

MEASURING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

A PENNCAN ISSUE BRIEF



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Introduction

Providing Pennsylvania's children with excellent teachers is the first step in building great schools. Common sense tells us that great teachers matter, and decades of research confirms this intuition. Teachers have a bigger impact on students' success than anything else at school.¹ Regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, students assigned to great teachers can learn about three times more in one year than those assigned to the least effective teachers.²

Unfortunately, in Pennsylvania we have no uniform way to identify great teachers or support their growth. Our evaluations aren't consistently linked to student learning, don't reflect differences in teacher effectiveness and aren't fundamental to school decision making. As a result, top teachers are seldom recognized for their success, struggling teachers don't receive the support they need to hone their craft and our students continue to lag behind.

To deliver on the promise of a top-notch education for all our kids, we must develop and implement a statewide teacher evaluation framework. This framework should incorporate student achievement and emphasize robust observation, evaluation and feedback to develop and support excellent instruction in all of our schools.

First and foremost, we must begin using the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System to link student performance to teachers. Next, our state must move beyond binary satisfactory/unsatisfactory evaluation systems to including multiple ratings and clear objectives for teachers. Third, our state must commit to rigorous oversight and implementation. And finally, our evaluation system must recognize greatness and drive improvement in the teaching profession. Taking these measures will not only help our teachers grow, but also give our students their best shot at a high-quality education.

1 Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job. Robert Gordon, Thomas Kane and Douglas Staiger. The Brookings Institution (2006); available: <http://bit.ly/bgtoKc>. Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement. Eric Hanushek, John F. Kain and Steven Rivkin. *Econometrica* (2005); available <http://hvrdr.me/Ley1BO>.
2 The Difference is Teacher Quality. Eric Hanushek. In K. Weber (Ed.), *Waiting for Superman: How We Can Save America's Failing Public Schools* (2010), pp. 81-100.

Background on teacher evaluations: We've only just begun

In 2005, our state took a step forward with the development of the PVAAS. PVAAS analyzes district and school assessment data to produce measures of student growth and achievement in reading and math. The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides districts and schools with this information around the beginning of each school year to help educators monitor the progress of students and make informed, data-driven decisions based on student performance. Pennsylvania is one of only several states providing this information to all school districts.³

But providing this information annually is only the beginning. Right now, this data is not a required component of our teacher evaluations. Because of the lack of evidence of student learning included in the evaluations, the Center for American Progress and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce gave Pennsylvania a “D” for the quality of our teacher evaluation systems in their 2009 *Leaders and Laggards* report.⁴ The National Council on Teacher Quality echoed this analysis in its 2011 report, giving Pennsylvania a D+ for our weak ability to identify effective teachers. This grade stems from the absence of student learning metrics in evaluation systems.⁵ Meanwhile, neighboring states such as Delaware and Tennessee received a B for their ability to identify effective teachers.⁶

³ What is PVAAS: Evaluating Growth, Projecting Performance. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/KzAA3m>.

⁴ *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Innovation*. Center for American Progress, U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Frederick M. Hess at the American Enterprise Institute (2009); available <http://bit.ly/EoalU>.

⁵ *2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*. National Council on Teacher Quality (2011); available <http://bit.ly/MTtJk7>.

⁶ *2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: State Overall Results*. National Center on Teacher Quality (2011); available <http://bit.ly/wmuC4g>.

Ineffective evaluations

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While some districts have opted to increase the rigor of their evaluation systems, there is no requirement that they do so. As a result, many of Pennsylvania's educators aren't receiving meaningful appraisals of their performance. Two factors weaken our state's teacher evaluation systems:

- *Evaluations aren't linked to student learning.* Right now in Pennsylvania, educator evaluations aren't required to incorporate any type of evidence of student learning, despite the fact that we have developed PVAAS and our data systems have the ability to link individual teacher records with individual student records.⁷ Over the past several years, 12 states and the District of Columbia have required student learning to be the main criterion in teacher evaluations,⁸ and 12 others require that student achievement data be considered.⁹ The Keystone State should follow suit.
- *Ratings don't reflect differences in teacher effectiveness.* Pennsylvania schools aren't required to use more than a binary rating system in teacher evaluations. Educators are deemed either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory."¹⁰ In many states where this rating system is used, nearly 99 percent of teachers receive a satisfactory rating in a great number of districts, even in the lowest-performing schools. Pennsylvania is no exception.¹¹ A comprehensive evaluation system with multiple ratings would keep all teachers from being treated as the same—what The New Teacher Project calls the "widget effect."¹² Multiple, distinct rating options would enable evaluators to precisely describe, compare and address differences in teaching. Taking this step will help our educators sharpen their teaching and in turn help students realize their full potential.

