2013-14: Lessons From Educators

Background and Overview

As all New Jersey districts implement AchieveNJ in the 2013-14 school year, educators are sharing feedback about areas of success and challenge. In an ongoing effort to understand implementation from the educator perspective and provide related support, the Department has been working with educators from a variety of districts. These educators have shared insights about their planning, training, and communications as well as approaches to data management and Student Growth Objectives (SGOs). Administrators have also shared some of the early benefits they are seeing from AchieveNJ. As these district examples demonstrate, many educators are doing this work in thoughtful and effective ways. This document shares these educator experiences and advice as a resource for all New Jersey districts and covers the following topics with district examples:

1. High Quality Practice Instruments and Additional Conferences Improve Professional Dialogue
2. Quality Conferences Require Quality Training
3. Teachers Need Support to Acclimate to More Rigorous Observations
4. High Quality Evaluator Training is Critical for Accurate and Fair Observations
5. Creative and Effective Approaches Support Data Management
6. SGOs Are Extensions of an Educator's Work, Not Additions to It
7. Leadership, Communication, and a Commitment to Growth Are Key

1. High Quality Practice Instruments and Additional Conferences Improve Professional Dialogue

Districts across New Jersey report that the adoption of a high-quality teacher practice instrument and the increase in teacher observations has resulted in a shift in professional dialogue about teaching and learning. According to Mike Gorman, superintendent of Pemberton School District, AchieveNJ has "forced the conversation of instruction." This focus has been bolstered by an increased number of pre- and post-observation conferences. Prior to AchieveNJ, a tenured teacher might meet only once with an administrator during the year – or not at all. Now, the minimum number of conferences is four, but many educators experience several more. This provides "more opportunity for teachers to engage their principal throughout the year," according to Joe Jones, Superintendent of Woodbury Public Schools.

2. Quality Conferences Require Quality Training

Districts have taken advantage of more conference time by improving the quality of the conference experience for educators. Administrators at Montgomery High School refer to the book Learning-focused Supervision[1] as they develop their conferencing skills. According to Corie Gaylord, Assistant Principal of Montgomery High School, "Administrators role-played with each other prior to conducting conferences with teachers." Gaylord also stresses that during conferences, administrators seek to provide a safe environment in which teachers are encouraged to freely provide self-reflection.

Administrators at Teaneck Public Schools maximize the value of conferences by ensuring all participants have a shared body of knowledge to draw upon during the conversation. Teaneck requires its non-tenured staff to attend monthly "Foundation Training" sessions where they learn about teaching strategies and resources aligned to their practice instrument that can help them improve their teaching (see Appendix A). According to Vincent McHale, Teaneck's Assistant Superintendent in charge of evaluation, "During post-observation conferences the teacher and evaluator are able to call on a shared body of understanding and resources that helps them develop a concrete and productive plan of action to improve areas of weakness." McHale also notes that AchieveNJ has promoted a resurgence of interest in these resources from more experienced teachers. He notes, "These staff members realize using these resources effectively can help their teaching practice."

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[1] **Learning-focused Supervision**: Developing Professional Expertise in Standards-Driven Systems by Laura Lipton, Ed.D and Bruce Wellman, M.Ed

3. Teachers Need Support to Acclimate to More Rigorous Observations

Although many district leaders are making efforts to support their teaching staff through high quality conferences, the switch to a more differentiated rating system is a sensitive issue. Many teachers accustomed to evaluations where they were rated satisfactory or unsatisfactory (almost always satisfactory) have struggled to come to terms with a 1 - 4 rating system. Leaders in Roselle Public Schools have attempted to help teachers through this transition. As a start, to support Roselle's protocol to use multiple-observers for every teacher, administrators set up office hours at the beginning of the year "so teachers could meet district level principals and supervisors who may be unfamiliar to certain teachers and new to observe in a particular building or content area," says Dana Walker, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and

> **Observation Best Practices:**
> **Roselle Public Schools**
> - Use multiple observers for every teacher.
> - Provide a meet and greet time for teachers and observers.
> - Make the observation schedule public.
> - Conduct more long observations than required.

