YOU'VE BEEN EVALUATED.

NOW WHAT?

USE RESULTS TO PUMP UP PROFESSIONAL LEARNING'S POTENTIAL

By Stephanie Hirsh

"I've just had my first evaluation in our new system. Now what do I do?"

This school year, countless teachers are participating in new evaluation systems. Many have invested deeply in gaining new knowledge and skills associated with their new evaluation frameworks. And as much as these new systems may cause anxiety, educators who participate in them expect feedback and support that will assist them in improving their performance and gaining better outcomes with students.

Individual teachers working on their own examining evaluation feedback will have valuable information to inform individual improvement. However, teacher evaluations have the potential to achieve more, and to do it more quickly, when they are part of a comprehensive professional learning system tied to a school district's and a school's improvement goals for students. At the foundation of such a professional learning system is collaboration

— at every juncture where a teacher, team, school, and system leader work with information to examine, reflect upon, learn about, and improve practice.

The individual teacher's continuous improvement journey will be significantly enhanced when he or she is engaged in a continuous improvement process that prioritizes learning, problem solving, and reflection with colleagues within the school and beyond.

The process outlined here is based on the assumption that teachers feel comfortable sharing needs and goals and will look to their colleagues to assist in addressing them. They have assumed responsibility for the success of their students as well as those of their learning team colleagues. Collectively, their goals may not differ much. Everyone's bottom line is that all students achieve at high levels. The best way to do that is to ensure that best practices are spread from classroom to classroom and school to school.

So, to answer the baffled teacher's question, here are steps teachers can take in using evaluation results for improvement.

1. Reflect on your evaluation data and gather feedback from colleagues to identify your student learning and professional learning needs.

In Learning Forward's definition of professional learning (see box at right), the improvement cycle begins with an examination of data. Your evaluation data comes from many sources to determine strengths and opportunities for growth. You can begin your process of improvement by digging deep into data to assist you in identifying your student and professional learning goals and needs.

Compare your evaluation results to required student learning outcomes and educator performance standards. Examine the multiple measures of student performance collected in your school system to determine where your students excelled and where you want to see improvement. Review system and schoolwide goals and priorities. Identify any new programs you are expected to implement, such as Common Core standards or new assessments.

Knowing all that you have to take into consideration, you can then draft your professional learning goals and needs. Share your goals and needs with key individuals, including learning team colleagues, coaches, and supervisors. Gather their insights and suggestions.

Look for areas where goals and needs overlap with your team members. This will be your opportunity to collec-

Learning Forward's definition of professional learning

The term "professional learning" means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement.

Professional learning fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that:

- Is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;

- Is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;

- Primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that:

  - Evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;

  - Defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;

  - Achieves the educator learning goals identified above by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;

  - Provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;

  - Regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;

  - Informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and

  - May be supported by external assistance.

The process outlined above may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:

- Must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;

- Advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and

- Are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school, such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.

tively commit to improving in areas that meet the needs of many students in the school. Finalize your goals for your professional learning plan or commit to one set of goals developed by the team.

2. Collaborate with your colleagues to personalize your professional learning plan.

Begin by considering how you will organize and manage your learning agenda. Hopefully, your school system has invested in a professional learning management system for you to maintain your plans. If not, consider establishing an electronic portfolio and template or protocol for capturing your learning journey.

While there will be countless professional resources and learning opportunities available, the key is to build a personal professional learning plan that leads you directly to the outcomes you seek to achieve.

Ideally, you'll begin planning with a learning team and focus on some initial shared goals. However, limit your first steps to immediate priorities, recognizing that the continuous improvement process means that you will identify new learning priorities as other needs emerge.

As part of a team involved in a continuous learning cycle, you'll continue to assess progress and how well your learning steps are advancing you toward your goals. Each time you are confronted with a new need, your team will again determine if it is identifying the most powerful professional learning that will lead to the results it seeks.

In addition, seek input about your individual learning priorities. With input and other resources in hand, you will finish your personalized plan by identifying the learning strategies you'll choose to address your individual goals and needs.

As you collaborate or work independently to complete the initial steps of your plan, take into account these factors to structure your learning agenda:

- **Expertise:** Identify expertise within your learning team, school, or system to address your priorities. If expertise doesn't exist within the school or system, consider strategies for finding external support.
- **Design:** Select the learning design best suited to the intended goals. Decide if you need formal learning opportunities, peer collaborative learning, structured coaching or supervision, or individualized or independent learning.
- **Alignment:** Verify evidence that the content and programming you have identified is aligned with your precise goals and needs and that it has potential to lead to the desired outcomes. Find out where it has been effective.
- **Support:** Seek, as appropriate, additional coaching and support for successful implementation of desired changes.
- **Strategies:** Engage in learning processes that replicate the precise strategies you seek to incorporate in your practice with students.
- **Data:** Determine the data that will be collected to assess the impact of the professional learning.
- **Fit:** Consider the best fit for your individual and team preferred learning styles, schedules, and available resources.

After reviewing all your options and considering your goals, you will be prepared to formally commit to your plan with confidence that it will lead you toward the outcomes you seek.

