



MAKING TEACHER EVALUATION MATTER

DISTRICT STRATEGIES FOR SELECTING AND TRAINING EVALUATORS



Ultimately, the goal of any lesson is for students to master the content delivered. The only way to know if this goal is met is to observe what students do as a result of the teacher's practice.

Ensuring Observations of Teacher Practice Matter

Revamping evaluation systems will matter most when teachers receive timely and differentiated feedback and professional development that helps improve their practice. To accomplish this, some Colorado districts are providing teachers with multiple observations from both principals and peers throughout the school year. These districts have developed strategies for selecting, training and in some cases, certifying evaluators.

Surveys of teachers and research support these efforts. Consider the following evidence.

- Two-thirds of American teachers feel that current evaluations don't accurately capture the full picture of what they do in the classroom.ⁱ
- Teachers believe multiple measures should be used to evaluate their performance. They welcome more frequent and meaningful opportunities to improve their practice, including observations from both

principals and peers.ⁱⁱ

- Reliably characterizing a teacher's practice requires averaging scores over multiple observations.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Observers must be required to demonstrate accuracy before they rate teacher practice. Good training is not enough. Observers should be expected to demonstrate their ability to generate accurate observations and should be recertified periodically.^{iv}

Eagle County School District, Jefferson County School District, and Denver Public Schools are providing teachers with multiple observations and have developed strategies for selecting and training peer observers as well as principals. These districts are at different stages with their evaluation systems and take varying approaches to deploying observers/evaluators. They are sharing their stories and strategies in order to help districts implement evaluation systems that matter to teachers and lead to improved student achievement.^{iv}

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE IDEAL AND ACTUAL USE OF FEEDBACK AND REVIEW SYSTEMS ^v				
Metric	% of teachers who say this SHOULD happen at least annually	% of teachers who say this ACTUALLY happens at least annually	Avg. times per year this SHOULD happen (per teachers surveyed)	Avg. Times per year this ACTUALLY happens (per teachers surveyed)
Principal observation and review	95	87	3.6	3.1
Teacher/peer observation and review	81	36	2.7	1.3

EAGLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

BACKGROUND ON DISTRICT'S EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS EFFORTS

For a decade, Eagle County School District (ECSD) has been [implementing a system of teacher evaluation](#) connected to professional development and performance pay for teachers. The purpose of the evaluation system is to place a well-trained and well-prepared teacher in front of every student, every day.

Each school in ECSD has an instructional leadership team made up of the principal, mentor and master teachers. Every teacher receives three evaluations during the school year. Each member of the instructional team observes teachers multiple times during three different observation windows. Each teacher receives a final effectiveness rating; the principal's evaluation is weighted at 60%, master teacher observation at 35%, and teacher self-reflection at 5%.

Time Frame	Evaluator	Observation
August - October	Mentor Teacher	Announced, low-stakes. Includes a pre and post conference and written teacher self-reflection.
November - January*	Master Teacher	Announced, weighted at 35% of final rating. Includes a pre and post conference and teacher self-reflection.
February - May*	Principal	Unannounced, weighted at 60% of final rating. Includes a post conference and written teacher self-reflection.

*It's not set in stone that the second cycle is master and the third is principal. The principal uses his/her discretion to set the schedule. For example, for less-than-effective teachers that may be approaching dismissal, the principal will likely conduct his/her evaluation earlier in the year during the second evaluation cycle.

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF DISTRICT'S SELECTION AND TRAINING PROCESS

In ECSD, the following apply to master and mentor teachers.

- Master teachers must have a Master's degree and three years of successful teaching experience or a bachelor's degree and seven years of successful teaching experience.
- Mentor teachers must have a minimum of three years of successful teaching experience.
- Both mentor and master teachers must be able to demonstrate increases in student achievement while a classroom teacher.
- Both mentor and master teachers should demonstrate previous leadership experience.
- Mentor and master teachers are also classroom teachers. Mentor teachers are in the classroom 70% of the time and observing/coaching 30% of the time. Master teachers are in the classroom 30% of the time and observing/coaching 30% of the time.
- Mentor and master teachers observe teachers in their building assignments, thereby creating an instructional leadership team in the building comprised of mentor and master teachers and the principal.

EAGLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (CONT.)

ECSD has an annual process for certifying evaluators as well as an annual recertification process.

Timing	Training Component	Activities
Days 1 and 2 (of 4) – August	Develop expertise on district quality standards and rubric.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch videos of teachers delivering a lesson (each approximately 50 minutes long).• Independently and jointly evaluate the teachers' practice based on the district adopted rubric.• Dialogue with district leader's and peers to achieve agreement on effectiveness ratings.
In-building work between Days 1,2 and 3, 4 August - October	In-building, gaining authentic experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accompany 2 or more certified, experienced observers on 2-5 real-life observations, pre and post conferences.• Spend 2-3 hours on an extensive debrief with certified observer in a "think-aloud" style following each observation.
Days 3 and 4 (of 4) – September - October	Achieve certification as an evaluator by passing exam.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conclude training by continuing to develop understanding of effective classroom instruction. (1.5 days)• Watch a video (50 min) and score it independently, documenting evidence that supports the rating. (.5 days)• Write a post conference.• District conducts statistical analysis on scores and provides remediation if evaluator doesn't meet the requirements.

Each evaluator is recertified annually. Prior to the school year, they are trained on any changes to the district-adopted rubric, conduct practice scoring, and must pass the certification test. In addition, all district leaders who deliver the training go through the same annual process.

Eagle ensures that all evaluators are matched with teachers in the same grade range: elementary with elementary, etc. The principal can choose to assign mentor and master teachers to classroom teachers according to their content expertise. However, Eagle believes that a quality evaluator does not need to have a perfect content match with the teacher in order to accurately evaluate practice or provide valuable feedback.



ECSD'S LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE FOR DISTRICTS

Training observers is essential but not sufficient in order to establish a shared understanding of effective teaching.

District leaders must also provide training to teachers.

During early implementation of ECSD's educator effectiveness initiative, the district provided training to principals, master and mentor teachers using the components described previously, but not to classroom teachers. However, the district soon realized that teachers needed to be familiar with the content of the instrument used to evaluate them. ECSD now provides training to new teachers during new teacher induction and training to veteran teachers during orientation. Training consists of watching videos and dialoguing about the instructional strategies used. Follow up work is done during weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This proved to be a major turning point for the district, because it reinforced the district's philosophy and strategies on effective teaching.

Observers in ECSD are trained to watch what students do in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher.

Ultimately, the goal of any lesson is for students to master the content delivered. The only way to know if this goal is met is to observe what students do as a result of the teacher's practice. Therefore, the evidence gathered by the observer to support a particular rating is framed as "the student did

x in response to y." This framing also has the benefit of removing any "finger pointing" by the observer, and makes delivering feedback less confrontational. ECSD spends lots of time focused on this during training, although it takes time for people to evolve into understanding it because they are initially so focused on watching teacher behavior.

Teachers need low or no stakes coaching in addition to formal, high-stakes observations.

The district's initial effort to better evaluate teachers was couched in a pay for performance plan and the district initially did a poor job of getting teachers to buy into the system. Teachers weren't comfortable being forthcoming about their weaknesses when they knew it would be part of their evaluation and affect their pay. Similarly, mentor teachers had a difficult time establishing a trusting relationship with teachers. In response, ECSD stopped counting the mentor teacher's observation score toward a final effectiveness rating, and made it a low-stakes coaching role.

Teachers are required to complete a self-reflection template and share it with the observer 24 hours prior to any post-conference.

This assists the evaluator in understanding the teacher's perspective of the effectiveness of the lesson, which allows for more effective coaching and feedback.

JEFFERSON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

BACKGROUND ON DISTRICT'S EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS EFFORTS

Jefferson County School District (JeffCo) is currently in the first year of piloting a strategic compensation plan that is tied to the district's efforts to [increase educator effectiveness](#). An important component of JeffCo's efforts to support teachers and improve student learning is the utilization of peer evaluators. District leaders believe that peer evaluators provide more authentic and meaningful observations for teachers, and that multiple perspectives provide valuable information to help teachers improve. They also provide principals with a partner in the important work of instructional leadership, and commit 100% of their time to classroom observations and providing growth-producing feedback to teachers to improve their practice and drive school and individualized professional development.

