



TEACHING COUNTS:

Recommendations for Reforming California's Teacher Evaluation System

Parents know what researchers confirm: The single most important school-based factor affecting student academic performance is the quality of the teacher in the classroom.

Teachers matter because when they have high expectations of their students, their students rise to meet them. Teachers count because they not only play an important role in raising student achievement, but they also have the potential to close long-standing achievement gaps that persist between low-income students and students of color and their more advantaged peers. Teachers matter to all students, but great teaching makes the most difference for our highest need students, who are least likely to have academic supports outside of school.¹

Research makes it clear that students who have a series of strong teachers soar academically, while those who have a series of ineffective teachers fall behind.² To ensure that our highest need students have access to effective teachers, school districts need to know where great teaching is taking place. They also need to provide feedback and supports so all teachers can reach their full potential. Robust, multiple-measure teacher evaluation systems that emphasize a teacher's impact on student performance are designed to achieve these goals.

To guarantee such systems are in place, California needs to overhaul its laws governing teacher evaluation. The state should direct school districts to implement teacher

evaluation systems that, when combined with ongoing feedback and professional development, allow all teachers to improve. And the state should require that school districts use the results of evaluations to make staffing decisions based on a teacher's effectiveness, so that all students, but especially the highest need students, have access to effective teachers.

The Education Trust—West urges California's lawmakers to direct school districts to adopt teacher evaluation systems that are consistent, transparent, timely, meaningful, and fair. Such systems will help all teachers improve their practice, regardless of their starting point, and as a result will help all California students advance on the road toward college and career readiness.

We recommend that the state develop a framework to guide districts' adoption of improved teacher evaluation systems. Our policy recommendations fall into four categories:

1. *Standards and Criteria*
2. *Timelines and Processes*
3. *Ratings and Results*
4. *Using Evaluation Results to Make Staffing Decisions*

TEACHER EVALUATIONS AS PART OF A PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

A teacher cannot grow professionally if the only feedback he or she receives is through a formal evaluation once every few years, or even every year. If the quality of teaching in California's schools is to meaningfully improve, regular cycles of evaluation must be coupled with professional development to improve teaching practices, such as using data to drive decision making, collaborating on lesson plans, and targeting instructional supports.

Currently, many teachers feel isolated and deprived of meaningful feedback on their teaching.³ School leaders should use the teacher evaluation process as an opportunity to offer teachers the coaching, support, and professional development that will improve their instructional practice. This can include the following steps:

- Offer professional development opportunities that respond to an individual teacher's strengths and areas of growth.
- Scale up interventions when more than one teacher is struggling with the same teaching challenge.
- Use instructional coaches or collaboration among teachers who want or need to develop certain instructional strategies.
- Provide mentors and opportunities for teams to work together to build more accountability and support among peers.⁴

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STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

Educators should be evaluated against clear, rigorous standards and criteria based on multiple measures of student learning.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Implementation of District-wide Teacher Evaluation System:** School districts must be required to develop and implement a uniform multiple-measure system (see below) for teacher evaluation focused on how teachers affect student learning. The state should consider providing districts with a model teacher evaluation system, which they may choose to adopt. Otherwise, they must develop their own evaluation systems that adhere to state guidelines.
- **Multiple Measures:** To measure effective teaching, an overall evaluation rating should include two essential components:
 1. **Evidence of a teacher's impact on *student achievement* based largely on pupil academic growth.**

In tested grades and subjects, districts should use a value-added or growth score, as measured by statewide standardized test results from one year to the next. In non-tested grades and subjects, districts should use other rigorous evidence of a teacher's contribution to student academic learning, such as valid and reliable district-wide assessments and performance tasks.
 2. **Review of a teacher's *instructional practice* based on, at minimum, two classroom observations.**

Multiple classroom observations conducted by trained evaluators should provide the bulk of the evidence in this section. Observations should be augmented by such measures of quality teaching as, but not limited to, the following: teacher attendance, contributions to the school community, and student, family, or peer surveys.

(See Figure 1 for an example of how these two necessary components may interact to generate a single evaluation rating.)

