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Baltimore Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts English teacher Sean McComb is the 2014 National Teacher of the Year. “My teaching is built on the belief that relationships and engagement can turn challenges into opportunities for excellence for all students,” said McComb.

Demographics and poverty expert James H. Johnson Jr., of the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School has dedicated his life’s work to social justice issues. He is an accomplished writer, and has published groundbreaking analysis of the economic impact of North Carolina’s African American and Hispanic populations.

Annie Murphy Paul is the author of the forthcoming book, Brilliant: The New Science of Smart that argues we can make ourselves, and our children, smarter. The book presents compelling evidence that intelligence can be acquired—and highlights persuasive examples from real-life schools and workplaces.

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NASBE Study Group Surveys State Leadership Development Policy
States report a fractured process split across divisions of their state agencies and too little focus on principal preparation. Bobbi Newman and Robert Hull

Renewing the Principal Pipeline
Six districts set in motion systems to ensure their schools have a steady supply of excellent principals. Brenda Turnbull

Retooling Teacher Preparation in West Virginia
Adopting CAEP standards and bringing higher education leaders to the table were key. Gayle C. Manchin

Massachusetts Changes Its Approach to Educator Preparation Programs
Ed prep programs in Massachusetts must undergo a review that requires them to demonstrate need and provide evidence they are filling it. Heather Peske, Liz Losee, and Meagan Comb

Supporting Effective Teacher Evaluation
How can teacher evaluations that target a few top performers and struggling teachers ever move the needle in classrooms that make up the vast middle ground? Drew Gitomer

Remaking Teacher Evaluation: A Heavy Lift for State Education Policymakers
Early Race to the Top adopters provide lessons on the reform of teacher evaluation systems. Patrick McGuinn

Teacher Leaders in Denver Public Schools
Denver is on track to deploy teacher leaders in all its public schools by 2018. Lori Nazareno
The US education system was set up as a garden where a thousand flowers can bloom, and where many put their hands to a trowel. State education policymakers viewing the school landscape may at first see nothing but weeds and rocks, a vista that calls for thoroughgoing redesign. But their first job is to make sure the gardeners are well equipped.

What should become clear from even a breezy reading of this edition of the Standard—if it wasn’t already—is that there are many ways to make sure those who teach and lead our children are better prepared and better supported to do their jobs well. Perhaps as many ways as there are US states and territories.

In West Virginia, buoyed by a directive from the governor’s office, the state board of education began the work of changing requirements for teacher preparation and certification. As its past president, Gayle Manchin, can attest, such planning is best started around a table big enough to fit a lot of stakeholders. Massachusetts asked all teacher preparation programs in the state to show evidence they were filling public school needs—and made clear they were willing to shut down programs that weren’t.

Six school districts around the country are broadening and deepening their pools of potential principals, according to researcher Brenda Turnbull, who is leading evaluation of The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative. Those districts want to match top-notch leaders to schools where they can succeed, and they have committed to supporting them once they are placed. And Denver teacher Lori Nazareno details the sequence of events that led Denver Public Schools to commit to tapping teacher leaders in all its schools.

In the pilot schools, surveyed teachers give the program high marks.

Equipping teachers and leaders does not end with their first day of leading a class, a group of teachers, or a whole school. Evaluation can be a key tool in continuing to build up education leaders. Too often, says Rutgers University’s Drew Gitomer, it’s just a hammer. State policymakers should look at evaluation systems with fresh eyes so that these systems really become engines of instructional improvement.

But they will quickly get lost if they get too deep in the weeds of the innovative approaches their districts are taking, writes Drew University’s Patrick McGuinn. The varied approaches blossoming there require state education agencies and state boards of education to take a hard look at what tasks they can take on—and which they can’t. McGuinn goes on to offer up myriad ways state policymakers can best support those who truly can make US public schools a beautiful space.
In July, the Senate and House passed bills (S. 1177 and H.R. 5) to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and thereby set in motion a fall conference committee, Schoolhouse Rock-style, to reconcile the two into one bill to be sent to the president. The two bills have many things in common: Both continue the requirement for annual assessment, although they address accountability differently. Neither defines what percentage of schools should be designated “lowest performing,” whereas waiver states now must identify the lowest performing 15 percent. The committee will begin to hammer out differences in September when Congress returns from recess. Negotiations will continue throughout the fall, likely until November. The biggest battles on the road to creating a bill that the full Congress will approve and President Obama will sign will be over the formula for Title I funding, the elimination of programs, and levels of federal prescription around accountability.

While ESEA reauthorization has taken center stage, the Senate has also been considering the Higher Education Act, up for reauthorization since 2013. Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) has said he hopes to submit a draft bill to the HELP committee in September. The chairman established four working groups to develop ideas for the future of the law, and, in a reprise of their successful ESEA collaboration, he plans to work closely with Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) to develop a bipartisan bill. One issue on the table is the stringency of teacher preparation programs. A recent US Government Accountability Office report (15-598) found that some states fail to report on the quality of such programs, as current law requires, and that the US Department of Education has missed opportunities to help states improve programs’ quality. Also up for debate will be renewal of grant programs such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), which helps high-poverty middle and high schools provide college guidance and support.

A report NASBE released in July urges state boards to view the surge in parent requests to opt their children out of standardized tests as an opportunity to communicate how the tests benefit students and schools. It also represents a chance to clarify state policy and guidance to local districts.


On September 17, the Senate Agriculture Committee, led by Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), plans to consider legislation to update the Child Nutrition Act, including the School Lunch Program. The committee held hearings this summer on the future of the act. The House Education and the Workforce Committee, led by Representative John Kline (R-MN) and Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA), also held hearings, but no time had been scheduled at this writing to consider legislation.

Twenty states have student representatives on their state boards of education. Typically, there are one or two student members, with powers ranging from purely advisory to full voting rights (see map). Because the students are still in classrooms, they can bring an influential voice and distinctive perspective to their boards.

—Reg Leichty, Jared Costanzo, and Sarah-Jane Lorenzo contributed to this section.

Figure 1. Student Membership on State Boards of Education

* Vermont has one voting and one nonvoting student member.
** Illinois has a separate Student Advisory Council.
Don’t you just love the start of a new school year? When I was in school, September wasn’t just about cracking open a fresh notebook and donning new outfits (and yes, I debated for days over what to wear on the first day). A new school year meant a fresh start: a chance to learn something new, fall in love with a new subject, and rediscover old ones. Although I’ve been out of school for some time, the notion of a restart in September has stuck. The start of school now means “everyone back to work” after a summer-time lull. Because who is really going to pay attention to important, news-making education analyses when many readers are poolside?

For state board of education members, the start of a new school year presents another opportunity: It provides a natural news hook for communicating about key education issues. One of the more accessible ways to do that is to write an op-ed for your local paper. As respected public officials, state board members are naturals for this sort of writing. Here are three angles you might use:

1) What’s on Your Agenda? The start of a new school year is a good reminder to teachers, parents, community leaders, policymakers, and others that your state board is working hard to ensure all students receive a high-quality education. Share what items will be on the board’s agenda in the coming year—explain why—and invite stakeholders to get involved. Nebraska’s Rachel Wise wrote just such an article this year for a local paper.

   http://katcountryhub.com/tag/rachel-wise/

2) Back-to-School Facts. In the education domain, misinformation spreads like wildfire, and it’s not unusual for someone to get it wrong. An article on “Five Facts You Didn’t Know about Education in [Your State],” or “Three Myths about Education in

   http://www.richmond.com/opinion/their-opinion/guest-columnists/article_a7ae785-5271-5167-be39-a36a8675d8c4.html

He built his case with clear facts about Virginia’s schools and state board policies.

3) State Achievement. Does the public know what decisions your state board has made? Do they know how particular decisions have led to improved student learning? West Virginia’s Gayle Manchin last year showcased her state’s progress as a pilot state for the community eligibility provision under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, a program that gives all students free school meals in qualifying schools, regardless of income.

   http://www.wvgazette.com/article/20140524/ARTICLE/140529600

No matter what the topic, the key to op-ed writing is timing. The most memorable, impactful opinion pieces take advantage of issues that are already making headlines and provide a fresh view of those issues. They might also be forward thinking. Plot your “back to school” op-ed this September. As state board members pitching these pieces to local editors, you have a certain advantage: The decisions you make may actually become headlines in your state.

We, the Media
The Supreme Court’s 2014 term ended June 29, 2015. In addition to high-profile Affordable Care Act and marriage equality cases, the court issued 74 other opinions; of these, the largest number, 20, involved criminal law and procedure. While none involved education law, many of these cases will be important to state boards of education. While precisely how this term will affect state boards is not immediately clear, a couple of cases that flew under the radar deserve the attention of state boards and their legal counsel.

In *Michigan v. EPA*, the court considered an Environmental Protection Agency regulation of power plant emissions. The Clean Air Act authorized the EPA to regulate to protect public health but also required EPA to determine that the regulation was “appropriate and necessary” to achieve that end. The EPA refused to consider cost as part of this determination, and the Supreme Court has now declared this refusal to be unreasonable. The court concluded that the EPA must consider the cost of emissions regulations before it can determine whether the regulations are “appropriate.” Whenever a proposed federal regulation may impose costs on state boards and local school districts, *Michigan v. EPA* is a reminder to consult the statutory authority for the regulation. If the statute contains language that may require the issuing agency to consider costs of compliance, this case supports an argument that the agency must do so before regulating.

The US Department of Education issues many guidance documents, some of which spell out changes in agency policy. In *Perez v. Mortgage Bankers Association*, the court rejected a requirement that federal agencies engage in the notice-and-comment process before issuing a new interpretation of regulations that “deviates significantly” from a previous one. While the notice-and-comment process does not apply to issuing or revising guidance documents, state boards may wish to review new guidance documents to determine whether a policy change is so drastic that it is, in effect, a new rule, which must undergo a rule-making process (requiring notice and comment), a possibility *Perez* recognized.

