



The ABCs of Teacher Evaluations: Best Practices to Improve Teaching and Learning

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEASURING AND CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY

There has been a great deal of discussion at the local, state, and federal level addressing the achievement gap and the critical role that teachers play in the learning process. An integral part of this discussion assesses which teacher evaluation models are most effective in measuring and improving teacher quality. Research shows that good teaching is the most important school-based factor in increasing student learning, followed closely by principal effectiveness. A single teacher can have a profound impact on student learning over the course of a year, and, indeed, a lifetime.



Today, school districts across the nation are examining how they can help teachers become even more successful in their classrooms, and, thereby, increase the success of their students. A quality teacher evaluation system is paramount to ensuring good teaching. In the context of assessing what works and what does not in terms of teacher evaluations, the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) and its Education and Early Care Task Force believe there is a need for parents and the community to better understand the teacher evaluation models currently in use nation-wide and those being developed.

The teacher evaluation process has many components. We offer this report so that Bridgeport parents and residents can better understand the prevailing teacher evaluation models, the terminology used in this field, and the best practices that BCAC believes would benefit the Bridgeport School District.

TEACHER EVALUATIONS:A VITAL TOOL

"If teachers were evaluated more regularly, then newer teachers would naturally have more support and struggling teachers would be identified quicker. I see evaluation as a means to support good teachers and provide more guidance for new or struggling teachers."

- Teacher, 22 years

BCAC applauds the hard work of our Bridgeport teachers. Teacher evaluation systems should be viewed as a vital tool for teachers that will help them enhance strengths and address specific challenges. A collaborative, encouraging, and assessment-based model is necessary to ensure a high-quality

education for all Bridgeport children.

We hope the information provided in this report will be used to: foster greater understanding of teacher evaluation systems as mechanisms for providing teacher support; strengthen teacher evaluation in Bridgeport public schools; and proceed one step further toward bridging the achievement gap.

The information in this report was compiled through research, comparative analysis of teacher evaluation models in other urban districts, data collection, and teacher interviews. We thank those teachers who provided their invaluable feedback in the preparation of this report.

Key findings and conclusions:

At a minimum, teacher evaluations should:

- Assess teacher performance regularly during the school year and not simply at year-end.
- Identify struggling teachers and provide intensive intervention early and throughout the entire school year.
- Engage teachers in reflecting on their instructional practices and assessing their own strengths and areas that need improvement.
- Ensure that schools have the information they need to build strong instructional teams that can improve school-wide academic performance.
- Identify areas where, based on aggregate evaluation results, instruction needs to improve.
- Provide the necessary supports, coaching, and professional development to ensure instructional improvement.
- Ensure that principals are held accountable for evaluating, developing, and retaining the best teachers.
- Create a culture of collaboration where everyone in the school stays focused on accountability and results.

THE TEACHER EVALUATION PROCESS IN CONNECTICUT



In Connecticut, superintendents are responsible for developing and implementing teacher evaluation systems and processes for their districts. Superintendents have some flexibility in designing an evaluation system that suits the particular needs of their districts as long as the process remains consistent with guidelines provided by the State Department of Education and any agreements regarding evaluations made between local boards of education and teacher unions.

Current state guidelines require evaluations to address each teacher's strengths, areas for improvement, improvement strategies, and student performance. Superintendents are required to report to their boards of education annually on June 1st regarding the status of teacher evaluations in their districts.

TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS: A WORK IN PROGRESS

For many years, teacher evaluation was based solely on classroom observation. But, recent studies have shown that unless observations are frequent and use a clear and comprehensive set of instructional standards, this method alone is not totally effective in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, many teacher evaluation systems remain "works in progress" that are being adapted over time to reflect new understanding of what practices improve the quality of teaching and contribute to increased student achievement.

Spurred by No Child Left Behind and competition for federal Race to the Top funds, many states are revising their teacher evaluation guidelines to include assessments of measurable growth in student achievement. Some districts measure the impact individual teachers have on student test scores and rank their teachers using the Value-Added model. Some of these districts then use these rankings to influence decisions about employment, promotions, and pay. Another evaluation model, Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), focuses on classroom instructional practices, using more frequent and intensive classroom observations combined with peer support to improve the quality of teaching.

