ASK THE TEAM

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Lacking Capacity? How to Work Smart in Teacher Evaluation

Question From the Field

How are states addressing capacity challenges, such as dealing with the burden of performing multiple observations for all teachers?

Capacity is a real and pressing challenge for educators tasked with implementing robust evaluation systems that include multiple measures of performance. In response to questions from the field, we have gathered emerging strategies from policymakers and practitioners who are grappling with capacity challenges in teacher evaluation. As implementation deepens, we expect to learn more about which of these emerging strategies might represent promising practices. For now, we offer the following strategies and examples to consider as you work to address your state's or district's own unique capacity challenges.

1. LIGHTEN THE LOAD
Strategically Adjust Evaluation and Observation Requirements

Differentiate evaluation requirements for teachers.

Requiring multiple observations per year for all teachers creates a significant time burden for principals, especially when they serve as the sole observer. To ease this burden, Illinois, South Carolina, and Tennessee reduce the number of required observations for high-performing teachers. This approach strategically allocates principals' time to the teachers most in need of assistance.

Tip ✓ High-performing teachers still need regular feedback for continuous professional growth. During nonobservation years, principals can collaborate with these teachers through the professional growth planning process. This can be done individually or with teacher teams through existing professional learning communities, which leverages teachers' and principals' existing responsibilities.

South Carolina requires only one observation and postconference annually and a summative evaluation with portfolio review every five years for the following teachers:

- Third-year teachers rated proficient or higher in their second-year evaluation
- Experienced teachers rated proficient or higher in their most recent summative evaluation

Source: *Educator Evaluation and Support Guidelines* (http://ed.sc.gov/agency/lpa/documents/Proposed_SC_EdEval_Guidelines_06252012.pdf)

Limit the number of competencies assessed in each observation.

Evaluation frameworks and observation tools typically require the evaluator to observe multiple competencies across a set of standards-aligned domains. To see all the competencies in a single observation requires lengthier observations (30 minutes or more) for every teacher. Principals can find it challenging to schedule and complete long, repeated observations for all teachers. In Georgia, Indiana, and South Dakota, policymakers have opted to require that evaluators observe a limited number of domains or competencies during each observation. During the course of the year, typically all competencies are evaluated; however, they are not evaluated during every observation.

South Dakota recommends that evaluators begin by looking for "eight essential components" when observing (Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*, Components 1c, 1e, 2b, 2d, 3b, 3c, 4a, and 4c). After focusing on these components, evaluators can build out their observations to include additional competencies required by the district. Districts have flexibility to select the additional competencies, but the selected competencies must span all four domains.

Source: *South Dakota Standards for Teaching: Frequently Asked Questions* (http://doe.sd.gov/secretary/documents/Danielson.pdf)

2. LEVERAGE YOUR TALENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND TEAMS

Train other staff, beyond the principal, as observers.

District staff, peers, teachers from other schools, and retired principals and teachers can serve as potential observers. You need to ensure that contract language and state policy allow for nonadministrative staff to conduct observations. Most important, you need to ensure that all observers receive training, certification, and opportunities for maintaining reliability across multiple observations and years.

Tip

In some cases, retirees are allowed to work only a limited number of days without negatively impacting their retirement benefits. Consult state and local legislation on this question before enlisting retired educators as observers.

Hillsborough County Public Schools (Florida) uses both peer and administrator observers and has employed the following strategies:

- Requires between three and 11 observations for each teacher depending on the teacher's tenure status and previous evaluation rating.

- Administrators must conduct at least one of the required observations for each teacher; however, trained peers, mentors, and content supervisors conduct more frequent observations for lower performing or less experienced teachers.

- The district provides training to peer evaluators, mentors, and content area directors to align curriculum and evaluation efforts across the schools.

Source: *Teacher Evaluation Handbook: Empowering Effective Teachers* (http://www.fldoe.org/profdev/pdf/pa/Hillsborough.pdf)

Redistribute leadership tasks.

Districts should acknowledge the new responsibilities principals are taking on when implementing a new evaluation system. Start by identifying areas where responsibilities can be reallocated to other staff, including assistant principals and teacher leaders.

Tennessee received funding in the first round of Race to the Top and is a forerunner in implementing a statewide comprehensive evaluation system. Tennessee Education Commissioner, Kevin Huffman, recently noted that one of his state's key "lessons learned" was the importance of redistributing principals' workloads.

Source: *Take It From Tennessee: Lessons on Teacher Evaluation* (http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2012/11/take_it_from_tennessee_lessons_on_teacher_evaluation.html?cmp=ENL-TU-VIEWS2)

Video record lessons for observation rather than observing in person.

Principals struggle to schedule observations during the school day while juggling other school responsibilities. One way to provide principals greater flexibility is to allow observers to review and score video recordings of classroom lessons instead of attending in person. Principals should still schedule in-person, postobservation conferences to ensure that teachers receive high-quality feedback. The Measures of Effective Teaching project (www.metproject.org; funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) used trained and certified observers to review and score thousands of videos of classroom teaching to evaluate teacher practice.

Create teacher working groups focused on data analysis and scoring for student growth data.

If you are using student learning objectives, teachers need sufficient direction and adequate time to work together on scoring student work (particularly those scored with a rubric, such as essays, portfolios, projects, or performance tasks). Consider allocating existing staff development days to teacher working groups to (1) ensure teachers have a shared understanding of the quality of student work, (2) ensure greater comparability in scores across classrooms, and (3) promote thoughtful analysis and the use of the data to make adjustments to instruction.

Create consistent processes for designing and implementing the evaluation system.

Consistent processes reduce the burden at the local level by establishing processes or guidelines that all districts must adhere to; this approach is typically balanced with allowing flexibility for local decision making in other aspects of the evaluation system. For example, states have streamlined processes by

- Setting required weights for different measures.
- Requiring the use of specific measures.
- Creating a common scoring process.
- Developing electronic systems to track performance data.

State Spotlight

Ohio created a required uniform scoring process for all teachers using student learning objectives. This reduces the burden on districts because they do not need to independently develop scoring systems.

Source: *A Guide to Using Student Learning Objectives as a Locally-Determined Measure of Student Growth* (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=139732)

Develop statewide resources and materials to support districts in design and implementation.

Race to the Top states are working to develop materials that allow districts to submit evaluation information in a consistent, organized format. For example, district planning guides or comprehensive evaluation guidebooks or manuals that include templates for observation forms, postconference meetings, and summative scoring can be critical resources for districts that need practical, immediate resources to support implementation.

I WANT TO KNOW MORE

Bonus resource (see especially pages 21–25):

Jerald, C. (2012, March). *Ensuring accurate feedback from observations: Perspectives on practice.* Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from http://education.ky.gov/teachers/HQT/Documents/Ensuring-Accuracy%20in%20Observations.pdf

For more examples or information on this topic, please e-mail gtlcenter@air.org.

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