Instruction. Walker took the lead by emailing the full staff to make the observation schedule and required evaluators to have a "meet and greet" with teachers. This introductory meeting was proposed so that the first time teachers saw a new evaluator was not "when he or she is standing in your door with a laptop," Walker says. In addition to multiple observers for all teachers, Roselle also chose to require two, rather than one long observation for non-tenured teachers in years three and four and at least one long observation for tenured teachers. These practices exceed the state's minimum requirements and move Roselle from "compliance to all-around best-practices" according to Walker.

4. High Quality Evaluator Training is Critical for Accurate and Fair Observations

To ensure all their administrators are on the same page during the observation process, evaluator training and rater reliability has been a high priority for many districts. Clifton Public Schools, one of the largest districts in New Jersey, spent about 10 days training administrators prior to conducting observations and had five follow-up sessions throughout 2013-14. Administrators observed that this commitment to training not only helped observers develop a similar voice and message about best practices, but it was also important for creating teacher buy-in. Teachers appreciated the time and energy they saw their leaders devoting to the training process.

Administrator Training in Clifton Public Schools	
Topic	**Time**
Data Platform Training with Consultant	3 half days released
Data Platform Online Training	8 half days released
Learn Instrument Components and Observation Basics	3 full days released
District Calibration PLCs	5 sessions in 2013-14

Roselle Public Schools made a similar investment in training early on and like Clifton, continue to improve rater reliability. During the first year of full implementation, after round one observations Walker conducted an activity with the administrative team to compare expected teacher scores to actual scores. In general, administrators found that they were giving higher scores than were warranted by their overall experiences in classrooms with teachers. This led the team to a valuable conversation about score inflation. Walker explains it this way, "We want to make sure that we are being clear and that our expectations materialize in what we write and how we rate instruction." She goes on to say, "You don't want to give the message that you are lowering grades. That is not the goal. The objective is to improve teacher quality for student success."

Like Roselle, Montgomery High School (MHS) has developed a strategy to ensure that observations are conducted accurately and fairly by administrators. Thorough training on the practice instrument set the stage for conducting high quality observations in 2013-14. Reinforcing these efforts, building administrators continued to compare their observation results frequently at regular meetings to ensure

a continued shared understanding. The results of this work are telling. According to MHS Assistant Principal Corie Gaylord, "The variation in average observation score across our ten administrators who conducted roughly 240 observations was about 0.4 points."

5. Creative and Effective Approaches Support Data Management

While many districts have chosen to purchase data management systems from private companies, others have taken a different approach. Rich Panicucci, Bergen County Technical Schools' Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, considered having control of data systems an important aspect of streamlining AchieveNJ implementation. "Bergen made a moderate time investment upfront to create their own system (see Appendix B for screenshots). Panicucci and his evaluators have been very happy with the system they have created. Panicucci says, "Once we designed the interface, screens and links in PowerPoint, Ed Hayward, our Coordinator of Technology provided the programming support needed to develop the program. This process took a few weeks. I think it was a great example of technology supporting instruction." Panicucci reports that once the system was created, everything went fairly smoothly, "After the initial training – about 45 minutes – it wasn't hard for people to use." Panicucci and his team continue to make tweaks and add functionality and have plans to further develop the web-based version of the program and look into the other types of useful reports.