- **Common Measure of Pupil Academic Growth:** The measure of pupil academic growth, as measured by statewide standardized test performance in tested grades and subjects, could be a common measure set forth by the state, so as to enable district-to-district comparisons. At minimum, the state should provide districts with a standard growth model and the resulting data which they may choose to integrate into their own evaluation systems.
- **Principal Evaluation:** Districts should develop and implement a system for evaluating principals concurrently with their teacher evaluation systems. Principal evaluations should be based primarily on student outcomes, while also considering how the principal has shown leadership to drive better results at the school site.

BEST PRACTICES:

Robust teacher evaluations include clear expectations for growth in student achievement. In many strong evaluation systems, effective teachers are expected to help their students achieve at least one year’s worth of academic progress each year.

“Best practice” evaluation systems are also based upon rubrics that include clear descriptions of effective teaching practice. A number of well-known teaching standards (California Standards for the Teaching Profession, for example) offer concrete descriptions of effective teaching aimed at helping teachers improve. Most of the widely adopted observation rubrics include similar standards and criteria to guide observations of teacher instruction. These criteria tend to cluster around the following domains:

- Creating a positive learning environment with strong classroom management;
- Planning and designing coherent instruction;
- Delivering high-quality instruction, targeted to each student’s needs, and continuously assessing learning;
- Collaborating and communicating with colleagues, parents, and the community.

Strong evaluation systems effectively integrate the two essential elements — student achievement and standards-based observations of teacher practice — into one performance rating. The highly touted **TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement**, now being implemented in Lucia Mar Unified School District, is a good example of this. TAP includes a *Skills, Knowledge and Responsibilities* score, based largely on classroom observations, and a Student Achievement Gains score, using value-added data to assess a teacher’s impact on student growth. Evaluators may also consider lesson plans, teacher-written assignments, student assessments, student work samples, and student surveys.

Mounting evidence from TAP suggests that when evaluations are tightly aligned to clear teaching standards, multiple measures that include both student performance data and more qualitative measures of teacher effectiveness yield consistent, valid results.⁵

IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS:

Using a Matrix to Assign Teacher Evaluation Ratings

How do these two very important elements — student growth and teacher practice — come together in one evaluation rating? A number of states and districts around the country are using a matrix to guide the assignment of an overall rating.

Under this approach, every teacher is first evaluated and receives ratings for his or her performance on both *student achievement* and *effective practice*. The scores from these two categories are then mapped onto a matrix to determine the teacher’s overall evaluation rating.

Figure 1 illustrates how a model currently being piloted by the Rhode Island Department of Education might work for California. (The terminology may differ, but the principles are the same.) In Rhode Island, evaluators assign two ratings for each teacher: a “Student Learning Rating” (a scale of 1 to 5) and a “Professional Practice and Professional Responsibilities Rating” (a scale of 1 to 4). Evaluators then use the matrix below to determine the overall effectiveness rating, which ranges from ineffective to highly effective.

FIGURE 1: RHODE ISLAND MODEL EDUCATOR EVALUATION SYSTEM, 2011-2012 (DRAFT)

		STUDENT LEARNING RATING				
		5	4	3	2	1
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE & PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES RATING	4	Highly Effective	Highly Effective	Effective	Effective*	Developing*
	3	Highly Effective	Effective	Effective	Developing	Ineffective*
	2	Effective*	Effective	Developing	Developing	Ineffective
	1	Developing*	Developing*	Developing	Ineffective	Ineffective

*Ratings in any of these cells will trigger an immediate review. Source: *The Rhode Island Model: Teacher Guidebook, 2011-2012*
http://www.ride.ri.gov/educatorquality/educatorevaluation/Docs/RIModelTeacherGuide_Interactive.pdf

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TIMELINES AND PROCESSES

The teacher evaluation cycle should be clear to both teachers and evaluators so they understand when, where, and how teachers will be assessed.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Annual Evaluations:** All teachers should receive an annual performance evaluation, conducted by a trained evaluator. This standard must apply to both probationary and permanent teachers, including teachers with many years of experience.
- **Professional Development for Evaluators:** Evaluators who conduct classroom observations should regularly attend a training workshop that adheres to state guidelines. Rigorous training and ongoing support for evaluators is necessary to ensure they can validly and reliably evaluate teacher performance and provide constructive, meaningful feedback.

