

CURTIS GARCIA, PRINCIPAL, CENTENNIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT (K-12)



THE COLORADO EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Curtis Garcia is the principal of all K-12 students in [Centennial School District](#), which has 187 students, 18 teachers and no assistant principals. Garcia is responsible for observing and evaluating all teachers in elementary, middle and high school. He has been principal of Centennial for two years. Previously, he was a teacher and a counselor in the district.

After the 2012-2013 school year, Centennial lost nine teachers. In the new school year, six of the replacement teachers were new to the teaching profession, creating a specific challenge in a small district.

FREQUENCY OF OBSERVATIONS

At the beginning of the school year, Garcia's goal was to observe each teacher four times each quarter (16 observations during the school year). He was able to meet this goal in the first quarter, but not the remaining three quarters because he spent more time providing in-depth support to teachers, particularly more novice staff, than conducting observations.

Tip: *Use a shared calendar to schedule and conduct teacher observations.* This tool allows administrative staff to protect the principal's time as an instructional leader. Although Garcia is the only principal in Centennial, he has colleagues at the district level who can take responsibility for unplanned events that could distract from his role as an observer and instructional leader. Sharing his calendar allows his colleagues to handle student discipline or noninstructional duties that arise during the day so that Garcia can observe or provide feedback to teachers.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

While Garcia has been challenged to observe teachers frequently, he has focused on providing all teachers, particularly novice teachers, with feedback and support.

Tip: *Use the [Colorado Teacher Quality Standards](#) and [rubric](#) to guide every conversation with teachers.* Garcia says this is one strategy for ensuring the principal is practicing instructional leadership. For example, Garcia uses every staff meeting as an opportunity to talk about a specific element or practice and draw connections between school priorities, initiatives and individual teacher practices. Using the standards and rubric also helps principals develop fluency and expertise in the teacher standards.

Tip: *When providing feedback to teachers, include concrete action steps that go beyond addressing the goals established in a professional growth plan.* Garcia



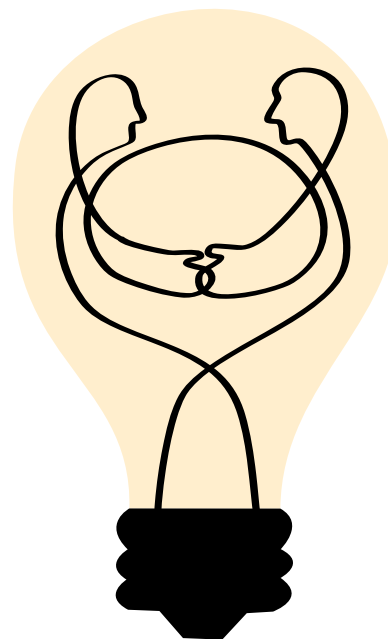
captures specific ideas for each teacher to practice or change directly on the rubric. A next step for the district is to compile the practices identified for teacher improvement into a more comprehensive resource aligned directly to the standards.

Teacher Feedback Example: One elementary teacher was struggling with how to integrate communication skills, such as listening, speaking and presenting, into lessons. Garcia helped the elementary teacher to develop an interdisciplinary social studies unit based on local culture and history. This exercise helped the teacher use purposeful planning to develop lessons that addressed specific standards and skills for students.

Tip: *Leverage the skills of veteran teacher leaders to provide feedback and support to teachers and administrative staff.* In small districts like Centennial with few administrators, Garcia has learned to share teacher coaching responsibility with strong teacher leaders who provide nonthreatening feedback to their colleagues that is grounded in the Colorado Teacher Quality Standards. Equally important is the feedback the teacher leaders give to Garcia in the areas he needs it most.

Tip: *Be very concrete when training teachers about the evaluation process. Have tools and processes clearly outlined at the beginning of the school year.* Garcia reports that the first year the district piloted the [State Model Evaluation System](#), he assumed that teachers would take ownership of the system because it was such a significant shift from prior policy and practice. This didn't happen, however, and he made the mistake of leaving too many issues open to question and assumption. In the second year, he started having conversations with teachers earlier and used a tool he developed to ground and guide the conversations.

Tool: [Professional Practice at a Glance](#). Garcia developed this tool in his second year of implementing the State Model Evaluation System. He uses it at the beginning of the year to provide teachers with a specific but concise guide to the new requirements and processes for collecting artifacts and evidence, and continues to reference it throughout the year as he has informal conversations with teachers.