> **Some Functions of Bergen County Technical Schools' Homegrown Data Platform**
> - Allows evidence collection during observations
> - Produces teacher observation reports
> - Tracks progress and allows scoring of SGOs
> - Generates summative evaluation reports
> - Flags teachers scoring particularly high or low in a particular domain
> - Produces data reports at district, school, observer, & teacher levels
> - Emails administrators seven days before end of observation cycle
> - Allows sharing of district-wide observation scores with administrators for rater reliability training

Montgomery Township School District has employed another type of homegrown approach, where observers collect evidence on a digital worksheet and add timestamps and component numbers manually. They then transfer this information to a template to generate the observation report (Appendix C). Even though this system may not have the sophistication of an off-the-shelf platform, administrators have not had any technical issues to deal with. Additionally, administrators find they take no more time producing observation reports than evaluators using various purchased data management systems.

6. SGOs Are Extensions of an Educator's Work, Not Additions to It

Understandably, as teachers and administrators grapple with the technical aspects of the implementation of SGOs, there has been a strong focus on *completion* in 2013-14 and less focus on quality. In an effort to simplify the process, many districts have mandated that teachers use a pre-assessment/post-assessment model for SGOs. However, educators are beginning to see the shortcomings of this approach. For example, teachers have realized that in many cases using pre-assessments alone for SGOs provided little useful information about their students' starting points, increasing the testing burden on students and teachers while providing little added educational value. Fortunately, districts are looking beyond the pre-/post- model as they plan for next year and considering a combination of readily available measures of prior student learning such as test scores from previous years, grades to date, and test scores from the current year. Michael Wilson, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning in, is looking to explore some of these options and move beyond just pre-assessments in 2014-15. "We will be looking at alternatives at our next DEAC meeting," he says.

Through SGOs, educators are thinking more than ever about assessments in their classrooms. For some districts, this complements ongoing work. Carolyn Keck, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction at Piscataway Public Schools, says, "The SGO process fits well with our established trajectory for implementing common assessments." Piscataway uses the term *learning targets* to describe the content of their benchmark assessments. Teachers understand that they are responsible for ensuring their students successfully meet these "learning targets" at the end of a given period. "The teachers take the test themselves in order to better understand the process a student needs to go through to be successful," says Keck. Piscataway teachers analyze data from the assessments on a regular basis to determine the effectiveness of assessment items, the test as a whole, and the curriculum being taught. Teams then make modifications as necessary to continue to build quality into the assessments. This approach enables Piscataway to align curriculum, teaching, assessment, and SGOs into a coherent process.

> **SGO Best Practices**
> - Multiple measures of prior learning for SGO purposes include information typically available to teachers such as grades to date and recent test scores.
> - District-developed common assessments aligned to critical content and skill standards can be used for SGO purposes.
> - SGOs are a point of convergence of standards, curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

A similar effort is underway in the Haddon Township School District, where administrators are helping teachers see how their work on SGOs in AchieveNJ and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are closely related. "There was a need to connect the work being done on Common Core and SGOs so as not to duplicate time and effort," says Liz Mennig, Haddon's Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Adopting a systematic approach to district-wide PD, Haddon first asked its math and science teachers to distill what students must know and be able to do to be prepared for college and career. Using this shared understanding, departmental teams then created benchmark assessments aligned to CCSS. Teachers at Haddon use these assessments for their SGOs, thereby creating consistency and efficiency in the process. Using a thoughtful and realistic approach, Haddon's long term goal is to create a bank of four assessments for every grade level and in each subject area in the next two years.

7. Leadership, Communication, and a Commitment to Growth are Key

Districts report the need for clear communication about evaluation and its connection to district priorities. Under the leadership of Superintendent Russell Lazovick, Nutley Public Schools has developed a district-wide vision for evaluation that encourages educators to see the inherent value in the requirements. Lazovick says, "If you do the things AchieveNJ asks you to, you're actually applying best practices." Using principled leadership and strategic thinking, and by building inclusive and transparent teams, Lazovick assuages some of the trepidation teachers have felt during the first year. On all evaluation documents and with frequent verbal reminders, Lazovick communicates his vision, "We believe that the goals of our evaluation system are growth, learning, and accountability. *In this order.*" (See Appendix D.)