BEST PRACTICES:

School districts with strong teacher evaluation systems conduct frequent observations and provide teachers with multiple formal checkpoints each year. In these districts, the evaluation process serves as an opportunity to provide meaningful feedback to improve teaching and learning, rather than simply as a compliance requirement. Sadly, research on California collective bargaining agreements suggests that most districts do only the state-required minimum when it comes to evaluation.⁶

Aspire Public Schools is an example of a school system that is creating a far more robust evaluation process than is currently the norm. Together with three other charter school networks that comprise a coalition called *The College-Ready Promise*, Aspire is developing a rigorous, annual teacher evaluation system. Aspire's system will ultimately include two formal 45-minute observations per year — a formative formal observation during the first semester, and a summative formal evaluation during the second semester. In addition, evaluators will conduct at least four 10-minute informal observations each year, providing written feedback to each teacher. Along with observation results, the annual evaluation will include feedback gathered from student, parent, and peer surveys, as well as a measure of student academic growth.

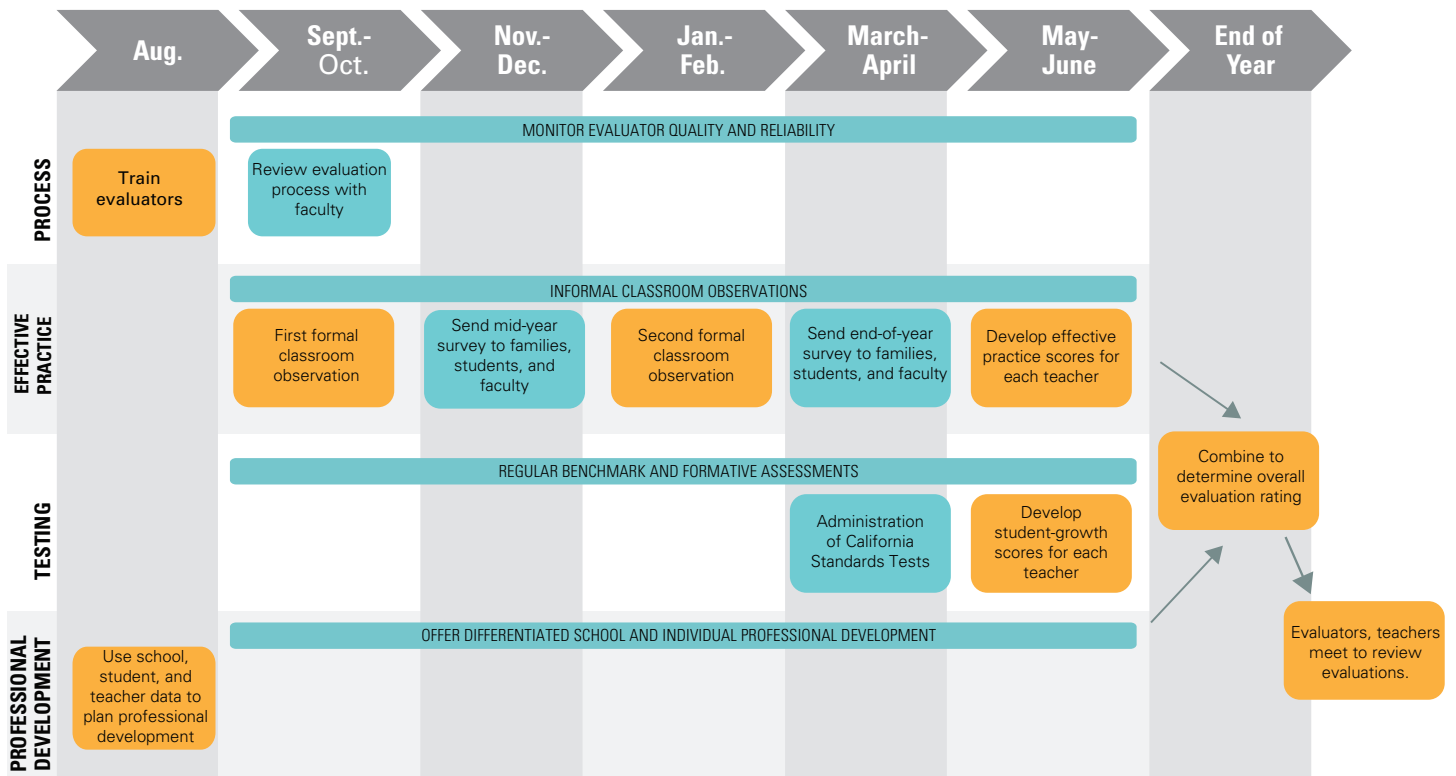
IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS:

