

OCTOBER 2011

Pioneering Districts

Brighton School District

Implementing Educator Effectiveness Systems



Investing in Innovation
in our Public Schools

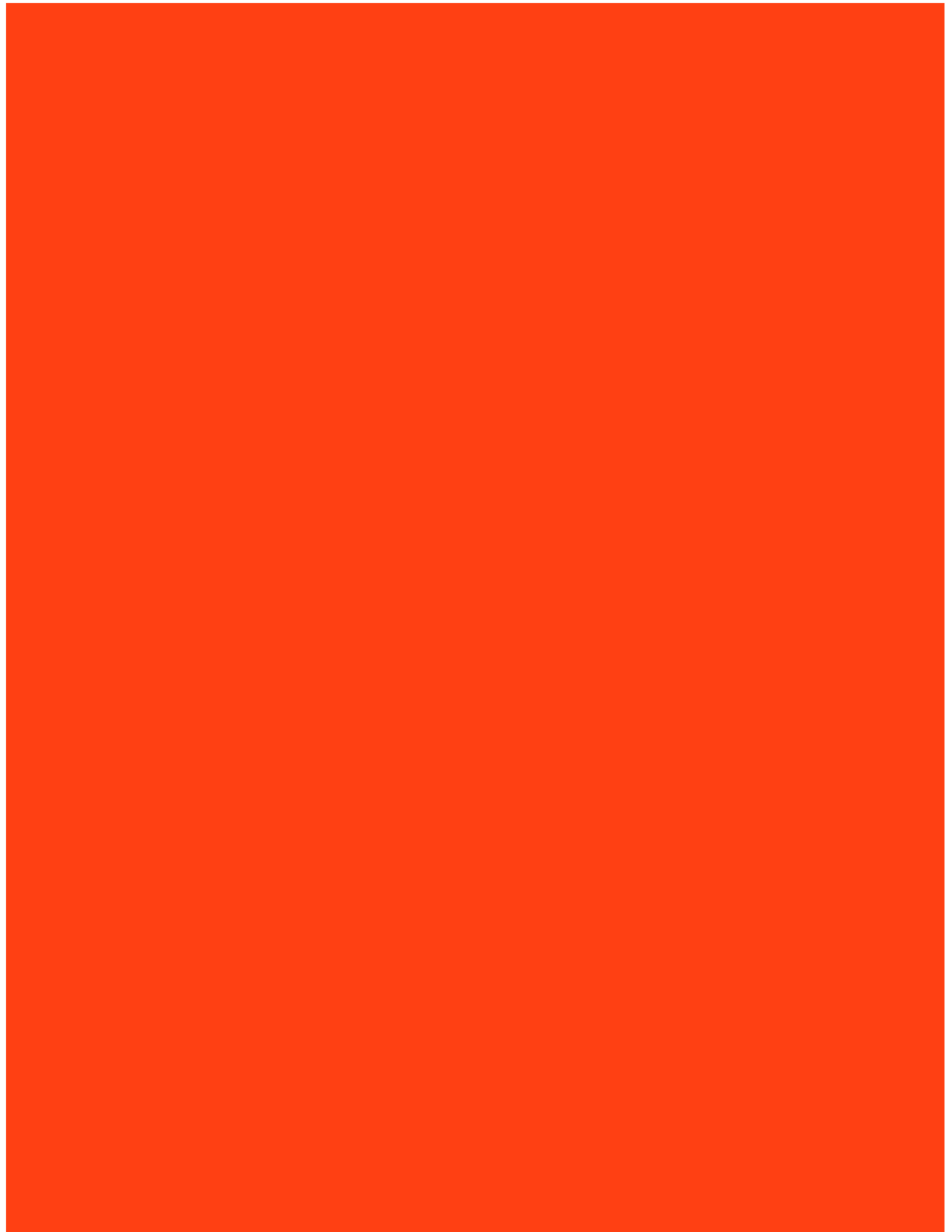


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Brighton Teacher Effectiveness Case Study

Introduction

Two years ago School District 27J's then chief academic officer asked staff for feedback about what was working in the district – and what wasn't. The biggest frustration? The teacher evaluation process, which was described as “having no value,” “a joke” and a “source of conflict among teachers.” Both teachers and administrators agreed.

In response, 27J and the Brighton Education Association (BEA) agreed to a memorandum of understanding to explore other teacher evaluation systems. Because the district and teachers' association have a solid relationship – they use an interest-based approach to solving problems – all issues and options could be put on the table for consideration.