In *Walker v. Sons of Confederate Veterans*, the court upheld Texas’s refusal to issue Confederate flag license plates. It concluded that license plates were “government speech,” which Texas was free to control. This case serves as a reminder that the First Amendment’s free speech clause does not constrain the policy positions state boards adopt. In setting science standards that include discussions of climate change, for example, a state board need not offer “equal time” in standards to climate-change deniers.

Finally, for state boards whose membership is based on congressional or other districts, two cases deserve note. In *Arizona State Legislature v. Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission*, the court upheld the use of independent commissions to draw congressional districts. *Alabama Legislative Black Caucus v. Alabama* held, in relevant part, that the proper unit of analysis in claims of racial gerrymandering in violation of the equal protection clause is not the state as a whole but individual districts.
Stock taking of states reveals relatively little focus on principal development and responsibilities split among divisions of state education agencies.

by Bobbi Newman and Robert Hull

NASBE Study Group Surveys State Leadership Development Policy

State board members, working in partnership with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania, this year conducted an in-depth study of states’ school leadership development policies and practices. Later this fall, the study group will release a report for NASBE members on the current landscape of leadership development in the United States and consequent policy considerations for state boards of education.

The group embarked on an ambitious work plan to inform their thinking about school leadership development policies. Its work has focused on four areas:

- current leadership development research from the United States and England;
- existing leadership development frameworks;
- a State Level Policy Development Framework for state board members; and
- study of US states and territories’ school leadership development policies.

A pivotal part of the study group’s work is a comprehensive study of US states and territories’ school leadership development policies. To make informed policy decisions and see how practice is taking shape across the country, state board members should take stock of policy initiatives in other states. These data will be a useful resource as they evaluate and revise leadership development policy in their respective states.

CPRE interviewed state board members and state education agencies about their school leadership development policies and practices, focusing on school leader identification, recruitment, preparation, licensure, accreditation, support and retention, evaluation, and data monitoring. A comprehensive analysis is being conducted, with findings to be published in the final report.

These interviews have yielded initial findings on 1) state-level oversight of the school leadership development process, 2) state perceptions of principal shortages, 3) recruitment, 4) use of standards to guide accreditation and licensure of school leaders, and 5) evaluation and support of school leaders. First, the study reveals that state education agencies typically house parts of the leadership development oversight process in different divisions. In most states, no one division is responsible for the whole process. Someone calling to ask about leadership accreditation, for example, may be referred to a director in the higher education division but to another person for answers about principal licensure and evaluation.

Second, many state education officials believe that their state has a shortage of quality leaders but not a shortage of licensed principals. Some states did report shortages in rural areas. Third, identification and recruitment of school leaders in nearly all states are left up to individual districts.

Fourth, the initial findings reveal that, of the states that use leadership standards to guide accreditation and licensure, several use the current Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards as the foundation for their leadership preparation program and licensure system. A majority do not have licensure requirements for teacher leaders, but they do have licensure requirements for assistant principals.

Last, nearly all states reported an enormous focus on teacher evaluation and support, but they also said there has been a lack of focus on principal development, especially in terms of evaluation and support.
Data from this study are being analyzed to determine ways that states can create systems and structures for leadership development as well as to facilitate identification, preparation, licensure, and support of individual leaders.

To guide state boards of education as they consider state-level policy actions around leadership development, study group members in concert with CPRE developed a State Level Policy Development Framework, a conceptual way of thinking about the policy development process. The framework can help state board members identify levers and processes their boards will need to consider. The study group will present its final report, along with the policy development framework, at NASBE’s annual conference in October 2015.

**Related Resources**


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**About the Study Group**

Each year the NASBE Board of Directors selects topics of importance for in-depth research, study, review, and reporting by member-led study groups. NASBE Director of College, Career, and Civic Readiness Robert Hull and West Virginia state board member Dr. William White led the study group, “Successful Leaders for Successful Schools: The Changing Role of Education Leaders.” For six months in 2015, state board members studied states’ school leadership development policies and practices. The group included state board members from Maryland, Virginia, Maine, Kansas, Illinois, Nebraska, West Virginia, the District of Columbia, Wyoming, and Guam.

Working closely with CPRE co-director Jonathan Supovitz and researcher Bobbi Newman, study group members analyzed current research, examined leadership development in the United States and England, and met with policy-oriented partner organizations such as CCSSO, NGA, NCSL, NAESP, NASSP, and NSBA to hear their perspectives on state-level policy actions around school leadership. Members also participated in webinars with leading experts and heard presentations from three school districts about their processes and policies. These central learning opportunities helped the group identify key issues, policy impact points, and recommendations for state board members to consider. Study group members acknowledged that even where state boards do not have policy authority in this area, they have the “power of the question” and the power to convene.
The work principals do has always mattered, but as the demands of the job increase, it matters even more. Perhaps once they could maintain safety and order and call it a day, but no longer. Successful principals today must also lead instruction and nurture a productive learning community for students, teachers, and staff. They set the tone for the school’s academic focus and ever-improving professional practice.1

State requirements shape the role of principals. States set the standards for principal licensure and approve preparation programs. They also set standards by which school districts evaluate their principals. Yet some principals still fall short, even when individuals, institutions, and school districts abide by these requirements. Perhaps it’s because school districts have to make hasty choices from the pool of available applicants, or they may simply hand a new principal the keys to the building and hope for the best. Or the best potential leaders may not be in the pool at all, having failed to pursue leader credentials. Or the preparation program that provided applicants with their credentials may itself be barely adequate.

Six school districts are taking on the critical challenge of ensuring their schools have a supply of effective principals, and their experiences can point other district and state leaders to how to do it. These districts are managing their principal pipelines intentionally: sending a consistent message about what they expect from principals, putting opportunities for advancement and learning in the hands of promising aspirants, and supporting novice principals on the job. If their work is to take hold and succeed more broadly, states will have to learn from it and support similar initiatives in their own backyards.

**Urgency and Hope**

With support from The Wallace Foundation, the six districts have participated since 2011 in the Principal Pipeline Initiative. They agreed to adopt and implement a shared set of approaches to standards-based preparation, selection, evaluation, and support for school leaders. Each district agreed to move fast so that many new principals could benefit within just a few years of start-up. These are the districts:

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina
- Denver Public Schools, Colorado
- Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia
- Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida
- New York City Department of Education, New York
- Prince George’s County Public Schools, Maryland

The foundation made a multiyear commitment to the six, which it selected in part because they had already launched some policies and practices consistent with the initiative design. The districts were awarded grants of $7.5 million to $12.5 million over six years, along with technical assistance supported by the foundation, to expand and improve on their existing practices and to build strong, sustainable policies and investments in school leadership.

By giving financial and technical help to districts that were already working on school leadership, Wallace hoped to support, study, and disseminate best practices in developing, selecting, and supporting school leaders.

The initiative reflects a comprehensive strategy for advancing districts’ priorities by strengthening school leadership in four mutually reinforcing domains of policy and practice:

- leader standards to which sites align job descriptions, preparation, selection, evaluation, and support;
Nevertheless, there are ways for any district to apply the lessons from these districts. In this article, I highlight adaptations that would be workable for small districts and at modest cost. I also emphasize state policies and supports that can help districts of all sizes and types in building stronger principal leadership.

Standards for School Leadership

Each district crafted statements about the competencies school principals should have. Because the districts actually used these leadership standards, they proved to be a powerful policy instrument, shaping job descriptions, curricula of preparation programs, and the assessments and support systems for aspiring and novice principals.

State standards for principals influenced the districts and were incorporated. But in addition, the districts took steps to build awareness, understanding, and credibility of the standards through broad-based discussion of the competencies that could best define the job of principal. “We want all of us to speak the same language” about school leadership, a Gwinnett County administrator said.

Hillsborough County, for example, engaged a 20-member committee of principals and assistant principals to develop and refine school leader standards and competencies and then asked all principals and assistant principals to vet the competencies. In 2014, a Hillsborough County administrator described the competencies this way:

The competencies drive everything we do. Every training we have, you’re going to see the competencies slide at the beginning, what competencies are we focusing on.... Every principal and assistant principal has a learning plan, where they sat down with their supervisor and created goals based on our competencies. It’s the language that is now being used across the district.3

As evaluators of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, a team from Policy Studies Associates has studied the districts’ work since 2011. The evaluation is not finished: along with our evaluation partners at RAND, we will continue to study it for the next several years; a final report in 2018 will examine the initiative’s impact on schools and student achievement. At this point, we know that districts are excited about several changes they are making, although the ultimate results are not yet known.

The evaluation team uses data from onsite interviews with administrators in district central offices and partner organizations; surveys and focus groups of novice principals and aspiring principals; and documents including the districts’ proposals, work plans, and progress reports. Three reports have presented the findings to date.2

Despite its interim stage, the initiative has already produced ideas about reshaping school leadership. To be sure, these districts are not typical. They are large, and foundation support has bolstered their already high capacity.
Partnerships with preparation programs reportedly benefited from a structured approach for program assessment called the Quality Measures for Education Leadership Systems and Programs. Designed by Education Development Center with Wallace support, Quality Measures addresses program components associated with effective leader preparation: course content and pedagogy, clinical practice, recruitment and selection, and three components related to graduate performance outcomes (knowledge, skills, and competencies; responsiveness to market demand; and impact on school, teacher, and student performance).4

Leaders of programs in districts and partner organizations gathered evidence on the extent to which their programs met criteria in each of the Quality Measures components. At each site, program representatives then met with district staff and Quality Measures facilitators to review and rate evidence. This analysis revealed that districts and providers needed better tracking systems to determine graduates’ employment status. Another discovery was that many program leaders welcomed a collaborative look at their preparation programs.

What a district can do: Whether or not a district finds it feasible to operate a full-fledged preparation program on its own, it can ensure that professional learning for aspiring principals, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, or assistant principals reflects established standards and expectations. Further, it can ensure that nearby universities have up-to-date district job descriptions and hiring criteria for principals and information about their graduates’ track records. If there are preparation providers whose graduates usually fail to qualify for principal jobs, a district can alert the providers about this issue and then inform its teachers.

