Reflective Practice Investigation
Lessons Learned and Implementation Suggestions

Purpose and Process

The Reflective Practice Investigation (RPI) pilot explored the process of providing Highly Effective teachers with a more in-depth opportunity to reflect on their instructional practices as part of their evaluation process.

Each participating teacher gathered information about his or her teaching over a pre-determined period of time during the school year. The information gathered was related to four components: video of the teacher in practice, student feedback, student assessment data and traditional observations. The teacher had a reflective conversation with a supervisor, where the teacher's ability to reflect on these four components to inform future improvement in practice was then evaluated. The reflective conversation took the place of one announced classroom observation.

Research Background[1]

Throughout the RPI pilot, REL Mid-Atlantic interviewed participants (singly and in focus groups) and assisted with the development and analysis of a survey to support the Department of Education (NJDOE) in understanding participants' feedback. Below is a summary of REL's **research findings and challenges on launching this initiative**, as well as the Department of Education's **suggestions for implementation** based on these findings[2].

Launch of the Pilot

➢ **Research Findings**

- Teachers who had earned a Highly Effective rating on their last summative evaluation were well-suited for the autonomy of self-reflection to inform future improvement in practice as part of their evaluation process.
- Pilot participants appreciated introductory sessions and training designed to help them understand the process and make decisions regarding implementation. In fact, many felt that more time dedicated to orientation and training would have been helpful.

➢ **Challenges**

- Participants wanted to collaborate with teachers outside of those selected to participate in the pilot but were unable to since, in many cases, teachers with a lower than Highly Effective rating were not invited to participate. Additionally, participants felt that teachers with a less than Highly Effective rating would benefit from participation.

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[1] REL Mid-Atlantic worked alongside NJDOE to document the self-evaluation process during the pilot and identify facilitators and roadblocks in the process. This summary provides highlights from the larger document.

[2] Researchers specifically focused on the areas of video and student feedback since, prior to this pilot, student assessment data and traditional observations were required components of the New Jersey evaluation system.

> **Suggestion for Implementation**
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> Districts should consider opening participation to a broader range of teachers. Even though the Reflective Conference option replaces one observation for only Highly Effective teachers at this time, districts may find it helpful to the school's culture and climate to offer participation to all teachers so that every teacher has the opportunity to participate in this type of reflective practice. Additionally, introductory sessions and training will help all participants to understand and get the greatest benefit out of this process.

Video Capture

- ➢ **Research Findings**
  - Participants found it helpful to use the video equipment prior to any targeted lessons for reflection in order to acclimate students to having video set up within the room.
  - Access to technology experts was helpful to participants who experienced difficulty using the technology.
- ➢ **Challenges**
  - Some participants experienced technology challenges (e.g., difficulty downloading, recording), but there were fewer than anticipated.
  - Teachers admitted to feeling self-conscious about seeing themselves on video.
  - When teachers did not choose to share the video recordings, there were limited opportunities for peer or supervisor input.

> **Suggestion for Implementation**
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> Districts should facilitate ongoing technology training and support to mitigate common roadblocks (e.g., difficulty downloading recording). Teachers should be encouraged to take video as often as they'd like and to view themselves on video frequently if needed. This may help teachers feel more comfortable with seeing themselves on video. Supervisors should encourage teachers to share videos with peers, or if comfortable, their supervisors, so they have the opportunity to share best practices, get more specific and useful feedback, and learn from each other.

Student Feedback

- ➢ **Research Findings**
  - When available, participants appreciated support from survey experts on framing survey questions and analyzing results.
- ➢ **Challenges**
  - Participants had a limited understanding of the goals and/or nature of collecting and integrating student feedback.
  - Some participants were concerned about whether student feedback would be considered in their overall evaluation.

- Participants needed to brainstorm developmentally appropriate methods of gathering student survey data for younger students. For example, some districts chose to hold small focus groups for younger students.

> **Suggestion for Implementation**
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> From the start, districts should ensure that participants understand the importance and purpose of gathering and incorporating student feedback. Supervisors should provide coaching and support in developing high-quality and appropriate questions to gather student feedback, and share effective ways to incorporate student feedback into instruction. Districts should work to establish a database of exemplars of student feedback.

Reflective Conversations

➢ **Research Findings**
- Supervisors and participants praised the authentic, collaborative conversations directed at improving instruction.
- Participants felt that they had moved beyond compliance and more toward ownership in terms of their instructional practices and subsequent evaluation process.
- The relationship between the supervisor and teacher played an important role in the openness and candor of the teacher's reflection.
- Using a video review tool and materials/artifacts helped promote a productive reflective conversation.

➢ **Challenges**
- A mismatch between the supervisor's expertise and the teacher's grade or subject area led to challenges in providing feedback and suggestions to the intricacies of curriculum or instructional roadblocks.
- Supervisors were not required to view the videos, so in these cases, supervisors could not comment directly on instructional practices during the Reflective Conference.

> **Suggestion for Implementation**
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> Districts should establish protocols for reflective conferences and provide training to supervisors and teachers regarding effective reflective conferencing.

Conclusion

In closing, the majority of participants felt that the studied method of evaluation was valid and accurate with 96% of participants agreeing that the process was fair. Participants felt that the video and reflective conversation provided a fuller picture of their instructional practices. Both teachers and supervisors were in agreement that the pilot processes drove teachers to think more deeply about how they could grow and improve their instruction.