

# Differentiated Evaluation Process

*A continuum of practice aligned with a continuum of support*



## The Challenge:

Teacher evaluation systems often deal with all teachers and students in the same manner — regardless of individual interests, priorities, or needs for support. These systems can be complicated, time-consuming, and inefficient. In addition, standardized or third-party assessments to measure student learning are often unable to capture evidence of teaching practices that promote 21st century skills, student engagement or constructivist teaching and learning. At present, New York state's single pathway through teacher evaluation neither accounts for differences in teacher performance and the limitations of standardized tests, nor does it offer evaluators strategies to target resources efficiently, streamline time commitments, or customize support for teacher professional growth. This Innovations Brief provides local leaders with teacher evaluation options that customize continuous professional learning, based on the strengths and needs of teachers.

## The Innovation:

Some New York school districts and their teachers' unions are negotiating customized models that include a differentiated evaluation process (DEP) to replace the one-size-fits-all approach described above. A DEP assesses both teacher practice and student learning by focusing the evaluation on targeted performance indicators and aligned teacher-created student assessments. A DEP bridges evaluation with professional learning and student assessment, affording teachers a personalized pathway for professional growth based on mutually agreed upon needs and/or interests. The goal of a DEP is to establish a rigorous evaluation process that drives specific customized professional learning for each teacher, leading to enhanced student learning.

Section 3012-c of New York State Education Law requires that all seven Teaching Standards are assessed annually, however not all elements/performance indicators for each standard must be addressed in the annual performance evaluation. Additionally, the state's Regulations (NYCRR30-2) allow student learning to be assessed with district-developed

*"This Differentiated Evaluation process is flexible and targeted providing greater autonomy for teachers to design and monitor their own professional growth. It's the support for teachers professional learning that will improve teacher effectiveness and student growth."*

Mary Lou Megarr,  
President, Plattsburgh  
Teachers Association



assessments for the local measure. This flexibility creates the congruity between teacher and student measures called for in a DEP, by identifying a focus area of teacher practice (using fewer performance indicators) with an aligned, locally developed student assessment.

In keeping with NYSUT's position that teacher evaluations should be standards-based and used for the purpose of continuous professional learning, the DEP provides a strategy for teachers or teams of teachers to determine their focus area of development. When a DEP is negotiated, a target or focus area (e.g., constructivist teaching, use of data to inform instruction, student questioning) is determined and a limited number of related performance indicators (one or two for each teaching standard) are carefully selected. Teachers and administrators agree to variations in format and frequency of observations for the focus area of the DEP.

### Differentiated Evaluation Process - In Action

#### 1. Select focus area

Teachers, either individually, or as a group (within the same building or across the district) *in collaboration with their evaluators* determine focus area (e.g., *student engagement as described in NYS Teaching Standard 3*) for their Differentiated Evaluation Process.

#### 2. Select one or two related elements or indicators from each teaching standard

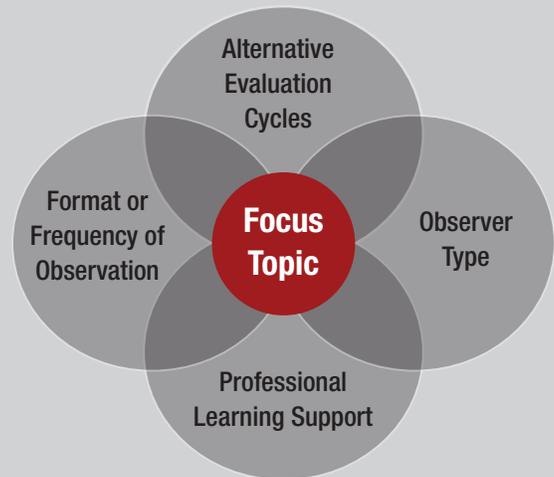
Teachers, either individually, or as a group, select one or two mutually agreed upon indicators in each NYS Teaching Standard related to that topic, creating a cluster of performance expectations supporting growth in their *student engagement* practice.

