



Teachers and students benefit when evaluation focuses on learning and growth

The purpose of a teacher evaluation system must be to help teachers achieve their greatest potential — that’s the bottom line. In more than three decades working with teachers, I have rarely met a teacher who has lost interest in learning more in order to better serve students. Yes, I have met teachers who were disillusioned when they struggled in classrooms and didn’t know where to turn for support. I have met teachers who were overwhelmed by the number of initiatives they are asked to implement over the course of one year.

However, these are not teachers who will best be served by an evaluation process designed to assign them a label. These are teachers who need an evaluation system that is designed to help them improve daily, provide ongoing feedback, and advance them along the continuum of effectiveness. In short, teachers need evaluation systems built on a continuous improvement cycle.

Evaluation systems built with such an approach include these elements:

Teachers have access to multiple forms of data to guide the creation of their annual improvement goals. Teachers access many types of student performance data, and they have

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multiple sources of feedback on their own performance.

Teachers align their goals with other teachers, their learning team colleagues, and the entire school. They know the value of shared vision and goals. They know they are much more likely to be successful in achieving their goals when others are working toward the same ends, resulting in more powerful impact on all students.

Teachers use multiple sources of support and information in creating their learning plans. They have evidence about the instructional strategies they will be working to master in concert with their colleagues. Team and school goals about the curriculum and student outcomes inform their learning choices.

Teachers engage in professional learning to acquire new knowledge and skills on their own and with team members and the entire faculty. Their learning experiences are varied, with learning designs selected carefully to match the desired outcomes of the learning and needs of the learner.

Teachers get classroom-based support to implement new strategies. They have opportunities to practice with the help of coaches or colleagues, and they hear feedback right away to deepen their understanding of what they are doing and how to improve.



Teachers have a variety of ways to monitor the impact of the improvements they attempt to make in their practice. They check regularly for student understanding; their supervisors and coaches do informal walk-throughs to offer input on specific elements.

While a cycle doesn’t have an end point, the end of the year brings an opportunity for teachers and supervisors to reflect together to determine the degree to which the teacher was successful in achieving the goals and where to focus next year. The cycle continues because committed professionals know that as long as there is one child who has not achieved all we want for him, there is still much to learn and apply.

The cycle of continuous improvement is so compelling to me because I believe in the power of learning and growth. And I know I’m not alone. For those of us who share that belief, any choice, approach, or system that doesn’t support effective teacher learning just doesn’t make sense. Do you agree? ■