3. Engage in appropriate learning designs.

Once the plan is finished, the work begins. You have selected a number of initial strategies to support your goals while recognizing that ongoing analysis of data may require alterations or additions to the plan. With members of your learning team, you have agreed to engage in several different learning designs to increase your individual and collective effectiveness.

How can this integration of team and individual needs work in practice? Let's look at a plan that includes several learning purposes and strategies.

Collaborative team-based learning and support. Your learning team has agreed to begin the year focusing on new literacy standards. Everyone has written at least one learning goal related to this area. You have divided up the new standards, and everyone has agreed to develop deeper expertise in assigned areas.

You will use your six-week improvement cycles to go deeper into the standards. Each member of the team will take responsibility for facilitating one six-week cycle of improvement around a problem of practice related to his or her standard. One of the school's instructional coaches has agreed to participate as a critical friend in the first round.

Schoolwide learning. Your school leadership team is also focusing on literacy across the curriculum. It is planning professional learning for six early release days. You have volunteered to facilitate one of the vertical learning teams for these sessions

---

Collaboration support teachers need

What support is required for teachers to integrate collaboration throughout their individual and collective improvement cycles?

1. **System and school recognition** that collaborative contexts provide the most enduring and meaningful support for individual and collective improvement.

2. **School climates** that allow safe and free discussion of individual challenges and needs for support, as well as selfless sharing of expertise so that effective practices move from room to room.

3. **Structures** that provide time and resources in the workday for teams to study, learn, experiment, and reflect.

4. **Support** to learn the specific collaboration skills that ensure teams work together well.

and look forward to the powerful lessons you'll gain as you hone your leadership skills and further the development of new resources to assist you in the classroom.

Formal learning. For areas where you need deeper content understanding, you have chosen to enroll in formal learning programs offered by the school system professional development department. The courses combine face-to-face sessions in the summer and blended learning follow-up throughout the school year. Every member of your team has committed to one course with a colleague and agreed to share what he or she has learned with other members throughout the school year.

Networking with other peers. Through the district learning community, you found several teachers working on similar goals, and you have joined a learning team focused on the particular goal that interests you most. You will begin meeting in the summer and plan to meet through the year.

You are pleased that several teachers of the year from other schools have indicated a desire to participate. They will bring great perspectives to the conversation. Everyone has agreed to start by viewing and cataloguing videos from the district library and other national sources that demonstrate the new standards in practice in classrooms. Some colleagues have suggested following up by posting and reflecting on videos of your classrooms.

Individualized job-embedded coaching and support. You still have particular areas identified in your evaluation that you want to improve. To improve your individual competencies, you commit to using a new district service that allows you to upload classroom videos and receive feedback from a certified evaluator.

You look forward to what you will gain from the perspectives of recognized excellent teachers. You have reviewed your goals and the evaluation rubric with your instructional coach and principal and determined focus areas for their early walk-throughs and formative and summative conferences.

4. **Use continuous feedback to deepen expertise, monitor implementation, assess progress, and improve performance and outcomes.**

Both planned and spontaneous feedback will assist you as you acquire, reflect, and improve application of new and refined areas of expertise. There are many sources of data that can provide the just-in-time information teachers want to determine the impact of their instruction.

Much of this data is even more valuable when examined by a learning team to identify what is working and where challenges exist. The data can be used to refine the continuous improvement process. Consider which to collect for personal and group reflection and set a schedule to support the completion of the process.

Students. Collect student performance data at six-week benchmarks. This will let you know whether your professional learning is helping you to address your students' learning needs.

Collect additional student and parent feedback on behavioral and attitudinal indicators. This will help you to refine the instructional strategies where you are focusing your improvement efforts. Record your reflections in your electronic portfolio.

Peers. Use your district or school learning team to gather feedback on lessons and classroom instruction. Bring student work to sessions, and use them as a basis for gaining insights into the impact of your new strategies on student learning. Share your benchmark results with your learning team, and use the results to refine the next six-week cycle of improvement.

Experts. Schedule the instructional coach to conduct walk-throughs every three weeks. Meet in pre-observation conversations to outline areas where you seek feedback. Schedule post-observation conferences soon after the walk-throughs to gain the coach's perspective and clarify areas for future focus. Discuss classroom-captured videos for additional feedback and the input of the district evaluation specialist who views and responds to a video from you each quarter.

Supervisors. Collect data and feedback to prepare for formative and summative conferences with your principal. Plan to present your reflections on the progress you have made on your goals and the impact on your practice and student learning.

Share evidence of collective impact of your team. Indicate where you need additional support and what you expect from your evaluation that year. Prepared this way, you not only own your professional learning, you have evidence to own your evaluation. Your principal will be impressed and appreciative.

> This individual and collective approach to improvement will produce powerful results for more educators and their students. While individual teacher evaluation is a requirement in more and more systems, teacher improvement doesn't have to be accomplished in isolation from other teachers.

POWERFUL RESULTS

This individual and collective approach to improvement will produce powerful results for more educators and their students. While individual teacher evaluation is a requirement in more and more systems, teacher improvement doesn't have to be accomplished in isolation from other teachers.

We want all teachers to have the opportunity to improve their individual performances. Yet students benefit most when teachers see their improvement as a shared responsibility to increase the collective impact for all students. Only then will we be able to say we are building systems that ensure great teaching for every child every day.

•

Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward. ■