

SREB

Toward Better Teaching

A view of evaluation policies, practices and lessons in SREB states

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This report was prepared by Andy Baxter, vice president, Educator Effectiveness, Southern Regional Education Board. It is the first in a series of publications that will examine the efforts of SREB states to prepare, place, develop, evaluate and retain effective teachers and principals, as called for in SREB's Challenge to Lead 2020 Goals for Education. It is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The conclusions presented here are those of SREB and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the funder. For more information on educator effectiveness policies in the region, visit SREB.org/EE. To consult with SREB staff about educator effectiveness systems, contact Andy Baxter at Andy.Baxter@SREB.org or (704) 247-7497.

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*A view of evaluation policies,
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SREB

Educator
Effectiveness

Executive Summary

The success of our students, in the classroom and beyond, depends on teachers. Understanding how to recruit, place, develop, evaluate and retain effective teachers is a topic of great importance — and increasing interest — in the 16 SREB states and elsewhere in the nation.

Many SREB states have begun to overhaul their teacher evaluation systems to provide more helpful feedback to teachers for their development. Since 2010, all but two SREB states have passed new legislation aimed at strengthening teacher evaluation; half were awarded federal Race to the Top funds, which also bring teacher effectiveness requirements; and all but two SREB states had to demonstrate their use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations, a stipulation of their waivers for federal *No Child Left Behind* requirements.

This flurry of activity has brought a wide range of evaluation tools and practices that SREB states employ to varying degrees. For example, nine of the 16 states use a single statewide evaluation system for teachers, though districts in four of those states may opt in or out of that system (depending on the state). Seven states use evaluation systems designed at the district level, though in three of those states, the state must approve the district's system.

Less varied is how frequently the SREB states evaluate tenured teachers: 10 of them conduct annual evaluations, and two others vary frequency depending on a teacher's prior evaluation. Similarly, every SREB state employs classroom observation methods to evaluate teachers, and student achievement data are considered in all but two states.

Especially crucial to effective teacher evaluation is stakeholder input early on — and stakeholder feedback later on. This input and feedback ensure that teacher evaluation remains a dynamic process. States and systems take action, monitor results, gather feedback and then modify actions — and the cycle continues anew. How states obtain this feedback varies, but the experiences of three states (Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee) illustrate effective approaches and valuable lessons learned.

Across the region, implementing or expanding teacher evaluation is unavoidably disruptive and challenging. Having detailed the challenges and broader lessons learned, SREB helps states develop teacher evaluation policies by:

- Finding and presenting the latest research and policies of greatest relevance to the state;
- Connecting leaders across states to collaborate on design and implementation;
- Conducting thorough analysis of state implementation plans for potential weaknesses or threats; and
- Serving as a “critical friend” throughout implementation.

To arrange a consultation with SREB's Educator Effectiveness professionals, contact Andy Baxter at (704) 247-7497.

Toward Better Teaching

A view of evaluation policies, practices and lessons in SREB states

This report provides a timely update on the policies SREB states have adopted in recent years to change how teachers are evaluated, with the ultimate goal of helping all teachers become more effective. Though the policies differ from state to state, they have great potential to provide teachers, school leaders, state policy-makers and the public with much more rigorous and multifaceted information about teachers' performance and impact than has ever been available before.

To realize the potential of the new evaluation systems, it will be vital for state leaders to gather ongoing feedback from teachers and principals, closely monitor results over time, and use this body of information to continuously improve evaluation practices and address any challenges that emerge. The payoff of this painstaking work will be high-quality teacher evaluation systems that are widely seen as fair, meaningful and appropriately nuanced — thereby earning the confidence of teachers, education leaders and stakeholders. Most important, these improved evaluation systems will be far more likely to accomplish their intended purpose: to help all teachers become more effective so that their students receive the education they need to prepare them for success in life. SREB can serve as a resource to state leaders as they navigate the challenges and opportunities inherent in creating new teacher evaluation systems and improving existing ones.

Why Higher Expectations for Students and Teachers?

Quality education has long been recognized as the key to economic prosperity for individuals, families, communities, states and the nation as a whole. For more than a century, the United States led the world in educational attainment and witnessed corresponding gains in per capita income. As levels of educational attainment increased in other countries around the world, the nation was challenged to respond, and states and districts did so by pursuing an array of reform efforts. As a result, student achievement has continued to improve, and college participation rates are now higher than ever. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 40 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in higher education in 2008, compared with 26 percent in 1980.

This progress is commendable, but it is insufficient. Persistent achievement gaps, large numbers of high school dropouts, high proportions of college students needing remediation, and low postsecondary completion rates provide compelling evidence that millions of young adults are not receiving the kind of education they will need to support themselves financially. To compete in the knowledge-based global economy and reverse the downward trend in economic mobility, all students need a rigorous education that will prepare them for postsecondary success.

The payoff of this painstaking work will be high-quality teacher evaluation systems that are widely seen as fair, meaningful and appropriately nuanced.

States across the nation are now engaged in myriad efforts to improve postsecondary outcomes through better curricula and assessments, higher standards, improved data systems and more rigorous accountability. All of these are important. More than any other factor, however, the success of public education depends — as it always has — on classroom teachers. As the authors of a pivotal report from the Brookings Institution put it, “Without the right people standing in front of the classroom, school reform is a futile exercise.”