LANNY HASS, PRINCIPAL, THOMPSON VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL



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Lanny Hass is the principal of Thompson Valley High School (TVHS) in [Thompson School District](#). TVHS has 1,250 students; 80 teachers; and 30 additional staff, including three assistant principals. Before becoming principal in 2013, Hass was an assistant principal and math teacher at TVHS. He also had a district role where part of his responsibilities included rolling out the State Model Evaluation System districtwide.

After only one year as TVHS principal, Hass already has plans for building and improving the foundation put in place in 2014 for teacher evaluation.

ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' ROLE IN TEACHER EVALUATION

All teachers at TVHS are divided into four effectiveness teams, each with about 20 teachers and created according to teacher schedules. For example, all teachers who have a second period planning time are on the principal's effectiveness team. The principal and three assistant principals each have responsibility for evaluating the teachers on one effectiveness team.

Although each administrator is responsible for 20 teacher evaluations from beginning to end, administrators work together to avoid creating silos between the teams. Multiple administrators might observe the same teacher, and administrators frequently review observation data together to ensure consistency and to identify teachers with common strengths and areas for growth.

Advantage: Hass and the administrative team are building a culture and schedule that encourage teacher collaboration. Grouping teachers according to their shared planning time gives effectiveness teams the option to meet as professional learning communities during the school day. This year, the conversations have been mostly informal, but next year, Hass plans to move to a more data-driven format focused on three priorities: instruction, community and culture, and post-secondary readiness.

Drawback: As a result of second semester schedule changes, some teachers in effectiveness teams no longer shared a planning time, reducing the original benefit of the grouping strategy.

Other Alternatives to Consider: Consider grouping teachers with similar strengths and areas for growth to provide smaller groups with targeted professional learning. Or, consider grouping teachers with complementary strengths or areas for growth so they can coach each other.



FREQUENCY OF OBSERVATIONS

The TVHS principal and assistant principals try to be in each of their teacher's classrooms as much as possible. This year, the TVHS administrative team observed each teacher's classroom anywhere from eight to 12 times, depending on the teacher's needs and the need to collect evidence of effectiveness.

Tip: *Block off classroom periods and visit multiple classrooms during that period.* Hass reports that when he schedules time on his calendar to observe teachers, he is very likely to get it done. He recommends scheduling a month in advance to ensure enough time is allotted for observations. Hass blocks one period of the day and will observe three or four teachers for approximately 10 minutes, which builds in needed flexibility. If he chooses a classroom where the students are independently writing for 20 minutes, he leaves, visits another classroom and then returns when there is more to observe.

Tip: *Record observations, questions for teachers and actionable feedback directly into a tool used for sharing feedback with the teacher. Don't wait until after the observation.* Hass uses BloomBoard, a technology tool offered as part of the evaluation pilot project to gather and share observation data with teachers and manage the principal's evaluation workload. He brings his digital tablet to each observation and makes notes directly into the platform. He is then able to share it with the teacher being observed with minimal editing using the platform.

Tip: *If a district is not utilizing one of the state-provided technology tools, consider creating a written or digital template, or Web-based document services, that can be used to both make and share teacher observations.*

CDE Tip: Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) new [performance management system, supported by RANDA Solutions](#), is free to districts and available for the 2014-

2015 school year. Training on the best practices using the tool is being provided to interested districts starting in summer 2014.

Research Tip: The [Measures of Effective Teaching](#) study found that a more reliable and complete picture of a teacher's practice should include multiple observations from multiple observers. *Districts could consider using master teachers or instructional coaches to assist principals who do not have assistant principals.*

PROVIDING FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

Hass shares everything he records during his observations with the teacher being observed to help build trust for the evaluation system and give each teacher the fullest picture of his or her classroom performance. Hass documents what teachers do as well as what students do, and asks questions meant to drive reflection and improvement. He frequently cross-references observations and feedback to teacher's goals.

Tip: *Use data from observations to drive goal setting, feedback conversations and professional development.* Increasingly, Hass and the administrative team are using the data collected from observations to drive their conversations with teachers, goal setting and professional development. For example, if 12 observations of a teacher's classroom don't produce evidence that he or she is demonstrating a specific practice, an administrator might suggest developing a professional growth goal around that practice. If the administrative team observes that most teachers in the building aren't providing evidence for a specific practice, schoolwide professional development might be needed.

Tip: *Establish your own guidelines for supporting teachers based on their rubric rating.* In future years, Hass hopes to build a process that targets professional development and resources for teachers based on their performance on the rubric.

CHRIS HINGER, PRINCIPAL, PAGOSA SPRINGS MIDDLE SCHOOL



THE COLORADO EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Chris Hinger is the principal of Pagosa Springs Middle School (PSMS) in [Archuleta School District](#). PSMS has 423 students, 30 teachers and one assistant principal. Hinger is responsible for evaluating all teachers and other licensed personnel in his building. Before becoming principal in 2004, he was a teacher at the school.

