

**SPOTLIGHT ON
SUPERVISION
&
EVALUATION**

RTTT Pilot Project Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 2

February 2012

Seven Levels of Reform

- Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement
- Induction
- Professional Development
- Supervision and Evaluation
- Teacher Leadership
- Organizational Structure
- Adult Professional Culture

Inside this issue:

Promising Practices from Attleboro	2
A Teacher's Perspective	3
Building Teacher Ownership of Evaluation	3
Interview with Jon Saphier	4
Evaluation for Lifelong Learning	5
WGEE Mission	7
Reference List	7

Supervision & Evaluation: What Really Matters?

The ESE's Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice will soon be required evaluation categories for teachers throughout the state. This is a major change from the formerly individualistic, district-based approach to evaluation.

We see this period of adoption as a time for both enthusiasm and reflection. A common evaluation system has the potential to raise standards in all schools and promote a common language across regions and districts. Developed in consultation with state associations, and with feedback solicited from stakeholders across the state, these standards consider the many ways in which teaching impacts student learning, both within and beyond classroom walls,

The standards are just the be-

ginning, however, of a larger effort that will play out in numerous ways within the state's individual districts. Districts will need to encourage dialogue about the new standards. Evaluator capacity must be developed or strengthened (see p. 4). Ultimately, whether it chooses to adopt the new standards entirely, adapt them to its context, or revise existing structures, each district will find its own unique way of blending the new evaluation with its existing values, as the Attleboro Public Schools have already begun to do (see below).

For the schools participating in the RTT Pilot Project, the introduction of the new standards comes at a particularly opportune time. As the three participating districts, Attleboro, Brockton, and Revere, move forward with their alignment

efforts, they will have a chance to consider how best to incorporate the new standards into their professional culture.

In the spirit of reflection, this newsletter will attempt to address several essential questions about the role of supervision and evaluation over the professional lifespan. For example: what principles should guide evaluation? How can evaluation meet the needs of teachers at various stages of practice? Who are our evaluators, and how are they prepared? Our contributors offer various perspectives, but all see evaluation as a vital part of a culture of continuous professional growth, and all understand that it is most effective when backed by a strong organizational structure. We wish all districts the best of luck as they navigate the coming changes.

Sustaining a Culture of Continuous Improvement: Transition and Growth in Attleboro

The implementation of a new teacher evaluation system is a daunting task for any district, particularly one that has received wide recognition for its existing evaluation practices. Yet Attleboro's public schools are ready for the challenge. Dr. Pia Durkin, Attleboro Superintendent, and Nancy Sprague, the Director for Teaching and Learning Excellence, spoke about the district's efforts as an Early Adopter of the new DESE evaluation regulations and their shared commitment to a com-

prehensive, inclusive change process. Adoption of the new regulations is, for Attleboro, more than an act of mere compliance; it is a process marked by reflection and dialogue. In this way, the district's self-evaluation mirrors the growth-oriented questioning that its personnel evaluation system has promoted among teachers and administrators. When it comes to district-wide change, "we're really talking about three C's," says Dr.

Durkin: "collaboration, calibration, and communication." These three ongoing processes have informed Attleboro's development of its highly regarded Professional Employee Evaluation System. Now, they are proving crucial to the transition from Attleboro's tool to the new DESE framework. True collaboration has come in the form of a planning and implementation team that includes **[Continued on page 2]**

Transition and Growth in Attleboro, continued

[Continued from page 1] principals, teachers, central administrators, and union leaders. Union representatives have been involved in decisions about the evaluation system from the very beginning of Dr. Durkin's tenure, contributing to the positive reception of the tool and smoothing the current transition process. An outside facilitator has lent perspective and objectivity to implementation team meetings.

Principals' and assistant principals' consistent calibration meetings help to ensure reliable evaluations, and have led to a system widely considered to be fair. Those who serve as evaluators in Attleboro have had a successful teaching record—"To lead the work, you need to know the work," says Dr. Durkin—as well as extensive training through the Research for Better Teaching program.