⁷ Pennsylvania: 2011 DQC State Analysis. Data Quality Campaign; available <http://bit.ly/Ms9nTN>.

⁸ The states that use student learning as the predominant factor in their teacher evaluations are Tennessee, Rhode Island, Oklahoma, Ohio, Nevada, Michigan, Maryland, Louisiana, Idaho, Florida, DC, Delaware and Colorado.

⁹ The states that require student achievement to at least play a role in teacher evaluations are Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Utah and Wyoming.

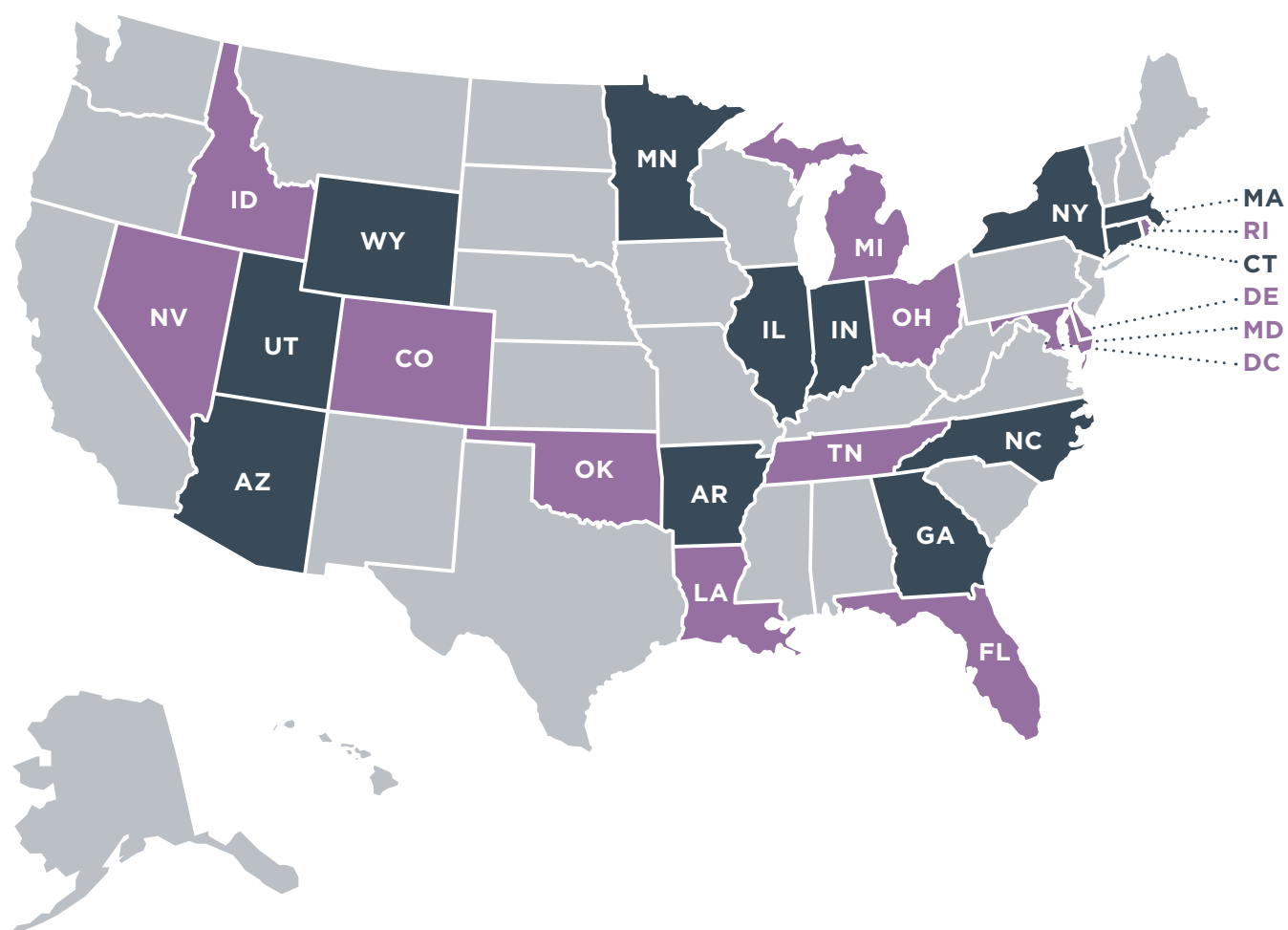
¹⁰ Pennsylvania Code Title 22 351.22; available <http://bit.ly/KYz63T>.