This report assesses the strengths and challenges of the Value-Added and Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) models and describes how school districts are beginning to combine these approaches to maximize the benefits of each model.

Value-Added Model

Value-Added models measure how individual teachers contribute to student achievement gains as indicated by annual improvement on standardized tests. Houston and Dallas, Texas, New York City and Washington, D.C., have begun to rank teachers for their "value-added" and use these scores to determine teacher compensation and/or to pay teacher bonuses.

Strengths

- Test results are one of the few quantifiable measures that can provide information on the quality of instruction.
- Value-Added scores can isolate the impact a teacher has on student achievement as measured by test results.
- Value-Added scores have proven effective in predicting which teachers will be successful in the future.

Challenges

There is a risk that teachers will be misjudged by the ranking system because:

- Teachers are more likely to be misclassified if only 1-2 years of test data are available. The more years of data, the more precise Value-Added measures become.
- It may be difficult to link student data accurately to teachers given the mobility of students, especially in urban districts.
- Only about one in four K-12 teachers teach in grades and subjects where there is annual testing.
- Alone, test-based measures offered in the Value-Added model provide little guidance in determining areas of focus for professional development.
- Reliance on test-based measures could lead teachers to focus narrowly on test-taking skills, encouraging the "teach to the test" approach.

Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)

Peer Assistance and Review is a teacher evaluation model based primarily on classroom observations, peer evaluation, mentoring, and coaching to help improve teacher effectiveness. It has been used in Montgomery County, Maryland, Toledo, Ohio, Rochester, New York, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. PAR evaluates teachers using experienced "consulting teachers" who mentor both new and struggling veteran teachers. Consulting teachers model best practices, demonstrate masteryteaching skills, and help their peers create materials to enhance curriculum, develop strategies for classroom management, and provide new instructional techniques. If mentoring does not work, a PAR panel, comprised of five to eight teachers and a similar number of principals, review teachers with unsatisfactory evaluations to decide whether employment should continue based on the evidence collected by the consulting teachers.

Strengths

- Research has shown that PAR gives teachers and administrators detailed information on the instructional practices that contribute to improved student results.
- PAR helps map out professional development for individual teachers and school staff as a whole.
- Experienced teachers are part of the process and provide the essential leadership of the evaluation system.
- PAR enhances teacher, administrator, and union collaboration.

Challenges

Resource-intensive model.
 Consulting teachers are
 released from the classroom
 for three years; Montgomery
 County, MD, for example,
 provides a full-time teacher
 in each school to serve
 as the staff development
 teacher. Each school also
 has an allocation of specified
 substitute time to release
 teachers for job-embedded
 professional development.

DISTRICTS MOVE TO COMBINE FEATURES OF VALUE-ADDED AND PAR

Increasingly, school districts are moving toward a teacher evaluation model combining both Value-Added and PAR. For example, school districts that have been measuring student achievement gains as indicated by annual test scores have also begun increasing the frequency of classroom observations and incorporating peer evaluators in the process. Other districts that had emphasized the importance of classroom observations in teacher evaluations have begun measuring students based on yearly standardized test goals and other measurable criteria. Three districts that have adopted this comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation models are New Haven, Connecticut, Denver, Colorado, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

New Haven, Connecticut

It is still too early to gauge the effectiveness of New Haven's innovative teacher evaluation and development system, which was first implemented in the 2010-2011 school year. With union support, the New Haven model, developed by teachers and administrators, combines a focus on student learning with strong emphasis on instructional coaching and development.

The New Haven system includes aspects of Value-Added and PAR. New Haven's teacher evaluation system has four key components: (1) measurements of student learning, as determined by state tests and district assessments; (2) assessments of teacher instructional practices via multiple classroom observations; (3) teacher development and instructional coaching; and (4) peer validation of administrators' judgments.

Teachers with exemplary ratings are eligible for leadership positions. Teachers needing improvement receive immediate and intense support, as well as a written improvement plan.