The integration of state policy and local best practices

While California should specify the essential elements of a teacher evaluation system, good state policy is just the first step. It provides school districts with a guiding framework as opposed to a fully developed “best practice” system. Districts must translate this framework into an evaluation system that promotes best instructional practices and provides the type of feedback that teachers need to dramatically raise student achievement. Therefore, local districts must do far more than what state policy requires if they are to truly offer a “best practices” teacher evaluation system.

Figure 2 is an example of how a district might organize an annual cycle of teacher evaluation that addresses both those elements required by state law (yellow) and those elements determined locally (blue). These elements together create a rigorous, meaningful teacher evaluation system.

FIGURE 2: A HYPOTHETICAL MODEL FOR A SCHOOL DISTRICT’S “BEST PRACTICE” TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM



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RATINGS AND RESULTS

Evaluators should provide teachers with ratings and quality feedback that meaningfully reflect upon their performance.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Bands of Effectiveness:** Evaluations ratings should meaningfully differentiate among teacher effectiveness using at least four categories (such as highly effective, effective, needs improvement/developing, unsatisfactory/ineffective).
- **Regular Feedback for Teachers:** After each classroom observation, evaluators should provide teachers with detailed feedback about their instructional practice in person, in writing, or both. This feedback should be timely, evidence-based, and specific about actions teachers can take to improve their practice. This feedback should be used by the teacher and her administrator(s) to set goals for the teacher's personal professional development. The evaluator should also discuss the results of the annual overall evaluation with each teacher — including the academic achievement of his students.

BEST PRACTICES:

The well-known study, “The Widget Effect,” reveals that, in districts with binary evaluation ratings (satisfactory/unsatisfactory), more than 99 percent of teachers receive a satisfactory rating. Districts with more meaningful evaluation ratings assign overall ratings using a scale with at least four categories. A four-point scale, for example, communicates a clear distinction between teachers who advance student learning (the top two ratings) from those who do not (the bottom two).

States like **Florida**, **Illinois**, and **Delaware** are proposing the use of four categories for teacher evaluation statewide, while **Oklahoma** is using five categories: superior, highly effective, effective, needs improvement, and ineffective. In California, several school districts are moving in this direction, including **Los Angeles Unified School District**. As part of its Teaching and Learning Framework, teachers are evaluated on four different performance measures. The district is still deciding how to assign effectiveness ratings for each of these measures, as well as how to combine them into an overall performance rating.

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USING EVALUATION RESULTS TO MAKE STAFFING DECISIONS

The results of teacher evaluation ratings must be used to help promote effective teaching and the equitable distribution of effective teachers.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Remediation of Teachers in Need of Improvement:** A permanent teacher identified in the lowest two performance categories should enter into a comprehensive remediation plan to improve instruction and performance, such as, but not limited to, the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Program or other remediation programs. A teacher receiving an overall unsatisfactory rating should have one year to improve his or her performance, with remediation provided, or return to probationary status.
- **Rewards and Consequences:** Districts should use a teacher's evaluation rating to make staffing decisions such as recruitment, tenure, compensation, professional development, promotion, assignment, layoff, and dismissal.
- **Equitable Access to Effective Teachers:** Districts should develop and implement a detailed, coherent set of activities to ensure that low-income students and students of color have equitable access to effective and highly effective teachers, as defined by evaluation ratings.