Finally, the district has ensured that communication about supervision and evaluation has been a two-way process; principals and instructional leadership teams are encouraged to share their feedback, and the central office works to promptly address concerns and misconceptions. Implementation team members are encouraged to share new information with their colleagues.

On a technical level, the district has sought common ground between the current evaluation system and the new regulations. For example, the eight district standards have been merged into the state's four categories. Newly developed Team Goals, now being piloted throughout the district, are consistent with the tool's focus on collaboration. Current efforts include the creation of crosswalks between Attleboro's "Pathways" and the state's "Educator Plans," as well as deliberation about the process for determining summative ratings.

Beyond these logistical steps, Attleboro faces the additional challenge of retaining the unique character of its

evaluation system while embracing the new state requirements. Supervision and evaluation in Attleboro are closely tied to the district culture, one in which teaching has become increasingly public and organizational structures have been created to support frequent peer and supervisor observations, both formal and informal. Attleboro's implementation committee has provided significant feedback on the new evaluation regulations, and is currently working with the state to augment the regulatory language with elements of the current Attleboro tool.

Attleboro's adoption of the DESE evaluation system corresponds with the Supervision and Evaluation lever of the RTT pilot project, one of seven levers that will be addressed in vari-

ous ways by the district this year. The pilot efforts should begin with a district's existing assets, and Attleboro's work on this lever represents a continuation of the district's strong, growth-oriented evaluation system. As Dr. Durkin puts it, Attleboro's evaluation system is "the single most important leverage point that has changed instruction in classrooms and has improved student achievement." Given the Attleboro tool's historic impact on student learning and teacher professionalism, and the district's ongoing efforts to monitor and improve its existing system, it is clear that Attleboro will continue to build its professional culture through innovative supervision and evaluation practices.

Promising Practices in Supervision and Evaluation from Attleboro Public Schools

Attleboro's supervision and evaluation systems promote teachers' and administrators' continuous growth over the professional lifespan. Here are just a few of the ways in which APS has cultivated a professional learning environment through supervision and evaluation:

-Collaborative design process: Elements of the current evaluation system, such as the lesson protocol used for evaluations, were designed by a team of stakeholders (teachers, principals, central office, union, etc.). The inclusive nature of the implementation process has increased understanding and satisfaction throughout the district, and the central office hopes to create even more direct avenues for communication and feedback in the future.

-Best practice classrooms: To receive a rating of distinction in the APS evaluation system, a teacher needs to actively share knowledge with other teachers. Teachers who have found an innovative way to address a common problem of practice may have their classrooms designated as "best practice classrooms," places where other teachers and administrators may go to see a specific practice in action. Currently, other teachers within the school are encouraged to visit the best practice classrooms, but over the next two years the district plans to extend this practice to teachers from other Attleboro schools and, later, those from other districts.

-Learning walks: Attleboro has put its own stamp on this popular practice. Principals choose the focus for a half-day learning walk. Participants may include the ELL coordinator, the Title I coordinator, subject-matter specialists, the director of special education, members of the data and accountability team, and other teachers from the Instructional Learning Team. The walk begins with a discussion, led by the principal, of the work that is being done, and ends with a discussion of next steps, subsequently summarized by the principal and sent to all participants. Those identified steps will be integrated into the next learning walk, creating a continuous cycle. The learning walks are not used for the evaluation of individual teachers, but to examine school-wide trends, successes, and areas for improvement.