What Do We Know About the Impact of Effective Teaching?

In recent years, research and experiences in high-performing, high-poverty schools have shown that while individual and family characteristics play a major role in student achievement, good teaching can do much to “level the playing field” between students from different backgrounds and circumstances. Although teachers do not shoulder sole responsibility for student learning, they can have a very powerful impact on how much and how well students learn, and thus on the long-term opportunities that learning provides.

A recent study by economists Raj Chetty, John Friedman and Jonah Rockoff found that students assigned to highly effective teachers (specifically, those with high value-added student achievement results) were more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries and live in higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods, and they were less likely to become parents as teenagers. Based on their analyses, the authors concluded, “Good teachers create substantial economic value.”

Recognizing the enduring impact of good teachers, and realizing that teacher effectiveness policies provide a powerful lever for elevating student success, federal and state leaders have focused considerable attention on crafting new legislation to transform how teachers are prepared, evaluated, developed and compensated. This brief focuses specifically on SREB states’ recent policy work related to teacher evaluations.

Impetus for Change in Teacher Evaluation Policies

A report from Bellwether Education Partners summarizes the recent history of efforts to evaluate U.S. teachers and the impetus behind the current reforms:

“Beginning in the 1980s, standards-based reformers called for greater rigor in teacher preparation programs, which were placing too much emphasis on pedagogical theories and too little on ensuring teachers had deep content knowledge in the subjects they taught . . . Building on this concern, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* also emphasizes teachers’ subject matter content knowledge. The law’s ‘highly qualified teacher’ (HQT) provisions require all teachers to hold a bachelor’s degree and state licensure and to demonstrate knowledge of the subject they teach, through either a college major, certification exam, or, for veteran teachers, by meeting a state-defined highly objective, uniform state standard of evaluation.

“These provisions were designed to ensure that teachers have subject matter knowledge specific to the subjects they teach . . . and improve equity in the distribution of qualified teachers for poor and minority students. But while the [highly qualified teacher] provisions were designed with the best of intentions, they ultimately fell short, creating paperwork hoops for teachers and schools to jump through without necessarily improving the quality of instruction.”

As improved data systems made linking teacher and student data easier, it became increasingly evident that the proxy indicators used in most teacher evaluation systems (such as certification, years of experience and master’s degrees) were not very good at predicting teachers’ impact on student learning.

Adding further motivation was an influential 2009 report from TNTP (formerly The National Teacher Project) titled *The Widget Effect*, which showed the extent to which public education was simultaneously ignoring teacher excellence and ineffectiveness. According to TNTP, under current teacher evaluation systems, nearly all teachers were rated as either good or great. Professional development was inadequate. Novices were receiving no special attention. Teaching excellence was

often ignored, as was poor performance. The authors concluded that teacher effectiveness, “the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement, is not measured, recorded or used to inform decision-making in any meaningful way.”

A second TNTP study in 2011, *The Irreplaceables*, showed that urban schools were losing their best and worst teachers at strikingly similar rates. “Schools rarely make a strong effort to keep [the most effective] teachers despite their success and rarely usher unsuccessful teachers out,” the authors wrote. “These retention patterns stymie school turnaround efforts and prevent the teaching profession from earning the prestige it deserves.”

The federal Race to the Top competition, launched in 2009 in the midst of the economic recession, provided further reason to focus on teacher effectiveness and other reform priorities of the U.S. Department of Education. Later, the federal government also enabled states to receive waivers from key elements of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in exchange for undertaking certain education reform measures, including more rigorous teacher evaluations.

Together, these factors created a sea change. Starting in 2009 and accelerating over the next few years, federal policy incentives and growing interest in strengthening teacher effectiveness led newly elected governors and legislative majorities in many states to embark on a wave of new policies to change teacher evaluation practices.

Part 1 of this report describes recent teacher evaluation policies undertaken by SREB states, either through legislative action or as part of the Race to the Top competition or the *NCLB* waiver process. The goal is to highlight and reflect on some of the important distinctions among the various states’ policies. Part 2 focuses on implementation of these policy reforms and reflects on lessons learned to date.

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PART 1: Recent Policy Developments Related to Teacher Evaluation in SREB States

From 2010 to 2013, it was difficult to find a state that was not pursuing decisive changes to its teacher evaluation policies. During this timeframe, more than 20 states across the nation adopted new legislation related to teachers and their work — for example, mandating annual teacher evaluations, requiring the use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations, or using evaluation results in personnel decisions (such as tenure, reductions in force, dismissal or retention). Some states passed multiple laws pertaining to teacher effectiveness. And once the new laws were passed, state departments of education began taking the next steps to develop the rules and regulations to ensure high-fidelity implementation.

