

Philadelphia's Teacher Appraisal System

Teacher Appraisal Report Card

Teaching standards set	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> unsatisfactory
Multiple measures of performance	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> unsatisfactory
Active teacher participation	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> unsatisfactory
Principals trained	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> unsatisfactory
Tenure earned and rewarded	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> unsatisfactory
Termination streamlined	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> unsatisfactory

Needs improvement!





Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, non-profit organization engaged in policy and evaluation research on urban education. Founded in 1992, RFA seeks to improve the education opportunities and outcomes of urban youth by strengthening public schools and enriching the civic and community dialogue about public education.

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The Effective Teaching Campaign

In the spring of 2009, the Cross City Campaign for School Reform and the Education First Compact launched the Effective Teaching Campaign built around their platform, **Effective Teaching for All Children: What It Will Take**. The imperatives that guide the platform are: *Every child deserves an effective teacher and every school deserves a stable workforce of effective teachers.*

The platform has six planks:

- Distribute experienced and effective teachers equitably across district schools.
- Create performance standards for teachers and principals that are aligned with student success, and implement them consistently district-wide.
- Create and implement an effective professional development strategy that is guided by teacher input and creates a “culture of collaboration” in schools.
- Give school leaders tools and resources to hire and create teams of effective teachers.
- Create a “deep bench” of applicants for teaching positions.
- Open school with NO teacher vacancies.

Improving Teacher Appraisal: The Time Is Now

The difficulties of the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) are widely known. Data from the 2009 state standardized achievement tests (PSSA) show that about half of its students are performing below proficiency in math and reading. The high school dropout rates are alarming: only 57 percent of high school students in the class of 2008 graduated in four years. Any path to turning the situation around depends on the presence of high-quality, well-supported teachers. A strong, well-designed system of teacher evaluation is an integral part of maintaining a system of high-quality teachers. In this area, Philadelphia has been sorely lacking. However, Dr. Arlene Ackerman, Philadelphia's current CEO has made improved appraisal a linchpin of her administration.

“The standard is so low that... as long as the kids are in their seats, you're not going to be given an unsatisfactory review.”

– SDP High School Teacher

The purpose of this pamphlet is to inform the community about teacher appraisal methods in the School District of Philadelphia, outline the difficulties of the current system, and suggest approaches that would strengthen the teacher appraisal process.

We gathered our information over three months in mid-2009 from multiple sources: interviews with 7 principals and 13 teachers in the city, interviews with 5 education advocates, observations of community meetings; official documents on state, district, and charter school policies; news articles; and pertinent academic and policy publications.

Recent reports have exposed the many problems that pervade teacher evaluation systems across the nation.¹ The most widely cited of these reports, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*, published by The New Teacher Project, argues that current performance appraisal systems treat teachers as interchangeable parts whose classroom effectiveness does not vary. Most appraisal processes do not adequately distinguish strong, solid, and weak teaching practices, and teachers are rarely rated unsatisfactory or terminated. The report contends that denying individual teachers' strengths and weaknesses is "deeply disrespectful to teachers [and] in its indifference to instructional effectiveness, it gambles with the lives of students."

The story of teacher appraisal in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) is no different. Without a system of performance appraisal that accurately captures the strengths and weaknesses of teachers, it is difficult to provide professional development that can address the needs of individual teachers. Further, in Philadelphia, as in other cities, the termination process for ineffective teachers places an unnecessarily onerous burden on principals and does a disservice to students and the vast majority of teachers who are good at what they do. Of the district's more than 10,000 teachers, only thirteen were rated unsatisfactory and a mere five were actually terminated during the 2007-08 school year. All of the remaining teachers were rated "satisfactory." In this situation, teacher ratings are virtually meaningless and Philadelphia's students pay the price.

"A more appropriate system would be to help teachers identify what their strengths and their weaknesses are and then help them develop plans to strengthen their areas of weakness through professional development and coaching."

– SDP Principal

¹ Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., Keeling, D. (2009). *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*. The New Teacher Project: New York; Toch, T. and Rothman, R. (2008, January). *Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education*. Education Sector Reports: Washington, DC; Education Resource Strategies. (2009). *Teaching Quality: The First Priority*. Education Resource Strategies: Watertown, MA; Donaldson, M. L. (June 2009). *So Long, Lake Wobegon?: Using Teacher Evaluation to Raise Teacher Quality*. Center for American Progress: Washington, DC; Baratz-Snowden, J. (June 2009). *Fixing Tenure: A proposal for assuring teacher effectiveness and due process*. Center for American Progress: Washington, DC.

