

OCTOBER 2011
Pioneering Districts
Implementing Educator Effectiveness Systems
Highlights of Findings



Investing in Innovation
in our Public Schools

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Introduction

SB-191 requires Colorado school districts to revise their evaluation systems for teachers and principals according to new state standards. In the spring of 2011 the Colorado Legacy Foundation (CLF) sponsored studies to identify what pioneering districts creating educator effectiveness systems were doing that could inform other districts as they begin to implement SB-191. This resource is a result of that work.

Who Should Use This Resource

School and district leaders who will be responsible for developing and implementing new evaluation systems, specifically superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders.

How to Use This Resource

This chart is a brief synopsis of actions three districts took to revise their evaluation systems. Two stages of implementation are included: planning and initial implementation. Each “Step for Implementation” listed is necessary in order to design and implement a new evaluation system. Individuals who are leading implementation planning teams in districts and schools should use these steps to facilitate conversations and subsequently develop an action plan. The examples provided should spark dialogue and provide concrete ideas for how other districts could approach the process.

Why CLF is Featuring Brighton, Eagle and Harrison

CLF is committed to helping all Colorado districts successfully implement new evaluation systems. We chose to highlight Brighton, Eagle and Harrison for different reasons. Brighton is an example of a district that very recently (in the last two years), and through a collaborative process with administrators, teachers, and the union, revamped their evaluation system in order to more meaningfully support teachers. Eagle and Harrison have a longer history with their evaluation systems. Each district goes well beyond what the state required prior to SB191 passage, and has intentionally aligned the evaluation system with bigger district goals to improve student achievement, and most importantly, improving instructional practice.

Steps for Implementation

PLANNING STAGE			
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	BRIGHTON 27J	EAGLE COUNTY	HARRISON TWO
District demographics	14,000 students; 1,400 teachers; 48% white; 44% Hispanic; 13% ELL; 34% FRL; \$6,880 PPE	6,032 students; 470 teachers; 47% white; 51% Hispanic; 34% ELL; 39% FRL; \$7,100 PPE	10,472 students; 860 teachers; 30% white; 39% Hispanic; 20% African American; 14% ELL; 70% FRL; \$6,576 PPE
Impetus for developing an evaluation system	In 2010, both the teachers' association and district leaders agreed that the teacher evaluation system added no value to improving teacher effectiveness. An MOU was signed to work together to develop a new system.	In 2001 a mill levy was proposed that, if passed, included resources for a teacher pay-for-performance plan and cost of living adjustments. The district wanted to attract and retain high quality teachers.	In 2006, the district was on academic watch. The board sought a new superintendent with a vision to improve teaching and learning and make "hard decisions." Miles brought a systemic vision with a centerpiece of teacher effectiveness.
Aligning the system to the district's core beliefs	District leaders believe teachers can improve their skills with coaching, feedback and reflective questions. Teachers were valued and expected to improve their instructional skills through observations and "learning logs."	Eagle values effective teachers who support their core values of innovation, team work, and professional pride. A core belief is to provide ongoing job-embedded professional learning linked to teacher evaluation results and student achievement.	Harrison has five core beliefs. Two in particular impact the design of the evaluation system: There is no excuse for poor quality instruction, and staff members must have a commitment to children and a commitment to the pursuit of excellence.

PLANNING STAGE			
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	BRIGHTON 27J	EAGLE COUNTY	HARRISON TWO
Engaging stakeholders in designing the system	An evaluation subcommittee of six teachers (including the teachers' association president) and six administrators were convened to design the new system.	A small cross-role committee selected the initial teacher evaluation model. Few teachers were involved. In a redesign six years later, more stakeholders were included and the system has more support.	Most development work was done in the central office. School board members and the public information officer communicated district efforts to stakeholders. Feedback and concerns from teachers are taken seriously and addressed quickly.
Developing or selecting professional standards	27J developed their own teacher "quality components" based on the Colorado Teaching Standards, Charlotte Danielson's work and other sources.	Eagle adopted the evaluation rubric developed by the Teacher Assessment Program (TAP) as their teacher quality standards.	Harrison relied on a multitude of research to ensure that teachers and principals were evaluated on proven practices and strategies that have a positive impact on student achievement. Standards were developed with teacher and principal input to create a clear rubric outlining performance in all evaluation categories.