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL ROLE IN TEACHER EVALUATION

Hinger and the assistant principal conduct unannounced teacher observations throughout the school year. The assistant principal is also responsible for athletics and has only limited capacity for observing and providing teachers with feedback and support. Hinger alone conducts formal, hourlong observations once a year for nonprobationary teachers and twice a year for probationary teachers. He is solely responsible for working with teachers to develop professional growth plans and provide a final effectiveness rating. Hinger and the assistant principal use [BloomBoard](#), a technology tool offered as part of the evaluation pilot project to gather and share observation data with teachers and manage the principal's evaluation workload.

Advantage: Hinger has a comprehensive view of all teachers. By including the assistant principal in teacher observations, he supplements his own capacity and, in turn, follows recommendations based on research that multiple observers lead to better reliability in teacher evaluation.

Drawback: To be prepared for the demands of being a principal, it is important for an assistant principal to have responsibility for evaluating teachers throughout the entire process. In future years, Hinger will experiment with different models of roles and responsibilities to give the assistant principal more responsibility for evaluating teachers throughout the entire evaluation cycle.

GOAL SETTING AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

Archuleta School District values all aspects of a child—mental, physical and social-emotional. When teachers complete the self-assessment required of the [State Model Evaluation System](#), reflecting on their strengths and areas for growth, they are encouraged to use sources beyond the obvious academic sources. Teachers view the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) and district assessments as equally important to data from the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey and [Colorado's Student Perception Survey \(SPS\)](#)¹. The school and district also include these sources and related goals in their Unified Improvement Plan.

Tip: *Encourage teachers to include nonacademic data sources when completing their self-assessment and creating growth goals.* Hinger reports that the self-assessment is a necessary and healthy reflective process that's new since implementing the State Model Evaluation System. Teachers build professional growth goals based on their self-assessment, TCAP data, district assessments, Healthy Kids Colorado Survey and SPS. Many teachers based one of their growth goals on SPS results, and in the following year, the school experienced a 10 percent increase in positive student responses.

¹ The Healthy Kids Colorado Survey provides teachers with data and insight into the physical and emotional state of their students, while the SPS provides data and insight into teachers' instructional practices.

FREQUENCY OF OBSERVATIONS

In the first semester, Hinger and the assistant principal conducted unannounced 15-minute observations of each teacher once every week or two weeks. The frequency decreased in the second semester as Hinger conducted formal, hourlong observations of teachers and the school administered state tests.

Tip: *Complete formal observations by March*, leaving enough time for the principal to aggregate all data, compile an initial effectiveness rating, conduct conversations with teachers, and then adjust and finalize ratings before the end of the school year. Hinger began conducting formal, hourlong teacher observations in November and concluded in February.

Tip: *In August, schedule announced formal observations and a midyear conversation between November and February with each teacher before calendars get busy.*

Tool: *Online calendars, such as Google Calendars, make more efficient use of time when scheduling announced observations.* Hinger reports that he saves approximately 15 to 30 minutes per teacher by using the tool rather than emailing back and forth to find the best date.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

Hinger's biggest challenge is providing teachers with timely feedback and support using the current technology. Because he uses it daily, Hinger has developed fluency with BloomBoard to gather and share observation data with teachers; unfortunately, most of his teachers don't use it frequently, and their ability to access principal feedback is limited by their own comfort level with the tool.

Tip: *Provide teachers and principals with quality training and frequent coaching for using the evaluation tools*, including technology tools. Shared fluency with the evaluation tools will reduce confusion, apprehension and suspicion, and increase positive interactions, dialogue and understanding.

CDE Tip: Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) new [performance management system, supported by RANDA](#).

[Solutions](#), is free to districts and available for the 2014-2015 school year. Training on the best practices using the tool is being provided to interested districts starting in summer 2014.

Hinger believes that when one person serves as both evaluator and coach, the relationship between principal and teacher is somewhat strained because the principal is also making high-stakes decisions about employment.

Tip: *Provide teachers with peer feedback and support.*

Teachers at PSMS are conducting instructional rounds, a monthly opportunity for teachers to observe one another and develop a common language around instruction. Instructional rounds are not evaluative and are not intended to provide teachers being observed with direct feedback, unless requested. Instead, during instructional rounds three to four teachers observe a colleague and dialogue around three questions: How does this experience validate what I do? What questions did this experience generate about what I'm doing in my own classroom? What's one thing I might try in my classroom after this observation?