Students and Schools

Brighton 27J is a district of over 14,000 students just 20 miles north of Denver. The school district has been quietly going about its business of school improvement and increasing student achievement.

27J has diverse demographics. Almost 34% of students receive free and reduced lunch. Forty-eight percent of the students are white, 44% Hispanic, and about 2% each African American students and Asian.

District Demographics

Location
Brighton 27J is located 20 miles north of Denver.

School Statistics
Brighton 27J is home to ten elementary schools, four middle schools, two high schools, one alternative high school, and five charter schools.

Teacher Statistics
Brighton 27J employs 670 teachers.

Student Statistics
Brighton 27J educates 14,000 students.

Race and Ethnicity

- Black: 2%
- Hispanic: 44%
- White: 48%
- Asian: 2%

Free and Reduced Lunch Population

Year	% Students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch
2005	29.5
2011	34

Student test scores in 27J hover around the state average, although they have been increasing over the past several years.

About 13% of the students are English Language Learners (ELL). Funding is a challenge. In 2009-10 per pupil spending was \$6,880 (below the state average of \$8,094).

The district operates 10 elementary schools, four middle schools, two high schools, one alternative high school, the Adams County youth detention school program, and five charter schools. The number of charter schools has been increasing, especially in the newer neighborhoods. Just over 670 teachers provide instruction in district-managed schools.

The district promotes decentralization and school accountability by providing each school its FTE and supplies and materials budget based on enrollment. With 27J's diverse population, this allows school leadership to spend resources to meet the needs of their students. It also holds principals accountable for school improvement and increased student achievement.

Student test scores in 27J hover around the state average, although they have been increasing over the past several years. Third grade writing proficiency is up 5% over the past five years, although math has held steady. Sixth grade math proficiency has increased from 43% in 2006 to 53% in 2010. Seventeen of the 24 CSAP reporting scores by grade level and subject area have increased over the past three years. District student achievement growth rates are mixed with the median growth percentile decreasing from 49 in 2009 to 45 in 2010. The achievement gap is not closing compared to prior years.

As with other districts in Colorado, 27J has experienced budget cuts (13%) over the past three years. Some of this has been off-set by increased growth but it has also been exacerbated by the district's inability to secure a mill levy override in the last election (currently at \$54 per student compared to a nearby district that has an override of \$1,200). A significant number of staff have been cut in the central office and in schools. Yet district leaders remain undaunted. Said one, "You get more bang for your buck in this district than anywhere else. Prove me wrong!"

District Goals

The school board uses a Policy Governance model that focuses on defining the “ends” – or outcomes - and not the “means” – or strategies – to get there. The strategies are the responsibility of the superintendent, central office staff, teachers’ association leaders, building staff, community members, etc.

27J HELPS STUDENTS ACHIEVE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE BY STRIVING TO MEET THREE GOALS:	
1	The graduation/completer rate will increase by 2 percent per year until 95 percent is reached, at which point it will not drop lower. (2009-2010 results: 76.4%)
2	The average composite ACT score will increase by .5 points per year until the score reaches 22, at which point it will not drop lower. (2009-2010 results: 18.2)
3	Students with continuous enrollment during an academic year will achieve at least one year’s academic growth in grades 1-10 in reading, writing and math. (2009-2010 results: The state median growth percentile is set at 50. In reading, 27J is at the 45 median growth percentile, in math 46 and in writing, 43.)

Creating a New Teacher Evaluation System

After the MOU between the teachers’ association and the district was signed, an evaluation subcommittee of six administrators and six teachers, representing all levels of the system, started by sharing what was working in the evaluation system – and what was not. Overwhelmingly, the bad experiences dominated discussions.

In many ways the old evaluation system looked similar to what most districts use. There was a pre-conference between the teacher and evaluator/principal, a series of formal classroom observations (nicknamed “the dog-and-pony-show”) followed by a summative narrative written by the evaluator, and a rating form with comments returned to the teacher at the end of the school year. Non-probationary teachers were evaluated once every three years.

Case study interviewees reported it was not unusual to see comments from one teacher’s prior-year evaluation seemingly cut and pasted into another teacher’s current evaluation. Mismatched pronouns were dead giveaways (e.g., Ms. Smith, he . . .). “The evaluation was for

compliance and wasn't contributing to improving teachers' instruction," said one evaluation subcommittee member.