PLANNING STAGE			
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	BRIGHTON 27J	EAGLE COUNTY	HARRISON TWO
Identifying desired system criteria and outcomes	A two track system was developed—intensive track and growth track. The evaluation system was designed to be formative with opportunities for coaching, feedback and reflection. Professional learning at the school and district level was connected to evaluation results.	The TAP model included four components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Multiple career paths •Ongoing, applied professional growth •Instructionally focused accountability •Performance-based compensation Eagle also wanted to attract and retain high quality teachers.	To create a system where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •School leaders understand and coach good instruction. •Teachers are observed, coached and get feedback using an evaluation rubric. •Data are used to improve instruction. •Support and professional learning helps improve instruction.
Integrating the evaluation system with the instructional program	Essential learning targets, formative assessments, data review teams, the district’s Instructional Model, teacher observations and professional learning were used in combination to improve teaching practice.	Traditional schools and schools of choice teach a common core curriculum. The formative assessment process was new to the district in school year 2010-11 and new curriculum units were shared in June 2011. Professional learning “clusters” support deepening use of research-based instructional strategies.	The evaluation system is linked to data (formative, common assessments, summative); and, professional behaviors known to improve student achievement. Teacher observations are designed to improve individual teachers’ instruction through coaching. Principals are trained in systems thinking to help them understand the alignment of the system.

PLANNING STAGE			
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	BRIGHTON 27J	EAGLE COUNTY	HARRISON TWO
Embedding the evaluation system into district policy	The evaluation process was written into the Master Agreement. It includes the desired outcomes and evaluation process. Flexibility of implementation is provided to schools, but each must have a shared understanding of the evaluation process.	Professional staff contracts and compensation are defined in board policy. These clearly state contract provisions, the role of master, mentor and career teachers and the calculation of performance pay.	The evaluation process was written into board policy under instructional staff contracts and compensation. Basic requirements for the evaluation system are specified including an outline of the evaluation process.
Governance and decision-making models	The board uses Policy Governance including global ends as a governance model. The board has determined three multi-year student achievement outcomes, leaving the means to reach them to the superintendent and district office.	The board uses the End's Policy Governance model to determine desired outcomes. The superintendent and district office staff identify and implement the means to reach the outcomes.	The board uses a coherent governance model that helps the board focus on results, operational expectations, board/CEO relationships and culture. Significant operational decision-making remains with the superintendent who involves a core team.

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION STAGE			
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	BRIGHTON 27J	EAGLE COUNTY	HARRISON TWO
Communicating the new system to central office leaders, principals and teachers	All principals and their building teacher association representative were trained in describing the new system. Together they presented the system to teachers in their school.	In 2001 a TAP oversight committee composed of two central office staff and 10 teachers was formed to guide implementation. Two central office staff visited each school describing TAP and the implementation plan to bring all schools on board over three years.	Provided multiple opportunities for Central Office, school administrators, and teachers to be trained on the evaluation system with numerous efforts to collaborate and identify effective teacher behavior in the classroom among all administrative staff.
Selecting or developing an evaluation rubric	27J did not develop an evaluation rubric—nor did they plan to.	The research-based TAP rubric was adopted covering 19 indicators of good instructional practice and professional competence. The rubric has evolved over time in response to research and to make the descriptors more “actionable.”	Teacher evaluation rubrics have seven standards that include: preparation for instruction, use of data to inform instruction, interventions, classroom environment, leadership and professionalism.
Training evaluators in the rubric/evaluation process	The CAO coaches principals on what good instruction looks like and practice conversations the principal would have with teachers based on the principal’s observations.	Four days of training in the rubric are provided to evaluators. Competence in rubric use is required to be an evaluator. There is an annual refresher in rubric use and inter-rater reliability is monitored. Evaluators must pass an annual certification test.	The superintendent and several district office staff are the primary trainers in the evaluation process. All of these staff visit schools several days each week supporting principals.

