



State of the States' Teacher Evaluation and Support Systems:

A PERSPECTIVE FROM EXEMPLARY TEACHERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Measuring the Power of Learning.®



State of the States' Teacher Evaluation and Support Systems: A Perspective From Exemplary Teachers

Executive Summary

Laura Goe,¹ E. Caroline Wylie,¹ David Bosso,² & Derek Olson³

1 Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ

2 National Network of State Teachers of the Year, Berlin Public Schools, Berlin, CT

3 National Network of State Teachers of the Year, Stillwater Area Public Schools, Stillwater, MN

As states reconsider their current evaluation systems, stakeholders are offering their views about what revisions should be made to existing measures and processes. This paper offers a unique perspective to these conversations by capturing and synthesizing the views of some of America's exemplary teachers: State Teachers of the Year (STOYs) and STOY finalists from every part of the country (hereafter referred to as STOYs). Given their recognition as effective practitioners and advocates, their involvement in policy-oriented discussions at various levels, and their overall impact on their respective educational environments, the experiences of STOYs with teacher evaluation and professional support systems provide a unique look into the myriad systems that are now being scrutinized. Accordingly, their insights and recommendations should serve to inform state and local discussions.

Recommendations

Based on survey and focus group responses from 266 STOYs, we offer the following recommendations for consideration by national, state, district, and school education leaders, focused on strengthening mechanisms for evaluating and supporting teachers:

- Focus more on targeted feedback for professional growth and improving instruction, with less emphasis on the evaluation "score."
- Provide training for teachers to help them understand the evaluation tools, as well as training for all evaluators to promote accuracy and consistency in results, independent of who conducts the evaluation.
- Provide time and resources for informal peer observation and discussion.
- Provide opportunities for formative observations and feedback from exemplary educators or support specialists with recent classroom experience in the grade level or content area.
- Ensure that a formal, structured system is in place to provide support and opportunities for professional growth to all teachers—not just novice or struggling teachers.
- Do away with one-size-fits-all professional development in favor of a system focused on differentiated and individualized professional development opportunities, taking advantage of online self-paced study opportunities, watching/discussion videos of excellent teaching with colleagues, and collaborating with teachers who have similar interests and needs for professional growth.
- Prioritize time for teachers to work together to improve their craft through professional learning communities, opportunities to observe/be observed, and time to discuss and reflect on practice with teachers from the same content or grade level.
- Consider ways to measure teachers' contributions to student growth that more accurately reflect students' progress on important learning goals throughout the year, rather than focusing on results from a single standardized test.

- Use student assessment data as a trigger to identify areas in which further attention and support may be needed, rather than as a weighted percentage of the evaluation score.
- If standardized test scores are included in teacher evaluation, consider how to ensure fairness and accuracy as well as how much impact test scores should have in a teacher's overall evaluation score.
- Reconsider the fairness and accuracy of the current approach of using the school-wide average for tested subjects as the student-growth part of evaluation scores for teachers in nontested subjects.
- When student learning objectives or student growth objectives are used, ensure that evaluators are trained in the processes involved so they can provide guidance during the process and accurately assess outcomes.

State Teachers of the Year Responses to Survey and Focus Group Questions

Responses were collected through a survey of STOYs and focus group discussions with a subset of survey respondents. A total of 266 valid survey responses were collected, and 29 respondents participated in the focus groups (sample details are available in the full report). From the survey we found that:

- Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents perceived their evaluation system as focused primarily on “getting a score or rating” rather than on professional growth.
- Respondents were least confident (less than 20%) in the fairness of the use of standardized test scores and school-wide averages based on those scores as a component of their evaluation.
- Classroom observations were judged to be fair by 63% of survey respondents.
- Student learning objectives or other local assessment data was perceived as fair by 43% of respondents.
- Only 29% of respondents with recent classroom experience indicated that they received timely and relevant feedback that helps them meet the needs of students.
- Fewer than half of respondents (49%) indicated that their observers were well-trained in conducting classroom observations.
- Forty-four percent (44%) of respondents believed evaluators could meaningfully assess their teaching practice.
- Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents thought evaluators could provide useful feedback on their teaching practice.
- About half of the respondents never received feedback on lesson planning.
- Approximately two fifths of the respondents never received feedback on teaching specific to their content/subject matter.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondents indicated that they had opportunities to identify what they wanted to learn for professional growth.
- Only 31% of respondents reported that professional development opportunities are differentiated by teacher expertise or experience.

As part of the survey, several open-ended questions were presented which focused on what STOYs believed should stay the same or change for evaluation and support systems. These

themes were then further explored during the focus group discussions. From these data, several key findings emerged:

- There is a need to maintain or provide access to peers, coaches, and mentors for informal observations and feedback.
- STOYs requested more frequent opportunities to work with others teaching the same content or grade level through observing, being observed, and having focused discussions.
- There is a desire for greater opportunities to shape and structure professional learning activities, reducing the dependence on a one-size-fits-all professional development approach.
- There is a strong desire to remove the use of standardized test scores from the evaluation process, and to explore other mechanisms for determining teachers' contributions to student learning growth

The full report is available on the Wiley Online Library at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ets2.12156/full>

About the Authors

Laura Goe, Ph.D., is a University of California Berkeley-trained researcher and policy analyst specializing in teacher preparation, evaluation, and professional growth. She has worked as a research scientist at Educational Testing Service (ETS) for 13 years. A former middle school teacher (special education and English language arts), Dr. Goe taught in both rural and inner-city high poverty schools.

Caroline Wylie, Ph.D., completed her teacher education and graduate studies at Queen's University, Belfast in Northern Ireland. She came to the United States 19 years ago, initially to work for ETS on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards project. More recently she has focused on supporting teachers engage in formative assessment practices.

David Bosso, Ed.D., is the 2012 Connecticut Teacher of the Year and 2012 National Secondary Social Studies Teacher of the Year. Over the course of his teaching career, Bosso has traveled to Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe as part of educational delegations for global understanding. His areas of expertise include teacher motivation and morale, educational history and policy, global education, and teacher leadership.

Derek Olson, Ed.D., is the 2008 Minnesota Teacher of the Year. He has taught 6th grade for the past 27 years and also teaches graduate courses at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls. His research areas of expertise include teacher quality, teacher evaluation, and teacher leadership.