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Preparing Principals to Evaluate Teachers

Executive Summary

During the past few years, more than 30 states have enacted legislation to change the way teachers are evaluated. The new laws require the annual evaluation of teachers; typically, multiple evaluations during the school year are required for new teachers. They also require the use of multiple measures to determine a teacher's effectiveness and tie high-stakes decisions to the outcomes of teacher evaluations. Decisions related to tenure, compensation, and employment are among these high-stakes decisions.

With such decisions tied to evaluation results, it is important that governors lead efforts to make changes to state policy to ensure that school principals and other educators responsible for conducting evaluations are trained and certified to conduct them. Governors can use the state's program approval authority to drive changes in principal preparation to improve principals' readiness to conduct teacher evaluations. Moreover, governors can call for the tracking of data on professional development to determine what type of professional development—and which providers—are most able to improve student outcomes; such information is necessary to improve the quality of professional development. The information can also be used to make data-driven decisions about resourcing professional development. Finally, governors may want to consider adopting reasonable and responsible timelines for implementing the evaluation policies to ensure principals have the time they need to adequately train, become certified, and practice conducting evaluations *before* evaluation results are used to make high-stakes decisions.

Background

Although considerable attention has been paid to the need to evaluate teachers to determine their effectiveness, far less attention has been paid to ensuring principals are prepared to conduct the evaluations. Before recent state reforms increased the importance of teacher evaluations, principals traditionally did not use evaluations to distinguish teacher performance. The New Teacher Project's report, for example, found that 98 percent of all teachers in the 12 districts surveyed received satisfactory or better ratings on their evaluations.¹ This statistic is staggering given that in a survey of principals, 80 percent said at least one teacher in their school building should not be teaching.²

During the past two years, 18 states have enacted legislation to require the evaluation of teachers. The laws call for the development and implementation of evaluation systems that are more rigorous and, in 25 states, require student performance measures to be used to determine a teacher's effectiveness. Several of the 25 states, including **Colorado**, **Delaware**, and **Tennessee**, now mandate a review of a teacher's evaluation results for tenure consideration.³ Several states have already adopted policies, or are considering adopting policies, that tie teacher evaluation

results to compensation. With high-stakes decisions now attached to the results of evaluations, principals must receive training and support to conduct them effectively.

Why Principals Need Professional Development to Evaluate Teachers

Notwithstanding the growing number of states that have enacted new policies governing the evaluation of educators, little attention has been paid to the training and support principals will need to evaluate teachers using the instruments states are developing and adopting. This lack of attention to principals' need for professional development to evaluate teachers is alarming for three reasons. First, research studies confirm that principals are relatively good at determining the effectiveness of teachers who are high performing and low performing. Yet principals cannot differentiate teacher performance for the approximately 60 percent of teachers whose effectiveness is average or near average.⁴

Second, principal preparation programs have little or no focus on evaluating teachers.⁵ This includes a lack of focus on conducting evaluations and on providing teachers with the actionable feedback they need to improve their performance. In addition to being neglected in the curriculum, some preparation programs do not provide enough clinical experiences for principals to learn about evaluating teachers and to practice conducting evaluations.

Finally, sitting principals typically have not conducted teacher evaluations in which multiple measures are used and high stakes are attached. The higher the stakes attached to the results of the evaluation, the more important it is that principals receive high-quality training and support. Otherwise, states and school districts could open themselves to legal challenges from teachers who suffer the consequences of a less-than-adequate evaluation rating.

The timelines many states have adopted for full implementation of new teacher evaluation systems may not be adequate to fully train principals and other administrators who are conducting evaluations. Just as important as the quality of the training and support principals receive is ensuring they have adequate time to learn how to use the instruments, ensuring they know how to provide actionable feedback to teachers, and ensuring they have sufficient time to practice using the instruments before high-stakes decisions are attached to evaluation results.⁶

What Governors Can Do

Governors can lead efforts to ensure principals receive the training and support they need to complete teacher evaluations. Specifically, they can push for changes in state policy to:

- Ensure principals have access to training to effectively use new teacher evaluation instruments, provide actionable feedback to teachers, and are certified to conduct evaluations;
- Track professional development and educator training expenditures to make decisions about reallocating resources and the effectiveness of the training and the training providers;
- Require traditional and alternative preparation programs to include teacher evaluation in their curriculum and require prospective principals to conduct teacher evaluations as part of their clinical experience; and
- Adopt responsible and reasonable timelines to ensure principals have time to complete training, earn certification, and practice conducting evaluations prior to attaching high-stakes decisions to evaluation results.

Governors can lead efforts to ensure principals receive the training they need to conduct teacher evaluations. For example, governors can recommend changes in state policy to require current

principals to receive high-quality training *before* they evaluate teachers. The training should impart information on how to use the evaluation instrument *and* how to drive improvements in teaching and learning by providing actionable feedback to teachers.⁷ **Rhode Island** is training professionals to provide training to all principals. **Tennessee** hired a nonprofit organization to conduct the training for all principals to ensure they were certified and ready to evaluate teachers beginning in fall 2011.