Next year, Hinger plans to implement a system of peer coaching that is nonevaluative and focused on instruction. He will designate two or three teacher leaders as peer coaches to observe classrooms and lead professional learning community conversations about best practices in instruction. The peer coaches will teach one fewer class to create time for their peer coaching role.

To assign a final effectiveness rating and develop a professional growth plan for each teacher, Hinger will rely heavily upon walk-through observation data combined with artifacts of instruction and formal observations.

Tip: *Before finalizing a teacher's effectiveness rating, conduct a collegial, coaching conversation so the teacher has an opportunity to present evidence for practices rated lower than expected.* It's also an opportunity for principals to provide praise and reinforce teacher strengths, give the teacher additional coaching in areas for growth and begin to collaboratively develop a professional growth plan.

LAURIE KLOEPFER, PRINCIPAL, FLORIDA MESA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



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Laurie Kloepfer is the principal of Florida Mesa Elementary School in [Durango School District](#). Florida Mesa has 350 students in grades PreK-5, 31 teachers and certified staff, 12 classified staff and no assistant principals.

Kloepfer has served as principal of Florida Mesa since 2012. At the time, the school was under Priority Improvement, the second lowest performance category in Colorado's accountability framework. In the two years since she has served as principal, the school has improved its accreditation rating to Performance status. Previously Kloepfer served as a principal, curriculum director, special education director and teacher in other schools and districts.

FREQUENCY OF OBSERVATIONS

Kloepfer's goal is to observe each teacher informally for 10 to 30 minutes three times each semester. In addition, each nonprobationary teacher receives one formal observation and each probationary teacher receives two formal observations per year. These observations are for the entire class period.

Following the [State Model Evaluation System](#) process, teachers complete a self-assessment at the beginning of the year and Kloepfer conducts goal-setting conversations with each teacher to help Kloepfer focus her coaching efforts throughout the year. She also conducts midyear conversations with teachers and gives them a draft of their summative evaluations between January and February.

TIP: *Establish goal-setting meetings early in the school year to set the stage for targeted coaching throughout the year.* Kloepfer says that she wouldn't trade these meetings for anything, and in fact, they are more valuable than two or three observations because she knows the support that each teacher needs at the beginning of the school year.

TIP: *To protect the principal's time for observing and providing instructional support to teachers, set clear parameters with all school staff about when issues should immediately escalate to the principal versus when issues can be dealt with later or by another staff member.* At Florida Mesa, emergencies are often directed to the school counselor. Nonurgent student discipline matters are scheduled later so that instruction time is protected.

TIP: *Plan for the entire cycle of evaluation at the beginning of the school year and schedule big events or weekly themes early.* Kloepfer thinks of the school year in "chunks" of time to observe and evaluate all teachers. The first week of the year, she doesn't undertake any activities related to evaluation. The next week, all teachers are observed once. During the next two weeks, teachers complete self-evaluations and meet with Kloepfer for goal-setting meetings. During the next two weeks, all teachers are observed once, and so on.

KICKING OFF THE SCHOOL-YEAR: EVALUATION ACTIVITIES FOR PRINCIPAL AND TEACHERS

Week One	No evaluation activities
Week Two	All teachers observed once
Week Three	Teachers complete self-evaluations; principal conducts goal-setting meetings
Week Four	Teachers complete self-evaluations; principal conducts goal-setting meetings
Week Five	All teachers observed once

TOOL: [Master Checklist of Evaluation](#). Kloepfer uses this tool to ensure she is meeting important deadlines and accomplishing each step of the State Model Evaluation System with every teacher.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

Kloepfer gives teachers informal verbal and written feedback using the walk-through tool after each observation. But Kloepfer stresses that feedback for teachers must come from a variety of sources, not just the principal. Therefore, she promotes a school climate that incentivizes teacher-to-teacher feedback and support.

TIP: *Incentivize teachers to give each other peer feedback to achieve a higher evaluation rating. [Quality Standard 4, Element C](#) of the State Model Evaluation System rubric assesses how a teacher collaborates with his or her colleagues, including acting as a critical friend and adapting instructional practices based on colleague feedback.* Kloepfer communicated this to her staff and made it easy to fulfill the requirement by simply self-reporting that they took part in peer observations and feedback related to instruction. As a result of this open climate, one teacher suggested that personal growth goals be posted on each teacher’s classroom wall so that anyone at any time could give them feedback.

TOOL: [Peer Observation Walk-Through Tool](#). Teachers are provided with a walk-through tool to encourage them to observe one another. The walk-through tool can also serve as an artifact to support teacher evaluations.