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Selecting student achievement measures	CSAP, NWEA and ACT are used as district-wide measures. Textbook unit tests are used; high schools had common assessments. Formative assessments were used for adjustments in instruction.	Eagle uses CSAP, ACT, and NWEA results. NWEA and CSAP were used for growth measures. Formative assessments are used for instructional adjustments.	Measures include, but are not limited to: CSAP, common assessments, curriculum-based measurement data, and timed student constructed response data (SCR). Formative assessments (called demonstrations of learning) are used for adjustments in instruction.
Conducting evaluations	The number of observations is left up to the principal in each school. At the end of the school year there is a final meeting between a principal and teacher attesting to a good faith effort to complete the evaluation process. An assignment to a growth or intensive track is made.	Teachers have an informal evaluation by mentors early in the school year; a master teacher conducts one announced observation and the principal conducts one unannounced observation.	Teachers receive four spot evaluations each semester (eight for probationary teachers), one formal evaluation (two if probationary) and one summative evaluation.
Developing a scoring rating or index	Teachers were placed either in the growth track (non-probationary) or the intensive track (probationary) based on observations and available student achievement data.	Each building has an assessment index comprised of district-wide ACT and CSAP results and building-wide NWEA and CSAP results. Evaluation rubric weightings are: principal ratings, 60%; master teachers, 35%; and a teacher self reflection at 5%.	The Effectiveness and Results (E&R) plan places teachers in one of nine categories (grades) based 50% on performance criteria and 50% on student achievement results.

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION STAGE			
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Linking evaluation results to professional learning	Early in the year teachers and principals meet together to develop growth plans and goals. Achieving these is the focus of the principal’s observation. Teachers provide their own evidence.	Teacher rubric evaluation scores and student learning needs are used to design weekly professional learning meetings as well as district-wide professional learning opportunities.	Spot observations of teachers throughout the district (40-50 a week) are conducted by district staff to guide professional district-wide development using leadership academies, principals meetings, professional development, etc. Principals use spot observations to guide work of school PLCs. Superintendent and central office staff are key staff developers.
Using pay-for-performance plans	District leaders don’t believe there is enough convincing research evidence to use pay-for-performance plan as a strategy to improve instruction. In fact, leaders cite counter evidence.	Teacher and principal bonuses are based on an index of student performance measures and include building-wide and district-wide measures. Salary increases are based solely on individual performance evaluations.	Each of the nine grades of performance has a set salary ranging from \$35K for novice to \$90K for master teachers. The board has an option of raising salaries for cost-of-living increases.
Evaluating principals	All principals are evaluated annually by the superintendent, primarily on building-level data. Conversations cover student achievement, budgets, staffing, accreditation, parent involvement, operational issues and each principal’s own professional growth.	Currently a more traditional evaluation model is used for principals and classified staff. Focus is on job performance and knowledge, reliability, quality of work, etc. A new principal evaluation rubric based on the new state principal standards is being developed.	Principals have at least four observations a year from district office staff; mid-year review on instruction and student data. There is one summative evaluation in the spring. Principal rubric covers leadership, instructional program, staff development, effective management and professional responsibilities.

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION STAGE			
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	BRIGHTON 27J	EAGLE COUNTY	HARRISON TWO
Next steps and outcomes 2011-2012	There will be more focus on refining and expanding the use of student achievement and growth measures. Principals and assistant principals will receive more training in teacher evaluation and coaching. Student achievement has increased, although unevenly.	Eagle will implement its new rigorous curriculum design to promote stronger content delivery, higher level thinking requirements for students and consistency of curriculum across the district. Professional learning for teachers will complement the implementation of the new units of study. Student achievement has increased, as has teacher retention.	A new five-year plan calls for college readiness, ending social promotion at key grades (3, 5, 8, 10), engaging parents and community, and recruiting and training the best and brightest teachers. Student achievement has increased.

