

THE LEADING Teacher

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EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

LEARNING IS THE FOUNDATION FOR EVALUATION

RHODE ISLAND EDUCATORS BUILD TEACHER EVALUATION
ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Valerie von Frank

In a state divided into 39 municipalities, Rhode Island teachers found themselves with 39 different evaluation processes. A five-mile move from Providence to Pawtucket could mean more than a change in building and principal. Teachers could be judged on different criteria — if either district even used its evaluation.

That inconsistency in how teacher performance is examined, along with some districts' spotty use of evaluations (Jordan, 2009), led the state to revamp the way teachers are judged for their work, a trend across the country as accountability measures begin to home in on teacher quality. The state will begin this fall to phase in a new evaluation system.

What's different about Rhode Island, however, is that when some districts thought about the new system, teachers and administrators were together at the table to rewrite the criteria. And, the evaluations are based on solid grounding in research and standards for exemplary practice.



“We all need good feedback on our practice,” said Colleen Callahan, Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) professional issues director.



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RHODE ISLAND EDUCATOR EVALUATION SYSTEM STANDARDS

Adopted in 2009, the standards state:

Standard 1: District evaluation systems establish a common vision of educator quality within a district through clearly communicated evaluation processes that build upon professional standards, emphasize professional practice, impact on student learning, demonstration of professional responsibilities, and content knowledge; and support district initiatives.

Standard 2: District evaluation systems emphasize the professional growth and continuous improvement of individual educators' professional practice to enhance student performance.

Standard 3: District evaluation systems create an organizational

approach to the collective professional growth and continuous improvement of groups of educators' (e.g., departments, teams, programs, schools) professional practice to enhance student performance.

Standard 4: District evaluation systems provide quality assurance of all district educators and differentiate evaluation processes based upon level of experience, job assignment, and information from prior evaluations.

Standard 5: District evaluation systems assure fair, accurate, and consistent assessment of educator performance.

Standard 6: District evaluation systems are an integral part of the district human capital management system and are supported by district educators who regularly review and revise the system in response to systematic feedback and changing district needs.

“The current system didn't provide that. Any evaluation system has to be designed for professional growth. What this (revised) system should do is give folks confidence that we have reliable information about the effectiveness of educators. Absent that, people make generalizations about all educators and blanket statements about teachers.”

Across the country, policy makers are reconsidering what teacher evaluations look like, with considerable debate over how to hold teachers accountable for student learning. With the press to use student standardized test scores as the main or sole measure of teacher effectiveness, few states or

systems have yet found a balance of measures that most would agree is a reasonable accounting. Fourteen states in the last two years have made evidence of student learning the main criteria for evaluating teachers, with several using test scores as more than 50% of the evaluation. The emphasis on student standardized test scores for evaluations and sometimes merit pay has led to several highly-publicized cheating scandals. Basing evaluations and in some cases bonus pay on teachers being able to raise scores has led not only to cheating scandals, but to divisions that research now says may hinder the

collegiality necessary for real reform — “the power of the collective” (Leana, 2011).

In six urban Rhode Island districts, the state teachers federation worked with district administrations over two years to come to a new agreement on how to examine teacher practice that incorporates the insights of both teachers and administrators. The RIFTHP is one of seven state unions to receive a grant from the American Federation of Teachers Innovation Fund, which, along with a federal Investing in Innovation Fund grant, supported the work of developing the evaluation.

Callahan said, “There have been lots of efforts to

involve practitioners on the periphery, but we wanted them to be involved at a leadership level in putting the system together.”

The new evaluation meets the requirements set out by the state department of education, which allows some latitude in how districts enact a revision so long as they have state approval. It is built on the state's approved professional standards for teaching, a significant aspect of the work, according to Callahan. The evaluation is aligned with state professional teacher standards (see boxes above and on p. 3), the state department of education evaluation system standards, and Charlotte Danielson's framework for quality teaching.

Danielson (n.d.) says quality teacher evaluation has several characteristics:

- Clarity about what is being evaluated, and good communication of those criteria to those undergoing evaluation. She notes that both teachers and evaluators are ideally involved in defining the criteria.
- Clear procedures for documenting performance.
- Trained evaluators.
- Differentiated procedures for novices and veterans, with additional support for newer teachers, multi-year evaluations for more experienced teachers, and required professional learning.

Teachers' evaluations should be reflective and not add on to their workload, Danielson says: “Whether discussing an observed lesson, or analyzing student work, or selecting samples of family communication to include in a professional portfolio, teachers engage in activities, as part of the evaluation process, that engage them in reflection and conversation about their practice. To the maximum extent possible, these activities also represent a ‘natural harvest’ (to borrow a concept from the National Board) of teachers' work; that is, what they do for their evaluation is not extra work.”