To ensure principals are ready to evaluate teachers and have mastered the training, principals should be required to be certified evaluators. Completion of training and certification should be a condition for initial licensure for all new principals. With higher stakes attached to the outcomes of teacher evaluations, states wanting to minimize legal challenges must be proactive to ensure principals are ready and capable to conduct teacher evaluations.

Illinois law now requires principals to participate in training and be approved by the state board of education before they conduct any teacher evaluation. Principals also are required to participate in additional training at least once during their licensure renewal cycle.⁸ **Tennessee** requires certification for all professionals who conduct evaluations and has set up an Internet-based test portal to enable principals to earn certification. **Louisiana** requires training for all professionals who conduct evaluations.

Nationwide, an estimated \$9 billion is spent annually on professional development and educator training.⁹ Such a large expenditure affords governors the opportunity to ask state education agencies (SEAs) to assess which professional development models lead to the greatest gains in student learning and produce the highest return on investment. Governors can also request that SEAs use data to determine which professional development providers are most effective. Being able to make these determinations could result in cost savings in the future. Cost savings can be achieved by discontinuing professional development that is not effective. The information can also be used to improve the quality of professional development, a prerequisite for improving teaching and learning.¹⁰ Moreover, tracking the effectiveness of professional development can help states reallocate resources to professional development and providers that demonstrate a high rate of return on the state's investment.

To address the deficiencies in principal preparation, governors can use the state's accreditation authority to require all principal preparation programs to add courses to the curriculum that aim to help train prospective principals to conduct evaluations and give teachers actionable feedback. Program approval and accreditation standards should also include a requirement that aspiring principals evaluate teachers—in conjunction with a certified evaluator—as part of their clinical experience.

Finally, governors can also require that the use of new instruments to evaluate teachers be phased in over a period of at least one year to ensure principals have the time they need to refine their evaluation skills and effectively use the evaluation instruments. Many states are piloting the instruments in select districts before full implementation to give principals time to practice using the evaluation instruments before evaluation results are used statewide to make high-stakes decisions about teachers. Thereafter, principals should be provided with ongoing professional support at the district level to guide them through the first year of full implementation.

Colorado, for example, has decided to conduct a one-year pilot in a limited number of districts and phase in the use of the new teacher evaluation over two years to ensure that principals have time to learn how to use the instrument and that principals' ratings have strong inter-rater

reliability.¹¹ The Colorado Department of Education will provide ongoing support and training for principals during the pilot phase and throughout the two-year phase-in period.

Next Steps for States

Many states have made progress in adopting policies that require teachers and principals to be evaluated regularly, while other states have not yet acted to do so. States considering action are well advised to go about the work in a way that supports teachers and principals in their practice. An urgent need exists to develop state policies that will ensure educators are evaluated in a meaningful way. However, new policies should recognize that principals must be trained and given time to ensure the policies' intention is realized. States that have already acted may need to examine the timelines tied to the implementation of new policies to ensure the process is as fair and as objective as possible.

¹ Dan Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, and David Keeling, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project, 2009), <http://widgeteffect.org/downloads/TheWidgetEffect.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Tenure typically is awarded to educators after they have been employed for a specific time and have completed a probationary period. The probationary period is three years in most states, but two states have a one-year probationary period and six states have a two-year probationary period. For more information on tenure policies in states, see http://www.nctq.org/stpy09/updates/docs/stpy_national.pdf.

⁴ Brian Jacob and Lars Lefgren, "Can Principals Identify Effective Teachers? Evidence on Subjective Performance Evaluation in Education," <http://econ.byu.edu/faculty/Lefgren/Assets/papers/principals.pdf>; Douglas N. Harris and Tim R. Sass, "What Makes for a Good Teacher and Who Can Tell?" Working Paper 30 (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, September 2009), <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~tsass/Papers/IES%20Principal%20Eval%2017B.pdf>.

⁵ For more information on how to use state policy to improve school principal preparation, see <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1104SCHOOLPRINCIPALS.PDF>.

⁶ This is particularly important to improve inter-rater reliability. For more information on inter-rater reliability, see <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/relval/com2a5.cfm>.

⁷ All professional development should be aligned to professional development standards. Learning Forward, formerly known as the National Staff Development Council, has recently released revised standards for professional learning. For more information, see <http://www.learningforward.org/standards/index.cfm>.

⁸ For more information on SB 315, see <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/96/PDF/096-0861.pdf>.

⁹ M. Kiernan Killeen, David H. Monk, and Margaret Plecki, "School District Spending on Professional Development: Insights from National Data (1992–1998)," *Journal of Education Finance* 28 (summer 2002): 25–50.

¹⁰ For more information on how to track professional development expenditures to improve professional development quality, see <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0910TEACHERDEVELOPMENT.PDF>.

¹¹ For more information on SB 191, see http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2010a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/EF2EBB67D47342CF872576A80027B078?open&file=191_enr.pdf.