



TEACHING QUALITY

Evaluation and Effectiveness

Education Commission of the States

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Teacher Evaluator Training: Ensuring Quality Classroom Observers

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Introduction

Extensive research tells us that improving teacher quality is the key to improving students' education. As a result of this compelling research and challenges put forward in the federal government's Race to The Top Program, many states are currently revisiting their teacher evaluation efforts. The issues implicated by these efforts are many and varied. For example, more than half the states are actively considering, or already utilizing, student performance on standardized testing as part of the means by which they measure teacher effectiveness. Classroom observation, however, still plays a prominent role in the evaluation of teacher efficacy. Many argue that a credible system of evaluation for teachers, including classroom observation, both demands more accountability from those teachers and provides the feedback necessary to help them improve or share their strengths with others through mentoring and various advanced teacher improvement programs.

Some, however, have raised concerns about the accuracy of observation-based evaluation methods.¹ Additionally, it is not unreasonable for teachers to question the qualifications of their observers to observe, evaluate and pass judgment on their teaching and professionalism. Accordingly, there has been a push at both the state and local levels to improve on the rigor and accountability of the observational component of evaluations.

Teacher Observer Training

One way to improve the quality of teacher observation evaluations is to provide training to the individuals doing the observing, be they administrators, other teachers or outside contractors. To their credit, states and local school agencies are recognizing this need. A number of states have legislation or policies mandating that those evaluating teachers be trained in the best practices of teacher observation and evaluation. How that is accomplished is often left up to local agencies. Other states provide more definition to the training required. Some require completion of an online training course or, in a number of cases, a multi-day training class, in order to be certified to observe and evaluate teachers. Additionally, there are independent consultants who specialize in such training, and a few of the states and school districts are tapping into these private resources. Examples of local and state approaches to teacher evaluator training follow.

Summary of approaches to training teacher evaluators utilized by states and local districts

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five week trainings and testing of “Master Educators” who are hired specifically to train for and conduct teacher evaluations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three day training and testing of teachers who serve as observers for three years and then return to the teaching ranks so they do not lose their peer qualities as a teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three to four day face to face trainings, with or without tests, for teacher evaluators who may be administrators or other teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online training with and without tests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State contracts with a private consultant to train all observers in the state, or in the alternative, train the trainers of observers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State contracts with a private consultant to advise and assist local districts in crafting and enacting a training program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State has trainers or models for training programs that the local districts, at their option, can consult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State mandates training for all observers, but vests full discretion in the local districts on how to execute that mandate

What States and Districts Are Doing: Some Aggressive Models

The ***District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)*** district provides an example of one of the more rigorous evaluator training and preparation programs. The elements of what DCPS calls its Master Educator Program, part of the DCPS Impact evaluation program, are as follows:

- DCPS uses Master Educators hired specifically for the purpose of evaluating teachers. These individuals are not necessarily hired from within the district as DCPS engages in nationwide recruiting efforts. They are paid a generous salary.
- Master Educators typically have at least 6-10 years teaching service, but prerequisites are more than just being a good teacher. A Master Educator specializes in a subject area. There is a rigorous five-step process for choosing applicants. Applicants complete a sample teacher observation scoring activity and go through in-depth content screening before being offered an in-person interview. The interview includes a mock observation debriefing. Applicants then meet with the leadership team for another interview.
- DC is transitioning from an eight-week training program to a five-week program as their data shows the extra weeks are not beneficial to their objectives. The Master Educators now train for three weeks, then spend two weeks in live, informal observations.
- Master Educators are now trained by current or past Master Educators. Extensive testing and calibrating is undertaken through observations of teaching on videotape. Experienced staff reviews this work on a regular basis.