#### 3. Select teacher learning activities to support growth in the focus area

The focus area of *student engagement* drives the professional learning activities of the teacher(s) throughout the subsequent year. This professional learning may encompass a wide variety of formats, such as study groups, demonstration classrooms, walk-throughs, lesson study, professional learning communities, peer assistance, curriculum projects, student assessments, etc., to support the teacher's growth in *student engagement*.

#### 4. Select evidence aligned in the focus area

As the teachers' expertise deepens, evidence for evaluation of the specific performance indicators is produced through classroom application of the professional learning and if applicable, the use of a student assessment created around the focus area of *student engagement* (e.g., community project.) This could include lesson planning, peer observations, creation of rubrics for student projects, collaboration with colleagues, or student interest survey data (bargained collectively) etc. Evidence is only collected for the selected indicators.

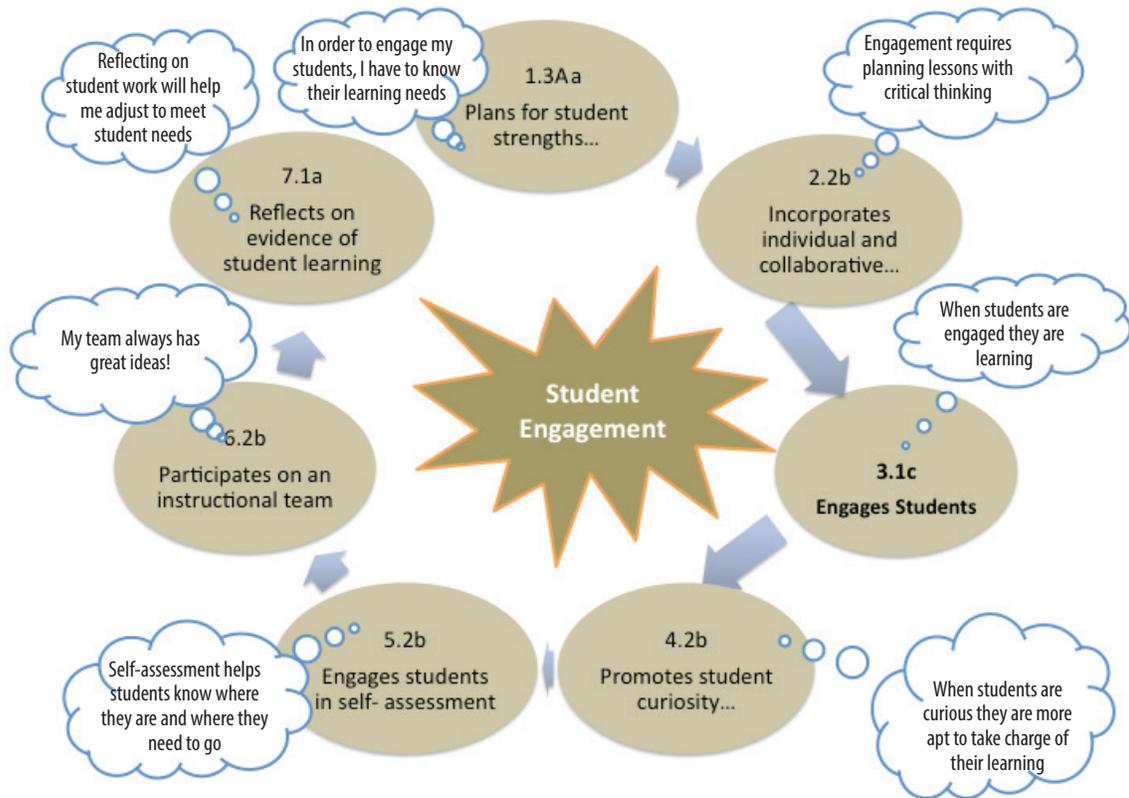


Completing the cycle, the "focus area" of *student engagement* then becomes the subject of an observation/evidence collection evaluation process that includes changes in frequency, format, protocols, artifacts and/or observers. Thus, the evaluation and development process centers on just a few indicators, and enables evaluators (peer or administrator) to provide targeted feedback, resulting in teachers with deeper expertise linked to student learning.

