
District Leader's Guide

Preparing Your District to Implement a New Educator Evaluation System



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Implementing Evaluation Systems: Learning from Pioneering Districts

In an effort to help districts implement local educator evaluation systems in line with the requirements of SB191, the Colorado Legacy Foundation is providing a suite of resources to district and school leaders. CLF worked with three Colorado districts who recently revised their evaluation process. Although these districts implemented their new systems prior to the passage of SB191, the process that each district went through is informative. We hope that highlighting these districts and the lessons they learned along the way will help other districts leverage their success and avoid re-living their most difficult challenges.

Three case studies provide the foundation for this work. District and school leaders can read the case studies for examples of how different districts have approached similar goals. A series of District Leader's Guides build on the case studies and provide more direct and specific guidance to district leaders as they move forward with implementation. The case studies and guides can be found on the Colorado Legacy Foundation's website.

Brighton Case Study - Brighton educators and administration agreed that their evaluation system was a “dog and pony show.” In 2009 they revised their system, with terrific buy-in from the union, to more meaningfully support teachers.

Eagle Case Study - Eagle has spent nearly a decade developing their evaluation system and aligning it to instruction, assessment, and professional development.

Harrison Case Study - In 2007, Harrison hired a new superintendent who instituted a new evaluation system along with rigorous instructional supports, interim assessments and a pay-for-performance system.

Who should use this Guide?

This guide has been developed from the lessons learned from Brighton, Eagle and Harrison. District leaders should use it in conjunction with the case studies to prepare the district for a new evaluation system. This guide is developed for district leaders who:

- . Are at the very beginning phase of implementing a new evaluation system aligned to SB191.
- . Have some understanding of the requirements of SB191, but have not begun the process of implementation.
- . Are seeking guidance on how to establish structures for implementing a new evaluation system.
- . Are looking for examples, lessons learned and implementation tips from Colorado school districts.

Overview

While SB 10-191 is unprecedented in Colorado and across the nation, there are promising practices already in place that can directly inform how to implement the statute. The first promising practice is to ready the district for reform. Although full statewide implementation is not required until school year 2014-15, all districts should be preparing for the impending changes now. Leaders in Brighton, Eagle and Harrison recommend the following steps, each of which is discussed in more detail below.

- . Assemble a District Evaluation Team to Oversee System Implementation
- . District Evaluation Team Uses Guiding Questions to Drive their Work
- . District Evaluation Teams Can Learn from Peer Districts

Assemble a District Evaluation Team to Oversee System Implementation

Implementing a new educator evaluation system begins by assembling a local district evaluation team to lead the effort. This team can be composed of district staff, local school board members, teachers, principals and other stakeholders such as parents and community members. According to existing state law, there are already a number of structures and processes in place in schools and districts that may serve this purpose. These include School Ac-

countability Committees (SACs) and District Accountability Committees (DACs). In addition, the pre-existing requirement that each district have a Licensed Personnel Performance Evaluation Council (a “1338 Council”) was re-affirmed by SB191, which charges that council with engaging in a continuous evaluation of the personnel evaluation systems in place in the district.

Once an evaluation team is established, the district leader should ensure that all team members are familiar with Senate Bill 191 and the recommendations of the [State Council for Educator Effectiveness](#). District leaders should highlight the purposes of the evaluation according to SB191:

- . Serve as a basis for the improvement of instruction;
- . Enhance the implementation of programs of curriculum;
- . Serve as a measurement of the professional growth and development of licensed personnel;
- . Evaluate the level of performance based on the effectiveness of licensed personnel; and
- . Provide a basis for making decisions in the areas of hiring, compensation, promotion, assignment, professional development, earning and retaining non-probationary status, dismissal, and non-renewal of contract.

Local district teams can also refer back to the Council's five key priorities in making decisions that meet local needs:

- . Data should inform decisions;
- . Continuous improvement mechanisms should be in place;
- . The system should provide meaningful and credible feedback;
- . Stakeholders should be involved in a collaborative design and implementation process; and
- . The evaluation system should be part of an aligned and supportive system.