The Rhode Island federation plan focuses on student success by promoting continuous improvement of teacher

The linchpin in the system is professional learning.

— Colleen Callahan, Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals professional issues director.

THE RHODE ISLAND PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

The Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards describe the knowledge and skills teachers need in order to ensure student achievement for each student. The Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education adopted the standards in 2007.

Standard 1: Teachers create learning experiences using a broad base of general knowledge that reflects an understanding of the nature of the communities and world in which we live.

Standard 2: Teachers have a deep content knowledge base sufficient to create learning experiences that reflect an understanding of central concepts, vocabulary, structures, and tools of inquiry of the disciplines/content areas they teach.

Standard 3: Teachers create instructional opportunities that reflect an understanding of how children learn and develop.

Standard 4: Teachers create instructional opportunities that reflect a respect for the diversity of learners and an understanding of how students differ in their approaches to learning.

Standard 5: Teachers create instructional opportunities to encourage all students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, performance skills, and literacy across content areas.

Standard 6: Teachers create a supportive learning environment that encourages appropriate standards of behavior, positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Standard 7: Teachers work collaboratively with all school personnel, families and the broader community to create a professional learning community and environment that supports the improvement of teaching, learning and student achievement.

Standard 8: Teachers use effective communication as the vehicle through which students explore, conjecture, discuss, and investigate new ideas.

Standard 9: Teachers use appropriate formal and informal assessment strategies with individuals and groups of students to determine the impact of instruction on learning, to provide feedback, and to plan future instruction.

Standard 10: Teachers reflect on their practice and assume responsibility for their own professional development by actively seeking and participating in opportunities to learn and grow as professionals.

Standard 11: Teachers maintain professional standards guided by legal and ethical principles.

practice. It includes three strands: observation of teachers' practice, professional development with an emphasis on support for those not meeting goals, and a measure of teachers' impact on student learning.

Under the union plan, teachers will set a professional practice goal and undergo both a formal and informal observation. They will receive feedback in a pre- and post-observation conference. Each teacher will be rated highly effective, effective, developing, or ineffective on a rubric that involves both student learning measures and professional practice.

The measurement of student learning, according to Callahan, will include not only state standardized assessments, but local assessments and student learning objectives from class work, such as end-of-course exams. Teachers may use portfolios to help gauge growth.

The linchpin in the system is professional learning, Callahan said. The system is designed to give teachers feedback and support to improve, an essential component of a quality process, according to Danielson.

Callahan said leaders have been working intensely to roll out the system by providing training to principals and other potential evaluators, as well as teachers, to understand the new criteria. The state federation has created video exemplars of pre- and post-conferences around classroom observations so all involved can see what to expect. As the new plan is enacted, teachers can expect professional development to be more specifically focused on their needs, based on classroom observations, she said.

"We are going to make sure that professional development is in place," Callahan said, particularly for teachers who need support to move from developing to effective. Teachers whose evaluations are less than adequate have two years to improve or face sanctions.

"It is absolutely critical that an evaluation system is designed to give teachers the information they need to do the job better," Callahan noted. "We need deeper professional development aligned with what we know about best practice. This is a rigorous system. It's not a drive-by, and it's not a gotcha."

In Cranston, local union president Liz Larkin said early professional development is focused on helping math and literacy coaches, principals, and department chairs understand what is required by the evaluation and how to gather the needed evidence of student learning. Cranston will have a four-part session to help educators learn about the evaluations and how to write individual SMART goals for their own professional development.

Larkin, a 7th grade social studies teacher, said, for example, that she has always begun unit lessons with some sense of what her students know and need to learn. Under

Learning Forward BELIEF

Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ARTICLES

Teacher evaluation:

An opportunity to leverage learning at all levels

The Learning System, Fall 2010

This issue on teacher evaluation includes tools for exploring and discussing how teacher evaluations align with professional learning.

www.learningforward.org/news/issueDetails.cfm?issueID=317

BRIEFS/REPORTS

Getting Teacher Evaluation Right

September 2011

This brief for policymakers, from the American Education Research Association and National Academy of Education, offers an insightful overview of why value-added models are highly unstable and unreliable and offers other, more reliable, approaches to teacher evaluation.

www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Gov_Relations/Getting_Teacher_Evaluation_Right_summary_brief-FINAL.pdf

A summary presentation is available here:

www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Gov_Relations/AERA-NAE_briefing_Combined_Slides_FOR_PRINTING.pdf

WEBSITE

The TAP System's Lessons Learned for Designing Better Teacher Evaluation Systems

This report's web page from the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching offers links to the full report, a summary outline of ten recommendations, and panel discussion video.

www.tapsystem.org/newsroom/newsroom.taf?page=whatsontap&_function=detail&id=112

the new system, however, she is creating a checklist and pre-assessment for each quarter's instruction to reach the SMART goal she set.