Legislative Action

As of June 2013, all but three SREB states have passed new teacher evaluation legislation since 2010. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1: Key Policy Developments Related to Teacher Effectiveness and Evaluation in SREB States, 2010-2013

State	Key Legislation	Race to the Top	NCLB Waiver
Alabama	–	Applied / No Award	Pending
Arkansas	HB 2178 (Act 1209), 2011	Applied / No Award	Yes
Delaware	SB 263, 2010 SB 51, 2013	Winner (Round 1)	Yes
Florida	SB 736 (Chapter 2011-1), 2011 SB 1664, 2013	Winner (Round 2)	Yes
Georgia	HB 244 (Act 336), 2013	Winner (Round 2)	Yes
Kentucky	HB 180 (Chapter 55), 2013	Winner (Round 3)	Yes
Louisiana	HB 1033 (Act 54), 2010 HB 974 (Act 1), 2012	Winner (Round 3)	Yes
Maryland	HB 1263 and SB 899 (Chapter 189), 2010	Winner (Round 2)	Yes
Mississippi	SB 2658 (Chapter 494), 2013	Applied / No Award	Yes
North Carolina	SB 724 (Chapter SL 2012-77), 2012	Winner (Round 2)	Yes
Oklahoma	SB 2033, 2010 SB 207, 2013 SB 426, 2013	Applied / No Award	Yes
South Carolina	–	Applied / No Award	Yes
Tennessee	HB 7010 and SB 7005 (Chapter 2), 2010 HB 2012 and SB 1528 (Chapter 70), 2011	Winner (Round 1)	Yes
Texas	–	Did not apply	Pending
Virginia	HB 1500 (Chapter 890), 2011 SB 278 (Chapter 106), 2012 HB 76 (Chapter 687), 2012 HB 2083 (Chapter 228), 2013 HB 2151 (Chapter 588), 2013 SB 116 (Chapter 640), 2013 SB 1223 (Chapter 650), 2013 HB 1999 (Chapter 672), 2013 SB 1207 (Chapter 692), 2013 SB 1185 (Chapter 691), 2013	Applied / No Award	Yes
West Virginia	HB 4236 and SB 372 (Chapter 165), 2012 SB 359 (Chapter 55), 2013	Applied / No Award	Yes

Sources: SREB, *Major Policies of Recent Teacher Reform Legislation in SREB States*: May 2013; National Council of State Legislatures — <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/educ/tenure.pdf>.

Race to the Top

Another influential development within the 2010-2012 time period was the federal Race to the Top (RTT) program. Announced in mid-2009 and conducted in three rounds of competition that all states were invited to enter, RTT winners were chosen based on what they had accomplished — or planned to accomplish — in particular priority areas. Under the heading “Great Teachers and Leaders,” these priorities included:

- 1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance;
- 2) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals;
- 3) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals;
- 4) Providing effective support to teachers and principals; and
- 5) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs.

All but one SREB state applied for funding under Race to the Top, and eight states were awarded funding. The impact of the competition reached far beyond the winners, as states across the country pressed forward with major changes to their teacher evaluation policies and systems.

The new policies have not been set in stone, however. In some SREB states, implementation has uncovered challenges that will have to be addressed in upcoming legislation or rule-making. In Florida, for example, teachers’ unions filed a lawsuit in 2013 opposing the state’s new teacher merit pay system, arguing that thousands of teachers would be evaluated based on test results in subjects they do not teach. In response, Florida Education Commissioner Tony Bennett reiterated his support for the core tenets of the law (SB 736-Ch. 2011-01), while expressing a desire to delay using it for compensation purposes until an appropriate assessment has been developed for teachers in subjects and grades not covered by state-mandated tests.

More than half of TIF grants (50 of the 95 grantees) are in SREB states, including states, districts, charter school organizations or technical assistance providers.

NCLB Waivers

In August 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan moved ahead to give flexibility to states seeking relief from key provisions of *NCLB*. In a September 2011 letter to state education leaders, Duncan explained,:

“While *NCLB* helped state and local educational agencies shine a bright light on the achievement gap and increased accountability for groups of high-need students, it inadvertently encouraged some states to set low academic standards, failed to recognize or reward growth in student learning, and did little to elevate the teaching profession or recognize the most effective teachers. [M]any *NCLB* requirements have unintentionally become barriers to state and local implementation of forward-looking reforms.”

States were asked to indicate by October 2011 whether they intended to apply for a waiver and to submit an outline of their reform plans by mid-February 2012. Accordingly, federal officials began considering and granting waivers to states in exchange for their agreement to implement certain reform measures, including revised teacher evaluation policies requiring the inclusion of student achievement data. By spring 2013, every SREB state had requested an *NCLB* waiver; 14 had been approved, and two were pending.

Teacher Incentive Fund Grants

The U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program, launched in 2010, provided another impetus for states — and school districts within those states — to revamp their teacher evaluation systems. The intent was to support projects to develop and implement performance-based compensation systems for teachers, principals and other personnel in high-need schools, with a goal of increasing educator effectiveness and student achievement, as measured in significant part by student growth. More than half of TIF grants (50 of the 95 grantees) are in SREB states, including states, districts, charter school organizations or technical assistance providers.

PART 2: How SREB States Are Designing and Implementing Teacher Evaluation

What kinds of policies are SREB states adopting in the teacher evaluation arena? And how “tight” or “loose” are they? In other words, are they highly prescriptive, or do they establish parameters or criteria and allow districts to determine the specifics?