The opportunity to change teacher appraisal in Philadelphia is now, as the push for reform comes from many directions:

- Dr. Ackerman's strategic plan, *Imagine 2014*, commits the district to developing teaching performance standards, an improved appraisal system, and a simplified process for removing ineffective teachers.
- The signed consent decree for Philadelphia's 40-year old desegregation case issued by Judge Doris Smith in July 2009 requires the district to "design and conduct teacher instructional evaluations based on teaching standards, with professional development based on those evaluations, in low-performing schools, to begin in this school year."²
- The district and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers are negotiating a new teacher contract which has the potential to include a new and better approach to teacher evaluation.
- Education advocacy groups in the city have organized a campaign to focus public attention on the right of every student to have an effective teacher. As part of their advocacy, they are seeking a substantive revamping of the teacher appraisal system.
- President Barack Obama has personally stressed the importance of a meaningful teacher assessment system, arguing that if poorly performing teachers fail to improve, they should be removed from the classroom.
- The U.S. Department of Education has stipulated that a portion of 2009 federal stimulus dollars be awarded only to states whose measures of teacher effectiveness include evidence of student learning growth.

A torrent of new academic and policy research that documents the problems with the current system of judging teacher quality and describes how selected states, districts, and public charter schools are experimenting with new ways of appraising and rewarding teachers is the backdrop for the press for change.

² School District of Philadelphia. (2009, July 13). *School Desegregation Case, Almost 40 Years Old, Comes to End; Judge accepts School District of Philadelphia's strategic plan as basis for historic accord*. Retrieved September 8, 2009 from <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/desegregation/rel-deseg-case-7-09.pdf>

Features of the Current School District of Philadelphia Teacher Appraisal System

Observations by the principal or assistant principal serve as the basis for teacher appraisal. The observation rating system is binary: the principal or assistant principal rate a teacher observation as either *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory*.

The Pennsylvania School Code and the contract between the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) and the School District of Philadelphia require that tenured teachers—i.e., those with job security and due process rights—are observed formally at least once a year. Tenured teachers who received an unsatisfactory rating in the previous three years must be observed twice a year unless they are in a peer intervention program run by the PFT. Teachers without tenure are observed at least twice a year.

The principal rates the teacher observation as either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” Comments by the principal may be included on the evaluation form but are not required. The observation notes must be presented to the teacher within five days of the observation in order for the notes to be used as evidence for an unsatisfactory rating.

Teachers are unsystematically observed, oftentimes without written feedback. Duration of classroom observations for tenured teachers varies widely, depending on the principal. Forty-five minute observations are required in order for teachers to be rated unsatisfactory. Pre- and post-observation conferences are optional, except in the case of teachers who have received at least one unsatisfactory rating. Teachers reported that they perceive observations as perfunctory and that they are only minimally engaged in the appraisal process.

The School District of Philadelphia continues to use an antiquated observation and evaluation process introduced by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in 1978. The form is not based on research about effective teaching. In 2004, PDE introduced a more comprehensive and sophisticat-

“I’d like to see observations reflect growth. I’d like to see something that was recognized as a weakness in a previous observation and see if we can’t find a way to chart that and see if it is turning into a strength. So, rather than observations just being cut and dry and just giving a satisfactory or unsatisfactory judgment, I think an observation should be structured so growth in certain areas is taken into account.”

— SDP Middle School Teacher

ed teacher rating form, and it strongly encouraged districts to use it. Philadelphia did not adopt that evaluation tool, and today still relies on the older, briefer form.

Philadelphia’s system of teacher evaluation does not require evidence of student learning.

While the evaluation forms encouraged by the state appraise teachers on how well they create conditions for learning, the process does not require evidence of such learning. An extensive 2008 study of teacher evaluation in Pennsylvania and other states concludes that in Pennsylvania, “there is no requirement that objective evidence of student learning [e.g., standardized test scores] be included [in a teacher evaluation], nor does the state require local districts to make evidence of student learning a preponderant component of an evaluation.”³

Tenure is virtually automatic to any educator who is employed beyond three years and who has earned six consecutive satisfactory ratings, including a satisfactory review in the last four months of the probationary period.