> **Purpose of AchieveNJ in Nutley Public Schools**
> "We believe that the goals of our evaluation system are growth, learning, and accountability. *In this order.*"
> ~Russell Lazovick, Superintendent

Nutley's integrated committee work is another example of a commitment to communication. Lazovick leads Nutley's District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC), which includes representatives of both local administrators' and teachers' associations, an important factor in maintaining open lines of communication with educators. The DEAC focuses on the processes of AchieveNJ while the Local Professional Development Committee (LPDC), under the leadership of Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Gina Villani, deals with the practical aspects of implementation such as providing PD in response to data collected by School Improvement Panels (ScIPs) in each of Nutley's seven schools.

Clearly defined structures and roles help staff at Nutley understand information channels. Monmouth County Vocational and Technical School, under the leadership of Principal Linda Eno, has made these channels explicit by creating a chart showing information flow (see Appendix E). This chart provides insight into how information from faculty and administrators flows towards and from the DEAC through DEAC representatives. In addition, Eno and the DEAC take advantage of state guidance for DEACs such as the DEAC Guidance EPAC Report Excerpt and information found on the AchieveNJ DEAC webpage.

> **Some Best Practices for DEACs**
> - Include representatives from associations and ScIPs.
> - Clarify the relationship between DEAC and other district structures.
> - Clearly define communication channels to and from the DEAC.
> - Seek information and respond proactively and transparently.

Haddonfield Public Schools further strengthens communication between district leadership and schools by having representatives from ScIPs serve on the DEAC. In addition, going above and beyond the requirements for a DEAC, Haddonfield's DEAC has created three growth goals for itself – goals it terms DEAC Growth Objectives, or "DGOs." For example, the DGO "Eighty percent of the professional staff will indicate that they are satisfied or highly satisfied with their understanding of and their progress in developing SGOs" was developed in response to survey results indicating that teachers felt unsatisfied with their understanding of SGOs (see Appendix F)." Through DGOs, the DEAC not only models effective goal setting but demonstrates to the district that leaders are listening to educators and responding appropriately.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This document offers only a snapshot of the good work going on around New Jersey in educator evaluation and support and the Department is committed to continuing to study the rollout of AchieveNJ this year and beyond. However, when considering these examples, it is clear that districts have found collaboration, transparency, and the inclusion of educator input crucial for the implementation of new evaluation systems. Of particular note is the intent with which these educational leaders have approached AchieveNJ. Rather than being limited by a mindset of simple compliance, they have embraced the system as a powerful vehicle for growth. Haddonfield's Assistant Superintendent Michael Wilson affirms this as he talks about the sense of purpose their DEAC brings to the work, "We are not doing this because we have to; we are doing this because the kids deserve it."

Acknowledgments

The Department is grateful to all the educators working hard to implement AchieveNJ in effective and thoughtful ways. In particular, we thank the following school districts for their time and support in creating this document: Bergen County Technical Schools, Clifton Public Schools, Haddon Township School District, Haddonfield Public Schools, Monmouth County Vocational and Technical School, Montgomery Township School District, Nutley Public Schools, Pemberton School District, Piscataway Public Schools, Roselle Public Schools, Teaneck Public Schools, and Woodbury Public Schools.

Foundation Training

Teaneck is proud to provide Foundation Training to all non-tenured teachers. This training is a critical component of the Teaneck Public Schools Instructional Model. The goal of Foundation Training is to ensure "that each may learn" by providing high levels of learning for all students through quality teaching in all classrooms.

The Foundation Training supports the following assumptions set forth by the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act (TEACHNJ):

- Quality teaching makes a difference in student learning.
- Teachers and administrators can improve their practice through professional learning.
- The professional learning of teachers is a central factor in determining the quality of teaching.
- The professional learning of principals is a central factor in determining the quality of their instructional leadership.
- District structures and culture that surround the school play a critical role in determining the quality of professional development experienced by teachers and administrators.