A Teacher's Perspective on Supervision and Evaluation

**By Marta Magnus, Lowell
Public Schools**

Recently, I was discussing the topic of teacher evaluation and observations with a colleague. I shared my hope that the new Massachusetts regulations would encourage frequent opportunities for reflection and conversation about how we can develop as teachers to increase student learning. I also expressed my eagerness to have others observe my teaching more to gain constructive feedback, which I feel rarely happens in the current evaluation system. My colleague, on the other hand, had hesitations. She told me that observations made her feel uncomfortable, and they weren't helpful. I was a bit surprised, thinking she would feel the same way I did. Doesn't she want administration to see her excellent teaching? Doesn't she want to discover ways to become a better teacher so she can help her students? I perceived feedback as a positive that needs to be used more regularly in schools, but in her experience she avoided it because the process was delivered in a discouraging way. Clearly teachers have a

range of opinions and perspectives about how classroom observations and giving feedback are handled in schools. We are at a unique point in our profession where we have the potential to influence a new evaluation system to better serve our professional growth. I urge policy and education leaders to pay particular attention to how classroom observations and the role of the evaluator can provide meaningful feedback to educators.

Classroom Observations

Many teachers can relate to the experience of being observed, where the evaluator sits in the back of the room, jotting down notes with a serious facial expression. I can recall times when I became tense with an administrator watching me during a rare classroom observation. Why should we feel nervous when an evaluator visits our classrooms? When it happens sporadically this is understandable; we are thrown off guard. Even if it is a scheduled observation, we may feel we have to perform something spectacular since this might be the only time the principal visits our classroom. I believe

observations need to be made more frequently and always unannounced. Teachers need to become accustomed to being observed and know that the quality of their teaching every day should match what it would be if they were being formally observed. Administrators should establish a procedure for observations to ensure their consistency, such as all teachers are observed at least two times a month by either themselves or a peer. In addition, they should always follow up, in person or in writing, with positive comments to confirm what the teacher is doing well and suggestions for improvement to provide guidance on where he/she can grow as an educator. Observations take time but they need to be made a priority. However, not all require a full class with a lengthy follow up meeting. A ten minute classroom observation can give an evaluator enough information to share quality feedback to a teacher. It takes another five minutes that same day to write a brief e-mail or note that describes the feedback. Regular, immediate feedback can have a **[Continued on page 6]**

“We are at a unique point in our profession where we have the potential to influence a new evaluation system to better serve our professional growth.”

In Brief: Building Teacher Ownership of the Evaluation System

In their publication *Building Teacher Evaluation Systems: Learning from Leading Efforts*, the Aspen Institute has compiled a list of suggestions based on the practices of the District of Columbia Public Schools and the Achievement First charter school network. They offer the following recommendations for the implementation of a new evaluation system:

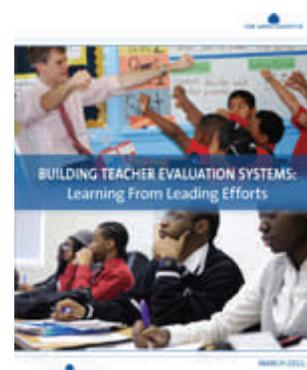
- Substantive, meaningful teacher involvement in the

writing of standards has the dual function of engaging teachers and strengthening the standards.

- Piloting the standards with a group of teachers can lead to increased ownership and helpful feedback. These teachers can then provide support during the implementation process.
- The evaluation of teachers by other teachers can

bring positive change to the evaluation dynamic and increase opportunities for teachers to receive specific feedback from a colleague with experience in the same grade / subject area.

- Trust and clear, two-way communication are essential to the success of any evaluation initiative. Surveys, focus groups, and workshops can be helpful.



The report can be found at www.aspeninstitute.org

Investing in Evaluators: An Interview with Jon Saphier



“Change doesn’t come from the evaluation system alone—it’s the evaluators, the people.”

How does teacher evaluation improve classroom teaching?

By itself, evaluation often doesn’t improve classroom teaching. Its success can be limited if evaluators don’t have enough time. If an evaluator has to evaluate too many people in a given year, it reduces the ability of the evaluation system to have an impact on the quality of teaching. Another limiting factor is insufficient training and accountability for evaluator skill. However, evaluation *can* be effective in improving teaching if teachers receive frequent, high-quality feedback.

What strategies can be used to make evaluation effective?

