



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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March 11, 2014

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
School Leaders

ROUTE TO: All district principals, assistant/vice principals, and teaching staff members

FROM: Peter Shulman, Acting Commissioner *PS*

SUBJECT: AchieveNJ Update

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In an ongoing effort to support implementation of AchieveNJ, the Department of Education (“the Department”) continues to develop guidance and resources about educator evaluation. Please share this information directly with all educators in your district. As always, we encourage you to visit the [AchieveNJ Website](#) and [FAQ page](#) and to send any questions and feedback to educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us.

I. New Resources

A. Guidance on Evaluating Educators with Extended Absences

The Department recently published guidance on the evaluation of teachers with extended leaves or absences in 2013-14. This guidance applies to teachers on family leave, those hired part-way through a school year, long-term substitutes, and others. You can access the guidance [here](#).

B. Finishing Strong: Preparing for School Year End

As we approach the end of the first year of AchieveNJ, there are several important actions that districts can take to support successful completion of evaluations. Please view our new document, [Finishing Strong](#), which was produced with significant input from the [AchieveNJ Advisory Committee](#) to provide guidance and recommendations for district consideration.

C. Data Collection for Evaluation Leadership Instrument

To facilitate the collection of evidence for the Evaluation Leadership component of principal evaluation, the Department has produced an optional spreadsheet that principal evaluators can use to collect evidence and score one or more principals. This tool can be accessed [here](#).

D. Summary Conference and Scoring Resources

As you know, districts must hold annual summary conferences for all teachers before the end of the school year. To assist supervisors in making the most of these conferences, the Department is providing an optional form. The form contains sections to record evaluation component scores and an overall rating, as well as a list of suggested topics to guide the conversation. This form can be used in digital or paper form and comes in two versions, one for teachers who will receive median Student Growth Percentile (mSGP) scores and one for those who will not:

- [Optional mSGP Teacher Summary Conference Form](#)
 - Please note that mSGP scores and final summative ratings for teachers receiving mSGPs will be provided by the Department in January 2015. Therefore, these teachers should discuss the other components of evaluation at the summary conference but will not have the mSGP or final evaluation score at that time.
- [Optional non-mSGP Teacher Summary Conference Form](#)

Districts should also ensure they have the proper documentation for each required observation in the teacher's personnel file by the time of the summary conference – including observer and teacher signatures. Districts using electronic records for observation reports might consider keeping one “signature page” in the teacher's file, listing the sign-off's after each observation. A number of districts have adopted this approach, which they have found to be very efficient.

Finally, we have launched a simple [“Calculate Your Rating”](#) tool that lets teachers determine a summative rating based on potential practice and student growth scores. Official summative ratings are calculated by an educator's district/the Department, but this tool can help educators get a sense of how the various components of an evaluation can affect a summative score.

E. Summary of Legal Requirements for Evaluation and Tenure Cases

In an effort to provide district educators with a comprehensive, streamlined guide to all the required steps before filing an inefficiency tenure charge under the TEACHNJ Act, the Department has posted a new resource. The document describes the legal requirements that must be followed for a teacher's evaluation, the steps for filing an inefficiency charge, and the streamlined tenure revocation process. We hope district leaders will use this guide to ensure all of the appropriate supports and opportunities to improve are provided to teachers before any inefficiency tenure charge is filed. In the event that an inefficiency charge is appropriate and necessary, we hope leaders can use this resource as a reference guide for that process as well. The guide can be accessed [here](#).

II. 2014-15 Evaluation Rubric Reminders

A. Process and Timeline

According to the TEACHNJ Act, districts are required to submit their evaluation rubrics for Commissioner approval by June 1st each year. In the coming weeks, the Department will provide specific instructions to district leaders for completing a survey to fulfill this requirement for 2014-15.

Two major components of these rubrics are the teacher practice and principal practice instruments (also referred to as observation instruments, i.e., Danielson, Marzano, McREL). Districts may continue to use the instruments in place for the 2013-14 school year, may select other [state-approved instruments](#), or may submit new or modified instruments for state approval for use in 2014-15. All districts will indicate their instrument choice (even if keeping the same instrument) in the survey referenced above. Please see the section below for new instrument submission procedures.

B. New Request for Qualifications for Educator Practice Instruments

In the past two years, we have conducted several rounds of the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process to allow providers and districts the opportunity to submit practice instruments and required evidence and assurances for state review. We recognize that new and modified instruments continue to emerge and that districts may wish to change their selected instruments for the 2014-15 school year. Therefore, the next round of the RFQ process will occur as follows:

- March 14, 2014: Updated [RFQ application available on AchieveNJ website](#)
- March 14, 2014 - April 4, 2014: Providers and districts submit instruments and information
- April 4, 2014 - April 15, 2014: Department reviews submissions
- April 15, 2014: Approved districts and providers notified; updated lists posted on website
- June 1 2014: Districts report selected instruments as part of evaluation rubric submission

Please note that the approved instrument list only includes instruments that have met the *technical requirements* for use in New Jersey. Any district that will be purchasing instruments is required to follow public bidding laws and regulations in acquiring an evaluation instrument and should consult with their Business Administrator (BA) for guidance. If the BA needs additional support, he or she should contact the appropriate county office of education. Instruments on the approved list *do not* have contracts with the state, necessitating that districts develop their own contracts; please refer to our [FAQ on public bidding](#) for more information. Additionally, local districts must ensure that they have the supports in place to meet the implementation requirements of the evaluation instrument, such as teacher and administrator training.

The entire RFQ process for teacher and principal practice evaluation instruments is detailed on our website at: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/resources/rfq.shtml>.

III. Announcements

A. Final Report on Teacher Evaluation Pilot from Rutgers University

On March 7, 2014, the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education (RUGSE) released their [final report](#) on the Department's two-year 2011-13 teacher evaluation pilot. This report is based on RUGSE's study of the pilot as an external evaluator and echoes several of the findings reported in the [Final Evaluation Pilot Advisory Committee \(EPAC\) Report](#) published last fall. Key findings include the following:

- Districts that joined the pilot in the second year (2012-13) districts found implementation easier and less time-consuming overall.
- In pilot year two, districts transitioned to focus training on professional growth based on the observation instrument, rather than just the mechanics of implementation.
- Although this report conveys initial concerns of pilot participants about completing all required observations, all districts did in fact complete a large number of observations during piloting, as documented in the Final EPAC Report. Further, AchieveNJ requires fewer observations than those mandated for the pilot.
- Certain districts noted that their success in completing observations was due to using a carefully constructed and monitored observation schedule. The Department has shared a sample schedule in the Final EPAC Report (Appendix E).
- The majority of tenured teachers surveyed in pilot districts reported that they felt it was unlikely that AchieveNJ would affect their tenure status, while the majority of non-tenured teachers responded that they thought AchieveNJ will either help them earn tenure or have no effect on their tenure prospects.
- Both teachers likely to receive a median Student Growth Percentile (mSGP) score and those who will not reported that they are generally not concerned that AchieveNJ will threaten their tenure.

The Department continues to examine resources such as this report to inform continuous improvements to AchieveNJ.

B. Improved AchieveNJ Website

With input from the AchieveNJ Advisory Committee and educators across the state, the Department has recently updated the entire AchieveNJ website. The streamlined site, accessed at <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/>, is designed to make key resources and answers to top questions easier to find. If you like the new site or have ideas for ways to make it even better, please email educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us.

Thank you for all that you do for the educators and students of New Jersey.

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