JeffCo hired 9 former classroom teachers to evaluate 600 teachers (16 elementary and 4 middle schools are participating in year one of the pilot). Each teacher in participating schools has two evaluators: one administrator with one peer evaluator or they may also have two peer evaluators. Throughout the year, teachers receive

many informal 10-20 minute observations from both of their evaluators, and three formal 50-60 minute observations. Two of the formal observations, one by each evaluator, are scheduled with the teacher and have a pre-conference. All of the informal observations and the final formal observation are unannounced. Peer evaluators send observation notes to the teacher within 48 hours, and all three formal observations have a post-conference with the teacher. After informal observations, notes are emailed to the teacher to continue to provide feedback. Throughout the year, teachers and peer evaluators meet as they feel necessary to discuss feedback and their growth areas.



District leaders believe that peer evaluators provide more authentic and meaningful observations for teachers, and that multiple perspectives provide valuable information to help teachers improve.

Each teacher in JeffCo's pilot program will receive a final evaluation by mid-May which was jointly written by both evaluators reflecting their full body of evidence based on informal and formal observations. District leaders feel strongly that a final effectiveness rating and subsequent support should be developed collaboratively to ensure a consistent message is delivered to each teacher. The growth-producing feedback that

is reflected in the final evaluation will be used to create each teacher's individual Professional Learning Plan for professional development for the following fall.

JEFFERSON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (CONT.)

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF DISTRICT’S SELECTION AND TRAINING PROCESS

In order to be a peer evaluator in JeffCo, candidates:

- Must have a minimum of 7 years of classroom experience.
- Must be able to demonstrate student achievement increases as a classroom teacher.
- Must undergo an extensive interview process, including:
 - o Watching a 20 minute video of a teacher deliver a lesson.
 - o Completing an evaluation form for the teacher.
 - o Leading a mock post conference with a “reluctant” teacher.

All peer evaluators were provided with approximately 160 hours of training prior to the school year and throughout the year.

The lead peer evaluator accompanied all peer evaluators, principals, and assistant principals during observations to ensure inter-rater reliability and provide job-embedded professional development for evaluators.

- The below table reflects JeffCo’s process for training peer evaluators in this first pilot year. Because the district is early in implementation, district leaders are considering what to do differently in subsequent years, including:
- Whether and how to certify evaluators.
 - How to provide principals with training throughout the year similar to what is provided for peer evaluators.
 - How many years peer evaluators should be allowed to observe teachers in the same schools.
 - How many years peer evaluators should remain in the role before returning to the classroom.
 - How to assign two different peer evaluators to the same building so they can support each other and constantly be calibrating observations.

Timing	Training Component	Activities
Prior to School Year	Develop expertise on district quality standards and role-specific rubrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch videos of teachers delivering lessons.• Practice completing district adopted rubrics.• Establish a bar for effectiveness conversations meant to calibrate scores.
Throughout School Year (Peer evaluators meet for 1 day every other week).	Calibrate observations, evidence, and scores with administrators and peer evaluators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify observable behaviors for each indicator in various rubrics.• Continue process of calibrating to a standard of effectiveness.• Conduct discussions with district specialists in role-specific contents, such as counselors, librarians, and special education.• Deepen understanding around researched-based best practices.• Gain expertise on having coaching conversations and difficult conversations with educators.

JEFFERSON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (CONT.)

JEFFCO'S LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE FOR DISTRICTS

Using videos for training observers is a good start, but they aren't sufficient.

Videos often help spark and fuel a good conversation in the beginning stages of evaluator training about effective practices, but they are not sufficient to achieve rater agreement. Continual calibration between observers can only be achieved once they are side by side in classrooms observing, dialoguing, and agreeing on whether or not the practices they are observing are effective. Videos also provide only a limited view of the classroom environment, and observers need to be able to see the connections teachers are making between instruction and the tools and items posted in the room. Finally, videos don't allow observers to ask students what they're learning, which has been important to help calibrate observations from multiple observers. In fact, evaluators in JeffCo talk to students as much as they listen to teachers.