I think that the answer is not to rely on formal evaluation alone to provide frequent, high-quality feedback. Other approaches can achieve that. One is frequent, short, informal visits by administrators. The second is highly trained instructional coaches who can do this, and it’s not called evaluation. These are full-time coaching positions for former classroom teachers. The criteria for selection should be a successful track record as a teacher, somebody who believes in effort-based ability, someone with good adult communication skills, and a willingness to learn. You need a constant learner in that role.

In your experience, what kind of training and support do supervisors and coaches need?

They need good skills for observing and analyzing teaching. They need a knowledge of content-specific pedagogy. They need to know how to do error analysis of student work. And they need good communication skills—active listening and differential supervision. They may not formally have the word supervisor in their job description or their title, but

that phrase “differential supervision” captures a body of knowledge and skill that’s usually taught to supervisors, meaning they know how to orchestrate across a directive to non-directive continuum.

And how might those skills be acquired?

It depends on what people come in with. The district needs to invest in capacity-building for the coaches.

There’s a big pay-off because whatever they learn and get good at will be multiplied.

Reliability is important. Evaluators need to be statistically reliable with relation to one another—that is, they form roughly the same impression, and see the same things as important. It means looking at classes together, either real ones or ones on video, and then recording your evaluations or analysis and discussing the differences until you stop having such big differences. But prior to that, you need the training in what you should be looking for to begin with. You’ve got to notice the things that are important. So those two things should happen at the same time—the training in what and how to observe, and the establishment of reliability. In well-designed courses, they do. This is a big gap, by the way, in the preparation of administrators, coaches, and evaluators—observation and analysis skills.

How can your model impact the adult professional culture and working relationships in a district?

Part of the coaches’ role is to build a strong adult professional culture. So part of their continuous training is to develop communication skills for work with individuals and groups. They also teach teachers how to do error analysis of student work in groups, and

they do it in such a way as to build a climate of non-defensive self-examination. PLCs get better when you hire instructional coaches, because coaches see it as part of their work to develop the honesty and the task focus of PLCs.

What needs to be done so that an evaluation system becomes courageous in addressing low-performing teachers?

Again, change doesn’t come from the evaluation system alone-- it’s the evaluators, the people. The way to build their courage has several components. First, we must create a moral urgency that children receive high expertise teaching, so the evaluator’s conscience starts to prod. The second thing is very good training and support so that the evaluators can document and provide evidence for their findings. A third component is that teachers who are identified as unsatisfactory must have a fair chance to improve with very good improvement plans and coaching support. A fourth is that school committees and superintendents have to be willing to back up administrators’ evaluations for the interest of children. Finally, we need to supervise and evaluate principals on their ability to do honest, thorough evaluations at a high bar. All of those things together will produce more courage, or more action, anyway.

How can evaluation improve the expertise of competent teachers?

By bringing them into closer contact with one another through observations and joint planning sessions, or on lessons and unit designs. In that sense, I wouldn’t call it a professional evaluation system, but a professional growth system of which evaluation is an important

Interview with Jon Saphier, continued

[Continued from page 4] component. That's what happened in Montgomery County. Our work there has been going on for fifteen years, during which time the achievement gap has narrowed, the high school graduation rate has risen. This isn't the only thing they have done to improve student results, but it's a big part of it. Teachers feel like they get higher quality feedback, more attention, and administrators feel that they have training to do the job.

What conditions need to be in place for a district to undertake this sort of project? I do think it's something that any district can do. But there are budgetary implications. If you have too few people doing evaluations, that is a permanent restriction on how in-depth the quality can be. That does not restrict you from using other sub-systems like coaching and peer observation to improve the frequency and quality of feedback. You also have to have a schedule and resources that will allow people to get

into each other's rooms. But now, we're not talking about making an evaluation system work, but making a professional growth system work. The focus of a school district should not be on the creation of rubrics and instruments. You can make any rubric and instrument work if you have skilled evaluators who have the time to do the job. Therefore, the focus should be on implementation rather than on documents and rubrics. It's all about implementation.