¹¹ Press release, September 21, 2011. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/JWzBe6>.

¹² *The Widget Effect*. Dan Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern and David Keeling. TNTP (2009); available <http://bit.ly/at6oM>.

FIGURE 1 States that have an evaluation system in place that includes student performance

SOURCE 2011 State teacher policy yearbook. National Council on Teacher Quality. (2011) Available: <http://bit.ly/M1tJk7>



- States that use student achievement/growth as the predominant factor in their teacher evaluations
- States that require student achievement to at least play a role in teacher evaluations

Where do we go from here?

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Fortunately, Pennsylvania can look within our own state, as well as to other states, for examples of strong teacher evaluation systems that offer meaningful measures of effectiveness, provide opportunities for professional development and help administrators make informed staffing decisions.

Pennsylvania department of education

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is spearheading a Teacher Effectiveness Project to develop and refine evaluation systems with direct feedback from educators and districts. In the 2010–2011 school year, four school districts participated in the project's pilot. This year, 122 districts serving nearly 320,000 students and representing nearly 20 percent of the state's student population participated in the pilot evaluation system. The pilot uses multiple measures of effectiveness, including overall achievement and student growth according to state assessments, promotion and graduation rates, attendance, national tests, district-approved projects and portfolios.¹³ The Department of Education is working with districts and participants to incorporate feedback from educators to refine the evaluation tool.¹⁴

The pilot system is just one of several ways that districts around the state are trying to better support their teachers. Pittsburgh and the Mastery charter school network, for example, were awarded Teacher Incentive Fund grants to implement more comprehensive teacher evaluation systems.¹⁵ Additionally, in 2010 Pennsylvania received \$141 million from the federal government's School Improvement Grant program to turn around the state's lowest-performing schools. In the application for those funds, Pennsylvania mapped out a plan to use the money to develop a multi-measure evaluation system for teachers and principals that provides annual evaluations and timely feedback.¹⁶

Pennsylvania also received \$41.3 million through the Race to the Top grant program for its plan to develop rigorous, transparent and fair teacher evaluation systems.¹⁷ In its Race to the Top application, the Pennsylvania Department of Education committed to developing evaluation systems that will have multiple rating levels for effectiveness and use student growth as a significant factor.¹⁸ The department intended these evaluation systems to provide useful feedback to Pennsylvania teachers concerning their strengths and weaknesses. The application also explicitly highlights the need to provide teachers and principals with professional development training on how best to implement

13 Educator Effectiveness Project. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/JD5Q3q>.

14 Press release, September 21, 2011. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/JWzBe6>.

15 TIF Grantees. Center for Educator Compensation Reform at the United States Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/J6EG1X>.

16 School Improvement Grant Application: Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://1.usa.gov/J1NgPd>.

17 Press release, December 23, 2011. Governor Corbett Announces \$41.3 Million Federal Education Grant. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/tayi3Z>.

18 Pennsylvania Race to the Top Application (2010); available <http://1.usa.gov/JaL6vL>.

and use their systems.¹⁹ With so many districts already involved in the state's pilot program and money from the federal government already being awarded to Pennsylvania educators to develop these systems, the wheels of this movement have been set in motion.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Pittsburgh public schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools is another example of on-the-ground momentum to improve teacher evaluation. With the support of a \$40 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and more than \$40 million in state and federal grants, Pittsburgh Public Schools and their teachers are implementing the Empowering Effective Teachers program. The goal is to raise student achievement by ensuring a highly effective teacher in every classroom. With that aim in mind, the district has created new opportunities for professional growth developed by teachers, for teachers. So far, the results are promising. In 2011, more students scored “proficient” or “advanced” than in the previous five years.²⁰ When evaluation systems empower teachers, students perform better.