TIP: *Build time for teachers to observe each other into the school’s master schedule. Grade-level teachers at Florida Mesa have the same planning time every day, and specials classes are grouped together.* Peer observations and feedback can happen informally and within the day. Kloepfer also substitutes for teachers if they ask for additional opportunities to observe their peers inside and outside the school building.

TIP: *Give teachers a draft of their summative evaluation as early as February so they know which areas to focus on for the remainder of the school year.* With CDE’s [performance management system, hosted by RANDA Solutions](#), a teacher can see feedback and the evaluator’s rating throughout the year, including evidence and artifacts shared between evaluator and educator. Durango’s technology solution did not provide this option, so Kloepfer created a rough draft of each teacher’s summative evaluation and shared it with the teacher in February, giving the teacher plenty of time to gather evidence and artifacts to complete or supplement his or her evaluation.

TIP: *Demonstrate to staff that the evaluation process and, specifically, the [Colorado Teacher Quality Standards](#) are aligned to school priorities.* Kloepfer emphasizes that like the Colorado Academic Standards for students, teachers should become well-versed in the standards and understand where they are on the standards at any time.

KAREN LUNCEFORD, PRINCIPAL, BAYFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL



THE COLORADO EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Karen Lunceford is the principal of [Bayfield Middle School](#) in Bayfield School District. Bayfield Middle School has 325 students in grades 6-8, 21 teachers and three additional staff. She is responsible for evaluating all teachers and other licensed staff in the building. Before becoming principal in 2012, Lunceford was an assistant principal, classroom teacher, curriculum director and staff trainer in literacy.

FREQUENCY OF OBSERVATIONS

Lunceford observed every teacher eight times during the school year for approximately 10 minutes each time or until she saw evidence that aligns to one of the [Colorado Teacher Quality Standards](#). At the beginning of the school year, she was skeptical that she would be able to visit classrooms so frequently, but was pleased to find that it was realistic and doable. Lunceford didn't schedule these informal walk-throughs with teachers; instead she used 30-minute blocks of unscheduled time during the day to observe three classrooms.

TIP: *Use technology to instantly align observations to the Colorado Teacher Quality Standards.* During the 2013-2014 school year, Lunceford used BloomBoard, a technology tool offered as part of the evaluation pilot project, to gather and share observation data with teachers and manage her workload. She reports that it saved her time because she was able to tag her observations of teacher and student behaviors immediately and directly to a standard. BloomBoard remains open at all times on her tablet so she doesn't waste time searching for what she needs, and she can quickly click into any teacher's profile.

TIP: *Schedule formal observations early in the school year and conduct them throughout the school year.* Lunceford conducted one formal observation of nonprobationary teachers and two formal observations of probationary teachers during the year.

TIP: *Don't limit classroom visits to informal and formal teacher observations. Quick "stop-ins" go a long way toward building a culture that supports observations.* Lunceford still stopped in every classroom almost every day, even if she wasn't observing for evaluation. She believes this helps to create and maintain good working relationships with her staff by building rapport with individual teachers and supporting a culture of open doors and feedback.



PROVIDING FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

When Lunceford became principal, a lot of silos needed to be broken down – between staff and administrators, among grades and between classrooms. She has worked to shift the culture of evaluation from one where teachers feel they are being graded to one where instructional feedback is common and nonthreatening. Her goal is that feedback is focused on getting teachers to feel good about talking, reflecting and identifying their own questions and solutions. Early in the school year, she spent a lot of time informally and frequently visiting classrooms to help teachers feel comfortable being observed.

TIP: *Be intentional about building trust with teachers. This is essential to establish a school culture that welcomes and prioritizes feedback.* When Lunceford became the Bayfield Middle School principal, she established herself as an ally of the staff rather than a threat by visiting classrooms every day, making sure she was in every classroom at least once every week and providing positive feedback to teachers after every visit. This step seems simple and obvious, but if it's skipped, especially in a school experiencing transition with a new principal or with a culture built on isolation instead of collaboration, the opportunity to establish a culture centered on feedback is reduced.

TIP: *Focus on creating good habits rather than doing everything perfectly and deeply right away.* For Lunceford, good habits meant spending time in classrooms, becoming well-versed in the [Colorado Teacher Quality Standards](#) and aligning all feedback to the standards.

TIP: *When setting goals with teachers, consider establishing some goals that are shared among teacher teams to encourage collaboration.* Lunceford asked teachers to create team goals by content area that rolled into the school's Unified Improvement Plan. This strategy led to midyear goal conversations with individual teachers and across teams of teachers.

