Shifting Perspectives:
Comprehensive, Integrated Professional Learning for Evaluators

If new performance evaluation systems are going to realize the promise of changing and improving teaching and leading, districts need to consider a new perspective on professional learning for evaluators: comprehensive, job-embedded professional learning that is integrated *across* the evaluation system and offers districts the opportunity to better support district and school leaders in new and challenging roles.

Shifting Roles, New Needs

Across the country, school principals are taking on new roles as discerning evaluators, supportive coaches, and instructional leaders in their schools (Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, & Fetters, 2012; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011). In addition to their usual responsibilities related to "buildings and budgets," many evaluators now need a whole new skillset that will enable them to gather and accurately analyze evidence of effective practice, provide targeted and meaningful feedback to teachers, facilitate individualized professional growth plans, and help teachers make connections among evidence, practice, and student outcomes (for full list of skills, see page 3 sidebar, District Self-Assessment).

As principals try to adapt to these shifting roles, superintendents and other district leaders also find themselves adapting to the new roles of evaluating, coaching, and building leaders while also managing multiple reform initiatives and mandates.

In many districts, these shifting roles and responsibilities among leaders represent a major cultural shift away from a task-oriented paradigm to one of shared, common understanding of high-quality teaching and leading across educator roles, schools, districts, and initiatives. Districts need to pause and reassess how their current approach to professional learning for school and district leaders may need to shift in tandem to best prepare school and district leaders to serve as fair evaluators and effective coaches.

Research states that the quality of the teacher and leader are the two most critical school-based factors in student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). When thoughtfully integrated into evaluation system implementation, comprehensive, job-embedded professional learning for evaluators reinforces and builds a shared and common understanding of high-quality teaching and leading, provides educators with targeted, meaningful feedback, and cultivates the structures for continuous improvement. Without this integration, performance evaluation is likely to remain in the "just one more thing" category for most educators.

AIR®
AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

Professional Learning With a Clear Payoff

Professional learning of any kind is a heavy investment for districts. Most districts invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in workshop-based, one-time professional development every year (Gulamhussein, 2013). However, contrary to what such events can deliver, adults learn best when they self-direct, build new knowledge on preexisting knowledge, and find relevance and personal significance in what they are learning—grounding theoretical knowledge in actual events (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). We know that comprehensive, job-embedded professional learning for teachers produces enduring effects when the learning is matched to the school curriculum, state standards, and assessment of student learning; is compatible with daily school operations; and is framed to address the particular instructional needs of a teacher's given assignment (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

The Payoff

Comprehensive professional learning can...

- Increase teachers' and leaders' **trust in** and **support for** the evaluation system
- Ensure the data collected are **fair**, **defensible**, **accurate**, and **useful**
- Improve the **usefulness** and **accuracy** of scoring and instructional feedback
- Ensure that the right **coaching** and **supports** are offered at the right time
- Prepare and support teachers and leaders to **take the lead** in their own professional growth
- Reinforce educators' capacity to deliver high-quality leadership and instruction

From: http://www.gtlcenter.org/content/professional-learning-modules-0

Of course the same conditions apply to school and district leaders, and ensuring meaningful professional learning is especially critical when it must occur simultaneously with implementation of new systems. Rather than providing typical, single-shot "training" sessions, districts need to invest in integrated professional learning for their principals and district leaders that serves to link the multiple roles they play as evaluators, instructional leaders, and coaches, systematically building skills that have a direct, positive, and lasting influence on teaching and learning across classrooms, schools, and districts. Comprehensive, job-embedded professional learning that is integrated with job responsibilities, school goals, and the realities of being a leader in complex times provides a setting and structure for in-depth, concrete, and hands-on support that builds a culture of ongoing improvement and sustainability. The District-Self Assessment (page 3) provides a snapshot of what a comprehensive set of evaluator skills and knowledge looks like.

What Does It Mean?