- Each year, Master Educators must complete a week of training and two weeks working with new trainees on live informal observations. Two days a month of continuing education are also required.
- DC is still building their training program for evaluations conducted by their school administrators.¹

Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) is another example of one of the more rigorous evaluator training and preparation programs. Elements of that program include:

- Teachers are evaluated by a peer evaluator external to the school, in addition to being evaluated by an administrator.
- The peer evaluators are teachers themselves who have been chosen for this duty in part based on their own Teacher Evaluation System (TES) evaluations.
- These teachers serve as full-time evaluators for a three-year term, but then must return to teaching so they do not lose their peer qualities.
- Both these teacher evaluators and administrators must complete an intensive three-day training course and accurately score videotaped teaching examples before being qualified to observe and evaluate.
- The training covers an evaluation rubric designed by Charlotte Danielson, how to avoid bias, what is good and bad evidence, and how to objectively state evidence.
- Practice evaluations are conducted in and out of class and trainers must adequately complete a videotape-based assessment test.
- The trainee must complete a live evaluation with a mentor present who also completes an

evaluation at the same time for comparison purposes.

- The evaluator can begin assessments of teachers, but their evaluations must regularly be checked by the program lead for accuracy and consistency with the protocols taught in training.
- The District uses results of teacher evaluations to either: (1) release the teacher from the evaluation program for a specified time period; (2) select the teacher for the evaluator training program; (3) initiate a teacher improvement plan for that teacher; or (4) terminate the teacher.
- Also, each teacher in the District completes an Effective Teaching program that focuses on how the evaluations will be conducted and the rubric being utilized. It is highly recommended that the evaluators attend this eight-hour course.²

Another example of a teacher evaluator training program is found in **Maryland**. Maryland law requires the state board of education to adopt regulations that establish general standards of performance evaluations for teachers and principals that include observations, clear standards, rigor and claims of evidence of observed instruction.³ Currently, the board has a temporary framework in place as they go through the regulation promulgation process.

Already in place in Maryland, though, is the **Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) Teacher Professional Growth System (TPGS)** aimed at ensuring teaching excellence by placing a premium on constant feedback, analysis and refinement of the quality of teaching. There is a comprehensive system in place to achieve these objectives, one element being a regular schedule of teacher observations. Like Cincinnati, extensive training is required for evaluators and teachers in order to increase accountability, create a common language for the discussion of what good teaching is, and to develop skills of analysis and critique that will make the dialogue a rich and data driven one. Specifically:

- Utilizing MCPS's teacher performance standards, an independent educational consultant group, Research for Better Technologies, Inc. (RBT), provides courses of study for observers and evaluators.
- In-district trainers at the MCPS Center for Skillful Teaching have been trained by RBT and assume most of the evaluator training responsibilities.

- Two six-day, 39-hour courses are required for all individuals engaged in observation and evaluation.
- Observational accountability is further strengthened by elements of the county's Peer Assistance and Review Program (PAR) where certain high-performing, proven teachers who are designated as Consulting Teachers (CT's) are the ones chosen to be trained to conduct observations and mentor teachers in need of assistance.⁴

Other approaches and examples of states or local districts with observer training programs include:

- **Florida:** Florida has contracted with an outside professional, Learning Sciences International (LSI), to provide technical assistance to all districts in their development of teacher evaluation plans consistent with the state's RTTT goals and objectives, including a renewed commitment to effective teacher evaluation. Districts formalize their own evaluation plans. To date, all of them include provisions for training the teacher observers and evaluators, but the specifics of that training is yet to be defined. It is anticipated that more details will be developed with LSI as time permits.⁵
- **Ohio:** Ohio's legislature has directed the state board of education to develop a standards-based state framework for the evaluation of teachers, including observational evaluations.⁶ Currently, the state department of education has a policy in place that requires a three-day face-to-face training followed by an online credentialing system for all prospective evaluators. The credentialing exercise has the potential evaluator observe and evaluate a teacher online and then assess him or her. If they do not assess correctly, then they must train further before being certified. The state is planning to develop an online continuing education requirement. Ohio has contracted with the National Institute for Effectiveness in Teaching (NIET), developers of the System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP), to help implement the program and train the trainers of the evaluators. The plan is to codify all of this in a statute, but currently it is only a department of education policy and part of the scope of the state's RTTT contract.