Across the country, tenure policies are determined by state law. In Pennsylvania and elsewhere, tenure confers two advantages for teachers: the prospect of continuous employment in the district (assuming positions are available) and the guarantee of due process rights. But neither the state nor district requires an additional performance review for tenure, let alone one that scrutinizes how well students’ learn in a teacher’s classroom. In effect, teachers automatically get tenure once they have completed three years of “satisfactory” classroom teaching in a district.

“Administrators could use support and professional development on how to assess teachers ... more professional development on how to offer suggestions for improvement. I think that administrators are good at writing what they see, both good and bad, but may not be as strong at writing how to change the bad or improve. We offer quick fixes like go observe someone else’s classroom or read this book or do this or that and I don’t necessarily think that that’s the cure for all teachers.”

— SDP Principal

³ 2008 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: What States Can Do To Retain Effective New Teachers: Pennsylvania, Kate Walsh & Sandi Jacobs, National Council on Teacher Quality, Washington, DC, 2009, p. 9 http://www.nctq.org/stpy08/reports/stpy_pennsylvania.pdf

Termination for ineffective teaching is an overly burdensome process and seldom pursued.

Once tenured, dismissing a poorly performing teacher is a cumbersome, time-consuming process that many administrators are loath to undertake. In order for a teacher to be dismissed, he or she must be rated unsatisfactory three consecutive times within the same school. These observations must begin by November. A regional superintendent must conduct a fourth observation. The teacher must be told, in writing, that a union representative should be present at disciplinary or termination conversations. If the teacher is not told in writing, the agreements are void. Twenty-four hour notice for such meetings between the principal and teacher is required.

Documentation of steps taken to help a teacher improve must be thorough. One principal complained that the process of “tak[ing] a marginal teacher to termination” is so time-consuming that principals who choose to follow that route have insufficient time to devote to the rest of their staff.

The fact that a teacher can only be terminated due to consecutive unsatisfactory ratings within the same school leads to a particularly troubling phenomenon. Because of the arduous task of removing a tenured teacher, one unsatisfactory rating is commonly used by principals to “persuade” a poorly performing teacher to transfer to another SDP school rather than risk sufficient unsatisfactory ratings to be terminated. This practice, often referred to as “the dance of the lemons,” simply shifts problem instruction rather than addressing it.

In reviewing these current practices, it is clear that the district’s present system for appraising teacher performance and awarding tenure has glaring weaknesses.

- The current system neither expects nor recognizes teaching excellence.
- Teaching performance standards are only now being developed.
- Teachers are awarded tenure based solely on their years of experience, not on evidence from a rigorous review of their effectiveness in the classroom.

“It is very hard to fire someone on bad teaching. It is virtually impossible.”

– SDP Principal

- Classroom observations are infrequent and often perfunctory, providing little in the way of meaningful feedback to teachers and incomplete information for a real assessment of their skills.
- Professional development experiences are not aligned with an individual teacher’s needs because information on those needs is not systemically gathered, analyzed, and used to inform professional development opportunities.
- Administrators do not have adequate training or materials on “best practices” in conducting teacher appraisals.
- Teacher observations are rated as either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory,” rather than on a more nuanced rating scale.
- The termination process is burdensome and time-consuming for administrators, disrespects good teachers, and jeopardizes the success of students.

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What We Can Learn from Other Approaches

Several other states and school districts and national charter management organizations have implemented teacher appraisal models that incorporate effective observation and feedback processes.⁴ Most importantly, these comprehensive appraisal models align evaluation with professional development, career lattices, compensation, and termination in ways that guide the development of promising or successful teachers and that remove ineffective teachers. The number of states and districts using improved appraisal models will surely increase quickly as the federal stimulus money finances more innovations in that field.

⁴ Toch, T. and Rothman, R. (2008, January). *Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education*. Education Sector Reports: Washington, DC; Education Resource Strategies. (2009). *The Grand Bargain for Education Reform: New Rewards and Supports for New Accountability*. Operation Public Education’s Comprehensive Framework for School Reform. Editors: Theodore Hershberg and Claire Robertson-Kraft (Harvard Education Press: Forthcoming, 2009).