What a state can do: States can examine the current state standards for principals, adopt or adapt the revised Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards, scheduled for release in fall 2015, and ensure that the wording reflects state priorities and will give actionable guidance both to preparation programs and to districts. States can also align principal licensure requirements and evaluation criteria to the standards and encourage districts to elaborate on the core state standards so as to serve local needs and priorities effectively.

Preservice Leader Preparation

The Principal Pipeline Initiative design called for a strong district role in the preservice preparation of aspiring leaders. The districts enlarged their role by operating their own formal preparation programs and by seeking greater influence over preparation programs in nearby universities or nonprofit organizations. In all cases, they wanted to ensure that programs for aspiring leaders would reflect their district standards and offer robust opportunities to practice leadership skills on the job with guidance from mentors.

By 2013, five of the six districts operated their own programs for sitting assistant principals who were promising candidates for the principalship. Top district leaders spent time with the cohort of participants, and sitting principals served as mentors. Denver and Prince George’s County each added a new district-run program; Gwinnett County, Hillsborough County, and New York City sought to improve existing programs.

All the districts also deepened working relationships with nearby universities and alternative programs that prepared school leaders. Charlotte-Mecklenburg actively selected participants for programs at nearby universities and collaborated to shape the curriculum. Prince George’s County worked with each of several nearby universities to start a specialized preparation program.

States can officially recognize preparation programs whose curricula are well aligned with state leadership standards.
Principal Hiring and Placement

The six districts were not content to wait for good applicants to show up when a vacancy arose but instead cultivated promising future leaders and set up multiple stages of leadership selection. Every district introduced standards-based assessments for those seeking to qualify as principals, and the assessments mattered, often opening or closing the door to advancement. Assessment procedures in all districts as of 2014 included practical demonstrations, typically with simulated scenarios, carried out over a day or more. Activities included the following:

- **Role play.** The candidate takes the role of principal in a difficult semiscripted scenario, such as addressing an angry parent or teacher.
- **In-basket exercise.** The candidate prioritizes and addresses multiple tasks and messages that might arrive.
- **School data review.** The candidate receives a package of school data to analyze, discuss, and address in recommendations for data-informed improvement.
- **Teacher observation and feedback.** The candidate observes a video of teacher instruction and then enacts or describes feedback for the teacher.

Every district assembled a pool of individuals who had performed well on the assessments and could be considered for principal jobs. The process of creating talent pools had two reported benefits, according to district leaders: It streamlined the process of filling vacancies by limiting the number of applications, and it produced stronger applicants.

Succession planning for schools engaged top-level district leaders. In Denver, for example, top leaders began identifying and discussing anticipated vacancies in the fall, and they actively encouraged districtwide identification of potential school leaders who should be encouraged to seek promotions or further preparation.

For leaders in these large districts, knowing potential principals well presented a challenge. Therefore the districts organized their human capital data into individual longitudinal records to provide accessible candidate profiles. These leader tracking systems capture data on potential leaders’ experience, performance, and assessed competencies.

Districts aspired to develop systems that let them use many kinds of data in hiring and placement, including applicants’ evaluation scores when they were teachers and assistant principals, experience with particular types of schools and students, language skills, performance on selection and exit assessments in preparation programs, and measured competencies related to instruction and leadership. Thus, for example, district leaders might look

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**Box 1. Principal Support in Charlotte-Mecklenburg**

Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s sequence illustrates the interplay of internal and external sources of support for novice principals:

- First- and second-year principals were matched with a district staff member called a consultant coach, who met with and advised principals in small groups.
- Second-year principals participated in the National SAM Innovation Project, a program in which coaches work with principals on time management and instructional leadership.
- Third-year principals participated in the Executive Leadership Institute at Queens University of Charlotte, NC. A collaboration between the university’s education and business schools, the program trained principals on leadership styles and organizational change.
- Fourth-year principals participated in the Innovation Institute of the nonprofit McColl Center for Art and Innovation, which focused on innovation for leaders from a variety of backgrounds.
- A fifth-year capstone experience through a local consulting firm, the Center for Intentional Leadership, rounded out the support sequence.
for a candidate who had experience in particular grade levels or with English learners whose competencies matched the needs of the school.

**What a district can do:** Districts can make performance tasks part of the hiring process and test capacity for future leadership by giving potential leaders the chance to demonstrate skills within their current schools. Districts also can organize human capital data into individual, longitudinal records, whether these records are securely stored in sophisticated databases or simple spreadsheets. They can determine specific experiences and leadership strengths of teachers or others who aspire to leadership.

**What a state can do:** States can support districts with technical assistance in finding or developing performance tasks for the hiring process. If feasible, they also can organize state-level educator data to permit tracking of credentials and career experiences over time and within and across districts, and they can make data available as appropriate for identification and selection of principals.

### Principal Evaluation and Support

The six districts built capacity for leader evaluation and support as they piloted, revised, scaled, and refined new procedures. In 2014, principal evaluation in each of the six included measures of student performance and supervisor ratings related to standards-based criteria. Refining a set of evaluation criteria aligned with standards was not simple; it required multiple rounds of clarification and supervisor preparation. Each district contracted with or employed coaches or mentors for novice principals. More than four of every five principals reported that coaches or mentors for novice principals helped them develop action plans to meet goals, mentor support addressed their needs and fine-tune the system. Districts can find a knowledgeable mentor or coach for each new principal. If a district is large enough to have many new principals, it can plan a structured program of induction support, but with or without such a program, it can help new principals find the right professional learning opportunities.

**What a state can do:** States can align principal evaluation requirements with state standards and then give districts time and support to learn the system and make it work for them.

States can support statewide learning opportunities for new principals and facilitate cross-district principal mentoring for small districts.

### Conclusion

As the Principal Pipeline Initiative and its evaluation continue, the research will reveal more about how districts can build thoughtful, effective systems to strengthen school leadership. For now, the participating districts’ experiences suggest approaches worth exploring. According to district leaders, the changes described here have helped them make better-informed hiring decisions and have helped aspiring and novice principals learn and practice skills of instructional leadership. To scale up to districts of all sizes, state leadership will be a crucial source of support.

1Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, and S. E. Anderson, **Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning** (Saint Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, 2010); Anthony S. Bryk, Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Q. Easton, **Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).


3Interview with evaluation team, April 2104.


5Turnbull et al., **Districts Taking Charge of the Principal Pipeline**.

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States can support statewide learning opportunities for new principals and facilitate cross-district principal mentoring.

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Brenda J. Turnbull, of Policy Studies Associates in Washington, DC, leads the evaluation of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, which was commissioned by The Wallace Foundation as part of its mission to support and share effective ideas and practices.
Retooling Teacher Preparation in West Virginia

West Virginia’s public schools have long struggled with student achievement levels in reading and math at levels significantly below the national average and with poverty-based achievement gaps within the state. Perhaps nowhere has the problem been as persistent as in reading, in which the state failed to show gains during the 20 years it has been measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.1 As a member of the West Virginia Board of Education, serving as president, I felt it was incumbent on myself and the other board members to address this issue.

Therefore, to respond to this challenge, West Virginia decided to focus first on improving teacher preparation and certification in reading. In 2013, West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin directed the state to “establish actionable and measurable evidence of teacher preparation effectiveness with an emphasis on reading instruction.” In response, the West Virginia State Board of Education created the West Virginia Higher
Education—High Quality Educator Stakeholder Committee. The committee comprised preK-12 practitioners and leaders, representatives of educator preparation programs, members of the West Virginia Board of Education, and representatives from the West Virginia Department of Education.

The committee’s charge was to create a plan with an aggressive timetable for carrying out the governor’s directive. Governor Tomblin articulated a number of goals for educators that their plan needed to address:

- admission to a nationally accredited educator preparation program;
- varied and increasingly robust clinical experiences;
- performance assessments in clinical practice throughout educator preparation, including challenging standards for candidate continuation or exit from programs of study;
- successful passage of a state certification system that uses multiple assessments to determine and measure a candidate’s knowledge, skills, dispositions, and ability to impact student learning;
- demonstration of subject-matter competence through extended content course requirements and a subject-matter degree where relevant;
- professional development—supported by institutions of higher education in collaboration with regional education service agencies, local schools, and school districts—that leads to regular certification and continuing certification, as well as national board certification;
- a rigorous, periodic evaluation system to assess the practice of certified teachers based on student performance, to offer incentives to successful educators and assistance to struggling educators, and to lead to dismissal of ineffective educators where warranted; and
- a statewide data system that tracks candidate performance, education preparation provider effectiveness, and educator effectiveness.2

Embracing Change

In instituting bold action on teacher preparation, the first obstacle to overcome was the perception of higher education leaders that the state board and the state education agency were doing something to them rather than with them and for the benefit of West Virginia’s students.

It was critical to include representatives from the state’s colleges and universities at the start. In May 2013, the High Quality Educator Committee convened a focus group with representatives from the state board, the West Virginia Department of Education, the WV Higher Education Policy Commission, higher education deans, a county superintendent, and practitioners. A resulting document outlined next steps for all constituencies.

The second obstacle the committee needed to address was the potential financial impact on colleges and universities. More rigorous preparation and certification of teachers posed the real risk of declining enrollment in the state’s teacher preparation programs, often considered a “cash cow” of their colleges and universities.

State board member Lloyd Jackson, representatives from the education department, and I met with the presidents of all private and public institutions to discuss the impact of this reform on their institutions. They had already heard about the potential impacts of these reforms from the deans and department chairs who participated in the first stages of our collaboration, but it was important that they have an opportunity to hear directly from the board and the department. Once higher education institutions accepted this challenge—and realized that both entities were committed to providing support to help them make the changes—the groundwork for collaboration was set.

Lastly, the state needed to consider policy revisions aligned with the committee’s recommendations, including adoption of the new accreditation standards set in 2013 by the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP). Faculty and higher education leadership have provided feedback during all stages of the processes, including policy revision.