Principals are happy to have a partner in this work and collaborative conversations between evaluators continue to improve instructional expertise for feedback to teachers.

The district hopes to achieve more frequent opportunities for evaluators, principals, assistant principals, and peers to observe classrooms together, dialogue about what effective teaching looks like, calibrate on the rubrics, and provide evidence that gives teachers growth-producing feedback.

Peer evaluators are the game changer in teacher effectiveness.

Because peer evaluators in JeffCo are on full-time release from the classroom, 100% of their time is spent observing, providing feedback, and working with school leadership to inform professional development. Peer evaluators have the time and opportunity to provide frequent feedback from informal and formal observations. Teachers report that they value the collegial conversations with peers.

The presence of peer evaluators in the same classroom several times a month allows teachers to have frequent conversations about their practice. Increasing teacher effectiveness through this process is how JeffCo hopes to positively impact student achievement.



DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DPS'S HISTORY WITH SELECTING AND TRAINING EVALUATORS

LEAP (Leading Effective Academic Practice) is DPS's teacher performance assessment system, developed collaboratively between the district and the union. The purpose of LEAP is to provide teachers with feedback and support so they can continue to learn and grow professionally. LEAP employs [multiple measures to evaluate teachers](#), including both peer and principal observations. During the LEAP pilot year (2011-2012), teachers received a total of three observations from a peer observer and principals. Principals and peer observers both use the [DPS Framework for Effective Teaching](#) in their observations and both follow the same protocol for providing feedback during post conferences. During the pilot years, these observations are low-stakes – teacher effectiveness ratings are used to inform specific coaching strategies and professional development, but should not be used to make any staffing decisions, per an agreement with the union.

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF DISTRICT'S SELECTION AND TRAINING PROCESS

Each teacher in DPS is observed by his or her principal and a peer observer. DPS has 42 peer observers (PO), each with a caseload of between 90 - 100 teachers. DPS plans to increase the number of POs on staff in 2012-13. Peer observers in DPS are:

- Required to have taught in a classroom for at least 2 of the last 5 years.
- Primarily teachers with urban teaching experience.
- Hired from both inside and outside the district.



- Contracted for 212 days a year (as opposed to 184 days for a classroom teacher) and are on full-time release.
- Matched with teachers who have the same content knowledge. For about 90% of teachers in DPS, their PO is a good content match (i.e., primary teachers have primary POs; chemistry teachers have a secondary science PO, etc.).

DPS provides training to both peer observers and principals, although the POs receive more intensive training than principals as this is their sole responsibility. District leaders have learned over the last year that principals would also benefit from more dedicated training time in order to become more proficient in using the district framework and providing effective feedback. District leaders are considering how to build this into principals' already busy schedules. Options they are considering include increasing time spent at monthly meetings led by Instructional Superintendents, more strongly coupling this training with that of the new standards rollout, and spending more time together with the POs in the summer months to improve their inter-rater reliability.

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CONT.)

The following table reflects the elements of training for peer observers.

Timing	Training Component	Activities
One month prior to school year.	Develop expertise on DPS adopted framework and effective strategies for conducting observations and providing feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice observations and collecting non-judgmental evidence (using videos).• Practice consistency in rating (observing practice, scoring and being normed).• Practice providing feedback.• Interpersonal development to work with a variety of people.
One month prior to school year.	Develop expertise on district specific values and areas of emphasis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn best practices in teaching, DPS curriculum, and English Language Acquisition theories and strategies.• Learn about cultural competency.
Throughout school year including 1/2 days, CSAP days, and as needed coaching days.	Continue work toward inter-rater reliability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POs attend observations together to calibrate ratings, evidence, feedback, etc.• Consultants coach POs in the field.