Another problem was the five-scale "grade" of exemplary (E), proficient (P), satisfactory (S), improvement recommended (IR), or unsatisfactory (U) assigned to each of four areas of teacher responsibility. Teachers said evaluations had become distorted by the grades, qualitative feedback was lost, and often they didn't understand how the grade and narrative lined up. "The first thing we did was count the number of Es and Ps," said one teacher. "If we didn't get all Es we were disappointed." Teachers also said the ratings were inconsistent across schools and among evaluators in the same school.

Professional learning opportunities were disconnected from the teacher evaluations. 27J had introduced formative assessments both as an instructional strategy and an assessment strategy with students. Using formative assessments, teachers were seeing gains in student achievement. They wanted to use the concept of formative assessments for their own professional learning. (See more on formative assessments later in the case study.)

Using Research to Inform the New Evaluation Design

The evaluation subcommittee used research to design the new evaluation system. For example, the subcommittee drafted new teacher quality components based on the Colorado Teaching Standards, Metro State's Alternative Licensure Program, Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, and other standards.

The underpinnings of the new evaluation system are based in large part on Robert Garmston's research about self-directed learning based on self-reflection, and Carol Dweck's research on using learning goals to increase competence.

The subcommittee also tapped Edward Deming's research explaining the conditions that create employee success. According to Deming, when there is a performance problem, 95 percent of the time it's due to the system and not the individual. Deming also noted that merit ratings may nourish short-term performance, but they annihilate long-term planning – leaving the organization as the loser. Deming's work was instrumental in 27J's getting away from a graded teacher evaluation system.

A review of different coaching models indicated that feedback about the quality of teachers' work and feedback about strategies teachers use to do their work are most helpful.

There was a unanimous belief among subcommittee members that teachers come to work every day to help students learn and to improve their own skills to become a better teacher.

“It wasn’t going to be punitive – it wasn’t going to be a gotcha,” said one subcommittee member.

Key Elements of the New Evaluation System

The evaluation subcommittee fleshed out the design of the new evaluation system during its second year of meetings. The following elements were submitted to the certified district negotiations team and both sides agreed to adopt it into the Master Contract.

THE PURPOSE OF THE NEW TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM IS TO:	
1	Emphasize the process of improvement by involving teachers and administrators in generating descriptive feedback and in discussing teaching and learning.
2	Use the summative evaluation for all teachers, every year.
3	Conduct multiple observations and discussions between teachers and their observers with the goal of providing increased and targeted support to teachers.
4	Increase joint accountability by requiring evaluators to observe classrooms and teachers to be reflective on their practice. Evaluations are to be a “good faith effort” of both the teacher and evaluator.

The new design provides significant flexibility. Teachers meet with their evaluator and may decide on the number and length of observations, and whether the feedback will be written or verbal. Teachers and evaluators are jointly responsible for documenting the evaluation process – called a professional growth/learning log.

To avoid the previous problem of grading teachers, only two evaluation categories are included in the new system instead of five – teachers on a growth track and considered to be effective and teachers on an intensive track and considered to be ineffective.

The intensive track is for teachers who have repeatedly not demonstrated growth even after intervention and coaching. These teachers have documented issues that remain even after attempting to problem-solve. The district’s human resources director and the BEA are notified, and the teacher has just 60 days to make improvements on specified areas.

Once placed on the intensive track, a support team meeting is held (including a representative from the superintendent and BEA), and an improvement plan is developed. The plan includes a re-statement of the issues, a clear set of reasonable expectations, action steps to meet the expectations and a timeline. Classroom visits to provide positive support and coaching are made at least every other week, and the support team meets midway through the

process to adjust the plan if necessary. At the end of 60 days, the teacher's performance is reviewed. Either the teacher has met expectations and is put on the growth track, or hasn't met expectations and is dismissed.

As of spring 2011, no 27J teacher had been placed on the intensive track – although one teacher interviewed for this case study thought some teachers should be. One teacher will begin the intensive track process in the fall of 2011.

The district says its core belief that all teachers can improve their skills with coaching, feedback and reflective questions is working. According to members of the evaluation subcommittee, as long as teachers commit to improving, make a genuine effort and show progress on meeting the quality components, they continue to teach on the growth track.