In September 2013, the larger stakeholder committee formed a steering committee to identify detailed recommendations and action items. The resulting white paper, shared with the state board in December 2013, also included metrics and/or benchmarks, timelines for completion, the person or entity responsible for each action,

More rigorous preparation and certification of teachers posed the real risk of declining enrollment in the state’s teacher preparation programs.
and a fiscal note for each. The board approved policy revisions incorporating these recommendations in October 2014.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations reflected the perspectives and analyses of a cross section of educators and education policy leaders from a range of experiences, professional knowledge bases, and the full gamut of institutional backgrounds. They examined a range of ideas and professional critiques from national organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers, CAEP, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the National Council on Teacher Quality; and the National Governors’ Association. In addition, they examined models used in states such as North Carolina, Maryland, and Kentucky to enhance the quality of educators and the rigor of preparation programs.

Their recommendations included the following:

- **Strengthen admission criteria.** In alignment with CAEP standards, West Virginia set the GPA requirement to 3.0 or better and required stepwise increases in performance on admissions tests between now and 2020.

- **Establish and enforce high standards for candidate program matriculation and completion.** These standards were to include clearly articulated program phases and benchmark criteria. Colleges had to develop new structures for ongoing assessments of teacher candidates, and the state board set new requirements for a reading Praxis II exam before all candidates’ first field experience.

- **Establish strong partnerships between preK-12 and higher education institutions.** These partnerships are crucial in identifying, setting new requirements for, and rewarding school-based clinical educators to work with teacher candidates in collaborative settings.

- **Use of employment and professional practice data to approve and improve educator preparation programs.** Action items include instituting surveys of West Virginia graduates who become practicing educators, rethinking professional development models, and creating a database of aggregated graduate performance data.

- **Review, identify and enact state-level supports.** Such supports include funding incentives for programs that meet and exceed state standards and tuition credits and loans for candidates in high-need programs that subsequently teach in West Virginia.

**Next Steps**

The first phase of reform has been aggressive. Whereas under the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education standards only state public institutions were involved, all West Virginia institutions of higher education are transitioning to CAEP accreditation requirements. In order to meet these requirements, most of the changes spelled out in the reform recommendations must be in place by fall 2016. Several of the changes, including those for new reading and elementary content assessments, are already in effect. In the early statewide meetings that followed, the institutions focused at first on the negative aspects of the change: lower student enrollment in teacher preparation programs, more rigorous coursework, and a more comprehensive teacher performance assessment. However, the climate and culture became more positive and open with the institution of a pilot program supported by national assessment groups, the department, the state board, and higher education institutions.

West Virginia’s higher education institutions are implementing these new assessments in spring 2015 and fall 2015. The state education agency will make further recommendations to the state board based on analysis of assessment data, which is expected by fall 2016.

As mentioned earlier, West Virginia is also piloting two teacher performance assessments (TPA) in each of six institutions of higher education through the end of 2015 to determine whether either should be a requirement for program completion or licensure. It is hoped that a TPA—whether based on Pearson’s or ETS’s—will provide a better measure of candidates’ performance and their impact on student learning. Data from the pilot will be analyzed in spring 2016.

This year, West Virginia education policymakers also began to focus on revising leadership standards, which will have consequences for leadership preparation programs as well. As we
Massachusetts Changes Its Approach to Educator Preparation Programs

One of the core priorities of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), articulated in its most recent strategic plan, focuses on educator capacity: “Massachusetts will develop all of its educators by improving educator preparation programs, setting high standards for entry and persistence in a diverse workforce, and promoting a system of continuous improvement and development.”

In 2012, BESE passed new program approval standards for educator preparation programs across the state. The standards ushered in new expectations for the 80 sponsoring organizations (SOs)—institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, and districts—that prepare educators in the state, including a new emphasis on program outcomes. The new standards also pushed harder for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to hold the preparation programs accountable for deep, robust partnerships with K-12 schools and districts.

The new standards presented no small challenge. ESE’s job is to review the quality of programs and to support programs to meet districts’ needs. In 2013, there were 1,719 initial licensure teacher programs approved to operate in Massachusetts, and just 46 percent of those programs were active.

On average, Massachusetts SOs prepare about 6,500 educators annually, of whom 65 percent (4,200) are employed in the state’s public schools, through everything from baccalaureate, teacher residency to postbaccalaureate programs. These 4,200 educators affect an estimated 63,000 students each year.

ESE’s task is critical. The inclusion of educator effectiveness as one of the board and ESE’s core priorities reflects two imperatives: a moral imperative to ensure that all children in Massachusetts—especially students who need good teachers the most—have access to effective teachers and leaders and the driving belief that teacher preparation programs can and should prepare teachers to be effective on day one.

Needs Assessment

Statutory and regulatory authority gives ESE authority to review and approve programs. During program review, ESE required SOs to reassess the breadth of their program offerings and demonstrate need for programs they wished to continue. To better align districts’ needs for a supply of educators with preparation program production and to ensure quality, ESE issued policy guidance that requires SOs to submit a needs assessment in two instances:

1. Low Completion or Zero Completer Programs. ESE requires that SOs assess the breadth and depth of their program offerings. ESE identifies programs that have had zero completers or low completion rates over the previous three years. ESE determines the threshold for low enrollment annually and takes into account state-level completer data.

2. New Programs. SOs may propose new programs during the formal or informal program review cycle.

In both instances, an SO must demonstrate state-specific need for its program as well as the ability to meet the demand. Operating a high-quality program, as well as reviewing it effectively, requires considerable resources from both SOs and ESE, and investments ought to go where they are most needed. Similarly, programs that have been largely dormant for years may lack the vitality necessary to produce effective educators.

A new state policy pushes schools and others that prepare educators to demonstrate need for their programs and to provide evidence that they have the capacity to run them.

by Heather Peske, Liz Losee, and Meagan Comb
Demonstrating Need

SOs are responsible for demonstrating need and providing evidence that they will be able to meet demand. Because these organizations are best positioned to identify areas of need, ESE places no restrictions on which programs can be put forth for review. But there are also no automatic confirmations just because a program is nationally or locally recognized as satisfying an area of need. For example, most would agree that STEM teachers are needed, but only 20 of 106 approved chemistry programs were “active” in 2013: that is, they produced fewer than 30 combined chemistry teachers in 2013–14. This example illustrates the point that the simple existence of a program does not guarantee a need will be addressed. ESE wants to approve programs that are going to actively recruit, enroll, and produce educators for high-need areas.

Outcomes

In the 2014–15 review year, nine SOs, representing a total of 393 programs, underwent review. Collectively, this cohort opted to let 107 of these programs expire without attempting to demonstrate need; 27 additional programs were phased out because they could not demonstrate sufficient need to continue operation. Thus, at the point of the formal review process when needs assessment was required, 34 percent of the programs up for review expired. In addition, 12 out of 30 proposed new programs were confirmed in ESE’s informal review cycle.

Another important outcome was the marker that was laid down for future program reviews: They would be evidence based.

Closing programs is a politically dicey proposition for all states, and Massachusetts is no different in this regard. However, the new policy pushed SOs to demonstrate need for their programs and to provide evidence that they had the capacity to run them. ESE set expectations, but the SOs themselves determined whether or not they met them.

We believe the new standards were successful for a number of reasons. First, in passing the standards, the board signaled a shift in emphasis from inputs to evidence. Second, the needs assessment policy set clear expectations for SOs. Third, ESE was willing to say no to SOs that could not demonstrate need or capacity. Finally, the standards helped SOs by providing them a solid external rationale for closing down unsuccessful programs and for not starting new ones without evidence of need and capacity.

Challenges remain. Other state boards of education and state education agencies will have to consider the following as they revamp their education preparation program review, as will ESE:

■ Does Massachusetts risk not approving programs that might fill high-need subjects, even if for only a few program completers (i.e., if a sponsoring organization demonstrates supply need, but no capacity)? Massachusetts added the category of evidence of impact in an effort to allow programs that are impactful to exist even if they serve only a small number of candidates.

■ Will this policy stifle innovation, especially for small programs or those that produce candidates in subjects other than high-need areas?

■ The needs assessment asks for evidence in four categories: high-need subject area, district need, candidate interest, impact/effectiveness of completers. Should ESE weight the evidence categories (e.g., strong impact evidence SOs get preference in opening new programs)?


2For purposes of this analysis, we considered “active programs” to be those for which there was at least one completer in 2013–14.

3Calculated as 4,200 educators times the average ratio of 15:1.


5For example, when ESE conducts program reviews, the process includes an offsite and onsite component and involves approximately three staff members from ESE and two to three external reviewers. For more information about Massachusetts’s program review criteria and process, please see http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/pr.html.
Supporting Effective Teacher Evaluation

In almost all states, education policy focuses on teacher evaluation in a bid to assess how well teachers are handling the substantial demands placed upon them. Teacher evaluations are intended to improve instruction in the classroom, and yet many state policies preclude the possibility that a teacher is both a productive employee and in need of improvement. Yet this situation characterizes most classrooms today. States that fail to address this disconnect between policy and practice will also fail to mount any meaningful improvement in instruction.

Teacher evaluation varies greatly from state to state and subsumes a range of policies, practices, and assumptions. To understand how systems of evaluation are changing and where they fall short, it is essential to understand some common drivers behind changes in the states’ systems of evaluation:

- National and international test results, reports from employers and higher

Most classroom practice is remarkably similar. Most classroom practice needs improvement. How can teacher evaluations that target a few top performers and struggling teachers ever move the needle?

by Drew H. Gitomer
are highly related to socioeconomic status) of the students they teach. The models take into account students’ prior test scores and attribute the changes in year-to-year performance to a specific teacher.

- There is a need to evaluate teachers’ contributions to student learning for those who teach in grades and subjects that are not subject to annual standardized testing.
- Education policymakers increasingly understand the need to include measures of teacher practice, most often through classroom observation, as part of an evaluation system.

### Components of Teacher Evaluation Systems

These forces have led to the redesign of state teacher evaluation systems. Federal programs such as Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, Teacher Incentive Fund, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have further incentivized changes in teacher evaluation. Despite the variety across states and often across districts within states, all systems include a student growth and a teacher practice component that are then combined to determine an overall teacher evaluation score (figure 1).