Table 1 Philadelphia: Comparison of Teacher Observation Processes

	School District of Philadelphia	Mastery Charter Schools
How Evaluators Are Trained	Varies by region	Two weeks of administrator training and ongoing norming among administrators
Pre-Observation Conference	Varies by principal	With all teachers new to the school Optional for others
Length of Observation	Varies	Usually for a full class period
Yearly Frequency of Formal Observations	1 formal observation for tenured teachers 2 formal observations for non-tenured teachers	3 formal observations for Associate Instructors and Senior Associate Instructors 2 formal observations for Advanced or Master Teachers
Post-Observation Conference	Varies by Principal	Always
Observation Domains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality • Preparation • Technique • Pupil reaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective-Driven Lesson • Instruction • Classroom Systems • Student Motivation
Rating Scale Used	1 No Evidence 2 Occasional Evidence 3 Frequent Presence or Use 4 Positive and Sustained Presence 5 Not Applicable	1 Unsatisfactory 2 Developing 3 Proficient 4 Advanced 5 Outstanding
Type of Feedback Generated	Brief comments to address desired teaching and lesson qualities	Narratives based on the observation domains with overall rating scores
How Observations Are Used	Teacher appraisal	Teacher appraisal Career ladder Compensation Renewal of contract

	KIPP Philadelphia Schools	Teacher Advancement Program (TAP)	<i>Skillful Teacher/ Research for Better Teaching*</i>
	Through The Skillful Teacher/ Research for Better Teaching training	Monthly professional development and weekly leadership team meetings	7 full days of training throughout the school year
	Always	Always	Varies
	Full class periods	30-90 minutes	Varies
	2 formal observations	4 formal observations	Varies by observer and teacher, based on needs
	Always	Always	Varies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation of Essential Beliefs • Attention, Momentum, Discipline, Space, Time, and Routines • Clarity, Principles of Learning, and Models of Teaching • Expectations, Personal Relationship Building, and Class Climate • Learning Experiences, Assessment, Objectives, Planning, Curriculum Design, and Overarching Objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards and Objectives • Motivating Students • Presenting Instructional Content • Lesson Structure and Pacing • Activities and Materials • Questioning • Academic Feedback • Grouping Students • Display of Teacher Content Knowledge • Teacher Knowledge of Students • Thinking • Problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation of Essential Beliefs • Attention, Momentum, Discipline, Space, Time, and Routines • Clarity, Principles of Learning, and Models of Teaching • Expectations, Personal Relationship Building, and Class Climate • Learning Experiences, Assessment, Objectives, Planning, Curriculum Design, and Overarching Objectives
	1 Unsatisfactory 2 Needs Improvement 3 Par (number an expert should receive) 4 Excellent 5 Superior	1 Needs Improvement 2 [Unnamed] 3 Proficient 4 [Unnamed] 5 Exemplary	None**
	Narrative script of what was observed is used to write Claims, Evidence, Interpretations, and Judgments of what was observed	Narrative scripts of what was observed (both of teacher and of students) during the classroom visit; individual scores and overall score	Narrative script of what was observed is used to write Claims, Evidence, Interpretations, and Judgments of what was observed
	Teacher appraisal Career ladder Renewal of contract	Teacher appraisal Compensation	Varies

*ALPS participants were trained in this method.

**This model is designed to help administrators provide better instructional feedback, not to rate teaching performance.

Closer to home, some district-managed public schools and charter schools in Philadelphia are experimenting with new observation processes and/or models of teacher appraisal. In some cases, they are using observation and feedback processes that more actively engage teachers in setting goals for improvement and inform professional development efforts. For example, principals in a few district-managed schools supplement the district's system of evaluation with detailed verbal feedback, discussing areas that need improvement and how to go about strengthening those areas. One principal interviewed for this report, for example, described using a coaching model from a national group, Research for Better Teaching, and providing written narratives based on the observation. As a participant in the Academy for Leadership in Philadelphia Schools (ALPS), he was trained in this model and some principals have found it more useful than the traditional SDP model. This kind of innovation remains an anomaly in the district. Eleven Philadelphia charter schools are implementing the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP). In these schools, principals provide detailed instructional feedback organized around teaching standards. These observational and feedback processes are not, however, tied to rating teaching performance.

Several charter schools operating in Philadelphia have developed more comprehensive models of appraisal that align observation systems with teacher ratings, career advancement, and salaries. In comparison to SDP schools and the TAP schools described above, KIPP and Mastery Charter Schools represent two local examples of schools that have achieved this kind of alignment.