During the first year of Teaneck's Foundation Training program, teachers are immersed in the learning styles model. They learn tools for effectively delivering instruction that fosters authentic learning. As teachers begin to embrace and internalize this dynamic perspective, they become more cognizant of individual learning styles, lesson design, student achievement and teaching methodologies.

The monthly training workshops are designed to empower teachers to become more thoughtful and purposeful educators. Using the resource, *Tools for Promoting Active, In-Depth Learning* (Silver, Strong, Perini), teachers are exposed to a wide variety of teaching tools that foster higher levels of critical thinking and deeper understanding in their students. Teachers are required to integrate these new approaches in their daily practice, document the experience and reflect upon the outcomes. The written reflections are preserved in a portfolio that will grow over the three year training process. A rubric is utilized to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of the instructional tool. During the first year there is also a focus on collaborative teaching methodologies. In order to best support all learners, including students with special needs, we provide all first year teachers with effective, research-based methods of co-teaching.

During the second year of the Foundation Training program, teachers learn many instructional strategies in an effort to deliver instruction that is meaningful, thoughtful, and self-reflective. The learning strategies may include Task Rotation, Questioning in Style, Compare & Contrast, New American Lecture, Inductive Learning, and Concept Attainment, among others. After learning these strategies, teachers create and implement a lesson plan using a strategy. Follow-up meetings allow the teachers to explain their lesson plans, share student work, and self-reflect on the lessons. The reflection process helps to improve teachers' understanding of how best to use the learning strategies with students. Second year teachers also create a performance-assessment project with an accompanying rubric for use with students.

During the third year of the Foundation Training program, teachers work on creating mini-unit plans that utilize Wiggins & McTighe's Understanding by Design model. Teachers practice how to effectively utilize data to inform instruction and create specific learning objectives focused on the critical skills students must master. Teachers create lesson plan maps and are required to use *tools* and *strategies* learned in the first and second years of Foundation Training to engage learners and differentiate instruction. Teachers deliver the mini-unit plan and upon completion students complete a summative assessment. Third year teachers gather student

work and create a class data chart to determine growth and mastery of skills related to the standards. They reflect on the process of creating and implementing a unit plan and their students' mastery of skills.

At the end of each year there is a Foundation Training Fair. This is the time that non-tenured teachers have the opportunity to present what they have learned to invited guests, who may include teacher colleagues, administrators, Teaneck Board of Education trustees and personal friends. It is a wonderful celebration of learning and teaching!

The Foundation Training program will add a fourth year component in the 2014-2015 school year, since TEACHNJ now requires a four year path to tenure. While technology integration into instruction is woven throughout the Foundation Training program, the fourth year will focus specifically on best practices for aligning technology tools with content and instruction so that student learning is improved.

This "Home" screen in the observation process allows the observer to input key info. Some info (i.e. school, tenure status, etc.) is auto populated.

This "Evidence" screen allows the observer to gather classroom evidence and assign to relevant components

This screen manages the SGO approval process. Once scored here, that performance level is auto-calculated into the "Summative/PDP" mode

Once all of the SGO info is submitted, these buttons produce auto-populated forms to be signed

Once all observations are completed, the Summative mode can be used to input overall domain level scores

NUMBER OR TIME STAMP	EVIDENCE	COMPONENT
Ctrl, Shift :		

Teacher: School: Class: Time/Period: Date of Observation:
Observer: Post-Conference Date:

Component	Evidence	Level
2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	•	
2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning	•	
2c: Managing Classroom Procedures	•	
2d: Managing Student Behavior	•	
2e: Organizing Physical Space	•	
3a: Communicating With Students	•	
3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	•	

3c: Engaging Students in Learning	•	
3d: Using Assessment in Instruction	•	
3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	•	

_____

Administrator's Signature   **Date**

_____

Teacher's Signature   **Date**

(The teacher's signature indicates that the observation document has been read by the teacher and reviewed with the observer.)