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**Figure 1. Teacher Evaluation Scoring**

![Teacher Evaluation Scoring Diagram](image)
In most states, different combinations of the following measures, along with different aggregation schemes, are used to determine an overall student growth measure.

**Standardized growth measures.** Virtually all states include a measure of student growth based on standardized achievement tests. However, some states use value-added modeling (VAM), while others use student growth models (SGMs). The specifics of the VAM and SGM models also vary across states. These growth measures are typically available for a minority of teachers in the state as a result of state testing requirements for specific grades and subjects.

**Student learning objectives (SLOs).** Used by many states, SLOs are locally determined measures of teacher effectiveness in which measurable targets for student achievement are set following an analysis of baseline data. The extent to which targets are met is then used to evaluate the teacher based on the degree that her students attain the goals. Every SLO has three primary components: the population of students it covers, the target for student achievement through the year, and the assessments that are used to evaluate the target. Specific features of the SLO process vary substantially, including the extent to which targets are common across groups of teachers, the nature of the assessments (e.g., commercially available, developed to be used across groups of teachers, or unique to particular teachers), and the extent to which some or all of a teacher’s students are included.

**School or gradewide measures.** Some states also include a school or gradewide growth measure to signal the collective responsibility that teachers have to ensure student progress within the school.

**Proficiency measures.** Some states also include a proficiency measure for some group of students (e.g., average test scores for the school) as part of the student growth measure. This is intended to recognize absolute academic performance in addition to the idea of growth embedded in the other constituent measures.

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*bMany states have analogous measures but use different terms: New Jersey uses student growth objective; North Carolina uses measures of student learning; Massachusetts uses district-determined measures; and Washington, D.C., uses teacher-assessed student achievement.

State policymakers have deployed a variety of measures that fall within each component (see boxes 1 and 2).

Relevant Distinctions for Practice

Describing the components of teacher evaluation provides only a superficial understanding of the status of these systems and the promise they have for improving education. To more fully appreciate the potential of teacher evaluation, state boards of education and state education agencies must consider the policies, practices, assumptions, and lenses that define their systems and influence their implementation, quality, and potential outcomes.

The distinctions drawn here are not intended to be exhaustive. Nor are they independent. Decisions and actions taken for particular aspects of the system have direct implications for other aspects and at times can work at cross-purposes.

Purposes and Policies

Most state evaluation systems have two explicit goals. One is to evaluate teachers for purposes of making employment-related decisions. On the basis of poor evaluations, teachers may be placed on probationary status or terminated. Conversely, strong evaluations may in some states lead to increased pay and reduced demands in future evaluations. The second goal is to improve classroom instruction. The key question for state and local policymakers is how these two goals can coexist productively.

Why is this so? To understand this disconnect, it is important to first note that recent research, based on observations or other measures and studies of classroom practice, judges large numbers of classroom interactions to be in need of improvement. Particularly on dimensions associated with instructional rigor,
the majority of classroom ratings fall somewhere below the midpoint on the measurement scales (e.g., a 2 on a 4-point scale). Such scores are likely to be termed either “basic” or “needing improvement,” depending on the scale used. Thus the research message is consistent: The majority of US students need to improve performance, and the majority of US classrooms need better instruction.

A reasonable person reading such findings would conclude that the quality of teaching across a broad proportion of classrooms should be improved. However, many state policies convey a very different message—that being assigned a rating of “needs improvement” puts someone on probationary status, potentially a precursor to being fired. Where policies treat “needs improvement” as an actionable status, the likelihood of improving educational performance is utterly compromised.

If saying someone needs improvement carries with it such dire disciplinary consequences, administrators will justifiably designate as needing improvement only those teachers who they consider to be weak employees. In such a system, “needs improvement” actually is understood to mean that a teacher’s performance is unsatisfactory. Thus, while many state policies preclude the possibility that a teacher is both a productive employee and in need of improvement, available research indicates that this is exactly the sort of person who characterizes most of the profession. At the same time, their supervisors are classifying most teachers as proficient/effective or highly proficient/effective.

The feedback from measures of teacher practice is similarly compromised. Teachers receive inflated observation scores that do not accurately describe the quality of their practice, making it difficult to provide effective feedback. In the majority of teachers’ classrooms, for example, the quality of classroom discourse is limited (a 2 on a 4-point scale). Teachers still control most of the classroom talk, and in many classrooms opportunities for students to share and exchange thinking are limited. Yet the vast majority of teachers will receive scores of 3 or higher, which are associated with a qualitative description in various protocols as classrooms that are rich in the exchange of ideas among and between teachers and students. It would be difficult to motivate teachers to change this aspect of teaching practice if they are receiving scores that convey high performance.

State boards of education should establish policies that support the goals of evaluation and instructional improvement. Forcing classifications that corrupt the meaning and use of measures designed to illuminate teaching will necessarily compromise initiatives designed to provide meaningful feedback and improve practice.

**Tenuous Link between Research and Practice**

A great deal of research has been used to inform evaluation systems’ overall design and the justification for them. Most prominent is the Measures of Effective Teaching Project. One of its most important findings (and those of related studies) has been the identification of sources of measurement error in order to ensure that judgments about teachers are as valid as possible.

First, classroom observation scores vary because of who observes, when they observe, and what kinds of lessons they observe. Any single observation by a single rater is a relatively unreliable measure. Thus research recommends that observers be highly trained, pass certification tests, and continue to have their performance checked and calibrated to ensure that they maintain a clear understanding of how to apply observation protocols. Further, it is recommended that every teacher be observed multiple times, by different observers, and with reliability checks to evaluate the continuing quality of the observations. To the extent possible, ratings should be a function of what is observed, not who is observing.

In the cauldron of practice, though, controls for measurement error are largely absent. Observers receive minimal training, and though they may have to pass a certification test, both training and certification is far less rigorous than that which observers experienced in these research studies. Additional postcertification calibration is rare, as is rating of a lesson by more than one observer to check on the reliability of observers. In some cases, the number of mandatory observations has been reduced. Thus, quality controls to ensure the quality of scores are in practice absent. Perhaps the most critical distinction between measures used in research and those used in practice is that in research, observers and evaluators have no relationship.
or knowledge of the people being observed and thus the researchers’ decisions have no bearing on the day-to-day and organizational impact of any evaluative judgments.

Given all the constraints and pressures on teachers and administrators, it is not possible for education systems to replicate these research efforts, but it might be possible to institute practices that provide meaningful information about the quality of evaluations. One can imagine periodic audit processes that add external, independent judgments against which those inside the system can calibrate their judgments and make modifications as appropriate.

**Policy Imperatives and the Distortion of Measurement**

Sometimes policies make sound measurement difficult. For example, one policy imperative—student growth—has been included as a central component of all teacher evaluations. The VAM research outlined earlier supports this policy. However, a relatively small proportion of teachers instruct students in the grades and subjects covered by annual standardized tests, so value-added estimates cannot be made for most teachers. For these teachers, policy requires that student growth be measured though a variety of locally determined processes, collectively known as student learning objectives (SLOs).

My colleagues and I have argued elsewhere that it is a mistake to construe SLOs as growth measures. Their various forms make them incomparable. When teachers and administrators treat SLOs as growth measures, they tend to focus on the attainment of somewhat arbitrary and problematic goals. For example, claiming that students should increase their scores from pre- to post-test by 20 percent is only meaningful if it is either clear how much most students improve in a year or it is clear what 20 percent means in terms of concepts or skills learned. In most cases, SLOs do neither. The goals risk being either trivial or so ambitious that they are unrealistic. Simply calling them growth measures does not make them so.

However, SLOs do have great potential if properly construed and supported as measures of teacher practice—how teachers establish important learning goals, how they develop assessments to measure that work, and how they consider student performance. These are central aspects of practice, and SLOs could be effective ways of both measuring and informing teacher practice. Indeed, there are successful models of SLOs being used in this way.9

**Individual Differences versus Institutional Consistencies**

The way researchers frame their questions determines the results they find. In the case of research on teaching quality, an individual differences perspective has dominated it. Such studies seek to determine where individuals fall on a distribution of effectiveness and then to highlight those distinctions. This leads us to policies and practices that try to identify individuals at the tails of the distribution—particularly the tail inhabited by the weakest performers. But such a lens may preclude a grasp of the larger picture. When one takes an individual differences perspective, one inherently looks for differences. But when looking for commonalities, one is struck by the relative sameness of instruction within a school or across schools in a district. While there are certainly outliers, by and large classrooms do not differ very much on observational measures.10 An institutional focus would bring attention to the commonality of practice and direct policymaking toward actions that could improve instruction across the board: modified curricula, perhaps, or coordinated professional development.

An individual differences model alone would be reasonable if the US educational system were deemed high performing. In that case, an evaluation system that filtered out individuals who did not meet the standards of a high-performing system would make sense. However, in a system that could benefit from broad improvement, it makes more sense to focus on consistencies and institutional factors that influence teaching performance, while also taking action on the relatively small proportion of teachers designated as poorly performing.

**Implications for the Future**

Teacher evaluation will remain an entrenched feature of American schools. The challenge is to make evaluations as effective as possible in terms of improving instruction and student
outcomes. This brief review suggests a few possible directions that state boards of education and state education agencies can pursue:

- **Do no harm.** Make sure that new policies do not subvert the intentions of the system one is trying to improve. One important way to gain insight into how the field is reacting to policy is to conduct occasional research studies that reveal what is working, or not working, as intended.

- **Recognize that evaluation processes are a set of tools to support professional judgments rather than a rigorous measurement process.** Ultimately, the effectiveness of the system will depend on the quality of evaluators’ judgments. Policies and processes should be set to monitor and improve the quality of those judgments.

- **Supplement individual evaluations with rigorous institutional evaluations.** If evaluations are going to improve education, then educators need to shift practice broadly and not simply identify and take action on the weakest. It is critical not to just compare individuals but to compare the status quo with where we all want our education systems to be.