Denver, Colorado

Denver had been using a value-added model of evaluation and a teacher salary plan that was partly based on student improvement on reading and math exams. To foster greater improvement in teacher instructional practices, Denver recently modified its evaluation system to focus on coaching, developing, and supporting teachers.

Starting in 2011, the district based a part of the teacher evaluation model on four annual classroom observations. Two classroom observations are conducted by the school principal and two by peers. Denver also developed a detailed set of standards to guide the observations, as well as a set of videos to help convey what effective qualities and practices might look like in the classroom.

Cincinnati, Ohio

More than a decade ago, Cincinnati implemented Peer Assistance and Review (PAR). First-year teachers and teachers up for tenure are observed four times a year – three times by an outside peer evaluator and once by a school administrator. Teachers at other stages of their careers are observed less frequently.

To increase teacher accountability and provide teachers with greater support, feedback, and professional development, Cincinnati implemented a revised teacher evaluation model for a trial period. In 2011, teacher pay raises and advancement were linked to student progress.

Now in Cincinnati, about one-half of the evaluation score is based on whether a teacher's students have met yearly goals determined by standardized test scores and other quantifiable measures. The other half of the evaluation score is based on classroom observations of the teacher, which will be performed by a certified consulting teacher or trained teacher evaluator.



BEST PRACTICES FOR DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

BCAC and its Education and Early Care Task Force propose best practices for use in designing an effective teacher evaluation system. These best practices are based in large part on the work of The New Teacher Project, a non-profit organization founded by teachers in 1997 that works with schools, districts, and states to provide excellent teachers to students in urban and high-poverty schools.

"Standards and expectations must be clear, held in common, and maintained every day. No exceptions."

- School principal, retired

Best Practices

- **1. An Annual Evaluation Process** All teachers should be evaluated at least once a year.
- 2. Clear, Rigorous Expectations Teachers should be evaluated against clear, rigorous performance expectations that reflect excellence in classroom teaching and promote student learning. Performance expectations should be precise and clear to promote consistency in the evaluation process.

Expectations should focus on specific, observable student behaviors—for example, evidence that students are actively engaged in the lesson being taught. Evaluators need a clear, workable assessment and scoring tool to help them make consistent judgments when evaluating teachers against performance expectations.

3. Multiple Measures – Evaluation systems should use multiple measures to determine whether teachers meet performance expectations. These measures include classroom observations, as well as objective evidence of student academic improvement.

Some examples of multiple measures would be: student performance on standardized tests, such as the Connecticut Mastery Test and Connecticut Academic Performance Test, and district- and teacher-generated assessments.

Each measure should have a specific weight so that the teacher and evaluator know how much effect each measure will have on the teacher's overall evaluation rating.

4. Multiple Ratings – Each measure of teacher performance being evaluated should be assigned one of four to five rating levels to give teachers a clear picture of distinct differences in their performance. For example, a five-tier rating system might use:

- 5 = Exemplary, 4 = Strong, 3 = Effective,
- 2 = Developing, 1 = Needs Improvement.
- 5. Extensive Training All teachers and evaluators should receive comprehensive training on the evaluation process so that they have a clear understanding of: (a) performance expectations; (b) the scores and other data that will be used as measures of student learning; and (c) the rating system.

Evaluators should receive additional training to gain consensus on how to apply the rating system to ensure consistency among evaluators.

6. Regular Feedback – The ideal teacher evaluation process should not consist of a single rating assigned at the end of the year. Rather, the evaluation process should include <u>frequent</u> classroom observations followed by timely, constructive feedback from the evaluator.

Evaluators need to have regular conversations with their teachers to discuss overall classroom performance, student progress, professional goals, developmental needs, and supports they will provide teachers to meet those needs. At the end of these conversations, there should be a shared understanding of what the teacher needs to focus on in the short term and how the evaluator and other school staff will help them improve performance.

7. Results Matter – Evaluation outcomes must matter. They should become a major factor used both in determining supports teachers need and in making key employment decisions. Proper implementation of action plans to address needs and areas of improvement are necessary to give teachers the proper support to continually sharpen their skills.