Once the team is familiar with the requirements of the new law and its purpose, the team can identify the district's core beliefs and values. Clarity on this point will help ground all discus-

sions in a common purpose. The district's beliefs and values will ultimately guide the goals and purposes of the educator evaluation system. Perhaps most importantly, districts should ensure that the evaluation system will lead to improved teaching and learning. As noted by the authors of "[A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems](#)," "Systems designed exclusively for accountability are much less likely to have an impact on educator practice than those tied to professional learning opportunities and growth."

District Evaluation Team Uses Guiding Questions to Drive their Work

The district evaluation team should consider meeting regularly to coordinate and plan for implementation. For districts that are just starting this process, discussing the following guiding questions is a good starting place for the implementation team. Ideally, these guiding questions will help the district team develop a common language and shared understanding of the district's goals in implementing the evaluation system. Subsequently, members of the team can help their peers district-wide - fellow teachers, principals, district staff, parents and community members - buy in to the process and intended outcomes of the evaluation system.

- . What authority will the design team have to make decisions? What will be their charter?
- . What are the district's core values and beliefs? How should these guide the purposes of the educator effectiveness evaluation system?
- . What is the district's "theory of action" for change and improving student achievement?
- . Besides raising student achievement, are there other "non-negotiables" that should be built into the evaluation system?
- . What student outcomes should the evaluation system serve?
- . What type of impact do stakeholders expect the evaluation system to support (e.g. better teacher retention, improved student achievement (or other outcomes), increased teacher capacity, principals as instructional leaders, etc.)?
- . How will the evaluation results be used to improve teacher and administrator practice?
- . What will be the intended link between results and providing targeted professional learning opportunities?
- . What financial and professional learning resources are available? What can be made available?

- . Will educator evaluation results be used for personnel and compensation decisions? Which decisions? What will this mean for district leadership and support roles? For the district budget?
- . How will progress towards the goals and purposes be assessed? With what measures or indicators?

District Evaluation Teams Can Learn from Peer Districts

Although Brighton, Eagle and Harrison undertook the reform of their evaluation systems prior to the passage of SB191, the process by which they developed the system and rolled it out district-wide yielded many lessons learned and implementation tips. District evaluation teams are encouraged to read the case studies and use the case study highlights, mentioned in the introduction, to further inform their discussions.

The following sections are examples and lessons learned from the three district case studies.

Identifying Core Beliefs and Values Leads to Establishing Evaluation System Goals

Brighton, Eagle and Harrison school districts all operated under a set of core values and beliefs. Each district has a shared philosophy, although in one district the philosophy was fairly well-defined, centralized and high stakes and in another it was more flexible, reflective and decentralized. Approaches were guided by the district context, district philosophy and the research district leaders used to guide the design of their systems. The district's core beliefs and values guided the decisions they made about each component of the evaluation system.

Harrison District Two's Core Beliefs and Values

One of the first actions taken by Mike Miles, Superintendent of Harrison, was putting in place a set of district core beliefs. Miles developed these with input from district staff. Within six weeks they were adopted by the board.

The Core Beliefs are widely understood by all board members, district staff and teachers. These are:

- Our main purpose is to improve student academic achievement.
- Effective instruction makes the most difference in student academic performance.
- There is no excuse for poor quality instruction.
- With our help, at-risk students will achieve at the same rate as non-at-risk students.
- Staff members must have a commitment to children and a commitment to the pursuit of excellence.

Harrison had three main purposes in mind when creating the new evaluation system. These were to:

- Raise student achievement.
- Provide effective signals to teachers to improve the quality of instruction.
- Differentiate teacher evaluations in order to make better decisions in promotion, retention and professional development.