²⁰ *Empowering Effective Teachers: A Collaborative Program of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and the Pittsburgh Public Schools*. Pittsburgh Public Schools (2012); available <http://bit.ly/JCgdGp>.

So what does Pittsburgh's teacher evaluation system measure? The Steel City incorporates three different measures of effectiveness: teacher practice, student learning and growth and other student outcomes.

The teacher practice category, which includes evaluations of a teacher's planning and preparation, classroom environment and professional responsibilities, is based largely on observations conducted by administrators. Tenured teachers are observed four times each year, and their non-tenured colleagues are observed eight times annually. As a result, administrators gain a strong sense of a teacher's abilities and his or her professional growth over the course of a school year. Meanwhile, student outcomes are measured through value-added data and the results of student surveys. Student learning and growth results will be used for teacher ratings during the 2013–2014 school year. The role that student survey results will play, however, has yet to be determined. Until a more comprehensive rollout in 2012–2013, these evaluations are used primarily to inform practice throughout the year rather than to provide a final grade;²¹ however, they are already helping teachers improve and boosting student achievement in Pittsburgh classrooms.

²¹ *Refining Our Professional Growth System of Teacher Evaluation*. Pittsburgh Public Schools (2011); available <http://bit.ly/KyWyXf>.

Pittsburgh's system represents one example of a strong system that meets the essential criteria of having multiple measures of effectiveness informing multiple rating levels for teachers.²² Their teacher evaluation system uses 24 different components of effective teaching. For each of these components, which include skills such as using as-

²² *Teacher Evaluation 2.0. TNTP* (2010); available <http://bit.ly/x4Tc4h>.

assessment to inform instruction and establishing a culture for learning, evaluators place a teacher's performance in one of four categories: distinguished, proficient, basic and unsatisfactory.²³

These multiple measures of effectiveness give a holistic view of the complex work that goes into being an amazing teacher. Pittsburgh's teacher evaluation system allows schools to celebrate and recognize their great educators and gives their less effective colleagues the feedback and support they need to become great.²⁴

New York and Delaware

Evidence of robust evaluation systems also exists in our neighboring states. For example, New York's statewide teacher evaluation framework requires student achievement data to count towards 40 percent of the evaluation. The remaining 60 percent is based on frequent classroom observations and other measures of performance and effectiveness.²⁵

Another neighbor, Delaware, continues to be a leader in the development of more reliable and supportive teacher evaluation systems. In order to be rated effective, Delaware teachers must reach student growth targets and receive positive classroom evaluations that are based on the nationally recognized Charlotte Danielson framework.²⁶ Delaware's system uses four different rating categories, and evaluators observe new teachers multiple times to better inform that teacher's annual evaluation. This comprehensive system recognizes the state's highly effective teachers and clearly outlines what great teaching looks like so all teachers can improve.