Comments by the teacher may be attached on a separate sheet within 10 working days of the post-conference. _Please check if you have attached comments:_ ☐

Nutley Public Schools
District Evaluation Advisory Committee
Board Office Conference Room
May 21, 2013 3:30 PM

Purpose of District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC)

In the Nutley Public Schools, we value: challenges that foster curiosity, growth, and confidence; integrity in person, action, and process; safe, inspirational communities; respectful, supportive, resourceful, and independent citizens; persistent, collaborative, open communicators.

It is our mission to challenge, inspire, and empower students to become creative, confident, passionate, self-directed citizens who actively and purposefully contribute in our global society.

We work to become a sustainable, integrated, efficient, and innovative school district that serves as the unifying and driving force in the community's effort to affect measurable growth as students develop into confident, responsible, productive, self-directed citizens who pursue excellence through personal, research-based, rigorous learning toward district established standards that fosters an on-going pursuit of excellence.

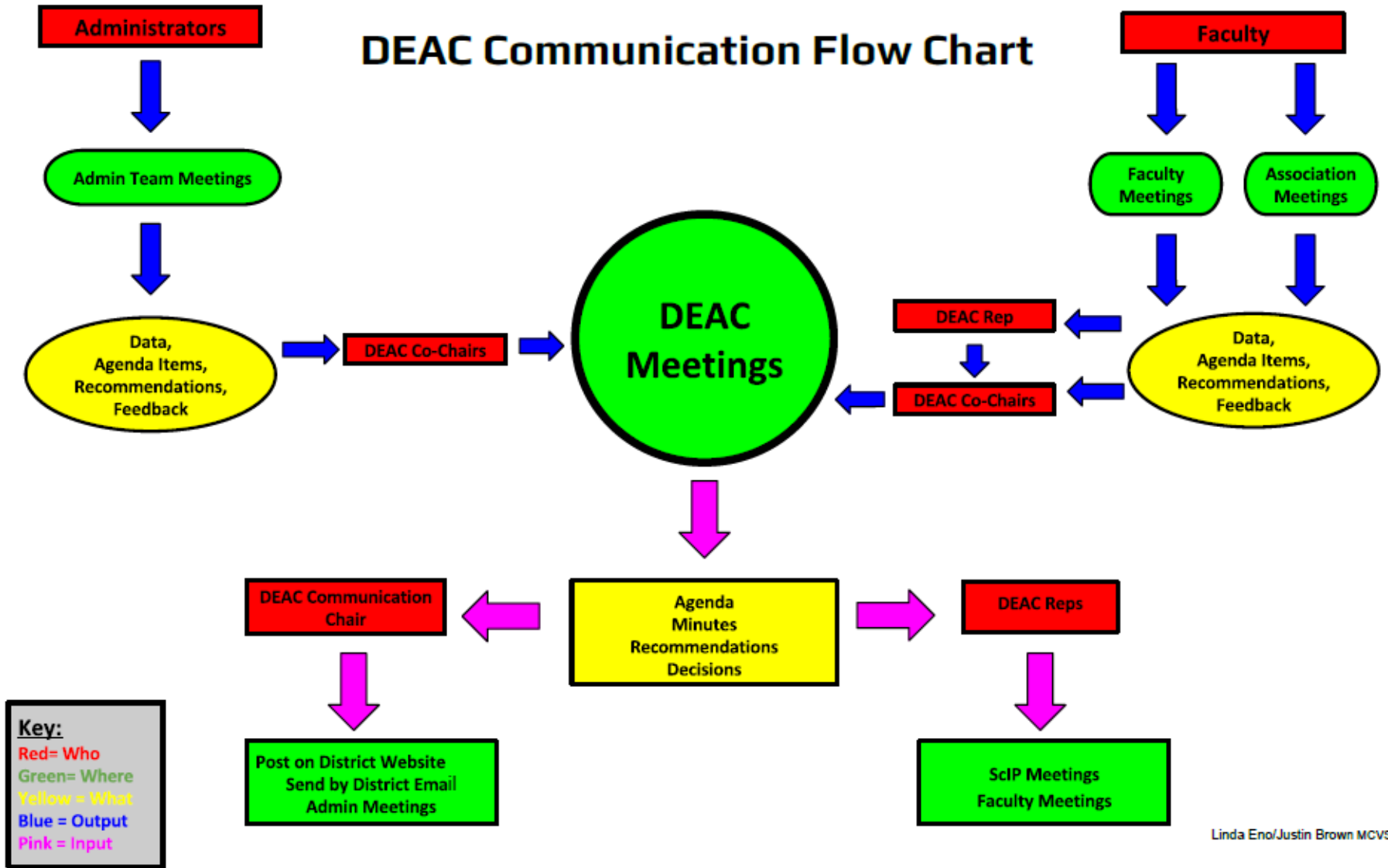The DEAC is committed to ensuring that our work on evaluations is in line with our strategic plan.
We believe that the goals of our evaluation system are:
1. Growth
2. Learning
3. Accountability
In this order.