Comprehensive professional learning is

| **In-depth** | **Concrete** | **Hands-on** |

In-depth professional learning yields evaluators who have

- **A working knowledge of the instructional or leadership framework and overall evaluation process.** Evaluators not only need to know what is required of them, but be skilled at building their knowledge into conversations and learning communities and use the data from the process to drive adjustments and improvements in real-time practice.
- **An ability to collect, analyze, and score evidence accurately and reliably.** In order to score accurately and reliably, evaluators need to understand their own biases and how to control for the biases when collecting evidence. Evidence should be clear and accurate and include observable and nonobservable evidence, as appropriate.
- **An ability to explain scoring, provide useful feedback, and coach educators.** Through data analysis, reflective language, and probing questions, a skilled evaluator can lead a teacher to accurately self-reflect and coidentify solutions and next steps that are useful to the teacher.

District Self-Assessment

Can your evaluators

- Manage time and technology to efficiently complete the process?
- Identify common sources of bias and strategies for minimizing subjectivity in the evaluation process?
- Understand the educational philosophy and research base of the framework?
- Understand the logic for each performance level and scale in the framework?
- Understand the framework structure and the core performance behaviors included in each dimension?
- Explain scoring rationale at different levels of performance for each component?
- Consistently and accurately score short and long observations across multiple dimensions of practice?
- Demonstrate their skills with a coach or within a professional learning community?
- Continuously learn how to improve on and maintain accuracy of scoring?
- Coach educators and provide feedback for educators at varied levels of performance?
- Analyze nonobservation evidence (e.g., artifact review or student or staff surveys)?
- Understand and analyze student growth data and measures?
- Combine multiple measures through a summative scoring process?
- Guide the creation of professional development plans?

(http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/GTL_AskTeam_HighFidelity.pdf)

Concrete professional learning provides evaluators with artifacts and examples to practice, critique, and understand within the context of their own setting. Examples of concrete professional learning could include

- Nonobservation artifacts
- Videos of classroom instruction
- Videos of conferences between teachers and evaluators
- Sample student and teacher data
- *Any type of evidence that evaluators will be considering*
- Completed evaluation forms

What Is Master Scoring?

Master scoring develops a baseline for evaluators as they learn and build their skills as evaluators. Engaging evaluators in the process fosters shared agreement and buy-in, which are essential to successful implementation of any evaluation system.

Master-scored videos are "videos of teachers engaged in classroom instruction that have been assigned correct scores by people with expertise in both the rubric and teaching practice" (McClellan, 2013, p. 2). More information about this can be found on the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Study website at http://www.metproject.org/.

Hands-on professional learning provides sufficient opportunities for evaluators to practice crucial skills and receive immediate feedback on their work. Evaluators benefit from hands-on activities such as

- Conferring with coaches to compare notes
- Double scoring a common set of artifacts
- Comparing notes to master scoring
- Modeling a postobservation conference followed by practice and video review
- Resolving time-management problems

What Does It Look Like?

Integrated professional learning sequences job-embedded learning into several phases that are carefully aligned and coordinated with your district's implementation timeline. American Institutes for Research (AIR) has developed a phased approach that groups job-embedded learning into four sets of continuous, practical, and timely learning opportunities.

- **Phase 1: Learn about the framework and the system.** Three main components encompass learning about the theory behind a framework's design, its structure and behaviors: the educational philosophy and research base, the purpose and logic for each performance level and scale, and the structure and core performance behaviors in each dimension or component. To contextualize the framework in individual settings, evaluators need an understanding of how its components fit together to serve a common purpose. Contextualizing means providing evaluators the time and permission to think about how the evaluation system fits into their school culture and how it can operate within the processes that already exist.

- **Phase 2: Apply the framework to evidence.** Using the framework in different contexts can increase the fluency and accuracy of evaluators. Providing a variety of ways to explore core practices, differentiate among performance levels, and collectively analyze the appropriateness of practice indicators to situations is critical in facilitating evaluators' fluent articulation of the tool, refined understanding of the practice indicators, and the confidence to have meaningful, robust conversations about teaching and learning. Phase 2 primarily utilizes concrete and hands-on professional learning.