HOW BRIDGEPORT'S CURRENT EVALUATION PROCESS COMPARES WITH BEST PRACTICES

BEST PRACTICE	Bridgeport Public Schools: How the Current Teacher Evaluation Model Measures Up	
	CURRENT PRACTICE	AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT
Annual Process for All Teachers	All non-tenured and tenured teachers, as well as other professional staff (including guidance counselors, social workers, etc.), receive a summative evaluation, which is due by May 31st of each year.	Evaluation process is cumbersome, consisting of four separate cycles for non-tenured and tenured staff within a four-year period, and an additional cycle for teachers identified as needing improvement.
Clear, Rigorous Expectations	Current standards are based on selected elements in the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT). (See Glossary of Terms on page 10)	 Evidence of student learning is not a primary focus of performance expectations. Expectations for instructional practice are not described in detail so that teachers know how their work will be assessed.
Multiple Measures	Current model relies primarily on classroom observation, although teachers may (but are not required to) provide examples of class- room assessments, student work samples, or other data as additional measures.	 Formal, pre-announced observations for non-tenured teachers are used. Tenured staff receives only one observation every fourth year. Formal indicators to measure attainment of student learning goals are lacking.
Multiple Ratings	Bridgeport uses a three-tiered rating system: 1 = Meets District Expectations, 2 = Needs Assistance, 3 = Not Meeting District Expectations/Notable Concerns.	 Three-tier rating system does not fully differentiate teacher performance levels. No scoring tool is available to help teachers match instructional practices with system. Performance measures are not weighted.
Extensive Training	Training on Common Core of Teaching standards is provided to new teachers and mentors.	 Training on completing summative evaluations provided to only some principals. No training provided to get principal consensus on scoring criteria. Training for teachers available only in summer, when relatively few can attend.
Regular Feedback	Evaluators are expected to conduct periodic conferences with teachers and provide feedback.	 There is no set timeline for feedback to be given teachers following their observations. Summative evaluations due on May 31st. Superintendents report results by June 1st. Principals have until October 1st of the <i>following</i> school year to submit final evaluations.
Results Matter	 Teachers who need to be put on an improvement plan are identified. Contracts of non-tenured teachers with poor summative evaluations may not be renewed. 	Evaluations are not used for career advancement, tenure decisions, merit pay, or for other employment purposes.

WHAT'S NEW IN BRIDGEPORT?

On January 1, 2012, Paul Vallas began his term as Interim Superintendent for the Bridgeport schools. Together with Chief Administrative Officer Dr. Sandra Kase, and a new team, the process of "discovery" has begun. School reviews have been implemented across the district to assess their needs so that a strong academic plan to support school improvement can be developed.

Part of the process of creating a system of excellent schools includes implementing a fair and consistent process for supporting and evaluating administrators and teachers that holds everyone accountable for student success. The Superintendent and his team will be working with Bridgeport administrators and teachers to develop a new evaluation system that will:

- Align with new state and federal teacher evaluation standards, including the most recent Connecticut Common Core of Teaching;
- Promote open discourse about teacher strengths and challenges, including professional development needs;
- · Involve all stakeholders in the evaluation process, including teachers and administrators; and
- Link to student performance, using multiple measures.

As the district begins to redesign its evaluation process, we urge that it consider this report's recommendations.

WHAT'S NEW AT THE STATE LEVEL?

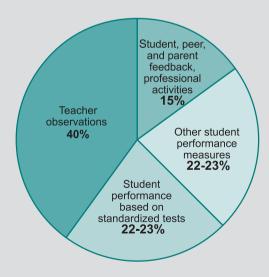
Recently enacted legislation empowers the State Board of Education to develop and adopt revised guidelines for teacher evaluations by July 1, 2012. The new guidelines will require districts to include in teacher evaluations explicit evidence of student academic progress. Local school districts will be expected to follow these guidelines as they develop their teacher evaluation systems.

The Connecticut State Department of Education established the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council to develop recommendations regarding new guidelines. In January 2012, the Council, whose members included representatives of teachers' unions, administrators, and boards of education, released its recommendations for new statewide teacher evaluation standards. The recommendations were adopted by the State Board of Education as this report went to press.