## A real-world example

Ms. Quinn opts into the school district's locally negotiated differentiated evaluation process (DEP) for a two-year cycle. She and her evaluator determine that "student engagement" is the focus of her professional growth and is the basis for her subsequent evaluation. She reviews the rubric and selects one or two indicators from each standard related to student engagement. With her evaluator, she identifies activities, strategies, related student assessment(s) and other measures to support evidence collection for each indicator. Some of these strategies and measures are part of her Professional Learning Plan.

Ms. Quinn, in collaboration with her evaluator, uses a thoughtful process to select the appropriate indicators and sources of evidence:



## As described below

Ms. Quinn selected one performance indicator from each NYS Teaching Standard and developed **Professional Learning Activities** (in red) to support her growth in focus area and **Evaluation Evidence** to align with indicators (in blue) [examples]:

**1.3a Plans for student strengths and interest:** Administer **Interest Inventory** to all students and parents first week of school [document through artifacts]

**2.2b Incorporates individual and collaborative critical thinking and problem solving:** Use student information to **design differentiated lessons** [document with detailed lesson plans, student work, other student data]

**3.1c Engages students:** **Teach lessons** [peer observations and administrator informal observations]

**4.2b Promotes student curiosity and enthusiasm:** **Develop essential questions** that will capture student curiosity [document by submitting essential questions]

**5.2b Engages students in self-assessment:** **Create rubrics** for projects so students will understand the criteria for success [document by submitting rubrics]

**6.2b Participates on an instructional team:** **Collaborate with colleagues** from previous grade level to learn about students' academic strengths/needs [document through meeting notes and minutes]

**7.1a Reflects on evidence of student learning:** **Analyze student self-assessments and student work** [document with student self-assessments, student work, written teacher reflections, and lesson adjustments]

## Determining a “focus area” for a DEP

In determining a specific focus area(s), a teacher working with his/her evaluator may consider a variety of inputs:

**Students** — as student populations change, specific learning needs can be targeted (e.g., incoming ELL populations might be a focus for specialized instructional techniques for English language learners).

**Interest** — professional aspirations, subject area, grade level (e.g., a grade level team might choose to focus on constructivist teaching strategies and use study groups, video review and demonstration classrooms to work with specific performance indicators).

**High leverage teaching practices (HLTP)** — practices most likely to result in significant learning gains for all students i.e., a district team might select a set of high leverage performance indicators, and after determining student outcomes related to those indicators, engages in professional development for formative assessment, data collection and peer coaching to focus on just those HLTP.

**Multiple Forms of Data** — qualitative and quantitative information derived from prior evaluations, student test data, surveys, e.g., a middle school team selects one or two indicators from each standard related to data and forms a building wide study group to learn about use of data, engages in walk-throughs for both professional learning and evaluation, and through digital portfolios shares lesson designs.

**External factors** — may result in certain targeted performance indicators, for example: school/district initiatives, such as new curriculum, school configuration (e.g., team teaching). For example, a district-wide team determines family and community engagement as a focus area and each building selects related performance indicators and engages in professional learning in the focus area.