At the time of publication, DPS is nearing completion of LEAP's second pilot year. District leadership is currently considering:

- How peer observations will ultimately count toward a teacher's effectiveness rating.
- How to provide principals with more hours of training, similar to what POs receive.
- Whether and how to certify observers and a process of recertification thereafter.
- How to use a combination of videos and real-life observations in a certification process.
- Better strategies for capturing typical teacher practice, including conducting more frequent, shorter walk-through and partial observations (perhaps 5-6 that are between 10-20 minutes) throughout the year rather than fewer formal observations.
- How peer observers might be involved in the remediation process and add value and credibility to employment decisions for the 60-70 non-probationary teachers who are facing dismissal due to poor performance during the pilot years.



DPS'S LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE FOR DISTRICTS

Interpersonal skills are equally important to content expertise when selecting POs and matching them with teachers.

District leaders anticipated that differences between POs and teachers could act as barriers to POs providing and teachers receiving feedback and coaching. For example, a science teacher matched with a PO who is not a science teacher, or a veteran teacher matched with a PO who is early in his or her career may create a situation where the teacher is reluctant to take seriously the feedback and coaching provided by the PO.

District leaders have learned, however, that how a PO delivers feedback is equally important as the feedback being delivered. Teachers in DPS with an imperfect PO match still find value in the feedback they receive, in large part due to the positive relationship they are able to form with the PO. Teachers with a great PO match tend not to find the feedback as valuable if the communication style of the PO is ineffective. This lesson has informed the way DPS is hiring POs. They plan to elevate the importance of excellent interpersonal skills to be equally important to content expertise when screening candidates.

The greatest advantage of a PO in DPS is that he or she is a “neutral” party, totally focused on instruction and not distracted by other factors that have traditionally influenced evaluations.

A common complaint among teachers about peer observers is that “they don’t know me, don’t know my kids, and don’t know my school.” However, DPS has learned that it is advantageous to have an additional observer who isn’t the principal and doesn’t have specific knowledge of a teacher’s history in the school. For example, a PO doesn’t know that a teacher is arguing with his or her principal about playground duty. A PO isn’t aware of the strained relationship between a teacher and student due to an incident that occurred early in the year. A PO is only observing what happens instructionally in a classroom environment during a specific lesson (or lessons) and is providing feedback and an effectiveness rating using evidence that is aligned to the district’s framework for effective teaching. Teachers can have confidence that a rating is based on observations and less influenced by other factors that have less or no impact on student learning.

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CONT.)

Hiring outside consultants to train observers helps build capacity at the district level. But it also requires district leaders to be very closely involved with the training at each stage to ensure that the trainer's notion of "effective teaching" is delivered within the context of other important district initiatives.

DPS has hired an outside consultant to train the POs (and principals to some extent). District leaders have learned that their involvement and attendance at these trainings is invaluable since they are the ones who have the context and need to be making explicit the connections between what is shared at training and other district priorities. Hard lessons have been learned when this intentional strategy is not in place. District leaders, at times, have had to clarify messages and/or modify training components on the back end leading to confusion or frustration.

For example, one of DPS's key instructional values and practices is cultural competency. It is reflected throughout the district's [Framework for Effective Teaching](#) and the district has dedicated significant time and energy to train educators in this area. District leaders need to be present during training sessions that address this important value in order to calibrate the district's beliefs about cultural competency with the trainer's beliefs and show alignment across these initiatives. The difficulty calibrating an outsider's beliefs about effective teaching with the district's beliefs about effective teaching have led district leaders to be more strategic by providing co-facilitation with the consultants, and at times, to contemplate the question of when to bring the job of training observers "in house" rather than hiring a consultant.

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- i Measures of Effective Teaching Project, <http://www.metproject.org/>.
- ii Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2012). Primary Sources: America's Teachers on the Teaching Profession. Scholastic. http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/pdfs/Gates2012_full.pdf.
- iii Kane, Tomas J, Staiger, Douglas O. (January 2012). Gathering Feedback for Teaching: Combining High-Quality Observations with Student Surveys and Achievement Gains. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- iv Kane and Staiger.
- v Primary Sources: America's Teachers on the Teaching Profession.