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Local control of teacher evaluation reform strains the capacity of state education agencies to support their districts and spurs some states to streamline their efforts.

by Patrick McGuinn

In 2010, the Obama administration's Race to the Top competitive grant program initiated a wave of teacher evaluation reform, which scholars and policymakers have long identified as critical to improving teacher quality and student performance.1 State boards of education (SBEs) and state education agencies (SEAs) took different approaches to these reforms, based on the strength of their state's attachment to local control of schools and varying views of the proper role of the state in education. As a result, clear tension has emerged between some states’ desires to let districts select or adapt evaluation instruments that are best suited to their particular circumstances and their SEAs' limited capacity to support the implementation of a wide array of instruments.

States that won Race to the Top grants have struggled with their teacher evaluation reforms. Media coverage in 2015 noted that while many of these states have made considerable progress in rolling out their new evaluation systems, most grantees have asked to extend the timetables for completing this work.2 In addition to limited SEA capacity, another obstacle to implementation stems from the traditional focus of SEAs and SBEs on compliance and accountability activities, which has made local education agencies (LEAs) hesitant to confess whether and how they might be struggling to implement reform and reluctant to seek assistance.

As US Education Secretary Arne Duncan remarked, "Because teacher evaluation systems are still a work in progress, it is vital that school leaders and administrators continue to solicit feedback, learn from their mistakes, and make improvements."3 In that spirit, I conducted comparative case studies on the implementation of teacher evaluation reforms in six “early adopter” states: Colorado, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Tennessee.4 Their experiences reveal some of the key challenges and adaptations in implementing new teacher evaluation systems as well as recommendations that can inform the efforts of other states going forward.

Targeting SEA Resources

Given limited resources, state leaders have to think about how to reallocate existing SEA staff and budgets to focus on new responsibilities, build capacity, and eventually bring work that is funded by external grants on-budget. As they do so, they should consider comparative advantage and economies of scale—where the state can provide something that districts cannot. Providing technical assistance and policy interpretation, creating networks for information sharing, expanding assessment portfolios, and establishing online training modules are several areas where SEAs and SBEs could add real value.

States should reorganize their education agencies (as Tennessee and New Jersey have) around discrete functions rather than funding streams. And they should create human capital offices that can integrate the recruitment, training, evaluation, and professional development of teachers. Given the distance—literal and figurative—between SEAs and LEAs, it is important to create structures—such as New Jersey’s county offices and regional achievement centers and Pennsylvania’s intermediate units—to provide differentiated and targeted support on a regional basis.

Providing Evaluator Training and Certification

The Rhode Island Department of Education has developed a promising approach to providing ongoing evaluator training. Every summer it runs institutes for all evaluators: a two-day session for veteran principals and a
The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) developed an incremental plan for implementing the state’s new teacher evaluation system and created mechanisms for practitioners to provide input and feedback. An Educator Effectiveness Task Force recommended a pilot in 10 school districts beginning in 2011–12. Another 20 districts joined the pilot for 2012–13, during which all other districts were instructed to build capacity for statewide implementation in 2013–14. Interested districts applied to participate in the pilot. For the second year of the pilot, NJDOE received 49 applications, and 10 districts received grants totaling $1 million to support implementation.

A State Evaluation Advisory Committee (EPAC) and District Evaluation Advisory Committees (DEAC) solicited feedback on pilot, and the DEACs met monthly to discuss challenges. Rutgers Graduate School of Education conducted an independent evaluation of the year one pilot that included site visits and administrator surveys.

In summer 2011, NJDOE surveyed its 580 superintendents and found that almost three-quarters believed the department did not play a role in improving student achievement. That same summer, new Education Commissioner Chris Cerf initiated a radical redesign of the department to better support district reforms. He reassigned staff around four areas—academics, performance, talent, and innovation—and all four offices focus on service delivery. The state also created seven regional achievement centers (RACs), each with a staff of 10 to 15, who connect the strands of school improvement work with teacher evaluation reform. There are also implementation teams that provide support to districts, both those in the pilot and in the preparation phase.
more comprehensive four-day session for new principals and those who are new to an evaluation role. It also offers "calibration sessions" during the academic year in which a team from the department works with a district's leadership team. The sessions focus on setting student learning objectives (SLOs), observing teachers, providing feedback, and scoring learning objectives. Evaluators pass a certification test and annual recertification tests—as they do in Tennessee—to demonstrate their readiness to conduct high-quality observations and ensure interrater reliability.

In addition to training and certification for evaluators on the front end, it is also important for state boards, SEAs, and LEAs to monitor results on the back end: Are evaluators achieving a meaningful distribution of observational scores? How well do those scores align with student achievement data? Tennessee’s SEA analyzes the data to identify schools that have a pattern of misalignment and offers them optional support in the form of a coach from the SEA.

**Supporting Principals**

States need to think long term about how to produce a large and stable supply of SEA staff, principals, and superintendents with the training, technical expertise, and field experience to handle teacher evaluation reform. Partnering with a state's higher education system or management consultants to devise training and certification programs that reflect the required skill sets is crucial. As the primary evaluators, school principals will in large measure determine whether these new evaluation systems succeed. However, it is a major challenge to find time to do lengthier and more numerous evaluations, to talk with teachers about the results of the observations, and to find ways to use the observations to modify and improve instruction.

Some states have tried to redefine the role of principals, reallocating some of their current responsibilities or providing external capacity to help them. One such example is the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program, a statewide, standards-based continuing professional education program for school and system leaders that focuses more than traditional programs on evaluation skills and using evaluation data to improving instruction. In Rhode Island, some districts have hired a central office staffer to help with the evaluation work. Others have created collective bargaining agreements whereby teacher leaders can help with the observations. Colorado has established a process whereby a nonprincipal can be trained as an approved evaluation provider.

**Moving from Evaluation to Coaching**

Once new evaluation systems are operational, states need to ensure that the new information they provide drives personnel decisions and instructional improvement. The principal evaluation system must be aligned with the new teacher evaluation system to ensure that principals are rewarded for giving priority to assessing and coaching teachers with rigor and objectivity. Pennsylvania, for example, introduced the new Framework for Leadership a year after it launched the new teacher evaluation system. Tennessee also redesigned its principal evaluation system to better align with teacher evaluation. For evaluations to inform classroom instruction, teachers need differentiated, targeted professional development that can accommodate the wide range of academic disciplines, grade levels, student demographics, and instructional specialists (i.e., for English as a second language and special education).

Teachers and principals are being asked to use data—from student assessments and their own evaluations—to create targeted interventions that can drive improvement in student achievement. But they often are not adequately trained to accomplish this task. Creating professional learning communities among groups of educators working in the same subject and/or grade level can be very helpful, as can providing principals with professional development or coaches to assist them in understanding how to analyze and use the new data.

**Centralizing Data Collection and Reporting**

Data collection and reporting systems are a crucial piece of infrastructure for the new evaluations. Districts and states need such systems in order to gather, analyze, and disseminate information about teacher performance: observations, student surveys, and student growth scores. This is where scale is helpful, and state-wide solutions will be more efficient and reliable
Given the interconnectedness of teacher evaluations with standards, assessment, and curriculum, state boards of education and administrators in SEAs and LEAs must ensure that these different areas are aligned.

SEAs also must be accessible to teachers and principals and answer their technical questions promptly. SEAs need to actively engage them in building, piloting, and refining the new evaluation systems. Such engagement will produce a better system and also give stakeholders ownership and buy-in in the system. New Jersey’s Evaluation Pilot Advisory Committee and the evaluation advisory committees in each district appear to have been effective in this regard. Operating as they do at the top of the state education governance structure, SBEs have an important role to play in communicating with parents and teachers about what the teacher evaluation changes mean and why they are necessary.

Aligning Teacher Evaluations with New Assessments

Implementing new teacher evaluation systems is a major undertaking in its own right, but most states and districts are simultaneously rolling out the new academic standards and aligned assessments. This further strains SEA and LEA capacity and emphasizes the need to think carefully about the sequencing of rollouts of new evaluation systems with interconnected reforms.

There is a crucial role here for SBEs as they set state policy; it is imperative that core education policies are well aligned and stable over time. Teachers and administrators in the field can become disillusioned when major policies become disjointed or unexpectedly changed in the middle of being implemented. Tennessee, for example, announced that it would not implement the PARCC assessments at the end of the 2014–15 school year as planned but that it would continue to implement the Common Core State Standards. The state’s standards and assessments are therefore misaligned, and educators believe they cannot be fairly evaluated on the new standards with old tests.6

In a Colorado program, 13 “integration districts” assign teacher leaders as “integration liaisons” to implement new evaluations using a systems thinking approach that integrates new than each district reinventing the wheel. Rhode Island, for example, used its Race to the Top funds to develop the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS), a platform that helps districts schedule evaluations and collect data and provides evaluators data at individual and aggregate levels. Colorado also built a management performance platform to help districts manage data from their evaluations. Use of the system is free but optional. As they build these systems, however, states should at the same time avoid creating student data privacy laws (such as the one enacted in Louisiana) that preclude policymakers and administrators from using the student assessment and teacher evaluation data as intended.5

Creating a Clearinghouse of Student Learning Objectives

Most teachers work in untested grades or subjects. Figuring out how to measure student achievement or growth in their classrooms remains perhaps the biggest problem confronting the new teacher evaluation systems. SEAs can play a productive role in identifying and designing assessments that are aligned with state learning standards. In Tennessee, for example, the department of education developed alternative growth measures that are optional for districts to use, including in world languages, physical education, health, fine arts, special education, and pre-K and kindergarten.

States vary widely in the extent to which they have created SLOs and aligned measures and in how centralized the assessment process is. Pennsylvania piloted a voluntary SLO process for districts in 2013–14 that was mandated in 2014–15. The Pennsylvania Department of Education worked with an expert to design training, resources, and templates. Pennsylvania then trained their trainers and piloted the system. The state vetted the models that came from the pilot and provided the exemplars and supporting resources to districts free of charge in 2014–15.