An element that is not part of the new teacher evaluation system in 27J is pay for performance. In fact, the subcommittee dismissed it as an idea that is attractive in theory, but not in practice. Members didn't feel there was enough research to show that pay for performance improves teachers' skills and raises student achievement. "\$5,000 isn't going to make me get better," said a highly skilled teacher on the subcommittee. "It assumes I am holding back, and that is an insult! I am already doing my best and working to improve all the time."

Implementing the New Teacher Evaluation System – Initial Rollout

The subcommittee chose to roll out the new quality components and implement the new evaluation system by continuing the collaboration it had modeled for two years. The members trained principals, assistant principals and BEA representatives to jointly present the background research and new evaluation system to school staffs. In May 2010, each school's leaders rolled out the evaluation system in a way they thought would spark full buy-in from teachers.

To promote continuous improvement, teachers were expected to create one to three learning goals they would focus on in the coming school year. Along with meeting the new quality components, learning goals became part of each teacher's evaluation. In July 2010 the dis-

trict hosted “fish bowls” to model how principals and assistant principals would help teachers set their learning goals. Frequently, one goal was aligned to a district or school goal, and another to the individual teacher’s needs.

Throughout the 2010-11 school year, principal coaching was an ongoing focus. To improve coaching skills, the district offered principals the Social Styles inventory that gave them feed-

“I feel my principal and district leaders care about what I am doing. They want to help me be a better teacher. I like that.”

– Teacher 27J

back on their leadership style, including their strengths and weaknesses with regard to communication.

Central office staff also worked with principals on a monthly basis during “site observations,” when the chief academic officer coached the principal on what good instruction looks like

and practiced conversations they would have with teachers based on observations. Providing feedback to teachers usually begins with successes – identifying what they are doing well – and moves to intervention feedback, which might be asking the teacher to explain the intent of the lesson and whether the lesson met that intent. Reflective questions as well as suggesting alternatives play a key role in coaching.

The New Teacher Evaluation System: The Principal’s Perspective

Early in the year the principal met with each teacher. Based on the school goals and the quality components, teachers selected two or three goals to work on. In some cases they continued to work on the previous year’s goal(s). On the next in-service day, the principal and assistant principal each met with half of the teachers and finalized their growth plans. In addition to goals, plans include strategies to meet the goals and measures of success. The growth plans are put into a template called “learning logs” that has spaces for an event, date and some notes.

Early on, another principal created a “cheat sheet” on what good/strong goals linked to the components would look like. This provided teachers with ideas and an appropriate scope for goals.

The principal or assistant principal would drop into classrooms for at least three observations lasting from 15-30 minutes or longer during the school year. The principal set up an electronic file to house each teacher’s learning logs. Mandatory items to include in the log are the professional growth plan, observations and conferences, and the end-of-year meeting. Optional events include learning opportunities outlined in the professional growth plan, including

workshops, book study, peer observation, peer coaching and other learning opportunities. (Another principal visited some teachers in his school three times, others ten times and one teacher almost 20 times based on their need for support.)

At the end of each visit, the principal adds observations, including several questions to the log about what the teacher was doing (for reflection purposes) and then the teacher would access the log and write back. The principal also said he might check in with a teacher after the observation. (Teachers valued quick feedback so they could act on it.)

Another principal would put research articles in teachers' mailboxes related to the goals they were working on. Then he would ask questions of the teacher such as "How did this impact your practice? How does this relate to your goal?" This same principal did model lessons on content strategies during faculty meetings, encouraging teams to work together and get comfortable in giving each other descriptive feedback. Teachers felt professional pressure to do good work in front of their colleagues.

As an example, the principal recounted coaching a new teacher last year who was having trouble with classroom management. The principal and teacher agreed on a classroom management goal and the principal gave her a short reading list, including *Tools for Teaching* by Fred Jones. Together they reviewed different strategies and then he would drop in and observe the use of those strategies – such as setting up the classroom, how to move within the classroom, how to call on students. The principal also encouraged her to talk with veteran teachers in the school to get more ideas. The principal notes that "She has overcome the classroom management issues she had before."

Teachers are also responsible for providing data on meeting their goals. It could be student test or quiz data or quality of student projects compared to the previous year. Summing up, the principal said, "I am coaching and giving feedback. Teachers aren't worried about what letter grade they get. They are more trusting, open to learning and working with peers. You have to build a trusting relationship with teachers...They need to know you are not there to take their job away. I am there to help them become a better teacher."

