received Proficient or Accomplished ratings in every domain, but no suggestions on how I can get better. I still want to improve my practice.”

Suggestion for District Leaders

The findings of the MET Study recommend that observers should be “trained and required to demonstrate their ability to score accurately before they [begin scoring teachers.]”³ In the study, evaluators rated videos of lessons to calibrate their scoring before entering classrooms. This is difficult and time consuming, but it is critical to the fairness and instructional value of the evaluation process.

- What training have evaluators in my school or district received to ensure that evaluations are consistent and fair across evaluators?

6 Teachers should know how evaluations will impact their careers.

As performance pay, merit pay, and bonuses become more common in teacher compensation models, teachers should know how their evaluations will factor into their retention, compensation, and opportunities for career growth.

Questions that should be answered in advance include:

- How will my evaluation rating impact my compensation (such as the amount of my bonus or my ability to earn a raise)?
- What portion of my performance pay will be decided by my evaluation and what percentage by other factors (and what are those other factors)?
- In what ways beyond compensation will the district retain and reward highly effective teachers?

Suggestion for District Leaders

Clearly publish how distinguished performance will be rewarded and what the consequences of poor performance will be at the beginning of the school year. This will minimize rumors and foster a sense of mutual respect and shared purpose.

End Notes

¹ Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). OECD. Data online at: www.pisa.oecd.org

² “The Widget Effect” (Executive Summary). The New Teacher Project, 2009, p. 4. Available online at www.thewidgeteffect.org

³ “Gathering Feedback for Teaching.” MET Project Research Paper. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, January 2012, p.34-40. Available online at: http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_Research_Paper.pdf

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