### How can the process of evaluation be differentiated within NYS’s Teacher Evaluation Law?

Section 3012-c of Education Law requires that the majority of each teacher’s annual evaluation must be based on multiple classroom observations (two or more with at least one unannounced) by a principal or other trained administrator in person or via video; the remaining portion of the evaluation may be based on classroom observations by trained in-school peer teachers. Evaluation must encompass all seven teaching standards but beyond the requirements in the regulations the specific assignment of points based on the rubric is a locally determined decision. *Guidance on New York’s Annual Professional Performance Review Law and Regulations H4*

Change the <b>focus</b> of the evaluation of professional practice to a specific set of indicators	Change the <b>frequency and type of observations</b> to a flexible number of announced or unannounced formal or informal walk-throughs or visits distributed over time	Change the <b>formats</b> in which evidence may be presented to include video, audio, scribing, digital portfolios, etc	Change the <b>professional development</b> to more self-directed and self-selected focus	Change the <b>observers</b> to include peers and/or external evaluators	Change the <b>evidence:</b> use artifacts from professional development activities	Change the <b>cycle:</b> vary the years a teacher participates in a DEP vs. traditional evaluation cycle	Change the <b>student assessment</b> to relate to the specific set of indicators
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## Benefits of DEP

DEP provides benefits to students, teachers, administrators, and districts working to strengthen teacher development and strategically deploy evaluation and development resources.

- **Target learning needs of students:** DEPs can be informed by the learning needs of specific groups of students. For example, English language learners (ELLs) prompt a teacher to develop a DEP around differentiating instruction specifically for these students. The teacher selects one or two related indicators from each NYS Teaching Standard to differentiate (planning, instructional delivery and environment, student assessment, professional growth, etc.) Student needs drive teacher selection of focus areas, thus creating an aligned adjustment to teacher practice and student assessment designed to increase student learning.
- **Promote professional growth for teachers:** Teachers determine the scope and methodology for assessment of their practice ensuring that their professional growth opportunities are targeted to their particular needs, expanding roles and responsibilities and to moving student learning forward. For example, a group of third-grade teachers may opt into a DEP that is focused on constructivist teaching and learning. They would select one or two indicators in each NYS Teaching Standard related to that topic, determine artifacts/evidence for indicators, and create a student assessment to measure constructivist teaching and learning. They may opt to video their practice and reflect with each other, or use student surveys to provide another lens on their targeted area. Teachers can serve as peer observers, coaches and mentors in a differentiated system, thus cultivating teacher leadership skills. With the “spotlight” on fewer performance indicators during evaluation, and student assessments that reflect the selected indicators, a less fragmented experience leads to opportunities for meaningful, focused and aligned feedback and support.
- **Improve school climate:** A DEP supports many opportunities for collaboration between teachers and evaluators, increasing overall participant buy-in. DEPs can enhance professional learning communities and build trust among faculty as teachers share in both learning and integrating practices over a school year that are focused on an area of growth for all. Through the use of several observation “walk-throughs,” for example, observers/administrators focus on specific dimensions of a teacher’s work, thus increasing opportunities for targeted, meaningful feedback and for cultivating a clearer sense of everyday practice. Peer observers and assistance can provide content and grade-level specific feedback as well as demonstrating practice and sharing materials.
- **Increase capacity for districts:** A narrower focus for teachers and administrators provides benefits in a number of ways: 1) DEP leverages a strategic and efficient use of resources. Administrators can focus on new teachers who may require a more intensive focus and evaluation. 2) As teachers engage in focus areas, they develop deep expertise in related performance indicators, creating in-house experts in focus areas. The flexibility inherent in a differentiated system points to the increasing capacity of a district to align its evaluation process with district or building goals and values. DEPs encourage increased communication and trust-building among teaching, supervisory, and administrative professionals.



## DEPs: Requirements and parameters

- In a DEP, teachers and evaluators meet NYS requirements (multiple observations, assess all standards within 60 points). Effective and highly effective teachers have the option of focusing their professional learning on key, specific practices and/or to prepare for roles as teacher-leaders.
- DEPs can tap into negotiated options including use of video, peer observers, locally developed student assessments, review of lesson plans, use of student surveys (negotiated) and portfolios.
- DEPs may allow for greater peer involvement as teachers trained as observers may be positioned to offer targeted and content-specific instructional feedback. Peers may also serve as coaches and mentors, as study group members and other roles that support teacher growth.
- In a DEP, the responsibility for scoring/rating remains the responsibility of the lead evaluator based on evidence collected across all 7 NYS Teaching Standards.