The New Teacher Evaluation System: The Teacher's Perspective

The two teachers in 27J interviewed for this case study praised the coaching aspect of the new evaluation system. "In the past, teachers just counted up Es and Ps and hoped they didn't have any Us," said one teacher. "Now I'm not going for a grade. I know I'm doing a good job and my evaluator knows I'm doing a good job."

The learning log, referred to by one teacher as an “electronic keepsake” where the coaching conversations are kept, needs to be better managed so that it can be used more effectively for professional growth. (This summer the district will be asking a consultant to review a sample of learning logs to identify more – and more appropriate – professional learning opportunities for teachers based on their needs.)

This same teacher was well-known for the reflection she put into her teaching. Recently, she was asked to present to a group of teachers and administrators on what goes through her mind when she reflects. She modeled her planning and reflection aligned with the Seven Strategies which is the reflective practice needed for the new evaluation system. This helped teachers reflect in similar ways.

This same amount of thought went into the selection of her personal goal for the past academic year. She waited until late September when she knew her students better and selected



just one goal from the Seven Strategies – engaging students in their own self-reflection, and having them keep track of and share their learning. (See more on Seven Strategies in the Instructional section below.) She has been trying to get her students to reflect on their own learning. “So this could be writing a note to themselves or to me on an objective or lesson,” she said.

“We communicate back and forth

and have a log going. The best part of the growth plan is the extra conversations I get to have with my evaluator. We talk and reason it out and I ask for advice – such as getting groups of kids on task. These conversations weren’t happening before this new system...Ultimately, what I really love is being in my classroom. I feel blessed to do it and have the kids I get to teach.”

Another teacher, new to 27J, values the multiple snapshots of his teaching rather than the summative evaluation used in his previous district. This year he picked two growth goals – one to improve his content knowledge and another to build rapport and have better management strategies with his students since he was new to the district.

“My principal comes into my classroom every 20-30 days. One or two days later he shares what he wrote in my log. Then I self reflect. At the end of the year there is a final reflection – whether I have met my goals and if I want to keep them for next year or set new goals.”

This teacher would like even more feedback from colleagues teaching the same subject. His induction mentor is across town in another building. “I would like to talk with teachers in other schools to learn from them. If we had this time we could also write common assessments.” Right now these teachers get together on their own time.

Using the Essential Learning Targets (ELTs) as content guides, he supplements his learning goals by going to clinics and seminars, collaborating with colleagues, doing web research, and reading professional journals.

The Principal's Evaluation

Each principal's evaluation is data-driven and conducted by the superintendent. The same principal evaluation has been used during the past five years of the current superintendent's leadership. 27J does not have a set of quality components for principals as they have for teachers.

The superintendent creates a set of building data – student achievement, building achievement growth, student achievement growth, Teaching, Empowering, Leading & Learning (TELL) survey (teachers' views of the school), CSAP data, and NWEA data. Conversations are then centered on student achievement, school budgeting, staffing, accreditation, working with the community, parent involvement, operational issues, and principals' own professional growth.

The central office gives principals wide decision-making authority (including budgeting and hiring) and holds them accountable for results. It also gives them the tools they need to be successful, including student data, resources, pre-screening of teachers, coaching support, etc. If a school overspends its budget, it comes out of the following year's allocation. Schools can under spend budgets and carry over the funds into the following year.

Over the past five years, five principals' contracts have not been renewed.

The Instructional Program in 27J

The best teacher evaluation system won't make up for a weak instructional program. 27J has a widely used and understood Instructional Model. Its purpose is to provide a tool to examine students' progress and to adjust instruction accordingly. The elements of the model are:

- Curriculum committees develop ELTs that form the backbone of the standards-based curriculum and are articulated from grade level to grade level. (Textbooks and resources may vary from school-to-school.)
- Instruction takes into account the time, focus and intensity of instruction to provide a viable curriculum for all students, including special education, ESL and gifted and talented. Four tiers of instruction are identified ranging from regular classroom, tailoring instruction to groups within classrooms, instruction in non-classroom settings and individualized instruction for students with exceptional needs.
- Assessments are balanced (both formative and summative) and can be used for student placement, to evaluate programs and assess instructional success.
- Collaboration where teachers work in teams to review student data to make instructional adjustments.
- Professional Development to ensure teachers have support in developing their professional skills that are critical to their role and relevant to the instructional model. 27J has 4.5 professional development days and schools decide how they are used.
- Leadership supports the instructional model by providing district and building professional development and coaching on high quality instruction, intervention and assessment; providing time for teachers to collaborate in looking at student data; clarifying the instruction and intervention expectations; monitoring implementation of ELTs; and modeling instructional leadership.

