ASK THE TEAM

BY CATHERINE JACQUES | March 2013

Two of a Kind: Are Your Districts' Evaluation Systems Equivalent?

Question From the Field

How are states creating equivalency processes for district evaluation systems?

States in the midst of implementing evaluation reforms face a common dilemma: how to ensure that all your districts are implementing quality educator evaluation systems while still providing them with the flexibility to design systems best suited to their own unique needs. One answer is to create an equivalency process (also known as an approval process) to verify that districts meet state requirements for evaluation components and processes. An equivalency process allows a state to provide quality assurance for district evaluation plans. States review documentation and evidence submitted by a district about its evaluation system. In designing an equivalency process, states typically include clear guidance on the requirements of the evaluation system, recommendations on best practices, rubrics or processes for meeting the requirements, and examples of approved models or components.

The nuts and bolts for creating an equivalency process, however, can seem daunting to sort out. In response to questions from the field, we developed a set of promising practices and recommendations for consideration when developing an equivalency process in your own state.

1. ESTABLISH GUIDELINES AND SPECIFY ALLOWABLE FLEXIBILITY
Measuring Student Learning

- Provide clear, comprehensive guidelines for how student learning should be measured for both tested and nontested grades and subjects.

- Create a uniform process for calculating student learning for all districts that accounts for several assessments for different grades and subjects.

- Carefully consider the availability of data and district capacity when deciding how much flexibility to give districts in calculating student learning.

> **Tip** If you opt to address tested subjects and grades by using state standardized assessments and a uniform growth calculation, be prepared to engage stakeholders in the process. Educators need support in understanding, interpreting, and using a growth score generated by the state.

Rhode Island provides clear guidelines on how student growth is calculated for tested grades, using the state's student growth percentile model, as well as how to use student learning objectives (SLOs) to measure student growth for all educators, including teachers of nontested grades and subjects. The SLO process in Rhode Island allows districts to choose assessments that best fit each educator's position while also maintaining rigor and comparability between growth scores.

Source: *Student Learning Objectives* (http://www.ride.ri.gov/educatorquality/educatorevaluation/SLO.aspx)

2. MAKE IT CRYSTAL CLEAR
Practice Measures and Rubrics

Issue clear guidance to districts on the requirements for assessing educator practice. This approach will help ensure that the measures of practice are both rigorous and of high quality. In developing this guidance, consider the following suggestions:

- Require that practice rubrics align with state teaching and leadership standards as well as standards for college and career readiness.

- Require that educator practice be scored on a similar scale statewide (e.g., observation rubrics are based on a four-level performance scale).

- State upfront whether districts can include district-selected measures of practice or must use or select from a state-determined set of measures.

- Require districts to include their plans for training observers and assessing rater reliability and accuracy in using the instructional or leadership rubrics to assess educator practice.

Tip

If districts can select additional measures of practice, be sure to provide clear guidelines on what types of measures are appropriate, including their scope.

If districts can select their own observation rubrics, create a list of state-approved vendors or instruments and include rubrics already in use in districts in your state. Be sure to specify that districts should either (1) select a research-based rubric that has been validated in a variety of educational contexts or (2) include plans to validate the rubric in their own district.

Ohio has developed a Web-based alignment tool that districts may use to perform a gap analysis between their district-designed system and the state's requirements. Districts may use this tool to submit their final evaluation system for approval when completed. If districts use a district-created performance rubric or have modified an existing state-approved rubric, the tool allows districts to create a crosswalk between the state's required standards and indicators and the district's rubric. The tool generates a report for districts that describes the areas in which the district rubric does not meet state requirements. This feature ensures that districts can demonstrate equivalency before they submit their evaluation system for final state review.

Sources: *Gap Analysis Tool* (http://education.ohio.gov/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail. aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1230&ContentID=125741); *Ohio ESEA Flexibility Request* (http://www2.ed.gov/ policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/oh.pdf)

3. MAKE IT UNIFORM
Rating Requirements

Summative evaluation ratings need to be comparable across a state. The majority of states require that districts use a uniform scale with established performance levels for all summative scores (e.g., basic, developing, proficient, and distinguished). States that allow flexibility in the scale or performance labels typically require a district to translate its scale into the statewide minimum rating scale.