The chart on pages 8 and 9 provides information on these observation models in use in Philadelphia district-managed schools or charter schools. It compares them on several dimensions: how evaluators are trained; whether or not pre- and post-observation conferences are conducted; the frequency of their observations; what evaluators look for in observations; how observations are rated; the type of feedback generated; and how observations are used.

As can be seen in the chart, classroom observations are central to teacher evaluation for all of these models. Within SDP, unlike the others, classroom observations are the sole data source for teacher evaluations. Moreover, the SDP observation rating scale (which has five levels of proficiency) does not align with the overall teacher evaluation rating scale, which only has “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” In contrast, KIPP’s model, Mastery’s model, and TAP’s model use the same rating scale for classroom observation and teacher evaluations.

In Philadelphia, then, there are examples of schools that have created more exacting and informative processes for assessing teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. These models typically:

- are more structured and more uniform within school types;
- include a wider array of evidence-based domains of practice than is currently the case in SDP schools;
- include pre- and post-observation conferences;
- use a classroom observation rating scale of teaching domains that matches up with the overall rating scale; and
- in some cases, use evaluative ratings to inform compensation, career advancement, and possible retention/termination.

District and PFT leaders in Philadelphia should study these innovations that exist inside their own city boundaries as they draw up plans to change the teacher appraisal process within the system.

A New Approach To Appraisal

Teacher appraisal systems should examine the strengths of educators against a set of high standards for teaching performance. Such an approach establishes assessment as a formative process that can be used to guide teachers’ professional growth, reward high-performing teachers, and, where necessary, remove teachers from a district’s classrooms.

“We don’t have the right to be called professionals – and we will never convince the public that we are – unless we are prepared honestly to decide what constitutes incompetence and apply those definitions to ourselves and our colleagues”

Albert Shanker, in a speech to a union convention in Niagara Falls in 1985⁵

⁵ Toch, T. (1991). *In the Name of Excellence*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 143.

Numerous studies and reports, both recent and ongoing, generally conclude that the following components need to be present in a strong teacher evaluation system.

Clear, rigorous, and evidence-based teaching standards should provide the foundation for appraisal.

Rubrics for classroom observations should be aligned with explicit and meaningful teaching standards, with frequent formal and informal classroom observations serving as opportunities to gather information about teachers' strengths and challenges in relation to standards. Teaching standards that are clear, fair, and based on concrete evidence should be used

Table 2 Types of data used for teacher appraisal in Philadelphia schools

Data source	All SDP schools	Some SDP schools (not as data source)	TAP schools	KIPP schools	Mastery schools
Lesson observation	✓		✓	✓	✓
Mini-observation / Quick visit		✓			
Peer review / Peer observation			✓		
Student achievement / Test scores			✓	✓	✓
Student feedback / Student surveys		✓			
Teacher's role in school community				✓	✓
Sample of teacher's lesson / Unit plans		✓		✓	✓
Teacher's professional growth / Teacher reflections			✓	✓	

to determine which teachers should and should not be retained. Similarly, ongoing professional development should focus on helping teachers to meet rigorous standards.

Appraisal should draw on multiple sources of data about teaching performance and include evidence of student learning.

Multiple data sources offer a more complete and far richer picture of teaching practices. Data on student learning should play a key role in the appraisal process, particularly when a teacher is being reviewed for tenure. Data sources could include:

- value-added student achievement data, where possible, from standardized student tests (PSSA)
- student achievement data from standardized formative assessments such as Philadelphia’s Benchmark tests or the to-be-adoped Keystone course examinations at the secondary level
- evidence of student learning levels from various forms of student work including tests, quizzes, projects, and written assignments
- full-length lesson observations by principals or other qualified staff
- mini-observations/quick unannounced visits to classrooms
- consideration of the teacher’s role in the school community
- student feedback/student surveys
- samples of regularly used assignments, unit plans, and lesson plans
- peer review/peer observations of teacher’s professional growth

“A good evaluation system has clear standards, a clear rubric for what good teaching looks like, and you can explain to teachers where they fall on a continuum of good teaching to unsatisfactory, and then you marry the professional development needs of that teacher with the evaluation and supervision process.”

Dr. Ackerman from Notebook NEWSFLASH: August 2009⁶

As the table on the previous page shows, the TAP, KIPP, and Mastery schools use a much wider variety of data sources for teacher evaluation than SDP.