This reports compares and contrasts SREB states' recent teacher evaluation policies with respect to three important dimensions:

- **Locus of evaluation system:** Which states have a single evaluation instrument and process, and which allow districts to use their own, subject to state approval? Locus matters because some states have a strong tradition of decentralized decision-making, and efforts to impose a single system statewide may foster resistance from teachers, principals and school communities.
- **Frequency:** Which states require annual teacher evaluations, and which alter the frequency for different types of teachers (for example, for differing levels of experience)? Frequency matters because all teachers need regular feedback, but some may not receive it on a regular basis without specific timing requirements in place. Research on performance improvement suggests that the ideal would likely be for all teachers to receive frequent formative evaluations (with the goal of monitoring and providing feedback) along with professional development based on the results. This reduces the need for more frequent summative evaluations (which evaluate at the end of a period).
- **Evaluation components:** Which states require that student achievement data be included in teacher evaluations? Are value-added student achievement data mandated? Beyond student achievement data, what other components are included in the evaluation system, such as observations or student surveys? Research from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project has shown that estimates of teachers' effectiveness are more stable from year to year when they combine classroom observations, student surveys and measures of student achievement gains than when they are based solely on the latter.

Most SREB states now also require that tenured teachers be evaluated (for summative purposes) annually, and a few require that they be evaluated twice per year.

Locus of Evaluation System

As of early 2013, nine SREB states had adopted a single statewide system for teacher evaluations, but not all of them required local school districts to use it. Oklahoma, for example, allowed districts to choose qualitative evaluation instruments from a list approved by the state, while South Carolina and Texas took a “presumptive” approach in which districts need state approval to opt out of the statewide system. Alternatively, seven SREB states had policies that permit school districts to develop and use their own teacher evaluation systems, as long as they meet state criteria. Some states, including Florida and Maryland, required districts to submit their evaluation systems for state approval. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2: Locus of Teacher Evaluation System: State- or District-Designed

Single Statewide Teacher Evaluation Systems	District-Designed Teacher Evaluation Systems*
Alabama	Florida
Arkansas	Georgia
Delaware	Kentucky
Mississippi	Louisiana
North Carolina	Maryland
Oklahoma	Virginia
South Carolina	West Virginia
Tennessee	
Texas	

* based on state criteria
Sources: SREB interviews with state education agencies; the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) database.

Frequency of Evaluations

All SREB states require *non-tenured* teachers to be evaluated at least annually. Florida requires first-year teachers to be evaluated twice annually; Oklahoma, South Carolina and West Virginia require all non-tenured teachers to be evaluated once each year.

Most SREB states now also require that *tenured* teachers be evaluated (for summative purposes) annually. Texas varies the evaluation frequency according to teachers’ evaluation results: A teacher who has been rated proficient in his or her most recent evaluation is evaluated at least once every five years. (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3: State Policies: Frequency of Evaluations for Tenured Teachers

Annual	Every 3 Years	Based on Prior Evaluation and/or Experience	No State Policy
Alabama	Arkansas	Oklahoma	Mississippi
Delaware	Kentucky	Texas	South Carolina
Florida	Virginia		
Georgia			
Louisiana			
Maryland			
North Carolina			
Tennessee			
West Virginia			

Sources: SREB interviews with state education agencies; NCTQ database.

Teacher evaluations have two primary purposes. The first is to ensure that every teacher receives regular, meaningful feedback on his or her performance, which can then inform professional development, supervision, coaching, etc. The second is for accountability purposes — that is, to provide assurances to parents and principals that teachers are teaching effectively, and to intervene when they are not. The former (developmental) purpose can be achieved either through formative or summative evaluations. Above and beyond the summative evaluations required by state policy, in other words, principals should be continuously gathering information throughout the school year — through classroom observations, walk-throughs, reviews of lesson plans and classroom work, etc. — and using this to give specific, constructive feedback on their strengths as well as on ways to improve their performance. This is the essence of healthy supervision and the key to continuous improvement for teachers and schools alike.

Though all teachers need feedback (and, therefore, evaluation), there is no simple answer to the question, “How often should teachers be evaluated?” Some need feedback frequently; others less often. The increasing level of state policy prescriptiveness regarding the frequency and content of evaluations seems due to the fact that many principals have not been providing regular, specific feedback on their teachers’ performance, which was traditionally not seen as central to the role of principals. But this has changed over time, and today, principals are expected to serve as instructional leaders of their schools. If more principals were to embrace (and have time to fulfill) their role as instructional leader, it is quite possible that the pressure to mandate annual summative evaluations would be lessened.

Teacher evaluations have two primary purposes. The first is to ensure that every teacher receives regular, meaningful feedback on his or her performance.

Some policy-makers want as many summative evaluations as possible. But this time-consuming requirement sometimes sparks pushback from teachers as well as from those in charge of implementation — namely, principals and their professional associations. Some leaders may be inclined to respond by scaling back the frequency of required observations or evaluations, either

across the board or selectively (for example, requiring less frequent observations or evaluations teachers who have demonstrated a high level of effectiveness). States considering such avenues may want to exercise caution, however, given the vital role of frequent, ongoing evaluations for formative purposes — that is, in providing feedback for continuous improvement — as well as for accountability purposes.

To provide the valuable information and feedback inherent in teacher observations without excessively burdening principals, many have observed that principals' roles will need to be redefined. Vital changes may include, for example, the creation of additional support roles with responsibility for managing tasks that pertain only indirectly to instruction, differentiating administrative staffing (for example, assigning different administrators to handle management and academic roles), and fostering “distributed leadership” — in other words, extending instructional leadership from principals to others in the school community, including teachers, parents and other district staff.