23 Pittsburgh RISE teacher evaluation rubric. Pittsburgh Public Schools (2009); available <http://bit.ly/Kg6gdw>.

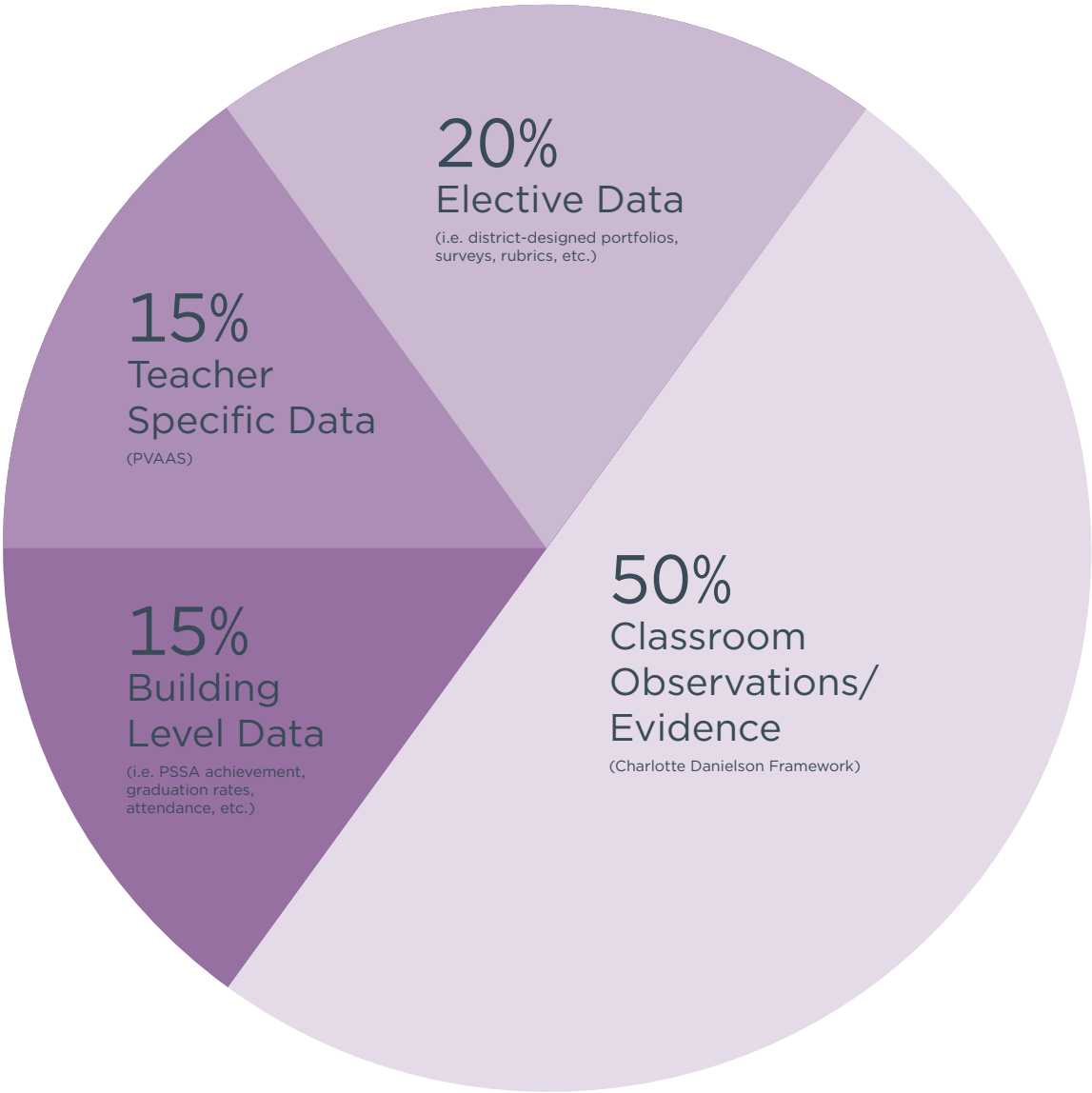
24 *Empowering Effective Teachers: A Collaborative Program of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and the Pittsburgh Public Schools*. Pittsburgh Public Schools; available <http://bit.ly/JCgdGp>.

25 New York Teacher and Principal Teacher Evaluation and Beyond: Summary of Revised APPR Revisions. New York State Education Department; available <http://bit.ly/zzNm4>

26 DPAS II—Component Rubrics for Teachers. Delaware Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/Lk28xY>.

TABLE 1 Proposed breakdown for Pennsylvania’s pilot teacher evaluation system

SOURCE Educator Effectiveness Project. Pennsylvania Department of Education; available <http://bit.ly/JD5Q3q>.



Applying lessons learned statewide

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Making use of strong data systems and reporting capabilities to measure teacher effectiveness will require a multipronged approach in Pennsylvania. In designing and supporting new policies, state legislators, education leaders and other stakeholders must leverage the pioneering work done by our state department of education, Pittsburgh and other states to support three key principles:

1. *Use our data systems and the PVAAS to link student performance to individual teachers and enable tracking of student learning over time.* Pennsylvania has all three necessary elements of a student and teacher longitudinal data system. The state assigns unique student identifiers that connect student data across key databases across years and has assigned unique teacher identifiers that enable the matching of individual teacher records with individual student test records to measure academic growth.²⁷ As the Data Quality Campaign notes, teacher identifiers that link to student records allow policymakers, educators and the public to tell which teachers are most effective.²⁸ The state department of education is already providing districts with district—and school-level value-add results via PVAAS. Now it's time for Pennsylvania to put its robust data systems and the PVAAS results to meaningful use in a statewide teacher evaluation system.
2. *Include multiple rating categories and clear objectives in new evaluation systems, incorporating both student performance and assessments of teaching practice.* Pennsylvania should require a system of ratings at the state level to serve as the standard for district evaluation systems. Rather than using the common satisfactory/unsatisfactory ratings, policymakers should set four or five rating levels (for example, “exceeds objectives,” “fully meets objectives,” “partially meets objectives,” and “unsatisfactory”). In addition, each rating should be well defined, so that expectations are clear to supervisors, ratings are more consistent and teachers understand what they mean.²⁹ Evaluators then can apply those ratings to carefully weighted, clearly written objectives for each job. The evaluation should consider a specified and significant student performance standard first, using our state's value-added models that link teachers with student scores on standardized tests, while controlling for such factors as a student's academic history.³⁰ The evaluation should also consider classroom observations to measure other com-

²⁷ 2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: Pennsylvania. National Center on Teacher Quality (2011); available <http://bit.ly/MitJk7>.

²⁸ 10 Essential Elements of a State Longitudinal Data System. Data Quality Campaign (2012); available <http://bit.ly/eiQfkZ>.

²⁹ Measuring Teacher and Leader Performance: Cross-Sector Lessons for Excellent Evaluations. Julie Kowal and Emily Hassel. Public Impact (2010); available <http://bit.ly/JSDmAX>.

³⁰ TNTP (2009).

ponents of teacher performance, such as planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. Finally, use of the new system must be legally required so that all districts in Pennsylvania comply.

3. *Commit to rigorous oversight and implementation.* As the state guides districts and schools in their implementation of new evaluation systems, we must develop the processes and oversight to leave the “widget effect” behind. Administrators who hold responsibility for evaluating teachers must be fully trained in the evaluation system and held accountable for the quality, rigor and accuracy of their ratings. At the same time, these evaluators will need ongoing support to make fair, consistent assessments according to established standards. We must also commit to continuous improvement in our evaluations, constantly increasing the correlation between the measures used and student learning results. While the data and technology needed to implement quality evaluations has improved dramatically over the past several years, educators and policymakers still do not have all the experience and information needed to ensure a flawless system. By regularly assessing the effectiveness of our new systems, we can support continuous improvement and ensure that they remain relevant to teachers and students in the classroom.

Seeing this through

In Pennsylvania, as in many states, evaluations aren’t typically used to inform decisions about teachers’ promotion, continuing development, compensation, tenure or dismissal. The absence of a strong evaluation system makes this decision making impossible. As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recognized in 2010, an evaluation system that fails to differentiate excellence “frustrates teachers who feel that their good work goes unrecognized and ignores other teachers who would benefit from additional support.”³¹ To make matters worse, tenure awards are made nearly automatically, with little or no consideration of a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom.³² Additionally, when layoffs must be made, Pennsylvania’s teachers are let go based solely on seniority, without consideration of effectiveness.³³ These aspects of our evaluation system hurt teachers and students alike.

³¹ TNTP (2010).

³² National Council on Teacher Quality (2011).

³³ Ibid

Pennsylvania's evaluation system will best serve educators and students when it recognizes great teaching and drives targeted professional development. At the same time, we must also use our evaluation system to sharpen the skills of teachers whose students are making subpar or mediocre gains in learning. This means using classroom observations and student performance data to provide teachers with continuous feedback and professional development opportunities. After all, the point of a great evaluation system isn't to punish teachers, but rather to help them improve instruction for our students. With that said, teachers who continue to receive low marks after intensive professional development should be placed on probationary status or dismissed.

Pennsylvania has come a long way, and we should be proud of the progress we're making. Now we must build on our success and give our educators the information they need to raise student achievement. Creating detailed, fair and comprehensible educator evaluations will go far toward ensuring great schools for all of Pennsylvania's students.

About PennCAN

PennCAN: The Pennsylvania Campaign for Achievement Now launched in the Spring of 2012 as an education reform advocacy organization building a movement of Pennsylvanians with the political will to enact smart public policies so that every Pennsylvania child has access to a great public school. We are a branch of 50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now, a growing national network of state-based education reform advocacy groups with campaigns in Rhode Island, Minnesota, New York and Maryland based on the groundbreaking model developed by ConnCAN in Connecticut.

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