Engaging Stakeholders

Educators have long complained about the silos in their SEAs and district central offices and their isolation from the field. These concerns underscore the need for effective lines of communication—horizontally and vertically.
academic standards, assessment, and evaluations. With the help of their SEA, the district leaders met at several professional development gatherings during the year. By piloting the new teacher evaluation systems in advance of “going live” statewide, implementers have been able to identify and resolve problems that emerged and give teachers and principals time to adjust to the new system and their roles within it.

**Learning from Others’ Successes and Struggles**

While the design of new teacher evaluation systems varies considerably from state to state, states can learn much from one another. For this learning to happen, LEAs, SEAs, and state boards must be forthcoming about what is working and what is not. In reality, such information sharing is scant. Balancing support and compliance monitoring is a delicate balancing act for SEAs, but getting the balance—and the communication—right will be crucial to successful evaluation reform.

**Conclusion**

States are working hard to realign education policies, institutions, and personnel in the wake of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. Their efforts to reform teacher evaluation offer excellent examples of how SEAs are adapting to the new roles thrust upon them as well as ways in which ongoing capacity gaps continue to impede their work. SBEs have a vital role to play in setting the broad policies that guide this work and in helping SEAs develop the necessary capacity to implement them successfully. Alignment, consistency, transparency, and communication by SBEs will dramatically increase the odds that these new evaluation systems will improve teaching and learning.

Improving teacher quality has become the centerpiece of the Obama administration’s education agenda and of the contemporary school reform movement. The past few years have highlighted how difficult this work is and how short timelines and limited staff and funding complicate it further. In particular, states are struggling with the incorporation of student test scores into teacher ratings, how to measure student growth for teachers in nontested grades and subjects, adapting professional development to the new evaluation process, and achieving meaningful differentiation in teacher ratings. It is important to recognize that the early adopter states discussed here are not a random or representative sample of states. By choosing to apply for a Race to the Top grant, they both self-selected into doing teacher evaluation reform and (because they won) demonstrated a greater initial ability to deliver on it compared with other states. As a result, states that subsequently undertake this work may well struggle even more than these six. But other states can benefit from a close study of the challenges the early adopters encountered in reforming teacher evaluations, and this analysis can inform their efforts going forward.


2See Michelle McNeil, “Race to Top Reports Detail Winners’ Progress, Challenges: Teacher Evaluation Puzzle Proving Difficult to Crack,” Education Week, March 27, 2015.


Teachers are increasingly dissatisfied. In one recent survey, 47 percent of teachers said they were not enthusiastic about their jobs, and another showed a sharp drop in teacher satisfaction since 2008, from 62 to 39 percent. This dissatisfaction does not stem from what one might think—stresses related to dealing with students and families. Teachers instead cite policy development by those outside of the profession, lack of respect by elected officials, lack of autonomy, and lack of input into decision making.

The teaching force is also becoming less stable, with an increase in attrition rates and in the number of teachers moving from one school or district to another. This instability is particularly apparent when one examines attrition rates of teachers of color. The organizational conditions most strongly related to minority teacher turnover are low levels of collective faculty decision-making influence, teachers’ perceived degree of individual classroom autonomy, and the level of collective faculty influence over schoolwide decisions. These factors have been found to be more significant than salary, professional development, or classroom resources.

These statistics point to a need for teacher leadership, which requires rethinking teachers’ autonomy and authority to make decisions that affect whole-school success. Teachers are ready and eager to play a larger, more important role in improving student learning—and the public wants them to do so. A recent survey found that more than 90 percent of Americans think that teachers should have a “great deal” or at least “some” authority to tailor instruction to individual students and that teachers should have a great deal or some authority over curriculum and choices of technology. The public also expresses overwhelming support for giving teachers the authority to select their colleagues and even control their school’s budget (80 percent and 72 percent, respectively). Policymakers can stimulate this shift through policies and practices aimed at developing, facilitating, and supporting teacher leadership.

Teacher leadership has come to mean different things to different people. Some believe it means teachers will lead initiatives that result from others’ decisions. However, Berry, Byrd, and Weider describe a bolder brand of teacher leadership in which teachers receive time, space, and rewards for incubating and executing their own solutions to the most pressing challenges in education. Such leadership provides opportunities for teachers to engage in the types of problem solving they are expected to instill in students. It also presents a means by which to leverage the skills of districts’ most accomplished teachers.

Teacher collaboration is an important facet of creating teacher leaders. When teachers share their expertise with peers, teaching practice improves, as does student learning. When schools actively involve teacher teams in decision making, student achievement increases. Teachers are looking for these opportunities. According to the most recent MetLife survey, 51 percent of US teachers are at least somewhat interested and 23 percent are very interested or extremely interested in hybrid roles that allow them to continue teaching part time while assuming other roles in their schools or districts. In other words, they want to lead without leaving the classroom.

Denver Makes a Start

Few districts have begun to make the systemic changes required to incorporate teacher leadership in their schools. Denver Public Schools (DPS) is one of them.
These challenges created an opportunity for DPS to leverage the talent of effective teachers to improve instructional practice across schools and the district. As DPS redesigned its evaluation system, it also started the Teacher Leadership Academy during the 2010–11 school year. This early phase of teacher leadership in DPS involved identifying teachers in each school, paying them a $500 stipend, and supporting them with additional professional development. Teachers in these roles were expected to conduct leadership activities on top of their full-time teaching load. The principals selected teacher leaders in an “anoint and appoint” approach.

Teacher Leadership in DPS Today

DPS has since expanded and evolved its approach to teacher leadership. Its current vision is to significantly improve student outcomes by deploying teacher leaders in consistently defined roles in all DPS schools by 2018. Its program has these goals:

- **Support teacher growth.** Provide more frequent and actionable feedback and coaching for teachers.
- **Strengthen teams in schools.** Increase opportunities for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing by teacher teams led by teacher leaders.
- **Attract and retain strong teachers.** Keep great teachers in the classroom and the profession.
- **Increase distributive leadership.** Build stronger leadership teams while growing and developing potential assistant principals and principals.

In the 2013–14 school year, DPS piloted two hybrid roles for teachers in 14 schools. To qualify for these roles, teachers had to be rated effective or higher, a significant shift from how teacher leaders were previously selected, under a system that could not determine who was effective but only who performed satisfactorily. Teacher leaders had as much as 50 percent release time from regular teaching duties. During this time, these teachers work with teams of teachers on instructional improvement. All teachers in these roles observe, give feedback, and contribute to the evaluation of the teachers on their team. (This shift is represented visually on the following page in figure 1.)

Several factors persuaded DPS to develop a teacher leadership strategy:

- **Increased enrollment alongside increasing needs.** More students overall were enrolling in DPS schools, and many of them were English language learners and students who qualified for free or reduced priced lunches. These are students for whom an effective teacher is even more important.
- **Poor structures for teacher feedback and growth.** High-quality feedback improves instructional practice, yet few structures were in place for teachers to receive such feedback.
- **Lack of formal means by which effective teachers share expertise.** Every school has outstanding teachers, and most members of the community know who they are. Yet DPS was not leveraging the talents of these teachers.

Teachers in the district began to express interest in an increasing role for teacher leaders in addressing these challenges, with the support of teacher leadership organizations outside the district such as the Center for Teaching Quality.

The Evolution of Teacher Leadership

DPS has long been willing to do things differently. Their current efforts to rethink teaching are rooted in work begun over a decade ago with ProComp, the district’s groundbreaking approach to teacher compensation. Its hallmark was a move away from paying teachers solely for years of service and degrees earned and toward compensating teachers for taking on challenging assignments, fostering student learning, and improving teaching practice.

In 2010, DPS changed its teacher evaluation system from one in which the only possible ratings were satisfactory or unsatisfactory and in which it was virtually impossible to differentiate developing teachers, good teachers, and great teachers. The new system, Leading Effective Academic Practice, or LEAP, made it possible to more clearly identify effective and highly effective teachers.

The system was not without its challenges. Improved precision in teacher evaluation requires more time and deeper expertise. In short, principals could not be the only ones making teacher observations and offering feedback.
The pilot is helping to distribute leadership and improve school culture.

Surveys of DPS teachers in the pilot schools also show positive results (figure 3):

- Eighty-nine percent responded that they value having leaders who are still in the classroom.
- Seventy-four percent are glad their school is participating in the pilot. Most teachers agree that the roles help distribute leadership, increase teacher voice, and have a positive impact on school culture overall.9
DPS completed year two of its pilot in 2014–15, increasing the number of participating schools from 14 to nearly 50. Early survey results are also promising in terms of impact on instructional practice, school climate, and teachers’ sense of engagement and ownership. There will be yet another ramp-up during the 2015–16 school year; it will be interesting to see the results as this approach goes to scale.

Policy Recommendations

DPS had to retool policies to account for teachers who both teach and lead. For example, some teacher responsibilities are defined by district policy and state statute. This is also true for principals. Having teachers assume responsibilities that were historically within the principal’s realm (like evaluation) required changes in policy. Specific policies vary from state to state and by district. The bottom line is that blurring the distinction between those who teach and those who lead requires policy shifts at the state and district levels.

As Denver schools and other districts and states continue to reimagine the role of teachers as leaders, policy barriers must be removed and new policies put in place. Current policies tend to emphasize individual performance and roles, whereas teacher leadership requires a collaborative mind-set for both performance and roles that policy must reflect.

Figure 2. Excerpts of team lead perceptions of pilot

Figure 3. Excerpts of team lead perceptions of pilot, year-long average of all responses
What follows are recommendations for guiding principles for new policies or removal of old ones that create barriers to teacher leadership.

**Emphasize collaboration rather than competition.** Policies that pit teachers against each other inhibit knowledge sharing and hinder a sense of collective responsibility for student success. Instead, state boards of education and local education agencies can consider the following:

- Create policies that encourage teachers to collaborate, share expertise, and support their colleagues in continuous improvement. Recognizing and rewarding teams of teachers for collaborating to improve practice and student outcomes are more likely to create systemic improvement. Incentives could be put in place, for example, to allow teachers in a team context to earn micro-credentials for demonstrating mastery of specific skills. Current policies, in contrast, tend to measure professional development in terms of hours spent attending lectures and seminars rather than skill mastery, with license renewal contingent on meeting these seat-time requirements.