Evaluation Components

In the ideal scenario, teachers would be evaluated based on a variety of robust measures. These would include not only ratings based on observations of their classroom practices and behaviors and using detailed criteria or rubrics outlining varying levels of performance, but also growth in students' learning and feedback from students and parents. Evaluations could go a step further, as well, by including other attributes found to be strong predictors of academic success — for example, zest, grit, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism and curiosity.

Traditionally, giving feedback to teachers was not seen as central to the role of principals. But this has changed over time, and today, principals are expected to serve as instructional leaders of their schools.

The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, a research partnership funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has focused on developing and evaluating multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. Teachers from four SREB states — North Carolina (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools), Texas (Dallas Independent School District), Florida (Hillsborough County Public Schools) and Tennessee (Memphis City Schools) — are among the more than 3,000 teacher volunteers who have participated in the MET project since it was launched in 2009. As a result of their work, multiple measures of teacher effectiveness are now available to provide an accurate and reliable picture of teaching effectiveness.

Among the teacher effectiveness measures studied by the MET project are the Tripod Student Perception Survey; the Content Knowledge for Teaching (CKT) test, which assesses teachers' understanding of teaching strategies; classroom observation protocols; Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching; the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); the Mathematical Quality of Instruction (MQI); the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observations (PLATO); the Quality of Science Teaching (QST); and the UTeach Teacher Observation Protocol (UTOP) for assessing math and science instruction.

SREB states have taken a variety of approaches in deciding which elements to require in their teacher evaluation systems — and the value of each. Some mandate as few as two measures, while others include many more. Nearly all states require the inclusion of student achievement data (specifically value-added or growth data), as well as ratings of teaching practices based on observations.

Student Achievement Data

Over the past several years — in response to the Race to the Top competition, the *NCLB* waiver process, and the growing understanding of the impact of teachers on student learning, among other factors — many states have established a requirement for evaluating teachers based on the performance of their students. This trend is evident in SREB states: all except Alabama and Texas now require the inclusion of student achievement data in teacher evaluations, nearly all further specify the use of value-added achievement data. (See Table 4.) The percent of the evaluation based on the value-added data varies, from 35 percent in states such as Oklahoma and Tennessee to 50 percent in Arkansas, Florida and Louisiana.

TABLE 4: Required Teacher Evaluation Components in SREB States: Student Achievement Data

Student Achievement Data		
Required		Not Required
Arkansas	Mississippi	Alabama
Delaware	North Carolina	Texas
Florida	Oklahoma	
Georgia	South Carolina	
Kentucky	Tennessee	
Louisiana	Virginia	
Maryland	West Virginia	

Sources: SREB interviews with state education agencies; Bellwether Education Partners; NCTQ database.

A significant challenge inherent in including student achievement data in teacher evaluations is that the data come from state tests, which typically cover only certain subjects and grade levels. States have therefore had to determine what to substitute for student achievement or growth data in evaluating teachers in grades and subjects that are not covered by mandated state assessments. This topic is the focus of a separate SREB brief.

Classroom Observations

In addition to student achievement data, ratings of teacher practice based on classroom observations are another key component in all of the SREB states’ policies regarding teacher evaluations. The use of observations is nothing new; the practice, in various forms, has been used for centuries. In the past, though, the rigor and quality of observations varied widely, and thus so did the caliber of the resulting feedback — if, in fact, any feedback was provided. The end result was very limited information with which to assess teachers’ performance or guide improvement.

Today, it has become prevalent for teacher observations to be based on specific criteria or rubrics that define and provide detailed examples of what constitutes effective practice, so that the observer (principal or otherwise) can accurately and reliably assess how well a particular teacher is teaching. In Louisiana, for example, the observation section of the new statewide teacher evaluation rubric focuses on five specific skills, while in Tennessee, observations are concentrated

on a set of 19 specific indicators across four domains — instruction, planning, environment and professionalism. These criteria are typically not specified in state legislation but instead are defined by the state’s department of education.

Well-executed, rigorous, systematic observations are crucial in assessing teacher effectiveness and in helping all teachers improve over time. Every SREB state now either includes classroom observations in its teacher evaluation system or requires that districts include them in their systems.

SREB states’ policies differ with respect to how teacher observations are used. More specifically, the policies vary in terms of:

- Frequency of observations;
- Types of observations (unannounced vs. announced);
- Requirements for feedback (e.g., pre- or post-observation conferences); and
- Requirements for specific observational instruments (e.g., rubrics, criteria).

Other Evaluation Components

In addition to observational data, many SREB states also require the inclusion of other elements in their teacher evaluation systems — for example, participation in professional development, professional responsibilities and self-assessment results. No SREB state currently requires the use of student survey data in its teacher evaluation system, although this is an area of growing interest among policy-makers.

When these various elements are combined, a holistic view of teaching — and the evaluation of teaching practice — emerges. In Delaware, for example, teachers are evaluated based on their planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities, as well as on the achievement growth of their students. Arkansas is using a similarly comprehensive but different approach. Starting in the 2014-2015 school year, teachers throughout the state will be evaluated through classroom observations (using frameworks developed by teaching expert Charlotte Danielson) as well as through evidence of performance and growth in student achievement. A professional growth plan will be developed for each teacher, based on his or her evaluation results, to identify areas that need improvement. The lowest-rated teachers will be given intensive support and required to demonstrate progress in order to keep their jobs.