## DEPs and collective bargaining

*DEP is subject to collectively bargaining consistent with the legal requirements of NYS law/regulations.*

**Process:** Labor/management teams utilize a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to detail the specific ways the evaluation process is adjusted in their DEP based on teachers' needs, abilities, or length of time in the profession.

**Points and weights:** If a DEP modifies the breadth of the assessment of professional practice (e.g., restricting focus to 14 indicators across seven standards or allowing choices in only some standards), it is important to specify within the negotiated agreement whether all standards and indicators will be equally weighted and scored.

**Training and awareness:** Adoption of a DEP requires that teachers and evaluators have opportunities to understand the new system and its practical expectations, particularly as it pertains to high quality evidence, professional learning opportunities, new observation formats, assessments, scoring, and selecting a focus area.



## DEP in NYSUT's Innovation Initiative school districts:

**Plattsburgh:** Teachers, who were rated highly effective or effective, opted into the district's DEP. A labor-management team preselected a list of High Leverage performance indicators from the NYSUT Teacher Practice Rubric. Each teacher considering his/her needs and interests chose one instructional practice to be their focus area and selected one or two indicators per standard to guide their growth, development and evaluation activities for the year. The teachers individually or in groups, engaged in book study, journal reading, research review, and classroom practice regarding their focus area. During their evaluations, teachers provided evidence for focus-related indicators. Evidence related to Standards 1-2 were presented during the pre-conference; Standards 3-4 during observations; Standard 5 in the post-conference. Teacher portfolios provided evidence on Standards 6-7 from their professional learning plans (PLPs). During Year Two of implementation teachers at various ratings were able to select the DEP option.

**North Syracuse:** Over a six-month period, teachers volunteered to join a pilot DEP defined in a MOU agreed to by the North Syracuse Education Association (NSEA) and the North Syracuse School District. Specific indicators were jointly chosen by teachers and administrators based on student needs and teacher interests. The DEP specified that teachers undergo four unannounced visits of minimally 15 minutes each and that evaluators provide feedback within five days of the visit. The DEP was described as “yielding a greater result in improving teachers’ practice,” particularly in the “rich conversations between teachers and their evaluators.”

**Marlboro:** In year 1, middle school faculty voluntarily chose the use of data as the target of their DEP. During scheduled professional development, the faculty reached consensus on specific performance indicators from each of the NYS Teaching Standards. Sixteen indicators aligned with the focus area were identified; teachers were free to choose six additional indicators in Standards 3-7 and formed study groups to support areas they would like to develop in the coming year. In year two of implementation, peer collaboration was added to the study groups as part of the professional support for DEP.

**Albany:** This district and its teachers association negotiated an agreement allowing any tenured teacher who received an overall HEDI rating of highly effective or effective and scored 59 or 60 total points on the teacher practice component of their evaluation during the 2013-14 school year to opt into the DEP for a maximum of two consecutive years.

### For more information about DEPs

Carnegie Policy Brief (2014) Evaluating Teachers More Strategically: Using Performance Results to Streamline Evaluation Systems

Johnson, Susan Moore. (2012) Having It Both Ways: Building the Capacity of Individual Teachers and Their Schools, Harvard Educational Review, Volume 82, Number 1 / Spring 2012

Sarah Archibald, J Cogshall, A Croft, and Laura Goe (2011) “High-Quality Professional Development for All Teachers: Effectively Allocating Resources”

Curtis, R. (2013) “Finding a New Way: Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Meet Unprecedented Demands” Education and Society Program, The Aspen Institute

**To schedule information sessions and workshops to develop your DEP,  
call NYSUT's Education & Learning Trust: 800-528-6208.**

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