- **Tennessee:** Observers are trained in four-day training sessions directly by expert trainers contracted from the National Institute for Effectiveness in Teaching's (NIET) TAP Program. At the end of the four days, observers must pass a certification test. Additional refresher trainings and support are provided throughout the year.⁷
- **Iowa:** Iowa trains its teacher observer-evaluators through its teacher preparatory programs and an online evaluator course called IEvaluate. Individuals who attend teaching preparatory institutions for Iowa schools engage in an evaluator approval curriculum aligned to the online course. Others must complete the online course. Evaluators are also required to take an online course called Assessing Academic Vigor. Renewal of observer-evaluator training is required every five years.⁸
- **Colorado:** By both Colorado statute and rule, all performance evaluations must be conducted by an individual who has completed a training in evaluation skills that has been approved by the Department of Education. The legislature has directed DOE to develop a process for such approval that, at a minimum, ensures each evaluator training program includes training in the following areas: (a) teaching and learning styles; (b) student performance and student assessment; (c) data collection and documentation; and (d) school district standards and state mandates.⁹
- **New York:** State law requires that teacher evaluators be trained in accordance with regulations of the commissioner of education.¹⁰ While recent agreements between New York and the state teachers' union will necessitate changes to state regulations on teacher evaluations, it does not appear that the state's commitment to a program to train teacher evaluators will be affected. The New York State Education Department has solicited proposals from qualified vendors to plan, design and deliver a training program using a train-the-trainer model to implement new performance evaluations for teachers. The training contractor should be selected and beginning work in early 2012. Most evaluators of teachers will be principals. New York's overall training program will be designed to:
 1. Provide a common language to discuss effective teacher practices and actions
 2. Articulate clear expectations for effective, evidence-based teacher practice, based on the NYS Teaching Standards
 3. Provide highly effective (as determined by specific measurements), and intensive training to teacher evaluator trainers statewide and successive, duplicative trainings for second and third cohorts in the remaining years
 4. Include the initial and on-going calibration among network team members through inter-rater reliability, defined herein as a standard whereby observers accurately assess practice against agreed-upon criteria
 5. Include an aligned set of tools, protocols and processes for teacher performance reviews.¹¹

As noted, there are many other issues implicated in the states' laudable commitment to improving the quality and accountability of teacher evaluation. Either because of the pressing need to address some of these other issues first, funding concerns or emphasis on state policies that defer to the expertise of local districts, a number of states do not provide as much definition as others on how teacher observers should be trained. Approaches among these states vary. Some have legislation or policies that simply recognize the importance of ensuring that teacher evaluators are professionally trained and developed. Some specifically require training of observers to ensure reliability and validity of the evaluation process, leaving it to the discretion of the district to determine how those standards are met. At least one state provides trainers to train the districts' trainers, though the districts are not required to use the state trainers. Another approach by some states is to prepare and offer one or more models of teacher evaluator training that the local school authorities can choose from, or consult in crafting their own model. Still others go a bit further, setting specific standards for districts to follow in implementing teacher evaluation systems and training evaluators. For example, **Kentucky**, by regulation, requires that a teacher's primary evaluator be trained, tested and approved by the state department of education, and that the training include:

1. Skill development in the use of the local evaluation process; each local district is to conduct this training.
2. Skill development in the identification of effective teaching and management practices,

effective observation and conferencing techniques, establishing and assisting with a certified employee professional growth plan, and summative evaluation techniques relative to the academic expectations in [703 KAR 4:060](#). This training is to be conducted by a provider who has been approved by the Kentucky Department of Education as a trainer for the Instructional Leadership Improvement Program.

Additionally, Kentucky requires a minimum of 12 hours of continuing evaluation training to be completed every two years.¹²

Conclusion

In sum, there is currently a diverse array of approaches among the states and school districts because for most, the idea of training and monitoring evaluators is relatively new. As states and local school agencies work to build improved teacher evaluation systems, hopefully this summary of states' approaches will be a helpful source of information.

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