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Implementing Evaluation Systems

SREB states are at different stages in rolling out their new teacher evaluation systems as well as in implementing consequences attached to the results, such as new professional development requirements, compensation systems and dismissal procedures.

Some SREB states have already launched new evaluation systems, while others are in the piloting or beta-testing stage, and some are preparing to roll out their new systems in upcoming years. (See Table 5.)

States in the nascent stages of redesigning their own teacher evaluation systems can learn much from the “early adoption” states about challenges and pitfalls to avoid and the types of midstream corrections that may be needed to ensure that the new systems are working optimally.

TABLE 5: Year of Implementation of New Teacher Evaluation System

State	First Year of Implementation			
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Alabama		pilot	launch	
Arkansas	pilot	pilot	pilot	launch
Delaware	pilot	launch		
Florida	launch			
Georgia				launch
Kentucky			pilot	launch
Louisiana	pilot	launch		
Maryland		pilot	launch	
Mississippi		pilot	field test	launch
North Carolina	pilot	launch		
Oklahoma		pilot	pilot	pilot
South Carolina	pilot	pilot	launch	
Tennessee	launch			
Texas		pilot	pilot	launch
Virginia	pilot	launch		
West Virginia	pilot	pilot	launch	

Sources: SREB interviews with state education agencies.

PART 3: The Crucial Roles of Input and Feedback in Effective Teacher Evaluation Practices

SREB states not only differ in terms of the specifics of their new teacher evaluation policies. They also vary in the process by which legislation was created, as well as the process through which it is being implemented. Most noteworthy is that some states have taken a deliberate path to involve stakeholders early in the process and all along the way.

An account of the full spectrum of ways states have involved stakeholders is beyond the scope of this report. But a look at three states — Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee — offers lessons on the importance of early input and later feedback.

The Arkansas Experience

Before the state’s 2011 legislative session even began, a group of Arkansas business leaders approached a legislator to discuss a proposed bill that would overhaul Arkansas’s teacher evaluation system.

Believing that the system needed to change but also knowing it was crucial to secure broad input and support, the legislator reached out to an array of stakeholders, including other legislators as well as members of the Arkansas School Boards Association, the Department of Education, the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, the Arkansas Public School Resource Center, the Arkansas Education Association (the state's teacher association), the Walton Family Foundation and business organizations. The charge from the legislator was to proceed thoughtfully: "Let's get it right, and let's take our time."

In the months that followed, this coalition of Arkansas stakeholders spent countless hours in meetings where they debated every aspect of the new evaluation legislation and worked through difficult issues. The process was led by a legislative research attorney who helped the group reach consensus on necessary changes to the proposed bill. Throughout, the legislator remained committed to not filing the bill until all of the stakeholders were in agreement. Participants were urged not to share drafts of the proposed changes with their members and constituents until the final document was completed.

Most noteworthy is that some states have taken a deliberate path to involve stakeholders early in the process and all along the way.

During the last week of the session, the bill was presented to the House Education Committee by representatives from all of the stakeholder groups, each of whom pledged support for the legislation. As a result, it moved quickly through both houses with few revisions and had broad sponsorship. The Arkansas Department of Education had extensive meetings around the state to gain input on the rules for the new teacher evaluation system. Reflecting on the impact of the new legislation, the legislator expressed her belief that the new system would be highly beneficial to teachers and students across the state. Moreover, she believed that the extensive stakeholder input would help to ensure that the new system would survive the inevitable transitions in leadership. As the legislator observed, "[There are] so many voices and tears and blood all over these pieces of paper that there's no way it can fail."

The Mississippi Experience

In June 2010, the Mississippi Department of Education formed a new entity called the Statewide Teacher Evaluation Council (STEC) and commissioned it to seek broad stakeholder input and guidance in the development of "a rigorous, transparent and fair evaluation system for teachers." The STEC was made up of teachers and administrators, as well as representatives from preparation programs, teachers' unions, community organizations, the superintendents' organization and the governor's office. The STEC convened several times to develop guiding principles for the new evaluation system and to define the specific characteristics of an effective evaluation instrument and process.

Once the new teacher evaluation system, M-STAR, had been drafted, the Department of Education invited feedback from more than 2,000 teachers, principals, college deans, professors and other stakeholders. More than 20 focus group meetings were held with elementary and secondary teachers and principals from across the state to hear their feedback on the new evaluation system.

Meetings were also held with teachers in grades and subjects without state-mandated tests, so that they could weigh in on the best methods to capture student growth in their areas.

Stakeholder input did not end there. To ensure continuous feedback, the Mississippi Department of Education plans to designate an M-STAR contact person for each of the 152 districts across the state and also intends to host statewide focus groups during the pilot year to assess progress, monitor concerns and gather feedback.

The Tennessee Experience

Tennessee began implementing its new teacher evaluation system in fall 2011. Because state leaders believed in the importance of not being too heavy-handed or prescriptive, and because some districts in the state (such as Memphis) were already moving down the path to creating robust, multifaceted teacher evaluation systems, state policy allowed districts to develop their own evaluation models, as long as their plans were consistent with the state's criteria and as long as they received approval from the state Board of Education. Districts across the state began rolling out one of four evaluation models, though most opted to use the state's model, called TEAM. The Tennessee Department of Education offered extensive support for the implementation of the TEAM model.