We believe that our district can achieve our strategic plan, these goals, and full compliance with AchieveNJ.

Appendix E: Monmouth County Vocational School District DEAC Communications Flow Chart

DEAC Communication Flow Chart

Administrators → Admin Team Meetings → Data, Agenda Items, Recommendations, Feedback → DEAC Co-Chairs → **DEAC Meetings**

Faculty → Faculty Meetings / Association Meetings → Data, Agenda Items, Recommendations, Feedback → DEAC Rep → DEAC Co-Chairs → **DEAC Meetings**

DEAC Meetings → Agenda, Minutes, Recommendations, Decisions

Agenda, Minutes, Recommendations, Decisions → DEAC Communication Chair → Post on District Website, Send by District Email, Admin Meetings

Agenda, Minutes, Recommendations, Decisions → DEAC Reps → ScIP Meetings, Faculty Meetings

Key:
Red= Who
Green= Where
Yellow = What
Blue = Output
Pink = Input

Linda Eno/Justin Brown MCVSD

Appendix F: Haddonfield School District DEAC Growth Objective (November 2013)

Rationale for DEAC Growth Objective
DEAC noted that high levels of dissatisfaction with regard to SGOs as reflected in question 6 of our survey (see question below). Nearly sixty percent of those surveyed indicated that they were not satisfied with their understanding of or their progress in developing SGOs. These concerns were also specified in the open ended responses in which six of the twenty-nine responses noted SGOs as an issue.

DEAC Growth Objective
Eighty percent (80%) of the professional staff will indicate that they are satisfied or highly satisfied with their understanding of and their progress in developing SGO's as measured by their response to question 6 on our end of year survey.

Baseline Data
Forty percent (41%) of the respondents to **question 6, "To what extent are you satisfied with your understanding of and your progress in developing an SGO to date?"** indicated that they were satisfied (35.34%) or highly satisfied (5.17%).

Scoring Plan

Objective Attainment Level Based on Percent of Survey Responses Satisfied, or Highly Satisfied				
Target Score	Unsatisfactory (1)	Basic (2)	Proficient (3)	Distinguished (4)
80% of responses satisfied or highly satisfied	49% and below satisfied or highly satisfied	50%-79% satisfied or highly satisfied	80%-89% satisfied or highly satisfied	90% and above satisfied or highly satisfied

Action Plan
❖ Additional training on SGOs at faculty meetings, grade level meetings and department meetings. ❖ More exemplars from both inside and outside the district. ❖ Exemplars reflecting the rigor and quality indicated by district principals. ❖ Consistency of expectations from one administrator to another. ❖ Additional time as needed to explore SGOs before February 15th deadline. ❖ Use the early dismissal on May 2nd to provide time for teachers to evaluate and score SGOs.

Results of DEAC Growth Objective
Score _____ Date _____