The district's deeply held value about continuous improvement has led 27J to adopt *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning* from the ETS Assessment Training Institute.¹ Every teacher has the book and has been trained on its use.

The book champions teachers' use of formative assessments which research shows raises student achievement two to four grade equivalents on standardized achievement test score scales.²

According to *Seven Strategies*, formative assessment is not an instrument or an event, but a collection of practices with a common feature: they lead to some action that improves learning.³ "Formative assessment...is carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching or learning. What makes formative assessment formative is that it is immediately used to make adjustments so as to form new learning."

SEVEN STRATEGIES OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING FROM THE ETS ASSESSMENT TRAINING INSTITUTE	
1	Provide students with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
2	Use examples and models of strong and weak work.
3	Offer regular descriptive feedback.
4	Teach students to self-assess and set goals.
5	Design lessons to focus on one learning target or aspect of quality at a time.
6	Teach students focused revision.
7	Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of and share their learning.

Seven Strategies is valued in 27J because it focuses on learning targets, encourages descriptive feedback and places responsibility on students to self-assess and keep track of their learning. Another advantage is that formative assessment can be used in any subject or classroom. These assessments lead to better instructional strategies that are coachable and ultimately lead to increased student achievement.

27J uses professional learning communities (PLCs) in all its schools to foster collaboration and sharing of successes, failures, trials, and best practices. Budget cuts have resulted in adding an extra period to the high school (to keep class sizes down), reducing the opportunity for PLCs to be built into the schedule. One PLC initiative was to incorporate writing across the curriculum. Exploratory teachers learned a common language and to use a district-developed rubric to evaluate students' writing.

Monthly principals' meetings are often focused on evaluation. "We break into groups and talk to each other about what we're doing, how things are going, what is feedback, and how we can help teachers be more successful."

Using Data as Part of the Teacher Evaluation

Assessments are a growing component of instruction in 27J. CSAPS are administered in spring and NWEA adaptive Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests are administered three times a year in English Language Arts and mathematics in grades 2-10. MAP tests provide growth scores as does the CSAP. Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) is administered each spring.

Elementary schools use the Houghton-Mifflin unit assessments as checkpoints every six weeks. All student assessment data is put into a data warehouse designed by a contractor.

Beyond required assessments, schools select their own measures based on school needs. Most schools use teachers on special assignment (TOSAs) to work with teachers on administering and scoring tests. Elementary schools have two dedicated assessment days at the beginning of each semester.

The 27J assessment director, along with teachers, recently updated a K-12 Reading and Math Assessment and Intervention Guide to help schools appropriately place students in intervention programs to meet their needs. This 60 page guide includes the name and description of research-based screening assessments for students needing more help. It also includes descriptions of reading and mathematics intervention programs, such as Soar to Success or Six Minute Solutions for reading and America's Choice Mathematics Navigator or Aleks in math.

High schools have developed common assessments in most subjects that are given seven or eight times per semester. Some subjects have end-of-course tests. Writing tests are administered and use district-created rubrics for scoring.

A high classroom priority is the use of formative assessments as described in Seven Strategies. One teacher gave her class "exit slips" at the end of the class which checked students' understanding of the lesson. She would look at these when she got home to see which students were having trouble, then re-think what she would do the next day in class.

27J is still wrestling with what assessments to give in K-2 and in exploratory classes. They are partly waiting to see what the state will provide. They are also reviewing teacher evaluations at the end of this year to see what measures teachers are currently using in their evaluations.

Enabling Factors

Each person interviewed was asked to reflect on the factors or conditions in the district that made the design and implementation of their teacher effectiveness model possible. There was significant agreement on what these were, although often stated in slightly different ways.

- **Trusting relationships.** Nearly everyone interviewed said the strong, trusting and collaborative relationship between the teachers' association and district leadership was essential in getting the teacher evaluation system designed and rolled out into the schools. Discussions began with a memorandum of understanding to explore different options related to the existing evaluation system that no one valued. The collaboration among the two groups (in-

cluding teachers and administrators) gave the new evaluation system a “bottom-up” approach and not something that was being done to teachers, but for and with teachers.