A few months into the 2011-2012 school year, tensions over the new evaluation system were already high, particularly over the amount of time that administrators were spending conducting teacher observations. Controversy over the new system among principals and teachers was quickly escalating. The commissioner of education recommended a policy change to the State Board of Education in November 2011 to allow administrators to combine two observations into a single classroom visit. (The recommendation was based on a principal time study, which analyzed how much time administrators were spending scheduling and conducting pre- and post-conferences, as well as actually observing teachers.) Administrators across the state were relieved by the policy change and the resulting time savings.

Tennessee's SCORE has played a pivotal role in the state's efforts to overhaul its teacher evaluation systems.

Even with this policy adjustment, however, Tennessee continued to gather feedback from multiple sources. The state's Department of Education drew upon lessons learned in its own implementation as well as research from the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development (TN CRED). The governor believed that it was important to gather more extensive feedback on how the new system was working, above and beyond the reviews and evaluations by the Department of Education and TN CRED. The governor therefore asked SCORE (State Collaborative on Reforming Education) — a highly respected independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy and research organization in the state — to conduct an independent review of the new system based on an extensive listening and feedback process. Moreover, he asked SCORE to deliver to the state Board of Education and Department of Education a report on the results that not only summarized positives as well as challenges and concerns but also provided policy recommendations for improving the new system. The combined efforts of Tennessee's Department of Education, TN CRED and SCORE created a feedback loop for refining the new system, just as the evaluation system creates ways for teachers to receive feedback for their improvement.

Tennessee's SCORE — like its counterpart in Kentucky, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence — has played a pivotal role in the state's efforts to overhaul its teacher evaluation systems and enact other education reforms. Each of these organizations serves as a “critical friend” to the state's policy leaders by convening stakeholders, conducting and disseminating vital research, and serving in other ways to improve the work and ensure that it is widely understood.

In response to the governor's request, SCORE spent the remainder of the 2011-2012 school year holding meetings and public roundtables with stakeholders across the state, including teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, local and state officials, community and business leaders, and other citizens. It also invited all teachers and principals in Tennessee to provide feedback through an online survey and conducted interviews with a variety of state and national leaders, as well as with the individuals who were overseeing each of the four approved evaluation models in use across the state. Finally, SCORE formed an Educator Work Team of 22 educators, principals and district leaders and solicited additional feedback from existing networks of teachers, principals and district leaders.

Just as teachers need feedback to improve the effectiveness of their teaching practices, so too do state leaders need feedback on the implementation of their new teacher evaluation systems in order to make continuous improvements.

The report that SCORE issued based on its information-gathering identified a number of positives regarding the new system as well as a variety of challenges and concerns. For example, many teachers questioned the benefits of the new evaluation system and reported that they were not receiving high-quality professional learning opportunities tied to their results. They also highlighted procedural problems with the classroom observations — for example, principals using the rubric inconsistently, or failing to capture authentic instruction. Furthermore, many teachers who were surveyed expressed the view that they were being judged by principals and evaluators who lacked the instructional leadership skills needed to evaluate teaching practices. Finally, it was widely perceived that not enough attention was being given to how the upcoming implementation of the Common Core State Standards would impact the new teacher evaluation system. Based on these findings, SCORE offered a number of policy recommendations, emphasizing that: “Continued improvement, over time, is critical.”

Beyond the SCORE findings, state leaders benefited from extensive research being conducted by the Department of Education and TN CRED. Among the most revealing findings were considerable discrepancies between the value-added student achievement data and the teacher ratings based on principals' observations. Specifically, in the first year of implementation, less than 0.5 percent of Tennessee's teachers were identified by their evaluators as performing significantly below expectations, versus 16 percent based on the value-added data. “In many cases,” the evaluation report noted, “evaluators are telling teachers they exceed expectations in their observation feedback when in fact student outcomes paint a very different picture.” This paved the way for further work in the second year of implementation on improving the rigor of the observations.

The Tennessee experience highlights the importance of feedback and communication to the success of the overall effort. Just as teachers need feedback to improve the effectiveness of their teaching practices, so too do state leaders need feedback on the implementation of their new teacher evaluation systems in order to make continuous improvements.

PART 4: Broader Lessons Learned from Implementing Teacher Evaluation Policies

Tennessee is not the only state moving along the complicated path to implementation. In fact, many states are struggling to put teacher evaluations promised in their Race to the Top applications and *NCLB* waivers into effect, particularly under the ambitious timelines to which they committed themselves. Numerous states have amended their RTT plans, either by scaling back certain reform elements, delaying implementation, or both.

A recent report from the Center for American Progress summarized the types of implementation challenges being seen in states thus far, including:

- Leadership transitions. For example, many legislative leaders who spearheaded the policy changes will be leaving office before implementation is in full swing;
- Rapid timetables for implementing the new systems;
- Challenges with sequencing the new teacher evaluations with other reform efforts, such as Common Core standards implementation and assessments;
- Tensions surrounding the changing role of state education agencies from “compliance monitors” to “service delivery school improvement” organizations;
- Tensions between the pressure to give school districts freedom to adapt evaluation instruments to meet their needs and limited capacity in state education agencies to support implementation of a large number of different instruments and processes;
- Lack of coordination within some state education agencies between new teacher evaluation units and other units;
- Concerns over long-term funding;
- Uneven approaches to training and supporting local education agencies as they implement the new evaluation systems; and
- Limited communication and information sharing about lessons learned and challenges.