In Brief: Support for Educators at All Stages of Practice

Teacher evaluation has two purposes: ensuring quality teaching and promoting professional development (Danielson, 2010). We tend to concentrate on the first, but a good system of evaluation must merge the two purposes.

The traditional emphasis on evaluation as punitive has caused the process to be viewed with general distrust. There seems to be some indication of a cultural shift, according to a recent

(2011) AFT report on "Generation Y Teachers." In higher numbers than colleagues from other generations, these young members of the teaching force express a desire for frequent observations and feedback.

The AFT has identified five essential components for any evaluation system meant to promote continuous development and improvement. These include professional teaching

standards that articulate a common vision, standards for assessing teaching practice based on evidence of both student learning and good teaching practice, detailed implementation standards, standards for professional contexts, and standards for support. The AFT framework rightly notes the importance of inputs—the conditions in which teachers do their work—as well as the outputs they produce.

Five Necessary Conditions for Developing Teacher Expertise (from Marzano, 2011)

- **A well-articulated knowledge base for teaching.** Districts in the pilot project are building from the framework of High Expertise Teaching.
- **Focused feedback and practice.** Observations and feedback related to a specific domain of practice will lead to more targeted improvement.
- **Opportunities to observe and discuss expertise.** This may include opportunities for teachers to discuss videotapes of other teachers, to visit and consult with expert teachers, and to interact with their peers.
- **Clear criteria and a plan for success.** Criteria should balance classroom strategies and behaviors with evidence of student achievement. The information gained through these criteria will aid in the construction of professional growth and development plans.
- **Recognition of expertise.** Evaluation systems can be designed to not only recognize and document levels of expertise, but to provide support for teachers at all levels to continue their progress.

If we want teacher evaluation systems that teachers find meaningful and from which they can learn, we must use processes that not only are rigorous, valid, and reliable, but also engage teachers in those activities that promote learning—namely self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation.

-Charlotte Danielson

A Teacher's Perspective, continued

[Continued from page 3]

tremendous influence on one's performance. I still remember a comment from my principal after a rare classroom observation four years ago. She suggested that I provide more specific, targeted comments to students to reinforce positive behaviors. Every day I think about that helpful comment when I choose the appropriate words to tell students what they are doing well and how they can improve. I can only imagine the growth teachers could make as a result of feedback from on-going classroom visits.

Role of the Evaluator

If implemented well, giving and receiving feedback creates a trusting school culture where teachers and administrators are on the same team, working towards the same goals. Evaluators – administrators and peers – can nurture this trust

by the way in which they act during classroom visits. One idea is for them to be more integrated into the classroom observation process, not separated from it. For example, the evaluator could interact with students and take part in classroom activities during observations. What a useful way to gauge a teacher's effectiveness - by experiencing hands-on with students what they are learning instead of always watching and note-taking from a distance which can be intimidating to a teacher. When evaluators recognize something positive they could provide feedback to the class at an appropriate time during the lesson. Once, my assistant principal made a brief, unannounced classroom visit when I was leading an art critique with my students. She joined in and was overwhelmed with the quality of their work. She made a point to announce this, praising both the students

and my teaching. This only took ten minutes out of her day, but it had a great impact on the students and me.

At the core of teacher evaluations, "feedback" is the word that comes to mind. Feedback needs to be given more often and appropriately so it can be viewed as a learning tool and not something that is intimidating or burdensome. On-going classroom observations are an ideal opportunity for administrators and peers to provide teachers with the support and suggestions that we need to guide our practice. We consistently give critical feedback to our students on their performance through report cards and written and verbal comments, encouraging them to work hard and master the concepts. We need to model the same behavior with each other and make it a permanent part of our professional work.



"We consistently give critical feedback to our students... We need to model the same behavior with each other and make it a permanent part of our professional work."