What Helped?

- **Trusting relationships.** Good relationships among the district leadership, school board and teachers’ association accelerated and deepened progress.
- **Effective decision-making structures.** Processes like “ends or global” governance, coherent governance and using an “interest-based problem-based approach” provided the structures to make collaborative decisions.
- **Clear roles and responsibilities.** Everyone knew what they were being held accountable for and how they would be evaluated.
- **A master communications plan.** These communicated in targeted ways to all stakeholders. Frequent Q&As were critical, especially for teachers, based on their questions.
- **Getting it right the first time: effective hiring practices.** Districts ensured new hires would be a good fit for the district instructional philosophy and working conditions (especially in the pay-for-performance systems).

- **Additional or a reallocation of existing resources.** Mill levies and TIF grants provided additional resources to design the evaluation system but a reallocation of existing resources sustained these systems.
- **Adoption of a comprehensive, research-based teacher evaluation system.** Models based on strong research had credibility and impact on teachers' instruction.
- **A “top-notch” teacher evaluation tool.** Rubrics that focused heavily on good instructional practice were most effective in improving teachers' instruction.
- **Supportive structures and “tool kits.”** These included a variety of ways to model the evaluation process as well as teachers' goal setting and self-reflection activities.
- **Principals and other leaders as instructional coaches.** Good coaches came from the ranks of the district office and mentor and master teachers.
- **Supportive data systems.** Data systems tracked student achievement as well as teacher evaluation records.
- **Data-informed professional development.** Teacher evaluation scores informed professional learning in small groups, schools and district-wide.
- **A process for continuous improvement and adaptation.** Because no system is perfect, districts had mechanisms for collecting data and making adjustments in the evaluation system, often informed by teacher feedback.

Lessons Learned

- **Create a sense of urgency to raise student achievement.** Include a focus on improving teaching quality through recruitment, retention and professional learning.
- **Be clear about your district's beliefs and core values.** Make sure the educator effectiveness system is congruent with these.
- **Have a clear purpose, design and intended outcomes for developing a teacher effectiveness system.** It forms the basis for helping teachers to improve their instructional skills through professional learning while rewarding and retaining effective teachers.
- **Ensure there is active, visible and unyielding leadership and support for the educator effectiveness system across the system.** Leadership at the very top is critical.

- **Get everyone 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.
- **Engage in transparent, targeted and ongoing communication.** Multiple stakeholders must be involved in the design, implementation and communication of the educator effectiveness plan.
- **Honor and value teachers from the beginning.** Teacher effectiveness should be cast as a system with professional learning opportunities that can help turn good teachers into great teachers – not a “gotcha” system. But consistently ineffective teachers should be dismissed.
- **Create a mechanism for listening, adapting and improving the system.** These systems are paradigm shifts and will be works in progress for several years.
- **Train everyone involved in the roll-out well.** Educator effectiveness systems can create initial fear among teachers which is alleviated as more is known about how it will work.
- **Know how the teacher evaluation system fits into the larger district approach to school improvement.** Teaching and learning can be accelerated when the evaluation aligns with curriculum, assessments and instructional approaches.
- **Create a change management strategy.** Decide how to stage implementation of different aspects of the system. Different districts used different strategies and sequences.
- **Model and encourage collaboration.** Teachers wanted to collaborate more to improve their instruction – not less.
- **Have technical rigor in student achievement measures used in teachers' evaluations, especially in pay-for-performance systems.** Teachers should know how their ratings are calculated.
- **Provide ongoing professional learning based on teacher evaluation results.** Good evaluation rubrics focus on improving instruction based on promising practices.
- **Pay attention to other changes in policies and district practices affected by the teacher effectiveness system.** Board policies and teachers' association contracts were changed to reflect the new system.

- **If it is not good for kids, don't do it!** Don't run the evaluation system around the interests of adults.

Acknowledgements

Central office staff, school board members, principals and teachers participated in interviews. The three districts opened their doors to the 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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