⁶ Dr. Ackerman from the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* NEWSFLASH: August 2009. <http://www.thenotebook.org/august-2009/091576/ackerman-has-got-be-radical>.

Drawing on multiple data sources, principals are able (and should be required) to offer a more nuanced rating. A binary system of “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” is not enough. The district should adopt a rating system that provides a more specific and complete picture of teacher performance and encourages excellence.

Support for principals to help them implement an effective teacher appraisal system should be a top priority of the district.

For the appraisal process to succeed as a tool for increasing teaching quality and improving student achievement, it must be conducted in a meaningful way. An appraisal system must be based on high expectations for all teachers. For such a system to remain meaningful, teachers throughout the district must be held to the same standards and appraisals need to be as objective as possible. Therefore, it is essential to provide administrators with training and resources necessary to conduct meaningful appraisals throughout the year. For example, New York City provides its principals with a “tenure toolkit” to help them ensure that teachers achieve a certain level of effectiveness in the classroom.⁷ Administrators must have a thorough understanding of the process, the instruments, and the standards used in appraising teachers. The initial training for administrators must be meticulous and supplemented by ongoing support. Administrators should be assessed on their use of the appraisal system and provided necessary supports to use the tools more effectively. With such supports, administrators will be better equipped to use the appraisal system as a central tool in their role as instructional leaders of their schools, working toward increasing student achievement.

The termination process should not be overly burdensome for principals nor disrespectful to teachers.

Teachers who do not improve after receiving additional supports should not remain classroom teachers. Teachers must be given due process and must be protected from administrative abuses of power. At the same time, the process for removing under-performing teachers must be streamlined so

⁷ 2008 Pennsylvania: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, p. 14
http://www.nctq.org/stpy08/reports/stpy_pennsylvania.pdf.

that it is a viable option when appropriate. A comprehensive appraisal system with recognized and consistently applied standards can provide the necessary evidence to ensure that a dismissal is justified.

Tenure should be a professional milestone that is earned and rewarded.

Automatic tenure should be replaced with a clear and rigorous additional evaluation process that requires teachers to demonstrate proficiency, including multiple sources of evidence of student learning. Instead of being an automatic right, tenure should be an earned privilege for high-quality educators.

Pennsylvania should require that teachers be in a district's classroom for five years prior to earning tenure, a period required in several other states. Teachers who successfully earn tenure after a high-quality and comprehensive review should be eligible for additional responsibilities and increased compensation. In this way, the tenure process can become a means of career advancement for teachers wishing to remain in the classroom.

Teachers should be active participants in the appraisal process.

A strong appraisal process asks teachers to take an active role in determining their professional strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for themselves with the encouragement and participation of administrators. Teachers should also play a role in establishing performance standards and in serving as peer reviewers in the evaluation process of other teachers.

Achieving A Meaningful Appraisal System

Reforming the appraisal system for teachers requires more than simply introducing new procedures and specifying additional measurements. To implement a more meaningful and effective system will require a *cultural shift*. Teachers and principals, who have experienced the appraisal process as a pointless and burdensome formality, will need to understand how a new and better system will benefit them, the profession, and their students. Working together, the district and the teachers' and administrators' unions must demonstrate a serious and sustained commitment to support educators through this cultural shift.

One step for increasing the buy-in needed to ensure the success of a new system is to include not only district and union officials, but also teachers, administrators, parents, students, and experts in teacher appraisal. Stakeholder involvement must be authentic and occur at all stages of the process from design to implementation to evaluation.

Designing and implementing an improved teacher appraisal system is no easy task. However, an improved system has the potential to respect teachers as professionals, while holding them to high standards and providing support for them to continuously strengthen their practice. Too many Philadelphia students are not meeting academic expectations. Every step must be taken to ensure the reversal of this trend. A good teacher appraisal system is a crucial component of this agenda, making now the time for reform.

About the Authors

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Her research interests include urban educator efficacy and resilience, the social and political context of schooling, and teaching quality. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, Camika taught middle school language arts in Baltimore, was a literacy coach and administrator at a charter high school in Washington, DC, worked for Teach For America training and supporting teachers in various capacities, and taught in the Education Department at Lincoln University of Pennsylvania.

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Camika and Matthew are 2009 Fels Interns with Research for Action. Their research was guided by the leadership of Jolley Bruce Christman, Ph.D., Founder and Principal of RFA.



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