- **A core belief that coaching, feedback and reflection lead to learning and professional growth.** The district had been so successful in using the formative assessments described in Seven Strategies with students that they wanted to use formative assessments with teachers. Teachers wanted this too. Based on research, they created a teacher evaluation that set goals related to the teacher quality components. Increasing the number of teacher observations, providing feedback and requesting reflection (documented in the learning log) has provided teachers with a safe forum to improve their craft. Teachers feeling comfortable with unannounced visits from the principal has been “a huge culture shift.”
- **Effective decision-making structures.** The district and teachers’ association use a decision-making process called “interest-based problem-based approach.” It is a consensus building process based on finding common interests among various constituencies in a group. It has six primary components that include telling the story (problem statement), interests, options, standards and evaluation, commitment and implementation. By working together through these steps the evaluation subcommittee quickly and collaboratively identified the problem and the options to solve it. Similarly, the 27J school board uses a global ends governance model that allows them to focus singularly on three measures of student achievement. They don’t get side tracked and are not tempted to micromanage district initiatives.
- **A strong focus on student outcomes.** Not only were all three district goals focused on student achievement and outcomes, but the district budget was aligned as well. As several years of budget cuts were being made, the focus was always on making the best investments for student learning. 27J made an unpopular decision to cut middle school sports rather than cut more academic programs.
- **Going slow now to go fast later.** This was also described as “patient acceleration.” Because 27J educators listen well and have a pulse on the district, they know the speed at which new initiatives can roll out. The evaluation design provided enormous flexibility at the school level in teachers’ goal setting and how the learning logs would be used. Recent refinements in the evaluation plan add more specificity and more emphasis on student growth measures.
- **Communication, modeling and buy-in.** The strong relationship with the Brighton Education Association should not be underestimated. When the new teacher evaluation system

was rolled out to schools, both the principal and BEA representative were co-leaders in describing it to teachers. They modeled the collaborative relationship and joint support which also gave the message that this was not a top-down mandate from the central office. The BEA “building rep” was crucial in giving feedback to the principal on how the new evaluation was working from the teachers’ perspective.

- **Supportive structures and tools.** From the beginning, the CAO was developing processes, templates, training materials and other tools to support the new evaluation system. He instituted observation visits where he would work with principals, sharpening their eye for good instruction when they evaluated teachers. Vignettes were developed, fish bowls were used to model good feedback, and research that underpinned the new evaluation system was shared. On the drawing board for next year’s orientation are vignettes, scenarios, stories, modeling and a way to develop a common language. Having a core belief and tools for formative feedback has been a crucial tool in 27J. PLCs have also enhanced communication, sharing of best practices, peer coaching and trust among teachers.
- **Getting it right the first time: effective hiring processes.** The Human Resource Director does the initial screening of 1,200 annual applicants to 27J. She has deep expertise in instruction and screens applicants well. In this economy of layoffs, it is a buyer’s market. Screened applicants are sent to principals who make the final decision in hiring. They may need a new teacher or experienced teacher to round out a grade level or subject area team. 27J would like to use a teacher applicant screening tool such as the Haberman Star Teacher Test or Gallup Teacher Insight Assessment but resources aren’t available for this now.
- **Evaluating their progress.** 27J hired a Denver consulting firm to evaluate their system and provide feedback on teachers’ reactions and suggestions to guide their continuous improvement of the system.

Inhibiting Factors

Like every district in Colorado, budget cuts are eating into the district’s ability to provide the needed instruction and programs to every teacher and student. Several of the inhibiting factors were related to scarce resources – whether it was time, people or money.

- **Tension between class sizes and planning time.** With staffing cuts, either class sizes could increase or teachers would have to teach more classes. The response has been more periods added to high schools to temper class sizes. Teachers have lost either a planning period or time to engage in a PLC.

- **Principals' time for teacher observations.** Instead of one summative evaluation per year, principals will now be in classrooms for likely several observations during the academic year. This will require an assistant principal or other designee to handle school management issues. In 27J, principals have made teacher observations a high priority. One interviewee calculated this number of observations: four evaluators for 80 teachers is 60 visits a year.
- **The CSAP tests.** Like most Colorado districts, 27J places enormous focus on getting their students ready for the CSAP. This consumes time between February and March when teachers are more focused on helping students get ready for the test rather than continue quality instruction on ELTs. Another issue is that CSAP tests can be tied directly to only about 30% of the teachers in 27J.
- **Unfunded state mandates and paperwork.** This is frustrating to district leaders but after the initial distress, 27J generally rises to the occasion. However, in one example, a \$2,000 state grant was not pursued because the extensive paperwork needed to apply for it wasn't worth the effort.