BEST PRACTICES:

Forward-thinking school districts consider a teacher's evaluation results when making staffing decisions or investing in professional development. They also use these evaluation results to ensure that their highest need students have access to the best teachers.

For example, many districts provide targeted remediation or support to teachers who receive poor evaluation ratings year after year. In California, both **Poway Unified School District** and **San Juan Unified School District** use the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program to provide veteran teachers with supports and intervention. Most of the teachers from San Juan Unified who underwent remediation have improved their practice and remain in the classroom. In Poway Unified, 13 of the 20 veteran teachers in PAR boosted their performance enough to and allow them to continue teaching in the district.⁷

Some school districts also offer compensation increases or bonuses to teachers with strong evaluation ratings. (Unfortunately, many districts in California are generally prevented from doing this by their collective bargaining agreements. Instead, compensation is almost always based on factors researchers assert have little or no bearing on student achievement, such as a teacher's years of experience or level of education.⁸)

In 2010, **Northern Humboldt Union High School District** won a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to implement a performance-based compensation system, in partnership with the teacher's union. The system will use teacher evaluation ratings — based on ongoing formative assessment, results from the California Standards Tests, and regular observations — to rank teachers' effectiveness. Rankings will determine teacher bonuses, up to 8 percent of an average teacher's salary, as well as inform professional development and key personnel decisions.

Looking Ahead

Building rigorous teacher evaluation that can develop and support all teachers will improve the quality of teaching offered to California students. However, creating new teacher evaluation systems is just a first step toward another urgent goal: using evaluation results to make key employment decisions.

Evaluation ratings must play an important role in choices about professional development and decisions like promotion, changes in compensation, and — if a teacher is continuously ineffective — dismissal. This is standard in most other professions. However, the constraints of state law hinder school district leaders in their ability to make decisions based on evaluation ratings.

California must take action to improve teacher evaluation systems in the ways we have outlined above, so that the results have enough meaning and significance to factor into staffing decisions. Only when this happens will all of California's students have access to the effective teachers they need in order to succeed academically and be prepared for the demands of college and careers.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Gerald Bracey, "Value-Added Assessment Findings: Poor Kids Get Poor Teachers," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Volume 86, Issue 4, December 1, 2004 citing Kevin Carey. "The Real Value of Teachers: If Good Teachers Matter, Why Don't We Act Like It?" *Thinking K-16*, Volume 6, Issue 1, Winter 2004, with original source from Sitha Babu and Robert Mendro, "Teacher Accountability: HLM-Based Teacher Effectiveness Indices." Presented at the American Education Research Association Annual Meeting, April 2003.
- ² See, for example, Bryan Hassel and Emily A. Hassel, "Opportunity at the Top: How America's Best Teachers Could Close Gaps, Raise the Bar, and Keep Our Nation Great" (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Public Impact, 2010).
- ³ For evidence from Los Angeles Unified School District, see "Teacher Quality Roadmap: Improving Policies and Practices in LAUSD" (Washington, D.C.: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2010).
- ⁴ Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert, *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001 and Stephanie Hirsh and Joellen Killion, *The Learning Educator: A New Era for Professional Learning* (Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council, 2007).
- ⁵ Craig D. Jerald and Kristan Van Hook, "More than Just Measurement: The TAP System's Lessons Learned for Designing Better Teacher Evaluation Systems." (Santa Monica, Calif.: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, January 2011).
- ⁶ Katharine Strunk. "Collective Bargaining Agreements in California School Districts: Moving Beyond the Stereotype." (Stanford, Berkeley, and Los Angeles, Calif.: Policy Analysis for California Education, January 2009).
- ⁷ John Fensterwald, "Praise for Peer Evaluations," *Top-Ed Blog*, September 15, 2011.
- ⁸ Marguerite Roza and Raegen Miller, "Separation of Degrees: State-by-State Analysis of Teacher Compensation for Master's Degrees" (University of Washington Bothell; Seattle, Wash.: Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2009).