In Brief: The Teaching Evaluation Gap (Hawley & Irvine, 2011)

In a recent (2011) Education Week article, Willis D. Hawley & Jacqueline Jordan Irvine call for greater attention to culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in teacher evaluation protocols. The researchers note that, despite the demonstrated importance of CRP, culturally responsive practices are not often included or assessed. The authors provide examples of evaluation components that could be used to measure effective, culturally responsive teaching, including the following:

-Learning from family and community engagement. *Teacher interacts frequently with families to inform them about*

their students' progress and help them support their students' learning. Teacher learns from families about the lived experiences of their students and uses this information in selecting learning resources and adapting instruction.

-Assessing student performance. *Assessments are based on a variety of measures of student learning that take into account differences in students' cultural experiences and language facility. Attention is paid to the possibility that students' performance will be based on their confidence about doing well, rather than their actual knowledge of the content being assessed.*

-Grouping students for instruction. *Various grouping strategies are flexibly used. Groups based on prior achievement are used sparingly and for specific purposes. Racially and ethnically homogeneous grouping is minimized, and student differences in readiness to contribute to group learning are taken into account.*

The compelling research on culturally responsive pedagogy suggests a need for evaluations that consider teachers' ability in that area. The state's Model Evaluation System Rubrics, which include an entire standard on "Family and Community Engagement," represent an important step in the right direction.

WORKING GROUP FOR EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE

Editor: Keridan Doyle
keridan.doyle@bc.edu

Many thanks to those who
contributed their perspectives
to this issue:

- Pia Durkin and Nancy Sprague, Attleboro Public Schools
- Marta Magnus, Lowell Public Schools
- Jon Saphier, Research for Better Teaching

Next Issue's Spotlight:
**Professional
Development**
Please send suggestions
to Sue Freedman
(syfreedman1@aol.com)
or Keridan Doyle
(keridan.doyle@bc.edu)

References

- The Aspen Institute (March 2011). *Building teacher evaluation systems: Learning from leading efforts*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/building-teacher-evaluation-systems-learning-leading-efforts>
- Coggshall, J. G., Behrstock-Sherratt, E., & Drill, K. (April 2011). *Workplaces that support high-performing teaching and learning: Insights from generation Y teachers*. Naperville, IL: American Institutes for Research and the American Federation of Teachers. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/teachers/genyreport0411.pdf>
- Danielson, C. (December 2010/January 2011). Evaluations that help teachers learn. *The Effective Educator* 68(4), 35-39.
- Hawley, W. D., & Irvine, J. J. (December 6, 2011). The teaching evaluation gap: Why students' cultural identities hold the key. *Education Week* 31(13), 30-31.
- Marzano, R. J. (2011). *Effective supervision: Supporting the art and science of teaching*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (December 2011). Educator evaluation. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>
- Saphier, J. (1993). *How to make supervision and evaluation really work*. Carlisle, MA: Research for Better Teaching.

The new state evaluation frameworks can be found at
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>

Mission of the Working Group for Educator Excellence

WGEE is a broad coalition of 60 individuals from 26 statewide organizations who are united in the belief that the most effective way to provide every child with an excellent education is to take a systemic approach to influencing what teachers and educational leaders know and can do. We believe when key elements of the human resource system are strengthened to align with one another and with a common research-based, field-tested core of professional knowledge, the cumulative effect will be improved student achievement and a more efficient and effective system that strengthens teacher and leader expertise.

Human Resource Pilot Project

The pilot project, funded by the RTTT initiative, is a joint effort by the WGEE and DESE to systematically and strategically create, strengthen, and align the key influences on the quality of teaching and leadership in three school districts: Attleboro, Brockton, and Revere. The influences, or levers, include Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement, Comprehensive Induction, Professional Development, Supervision and Evaluation, Teacher Leadership, Organizational Structure, and Adult Professional Culture. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, we aim to determine whether alignment will improve the quality of teaching and leadership. Goals of the project include:

- Increasing student achievement.
- Using cost, time, and resources with greater efficiency.
- Improving teaching and leadership practices.
- Increasing the satisfaction and retention of teachers and leaders.
- Improving school and district culture.