Rhode Island's multipart evaluation system may be a model for teacher involvement in revamping how educator evaluation occurs.

"We did not want this to be a punitive measure designed to weed out bad teachers, but a system to help assess which teacher practices are good and which could be improved and then to provide support and professional development," said Frank Flynn, RIFTHP president.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten praised the system in a news release, saying, "To ensure we help all children, schools need a valid evaluation system that assesses teachers' effectiveness and gives ongoing



TEAM TOOLS

www.learningforward.org/teamtools

With each issue of *The Leading Teacher*, Learning Forward provides free sample tools from our books, newsletters, and magazines. Selections for this issue:

• Walk-through group feedback form
Tools For Schools, August/September 2006

Teams can use this tool for classroom visits as a strategy for collecting information about practices.

• Individual goals for learning
The Learning System, October 2007

The tools in this issue can assist team members in asking guiding questions to set goals for professional growth by aligning goals to student learning needs. (Available on p. 5)

• Individual learning plan
The Learning System, October 2007

This tool can help teachers develop their own individual learning plans that are aligned to both school and districtwide student learning goals. (Available on p. 6)

• Four-step reflection process
Teachers Teaching Teachers, February 2006

Teams can use this tool to assist each other in reflecting and debriefing on taught lessons.

support and assistance to improve teaching and learning. This is what the Rhode Island plan will do."

References

Danielson, C. (n.d.). *New trends in teacher evaluation.* Available online at <http://charlottedanielson.com/articleEvaluation.htm>.

Jordan, J.D. (August 6, 2009). R.I. Regents to bolster teacher evaluation. *The Providence Journal.*

Leana, C.R. (2011). The missing link in school reform. *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

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DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL LEARNING GOALS

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING GOALS

I WILL:

- Know and apply strategies for extending student thinking
- Become knowledgeable about diverse cultures and apply new learning to the classroom
- Deepen my understanding of quality work attributes; design and implement quality work for students
- Read widely in the area of collegial learning; create opportunities for collegial learning among the staff
- Research school reform and leadership literature related to the role of the principal in school improvement; design strategies related to administrative work

INDIVIDUAL GOALS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	
<p>Teachers can develop their own individual learning plans that are tied to both school and districtwide student learning goals. This tool will assist you in thinking about questions that you could pose to educators to encourage them to set personal goals for professional growth and tie those goals to student learning needs.</p>	
GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will _____ • In what area _____ • And then _____
BASIS FOR YOUR GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your goal link to your individual needs? What data did you use to identify your needs? _____ • How does your goal link to your building goals? _____ • How does your goal link to the district's improvement plan? _____ • How does your goal link to student achievement? _____
EVIDENCE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence will you submit to show what you have accomplished? _____ _____ • When will you review your plan and make adjustments? _____

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How will I change as a result of participating in this activity?
- Will this activity foster collegiality?
- How can I link this activity to the work of colleagues?
- How can my learning activity benefit my colleagues?
- Who can I call upon for feedback?
- What evidence of my learning will I produce?
- What will I observe, count, or measure to determine whether the changes in practice stemming from this activity have improved student learning?
- What will be the first indication of student learning that I can expect to see?
- How long will it be before improvement can be measured?

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLAN	
<p>Your plan will consist of several goals. Use this sheet to create a plan for a single goal that is part of your larger plan.</p>	
<p>1 GOALS. What is your goal and how does it relate to student needs and building or district goals?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Example: Improve student performance on science proficiency tests, based on the number of students who must take the test more than once and the district goal that 90% of students should pass the test the first time they take it.</p>
<p>2 OBJECTIVES. What specific objectives do you expect to accomplish?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Example: Within the next two years, my classroom practice will enable 90% of my students to pass the science proficiency test the first time they take it.</p>
<p>3 POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES. What specific activities will you undertake that are directly related to these objectives?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Example: Take classes and/or workshops to improve my ability to implement inquiry-based learning in my classroom; collaborate with or seek mentoring from other teachers who use inquiry learning.</p>
<p>4 RELEVANCE. How is the scope of the plan relevant to the subject area you teach, your students, your building/district goals, and quality educational practice?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Example: Inquiry is an important and widely acknowledged method for effectively teaching science and will enable me to increase my students' performance on proficiency tests.</p>
<p>5 EVALUATION CRITERIA. What are the criteria for determining the success of your objectives? When and how will you adjust your plan if needed?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Example: In two years, 90% of my students will pass the science proficiency test; if after one year, they are not making progress, I will review and adjust my strategy.</p>



Use collaborative inquiry and multiple data sources to improve practice

For as long as I can remember, there has been an emphasis on data-driven decision making as an essential component of school and system improvement at the broader, collective level. According to the Data standard, however, this interpretation overlooks a significant aspect — using data to inform decisions about educator professional learning that improves instruction at a more individual level.