- **Phase 3: Assessing skills and knowledge.** Examining whether evaluators have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary for producing fair and accurate evaluation results is the best way to assess their learning. This phase provides a way to monitor and track evaluator progress and rater-drift over time, identifies areas for support and remediation, and ensures confidence in the rating system. In some cases, evaluators may need to demonstrate a basic level of proficiency or even participate in an annual certification process.

- **Phase 4: Continuous practice.** Sustainability is built through a continuous process of learning and development. Phase 4 ensures that there are multiple opportunities for learning and maintaining reliability over time. Educators have a highly complex responsibility that is ever-changing and evolving. Reformed teacher and leader evaluation systems are designed around that premise and as a result allow and acknowledge the need for regular growth and improvement. Providing evaluators the space and permission to continue to learn and build skills creates the need for structures that support continuous growth and development.

Comprehensive and enhanced educator evaluation systems hold great promise for changing educator practices, but only when integrated with comprehensive, job-embedded professional learning. Districts that adopt this perspective can continuously move toward improvements in the quality of district and school leadership, classroom instruction, and ultimately, outcomes for students.

AIR's Performance Management Advantage builds the systems and expertise needed to sustain and support teachers and principals over the long term. We bring

- Experience working with more than 20 states and districts on designing and implementing educator effectiveness systems
- A systems approach that allows for states and districts to make connections across multiple initiatives in order to enhance professional learning across educator roles
- Ample resources and tools that can accelerate progress and are adaptable to state and local contexts
- Expertise and experience in building capacity and sustainable solutions for states and districts

AIR offers a variety of supports that can be distinct or combined, depending on need. AIR services and supports include

- Implementing teacher and principal evaluation systems, including comprehensive, job-embedded, professional learning for teachers and leaders
- Developing and implementing student growth measures (value-added measures, student learning objectives, or others)
- Virtual or in-person research-based instructional coaching for leaders and teachers
- A library of classroom videos (through a partnership with Empirical Education) for observation and scoring practice: http://www.observationengine.info/
- Evaluating system implementation, including rubric validation
- Engaging stakeholders and communication planning

Contact Information

To learn more about what AIR can support or if you need more information, visit www.educatortalent.org.

References

Some of the content of the paper was adapted from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders Professional Learning Module *Preparing Educators for Evaluation and Feedback*. Visit www.gtlcenter.org for more information.

Behrstock, E., & Clifford, M. (2010). *Ensuring the equitable distribution of teachers: Strategies for school, district, and state leaders.* Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from www.tqsource.org/publications/February2010Brief.pdf

Blank, R. K., & de las Alas, N. (2009). *Effects of teacher professional development on gains in student achievement: How meta-analysis provides scientific evidence useful to education leaders.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking. R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Clifford, M., Behrstock-Sherratt, E., & Fetters, J. (2012). *The ripple effect: A synthesis of research on principal influence to inform performance evaluation design.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Davis, S., Kearney, K., Sanders, N., Thomas, C., & Leon, R. (2011). *The policies and practices of principal evaluation: A review of the literature.* San Francisco: WestEd.

Gulamhussein, A. (2013). *Teaching the teachers: Professional development in an era of high stakes accountability*. Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education. Retrieved from http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teaching-the-Teachers-Effective-Professional-Development-in-an-Era-of-High-Stakes-Accountability/Teaching-the-Teachers-Full-Report.pdf

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980–1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 9*(2), 157–191.

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (5th ed.). Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Leithwood, K., Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning* (*Review of Research*). New York: Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf

McClellan, C. (2013). *What it looks like: Master coding videos for observer training and assessment* (MET Project Policy and Practice Brief). Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Master_Coding_Brief.pdf

Waters, T., Marzano, R., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement.* Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning.

Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad* (Technical Report). Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council. Retrieved from http://www.nsdc.org/news/NSDCstudytechnicalreport2009.pdf