This led to an evaluation system where teachers were observed ten times each year (eight spot observations, one formal and one summative) based on a rubric weighted toward assessing instructional practices. Student achievement measures included CSAP, NWEA MAP tests, curriculum based measures, common assessments and constructed response measures for writing. Teacher evaluation results placed them in one of nine categories or grades in a pay-for-performance system.

Lessons Learned and Implementation Tips

Brighton, Eagle and Harrison shared the following lessons learned on how to prepare the district for implementation of a new system. The importance of the first three led to the development of this guide.

- **Provide active and visible leadership and support for the educator effectiveness system across the district.** There must be widespread, unified and consistent support for the evaluation system across the district.
- **Know your vision and purposes for an educator effectiveness system.** Harrison had three purposes for the evaluation system: 1) raise student achievement, 2) provide effective signals to teachers to improve the quality of instruction; and 3) differentiate teacher evaluations in order to make better decisions on promotion, retention and professional development. The design of and supports for the system flowed from these three purposes. The importance of this lesson led to the development of this guide.
- **Be clear about your district's beliefs, core values and approach.** Ensure the evaluation system is congruent with these. Brighton is very consistent in its use of formative assessments that are aligned to Essential Learning Targets as its approach to teaching and learning. Feedback, coaching and reflection are the basis for continuous improvement – for both students and teachers.
- **Create a sense of urgency.** The Eagle board and community felt they could no longer be complacent in educating the district's children and ignoring a growing achievement gap. Initially, stagnant student achievement scores, some unevenness in teaching quality and the need to attract excellent teachers drove the passage of a 2001 mill levy that included the pay-for-performance plan.
- **Involve all stakeholders in the design of the educator effectiveness evaluation system and listen well.** Everyone needs to be on board. Don't try to go it alone. Eagle didn't do this at first and had to back track several years later and engage more stakeholders. Brighton was adamant that district leaders, teachers' association leaders, building leaders, teachers, and evaluation subcommittee members be involved in the discussions, design and rollout of the teacher evaluation system. This will create buy-in and knowledge of the system for later communication to stakeholders.

. **Honor and value teachers from the beginning.** Teachers should be full partners in identifying the goals of the system and in its design. Teachers have the most to benefit and, perhaps lose, from an evaluation system. They are critical partners in identifying its desired outcomes and design. A teacher effectiveness system can't be seen as a "gotcha" system designed to punish teachers. This puts teachers on the defensive and demoralizes them at the outset. It should be cast as a system with professional learning opportunities that can turn good teachers into great teachers.

. **Use SB-191 and the SCEE recommendations to create**

the best learning environment for kids – and principals, teachers, school board members and central office staff.

Although SB-191 wasn't in effect when Harrison designed their system, they urge other districts to make the most of the legislation by including a strong professional learning component as part of the evaluation system and other school improvement strategies.

. **Look at existing evaluation models.** For example, Eagle County Schools originally adopted the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) and have adapted it over nine years to meet their goals and context.

. **Check the CDE Resource Bank Web site.** Numerous examples and best practices can be found there on an ongoing basis.

Components of an Interest-Based Strategy

Brighton used this strategy to develop their evaluation system:

1. Explain the problem and issues in detail; clarify and analyze. Answers "what?"
2. Identify stakeholders' interests and their motivation to solve the problem. Answers "why?"
3. Brainstorm options and solutions to the problem. Answers "how?"
4. Evaluate the options against interests and standards to identify objective measures of each option's value. Answers "how well?"
5. Seek consensus agreement to support selected options. Answers "will we?"
6. Implement an action plan to solve the problem. Answers "who, what, where and when?"

- **Use an effective decision-making process such as “interest-based decision-making.”** A model that Brighton used is described in the sidebar.

In summary, the starting point for designing an educator effectiveness system is to engage key stakeholders in a formal committee structure to identify the district’s core beliefs and values and the evaluation system’s purposes and goals. Other elements of the evaluation system will flow from this foundational understanding. The evaluation system will need visible and unwavering leadership and should be guided by the recommendations of the SCEE.

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