Lessons Learned

All interviewees were asked for advice they would give other districts to implement SB-191. They were also asked for lessons learned to help districts get started, and bumps in the road they should try to avoid. Their advice:

Be clear about your district's beliefs, core values and approach. Ensure the evaluation system is congruent with these. 27J is very consistent in its use of formative assessments aligned to ELTs as its approach to teaching and learning. Feedback and reflection are the basis for continuous improvement – for both students and teachers.

Everyone needs to be on board. Don't try to go it alone. District leaders, school board members, building leaders, teachers, teachers' association and evaluation subcommittee members must be involved in the discussions, design and rollout of the teacher evaluation system. This will create buy-in and knowledge of the system.

Don't make the teacher evaluation system the first collaborative effort in the district! Smaller steps, taken earlier that build trust and relationships, will go a long way to a smooth transition and implementation of a new teacher evaluation system.

It's all about instructional coaching. Although SB-191 may result in the dismissal of some teachers, its real value is the opportunity to improve teachers' instructional skills using evaluation results. Ongoing observations, feedback and reflection have improved teaching and

learning in 27J's classrooms. Evaluators should be trained in an effective coaching model and they should know what the quality standards look like in action.

This is a major culture shift. Teachers and students need to get comfortable seeing the principal or assistant principal in their classroom as a normal part of the day. Start observations as early as possible in a low stakes/safe environment.

Everyone involved in the roll-out should be very well trained. 27J let the principal and BEA rep tailor the roll out of the new teacher evaluation out to their building. These two representatives in every school received significant training and answers to FAQs to keep "the fear factor" in check. The unified front of the principal and BEA representative presenting the new system reassured teachers.

Keep nurturing the process so people don't revert to the old system. Educators will want to know, "Am I doing this right?" This is where examples, coaching site visits and school visits can be used as examples of good practices.

Create "tools" to support implementation. These can be scenarios, stories, modeling, fish bowls, developing a common language, etc. Provide a menu of resources from which to choose. There is no single "right way" to do the coaching and evaluations.

Teacher evaluation should fit into the larger district approach to school improvement. Curriculum, assessment and instruction are at the heart of any district and school. How the evaluation aligns with curriculum, both formative and summative assessments and instructional approaches can accelerate student and teacher learning.

Outcomes and Next Steps

With 2010-11 being the first year of implementation of the new teacher evaluation system, it is too soon to know if it is impacting student achievement. The NWEA MAP tests show a dip in 2010 and improvement in 2011. CSAP results won't be available until July.

The next big step in 27J will be refining and expanding the measures used to assess teacher growth. Writing, reading and mathematics teachers in grades 2-10 are covered by the NWEA and some of the CSAP tests. High schools will likely expand common assessments and perhaps end-of-course tests in more academic areas. More difficult will be measures for K-2 and exploratory teachers. "We focused on one piece of the evaluation system at a time," said one district administrator. "This year was the quality components and coaching, next year our focus will be on coaching and data. But we got a start this year."

Another focus in school year 2011-12 will be to revisit goal setting and provide clarity on the types of goals that will impact student achievement. 27J staff will also be reviewing the evaluation system and provide more principal training on both observations and a process and timelines.

Principals and teachers like the new system. They are reporting a higher trust level and communication between teachers and principals. Teachers are much more invested in their own learning. One teacher said the new evaluation “makes people behave differently. It’s just better when it’s about the growth and not the grade...The new system lets us grow in our career and not get stale.” Said another teacher, “I feel my principal and district leaders care about what I am doing. They want to help me be a better teacher. I like that.”

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Central office staff, school board members, principals and teachers participated in interviews. The Brighton School District opened its doors to researchers to describe what they were doing, how they were doing it, the challenges they faced and lessons they learned. Interviewees were both gracious and candid in their interviews. Without them, this knowledge could not be captured and shared.

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Endnotes

¹ Chappuis, Jan. Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning. ETS Assessment Training Institute. (Portland, OR: ETS.) 2004.

² Ibid. p. 3

³ Ibid. p. 4