



N.J. set to pilot new teacher evaluation systems

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Every child deserves a great teacher. New Jersey - which ranks among the top states in the nation in student achievement - is making great strides in delivering on that promise.

Research shows that the effectiveness of the teacher in front of the classroom is the most important in-school factor affecting student learning, and we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our teachers for our children's success.

Precisely because teaching is an honored craft, we must recognize and respect effective educators, support teachers in their efforts to continue to develop their skills and ensure that those comparatively few individuals who are unable to improve no longer remain in the classroom.

Current systems of educator evaluation fall far short of meeting this goal. Reviews, if conducted at all, are often perfunctory, based on unclear standards and frequently bear little relationship to the central objective of good teaching — advancing student learning. Lack of effective systems to ensure consistency between reviewers can lead to arbitrariness, as can poor training of the reviewers themselves.

Our teachers - and our children - deserve better.

This week, we are taking an important step toward developing a fair, consistent and learning-centered evaluation system by providing 10 districts across the state with \$1.1 million to collaboratively design and implement state-of-the-art educator evaluation systems. This pilot will be a critical step toward launching a statewide initiative in 2012.

A "one-size-fits-all" approach does not make sense for teacher evaluations because we should encourage and learn from local innovation. Accordingly, pilot districts will have flexibility in implementing a framework that best fits their needs. However, we are requiring that their plans adhere to several core principles:

- Teachers should never be evaluated on the basis of a single consideration such as test scores, much less a single test, but on the basis of multiple measures that include both learning outcomes and effective practice, with about 50 percent associated with each.
- Where applicable, the component of the evaluation based on "learning outcomes" should include, but is not limited to, progress on objective assessments such as NJ ASK. In untested grades and subjects, for example, student progress might include a focus on student work or locally determined criteria.
- To avoid penalizing teachers who work with our highest-needs students, evaluation criteria should be based on student progress and not absolute performance.
- To give teachers meaningful information to help them develop, the prior system of binary ratings (either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory") will be replaced by a four-tiered system, including "ineffective," "partially effective," "effective" and "highly effective."
- Districts should provide a direct link between the results of the evaluation and professional development opportunities to help teachers at all levels continuously improve.
- To assure consistency and fairness, plans should address inter-rater reliability.
- Any personnel consequences connected with evaluations remain a matter of local decision and applicable state law, and are not an element of the pilot program.

These principles represent a significant departure from existing practice. Perhaps the most important change is the belief that teachers should be evaluated both on how well they teach and how much their students improve.

Beginning in 2012, our statewide data system will be able to connect teachers in tested subjects to their individual students and determine the extent of student growth, relative to other students across the state with

the same achievement “starting point.” Even as we build statewide capacity, we will provide the same information to our pilot districts this year.

This pilot is an opportunity for teachers and administrators across the state to work together to design and implement a new evaluation system. Teachers will have a crucial voice in developing the new framework.

It's time we treat teachers as the professionals that they are. This means equipping them with a fair evaluation system that will honor their achievements and ensure that they have the tools they need as they develop their craft and help all of our students succeed.

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