In some states, the recalcitrance of certain school districts to comply with the new mandates has proved challenging. A recent study suggested that this resistance may stem in large part from some states’ inclination to adopt overly prescriptive policies that dictate the details of evaluation design and implementation rather than leaving room for local flexibility — which may ultimately be essential to the development and successful implementation of better evaluations.

Some states have also experienced pushback to new evaluation systems as leaders have moved to use the results as the basis for changing teachers’ compensation. SREB believes that it is important for states to first ensure that the evaluation measures and process are sound, and to build confidence in them, before using them for other “high-stakes” purposes. It is also important to remember and reinforce that the primary reason for evaluation is to improve, not to punish.

At the same time states are moving forward with new teacher evaluation systems, most of them will also be immersed in implementing new assessments linked to the Common Core State Standards. All SREB states but two (Texas and Virginia, which adopted other statewide college- and career-readiness standards) have adopted the Common Core standards.

Nine SREB states (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Tennessee) are either participating or governing members of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium, while four others (North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia and Delaware) have joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. The simultaneous pursuit of new curricula, assessments and teacher evaluation systems will require careful planning and coordination among state leaders and those in charge of myriad aspects of implementation so that the reforms complement one another rather than creating undue stress or confusion.

Though the challenges may appear daunting as SREB states implement their new teacher evaluation systems, it is important to bear in mind that major change is inherently and unavoidably disruptive. In fact, the types of challenges being seen in the teacher evaluation arena mirror the obstacles to transformational change profiled by Harvard Business School management expert John Kotter. As described in his groundbreaking writings on change management, there are many reasons why change efforts are so difficult. Sometimes challenges arise due to faulty plans. Often, multiple factors are at play — for example, insufficient efforts to communicate the vision broadly; lack of attention to removing obstacles; or failure to embed the changes deeply in organizational culture.

Many states are struggling to put teacher evaluations promised in their Race to the Top applications and NCLB waivers into effect, particularly under the ambitious timelines to which they committed themselves.

Kotter's emphasis on the importance of communication seems particularly relevant to teacher evaluation policy work. As he observes:

“Transformation is impossible unless hundreds or thousands of people are willing to help. Employees will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured.”

In other words, ongoing communication and feedback are essential to the success of change efforts. Because there is no such thing as perfect policy, or perfect implementation, the most important thing that SREB states — indeed, all states — can do is establish robust monitoring systems and feedback mechanisms so that the state's education leaders can see how well the new evaluation system is working, clearly discern where problems are and make informed decisions about ways to improve continuously. These steps are essential to creating a new teacher evaluation system that is not eroded through controversy or sabotaged through low-fidelity implementation and can thus achieve its intended goals.

This message was recently reinforced by a report from the Aspen Institute Education and Society Program and The Parthenon Group. “To convert evaluation information into more effective teaching,” the authors emphasized, “teachers, principals, and system leaders need to embrace a culture of ongoing, two-way feedback and a commitment to continuous improvement.” They also underscored the urgency of the endeavor. “If the new evaluation reforms do not generate systemwide improvements in teacher effectiveness in the next five years,” the authors noted, “all of the efforts will have been for naught.”

Conclusions

SREB states have embarked on an array of major changes to their teacher evaluation policies in recent years. When fully implemented, these new systems have the potential to provide teachers, school leaders, state policy-makers and the public with much better and more detailed information on teachers’ classroom practices — and their impact on student learning — than has heretofore been available. The crux of these change efforts should not be to shame or punish teachers, but rather to provide the kinds of nuanced, constructive feedback that can guide further development of teachers’ skills, strengthen the teaching profession and ultimately improve student achievement.

Now that states are moving further down the path to implementation, they will need to address an array of emerging challenges that are inevitable in pursuing such complex changes. States can learn much from one another, as well as from change-management experts, about how to navigate these.

Above all, communication and stakeholder involvement are imperative. Experience shows the importance of continuously gathering feedback, monitoring implementation through the use of data, and making mid-course adjustments and refinements. The end result of this patience and tenacity should be better teacher evaluation systems that are supported by a broad spectrum of stakeholders and implemented with fidelity so that they can achieve their goals.

SREB can help in a variety of ways as states navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities presented by their new teacher evaluation systems. For example, SREB can:

- Provide presentations on the latest educator effectiveness research and policies tailored to the needs of states;
- Conduct additional analysis on the specifics of a state’s implementation plan, to identify potential weaknesses or anticipate threats to successful implementation; and
- Serve as a thought partner to consult and convene during the implementation process.

Working together and learning from the rapidly growing body of experience, states can create meaningful and fair evaluation systems that make it easier for districts and schools to attract, recognize, reward, develop and retain quality teachers. And all students — not just the most advantaged — will have far greater access to the highly effective teachers they need to succeed in school and take advantage of the opportunities today’s global economy provides.

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