The Council recommended that teachers be evaluated using a weighted system based on:

- Student learning (45 percent), half of which will be determined by standardized tests;
- Teacher performance based on observation (40 percent); and
- Student, peer, and parent feedback, together with teachers' professional activities (15 percent).

Proposed Guidelines for Teacher Evaluations in Connecticut



Source: State Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, 1/12





BCAC and its Education and Early Care Task Force recommend that Bridgeport adopt the best practices below to design and improve the current teacher evaluation system.



Strengthen the Design of Teacher Performance Evaluations

Review and Revise Instructional Standards

• Develop and use clear, rigorous evaluation standards that reflect what teachers and administrators consider to be the hallmarks of effective teaching.



Improve the Annual Evaluation Process

Use Multiple Measures to Assess Teacher Performance

- In addition to observing teachers in the classroom, assess teachers' impact on student academic growth, such as student progress on standardized tests and other district-wide or teacher-generated assessments, as well as student portfolios.
- Increase the frequency of classroom observations for tenured and non-tenured teachers. Observe new teachers frequently throughout the school year.
- Schedule unannounced observation visits as a part of the classroom observation process.
- Develop a mechanism to seek input from others, such as peers, parents, and students.
- Determine how much weight to assign each of the measures that will be used in evaluating teacher performance and implement this weighting scheme.

Use Multiple Ratings

• Use a four-or five-tier rating system to differentiate teacher performance.

Train Teachers and Evaluators

- Develop and use a scoring tool that precisely defines each instructional standard by performance rating so that teachers know what they must do, for example, to receive an exemplary rating and evaluators know what to look for when they give teachers an exemplary rating.
- Provide extensive training to teachers and evaluators on every facet of the evaluation process so that everyone has a clear understanding of the performance expectations, measures of student learning, and the rating system that will be used.
- Provide mandatory training to all evaluators to ensure consistency and uniformity in applying the rating system.

Provide Timely and Regular Feedback

- Develop a schedule for providing immediate feedback to teachers following observation visits and ensure that feedback contains detailed guidance on how teachers can improve and what supports will be made available to help them improve.
- Schedule realistic dates for principals to complete and submit annual summative evaluations. Hold principals accountable in their performance evaluations for meeting this deadline.

"Informal evaluations were very helpful because they provide feedback instantly and allow changes to be made immediately. Formal evaluations...provide constructive criticism and suggestions to improve weak areas and amplify strengths."

-Special education teacher, 31 years

"The single most effective teaching skill that educators can use to reach students is passion for the material. A robust and effective teacher evaluation model would include classroom observations that watch for exhibited enthusiasm for the subject and knowledge of the material. To convey and transfer love for the subject matter from teacher to student is one of the most important ingredients of good teaching."

-Teacher, 3 years



Make Sure All Teachers Get the Supports They Need to Improve

Provide Support to Teachers Early and Throughout the School Year

• Work with all struggling teachers on their improvement plans frequently throughout the school year to ensure they are receiving the support they need to improve their rating.



Make Sure Teacher Evaluation Results Have an Effect on Personnel Decisions

Results Matter

 Use teacher performance evaluation results when making decisions about professional development, tenure, promotions, career planning, compensation, contract renewals, and dismissals.



Parent Engagement

Parents are Important to the Learning Process

 Teachers should be evaluated on parent engagement, that is, how well they seek to involve and engage parents, grandparents, and guardians in the learning process. This is an important measure as the district needs to continue to foster greater community engagement in all aspects of student learning.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Teacher evaluations can be complicated and involve multiple components. Understanding the terminology is the first step to understanding any teacher evaluation. To help the reader, the following glossary explains common terms used in this report.

Performance Evaluation: Nearly every employer requires a regular assessment of how well job responsibilities are performed by employees, or in this case, teachers and principals. This assessment is an ongoing process of defining goals and identifying, gathering, and using information to assess effectiveness, improve performance, and help make personnel decisions. In Connecticut, school districts are required to evaluate all teachers annually.

Evaluator: The person designated by the superintendent to assess teacher performance is, in most instances, the school principal. However, some districts use peer evaluators (master teachers from within the district or even individuals with special training who are not part of the district) in addition to, or instead of, principals or other school administrators.