Creating a bridge from data to substantive information that drives professional learning and informs educators' decisions about instruction requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. When teachers collectively work to improve instruction through collaborative inquiry in which they analyze a variety of data from multiple sources, the analysis shapes how educators engage in, and make decisions about, professional learning.

Through collaborative inquiry, teachers work together on the data analysis process to use data deliberately and intentionally to guide instruction and increase student learning. Teachers exhibit several competencies and sharpen their practice when they analyze data, brainstorm possible causes and challenges, collectively try new instructional approaches, and identify goals for student improvements.

Nancy Love (2008) acknowledged that collaborative inquiry can create data cultures that leverage professional learning to improve student learning. Love recognized that the overall

purpose for data collection, analysis, and use is to improve instruction, and asserted that “there is no way to bridge the gap between data and results without changing what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is assessed” (p. 20). With that end in mind, teacher leaders can explore questions that guide teachers in taking responsibility for the results, making the necessary adjustments, and working collectively to get to the intended outcomes for students. (See Team Tools on p. 4 and the tools on pp. 5 and 6 for examples of these types of discussions.)

The Standards for Professional Learning assert that effective professional learning uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning. Analyzing data from multiple sources bridges the gap between data and professional learning, giving teacher leaders and coaches the ability to use multiple data sources to guide instructional decisions and assess progress against established benchmarks. Routine and collaborative team analysis will empower teachers by giving them ownership of the data, and reinforce the cycle of improvement by making ongoing instructional adjustments in the learning process.

As teachers internalize the ongoing use and exchange of data, they will become more comfortable sharing setbacks and areas for improvements and engaging one another in inquiry-based approaches to discover solutions. When they see the effects of deep and



deliberate uses of data on their daily practice, their confidence in their knowledge, skills, and dispositions will be positively impacted; it will lead them to expect more of themselves and others and move them beyond meaningless data collection tasks and exhaustive data reporting.

Through the Data standard, teacher leaders have the ability to positively influence and model the effective use of data. They are empowered — and they empower others — to question swift decisions and knee-jerk reactions, remain focused on solutions to problems revealed through the data, and encourage deliberate and intentional interventions based on multiple sources of data.

Reference

Love, N. (2008). *Using data to improve learning for all: A collaborative inquiry approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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Work smarter, not harder, by focusing on student work

As told to Valerie von Frank

It was difficult when I started working as a building coach because I was working with teachers I had taught next to. I had relationships and good friends, and now I was coaching.

At first, I was trying to fix everybody. When I changed my approach to talking about student work, it was a different ballgame. I saw a lot more growth, buy in, and acceptance of my work.

We began writing content and language objectives together. It became clear working through the process whether students were learning what they needed to by the end of the lesson. As a coach, I was responsible for helping teachers implement those plans and making sure those plans supported the school's mission and vision. Making student work the focus of the conversation built a bridge to getting into classrooms and moving

student achievement ahead.

By having teachers bring student work to the table and then talking about it, I built new relationships. Everybody was taking a risk opening up, and it wasn't about whether one person was a good teacher, but about looking at a student's work and then discussing what to do to get that student to understand what he's supposed to learn.

I had to make sure I had the right attitude. At first, my mouth said that we were looking at student work, but my mind was saying to hold teachers accountable. I had to make sure I sent the message that I want teachers to feel what they do is valued, and that they have ideas of value to offer their colleagues. Now, we're trying to say to teachers that you don't have to work harder — work smarter. Shift to doing the work that matters and delve deeper into the content of what we want kids to know and be able to do. Having that focus on student work

takes the professional learning to a different level.

With more emphasis and focus on student work, we are able to see how using data drives instruction. By then talking in the school leadership team and planning professional development for teacher leaders to use and take back to their teams, we build sustainable structures so teachers become the leaders. As a coach, you really have to build a team of teacher leaders. The work becomes much easier when it is more than just the coach. Coaches are responsible for building sustainable practice in teachers — the idea is to work ourselves out of a job.

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