- Remove policies that create the conditions for teachers to compete for limited resources or incentives. Limiting resources or incentives to x number of teachers or schools creates a climate of competition.

- Remove policies that assign student scores or other measures of learning to individual teachers. Teachers understand that many teachers and support specialists contribute to student learning; it is not possible to attribute learning to one individual. Yet many current evaluation policies do just that. Removing these policies will encourage collaboration and collective responsibility for student outcomes.

**Emphasize autonomy rather than control.** Teachers are increasingly frustrated with being held accountable for things over which they have little or no control. Teachers willingly accept responsibility for student outcomes when they are also given the autonomy to address students’ individual needs.

- Create policies that support teachers in leading their own professional learning and that of their colleagues. Nationally, $18 billion is spent each year on professional development, and in formats that are not meeting teachers’ needs because they have little voice in their own learning, training is not connected to their core work of helping students learn, and it is not led by practicing teachers.¹⁰

- Remove overly prescriptive policies about how teacher leadership is to be implemented. Alternatively, create policies that provide flexibility for schools and districts to design the type of system that will meet their needs. For example, proposed legislation in Iowa would require that one in four teachers be tapped for teacher leadership roles over the next two years but provides districts flexibility to design these roles.¹¹

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What do you see as your mission as a teacher, and how did you get into this journey?

I started out as a broadcast journalism major. After a year, I realized I didn’t actually like that writing very much, and I didn’t think the camera liked me much, so I changed to philosophy. I changed a third time and went to the psychology department…. It was a moment of epiphany: I was walking through campus at Iowa State—I don’t know if the sun was shining just right or something—but I realized I wouldn’t have to give up all of these things I loved if I went to a classroom. I walked straight to the college of ed and said, “I’m going to be a teacher.”

Tell me a little about how your students would describe your classroom.

A place where we laugh. I think that they would describe it as a place where they have a voice. They would describe it as a place of challenge, a place that offers them an experience. One of my goals is that they leave feeling they had an experience grounded in literacy and learning, one that taught them not only about the purpose of language in their lives but, more important, their role in a larger world.

What does it mean for your students to be ready for college, career, and citizenship?

They need to be able to apply things they’re learning to new situations. They have to be flexible. They have to be able to handle situations that are unpredictable and do those things with communication skills: reading carefully and critically, understanding how to listen.

How do or don’t the new content standards in your state support this deeper student learning?

Standards are a wonderful compass…. At the heart of them is the idea that we should teach students how to think. It’s just as important to remember that it’s not the standards that do the work. It’s almost as though we envision them as a character in this larger narrative—the standards are the ones that are going to make the difference. We need make sure that we don’t rely on that notion [but rather] we rely on the understanding that it is how teachers and how school districts interpret them; nothing replaces that interaction between teacher and student or learner and learner.

What does personalized learning mean to you?

I’m at an advantage because I teach writing, a very personal endeavor. Every time I ask students to write, I’m personalizing their learning because they get to choose what they write about. They’re getting feedback that’s for them specifically.
Can you describe experiential learning that you feel made a difference for a student?

I had been getting fed up with traditional final exams, so I decided to take a leap: I asked every student to deliver a commencement address that was not a cliché. We spent time looking at poor commencement addresses [and] amazing commencement addresses. Through that process, they figured out criteria. Then every student delivered their address. It was one of the most amazing experiences of my career because I got to see every student for exactly who he or she was. We laughed, we cried, and we were amazed. They used symbols. They went from the concrete to the abstract. They used anecdotes. They used logic. They referenced text. They wove in things that we had read throughout the year. Most important, one of the students stood up and gave an incredibly personal address. At one point in it, he stopped, looked at his peers, and said, “I’m telling you this story because I trust you.” I realized at that moment what it meant to have an experience. Those kids are never going to forget that day because they understood they had created a community, a space in which people could be vulnerable and know that that’s part of learning.

Are there supports in place that you would advocate for every state? Are their supports or policy that get in the way?

I hear these stories over and over about misinterpretation of the standards funneled through something related to an assessment or an evaluation—people talking about lessons that are taught in isolation, evaluators who are going around rooms looking to see that people are at certain point on a pacing guide, or that they are checking off boxes on an evaluation form. While those things are meant to elevate learning, what actually happens is that takes us further from it because those actions focus on surface qualities. I’ve been in classrooms where teachers have everything in that room [it] looks like [they] should, but they are just turning the page one day to the next. I have been in classrooms where I might not see an objective on the board, I might not see someone else’s determination of what a good lesson plan looks like, but I see genuine learning: teachers who know their content so well that it comes alive for their students. So this larger conversation about support is actually about empowerment, the degree to which we are going to empower teachers to make sure they are staying human in the classroom.

How do you want to be held accountable for the success of your students?

Any one measure doesn’t give you the entire picture, and the entire picture shifts over time. It is important for teachers to be able to show that they have moved students. I don’t know there’s only way to show that. My experience going through the National Board certification process has been really formative in how I see the role of being evaluated…. I’m trying to figure out how I move individual students. One of the other things that I had to do during that process is a deep analysis about practice. It’s not summarizing what I’ve done in the classroom, but it’s making what’s very implicit to me very explicit to someone else. That process has absolutely been crucial in my growth as a teacher…. It’s important to have other sets of eyes in the classroom, whether that’s an administrator or a coach or someone else. But what I would want to be most evaluated is not necessarily what they saw, but what I did with what they saw and how I used what they saw…. We’re always riding a really fine line between garnering feedback that can make us really better and creating fear, because as soon as we create fear, teachers shut down. This is what humans do. I know what’s going to make me a better teacher is not being isolated. The more isolated I am as a teacher, the less effective I’m going to be.

Are there policies that allow you that leeway to be able to do things differently?

It’s not a policy that makes me feel I can make that leap [toward deeper learning]. It’s the support of my administrators who trust me enough to say, “All right, if you think this is going to work, then OK, we will give it a try.”

How do we as a profession improve an atmosphere of trust and collegiality systemwide?

That’s the tough one…. I wish I had the panacea. I wish I could say, “If we did this one thing, or these five things, it would all be better,” but the truth is it’s going to be a combination
of a degree of protection at the policy level, but more than that, the ability to grow people.

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**Are there ways your teacher prep program helped prepare you?**

My program taught me I was ready to engage in a lifetime of figuring it out. I felt ready to struggle, and that’s a really important characteristic. Understanding the importance of professional networks was important. I spent a lot of time in classrooms prior to student teaching—something like 300 hours—and that part of my experience was formative…. It comes back to whether a program has formalized mentorship or internship; it is incredibly important to have people who help you understand the classroom. We still largely do it in isolation. If it weren’t for video, we would see far fewer classrooms.

**Describe your best professional development experience and what makes it so valuable.**

The most beneficial professional learning helps teachers to reframe what they know and to think more carefully about their practice. It helps them determine ways in which they can be a learner, too…. When I’m [teaching teachers] the most beneficial things are not when I explain steps of a strategy but when I ask them to be metacognitive about their experience and work to transfer that. Establishing problems of practice becomes really important…. They want to investigate what’s not going well. On the other side of professional learning, a few experiences had a huge impact on me as a teacher, and they all have things in common: They were rigorous, and they involved student work…. I had to discern where my learners were and how I was going to get them from one point to the next…. I oftentimes tell people that I’m more afraid of my mediocrity than of my mistakes.

**What can we do to better prepare teachers to be leaders?**

Connecting them with other teacher leaders is important. Teachers need to be told that what they’re doing is special because a lot of teachers really don’t know it. It speaks to the isolation we experience in the profession. Making sure that teachers get out of that isolation is crucial to leadership.
When my principal said he’d be observing my second period class, I swallowed hard. This would be my first evaluation in my new school, and these were not my best students—or anyone’s. Passing English 11 was the only way they could graduate, and a high school diploma was the absolute limit of their educational aspirations.

I was determined not to put on a performance for the principal. As with every other evaluation in my teaching career, I taught the lesson I would have taught if there were no observer. (Over the years, this strategy produced some wonderful memories, including the principal who tried to listen in on a small-group activity until one student said, “Dr. Holden, in this class, no one gets to sit silently and let others do the work. What do you think about Romeo’s decision here?”)

The day’s lesson was part of a poetry unit, which the students approached with the same enthusiasm I imagine they showed the dentist. Their typical reaction to figurative language: “Why can’t the guy just say what he means?”

But that day, the poem spoke to them. “Something just like that happened to me,” said one boy who usually sat silent in the back. Another girl chimed in: She had felt what the poet expressed.

It was magic. The students connected to words on a page. They understood that others shared their experiences and feelings. And they had at least a glimmer of why the school board and I thought it was so important that they slog through poems, short stories, and novels.

I was sure the principal had seen all that. I looked forward to our post-evaluation conference.

His first words set me straight. “You didn’t call the roll.”

I pointed out that it was March. I knew these students, I told him, and I never wasted class time calling roll. He remained unconvinced until I opened my grade book and showed him the attendance for the day.

His oral and written evaluation said nothing about connection with literature. There was nothing about the fact that these students were completely engaged. I hadn’t called each name out loud, so I was not an excellent teacher.

This edition of the Standard deals with the important issue of teacher evaluations. Research consistently shows that, of all the in-school factors that influence a student’s learning, teacher quality makes the biggest difference.

The best teachers do want to improve their practice, and state boards of education can develop evaluation systems to raise the level of teaching in every classroom. Yet there are no easy recipes for structuring the best teacher evaluation system. It takes hard work and a deep commitment throughout the system.

What comes easily are poor evaluations, replete with check boxes that fail to measure learning in any meaningful way and manage to frustrate good teachers in the process. I cannot for the life of me remember the title of the poem I taught that day. But I have never forgotten what the evaluation conference felt like.
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