Standards of Instructional Excellence: Districts need to agree on a set of standards that will be used to rate the performance of their teachers. Because teaching is a complex, demanding, and challenging profession, it can sometimes take a great deal of time and effort to reach consensus on what constitutes good teaching among those responsible for developing the teacher evaluation criteria.

The main areas for which teaching standards are typically developed include:

- Classroom Management: How well does the teacher manage students and academic learning time?
- Delivery of Instruction: How effective is the teacher in involving and motivating students with different learning needs?
- Monitoring, Assessment, and Follow-up: How clearly does the teacher convey criteria for proficient work, check for understanding, clarify, and use data to re-teach or help struggling students?

Common Core of Teaching (CCT) Foundational Skills: These include basic teaching standards for the skills and competencies that pertain to all teachers, regardless of the subject or age group taught. Revised most recently by the Connecticut State Department of Education in 2010, the Common Core of Teaching skills are divided into six major areas of instructional practice and 46 indicators that provide a basis for teacher evaluations and professional development.

Observation Visit: The method evaluators use to gather information about what teachers do in the classroom and how well they do it. A classroom may be observed one time or more, and the observer may be present during the entire class or for just a few minutes. These visits may be either announced to the teacher in advance or unannounced. Observation visits can help improve teaching by providing professional development and other supports.

Observations of classroom practice alone do not provide a complete picture of everything teachers do. The evaluator must also gather information about how teachers perform in other areas, including:

 Planning and Preparation for Classroom Learning, such as knowledge of subject areas taught, instructional strategy, alignment of lessons with curriculum, relevancy of lessons, and classroom environment.

- **Professional Responsibilities**, such as attendance and punctuality, teamwork, collaboration, and self-improvement efforts.
- Family Engagement and Community Outreach, such as respect for family and community culture, involving parents, providing clear examples of classroom expectations to parents, giving parents frequent and helpful feedback regarding a child's progress, responsiveness, enlisting classroom volunteers, and obtaining extra resources from the community.

To gather this information, districts may solicit input on teacher performance from students, parents or guardians, colleagues, and supervisors through surveys or by other various means.

Rating System: The system used to rank teachers' performance levels for each instructional standard.

Observation Record: The evaluator's notes and thoughts documented during class-room visits.

Evaluation Forms: The form on which the evaluator summarizes findings and solicits comments from the teacher being evaluated. Evaluation forms include a place for:

- · Comments from the teacher being evaluated;
- Feedback, based on the data gathered; and
- Detailed guidance on how to improve.

Self-Assessment Forms: Many districts ask teachers to reflect on their teaching practice at the beginning of each school year using a form that identifies strengths and weaknesses, areas where they need support, and goals for improvement.

Timelines: Specify when every aspect of the evaluation process must be completed so that the teacher receives prompt feedback from the evaluator.

Summative Evaluations: A written summary of the results of teachers' individual performance evaluations throughout the school year. Summative evaluations must generate information the district can use to make decisions about which teachers need further professional development, support, and mentoring.

Scoring Tool: Many districts provide evaluators with a tool to help promote accurate and consistent performance ratings across the school district. The scoring tool clearly describes the characteristics of instructional practice at each performance rating level. This also protects teachers from inconsistent scoring.

Training of Evaluators and Teachers: Teachers and evaluators receive training on performance standards and the rating system to be used. This is critical to ensure the evaluation process is valid and reliable. Every effort must be made to bring evaluators to consensus on what represents good teaching. Evaluators must also be able to demonstrate their ability to make consistent judgments when applying ratings to each performance standard. Extensive evaluator training has been found to increase the validity and fairness of evaluations by reducing any possible bias.

Tenure: Tenure is the granting of teachers and administrators the right to hold positions permanently. In Connecticut, tenure is generally granted after teachers have been reappointed following the completion of four full years of teaching.



Sources: Bassick High School Teacher Evaluation Handboo Component, Bridgeport Public Schools, August 20

Our Mission

Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, BCAC, is a coalition of organizations, parents, and other concerned individuals committed to improving the well-being of Bridgeport's children through research, advocacy, community education, and mobilization.

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