State Spotlight

Arizona allows districts to determine the number and the labels of performance ratings for summative scoring; however, districts that use more than four performance levels must be able to condense their ratings into a four-level scale for state reporting purposes.

Source: *Arizona Framework for Measuring Educator Effectiveness* (http://www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/ArizonaFrameworkforMeasuringEducatorEffectiveness.pdf)

4. MAKE TIME
Feedback, Revisions, and Tools in the Process

When designing the structure, the sequence, and the timing of an equivalency process, be sure to consider both state education agency (SEA) and district capacity. Districts can benefit from a quick, one-month approval process that allows them to focus on implementation and planning. States might consider a presubmission process that allows districts to receive early SEA support before formal submission; SEA capacity, however, must be carefully considered in deciding whether to include these features. Presubmission processes, shorter timelines, and assessing multiple documents may tax SEA staff or may not be feasible in states with large numbers of districts. Regardless of capacity considerations, be sure to build sufficient time into the equivalency process for districts to make revisions and engage with stakeholders.

Tip

Build requirements for validity testing into the equivalency process. Issue guidance on how districts should develop plans for system testing and evaluation; be sure to include information on how the state intends to gather data on the quality of systems across the state and over time. Quality assurance is a critical guiding principle throughout this process.

States have developed several strategies for addressing timing and capacity considerations:

- Add a presubmission process whereby districts can receive informal feedback from the state on their draft applications.
- Ask districts to submit an intent-to-apply letter in advance of the presubmission deadline. This notice allows a state to plan sufficient time and resources for reviewing district applications in a timely manner.

- Provide opportunities for districts to modify and revise their applications after their initial submission.

- Create a preassessment audit for districts to use as they design their evaluation systems, which could include checklists, rubrics, and self-appraisal tools.

- Allow districts to submit preassessment tools with document citation rather than requiring a narrative. This practice helps support districts with limited capacity by saving time spent on design and documentation.

State Spotlight

Rhode Island

- **Rubric assessment.** The state uses educator evaluation standards to assess district-created evaluation systems and has developed a rubric for this process. The rubric rates districts on the extent to which the district's system has met the standards for each educator evaluation standard and substandard.

- **District self-assessment and guidelines.** These tools assist districts that choose to design their own evaluation systems. The guidelines document describes the process intuitively for districts to clarify the process.

- **Reducing the burden.** Rhode Island has attempted to reduce the documentation burden on districts by allowing them to simply cite the document name and page number of manuals or training documents rather than rewriting or summarizing the document. The state also provides forms for districts to complete to describe the ways in which all educators are evaluated.

Source: *District Developed Evaluation Systems* (http://www.ride.ri.gov/educatorquality/educatorevaluation/DDS.aspx)

State Spotlight

Tennessee allows districts to choose to either modify the state model to fit their needs or create a district-designed alternate evaluation system. Districts selecting either of these options must submit an application to the Tennessee Department of Education for review in the spring. The department shares feedback and works with the district over the month following the submission to determine whether approval is warranted. Districts must submit their model by March 15, and the department will provide notice of decision by April 15.

Sources: *Evaluation Model Selection Grand Division Meetings* (http://team-tn.org/assets/misc/Evaluation%20 Model%20Selection%20Presentation.pdf); *Model Selection Overview* (http://team-tn.org/assets/misc/Model_ Selection_Overview.pdf)

State Spotlight

Massachusetts requires districts that opt to design their own systems to complete an Educator Evaluation Review Questionnaire, which is not yet publicly available in its full form. The questionnaire includes yes/no questions and clarifies which aspects are requirements of the evaluation system and which aspects are optional. Districts must submit evidence from bargaining contracts and other district-created documents to support their explanation and justifications for the evaluation system design. All districts must submit the form, although the length and the detail required vary according to how many modifications the district has made to the model evaluation system.

Source: *Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation, Part I: District-Level Planning and Implementation Guide* (http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartI.pdf)

STATE EQUIVALENCY PROCESS CHECKLIST

In developing a district equivalency process, use the following list as a starting point to create your own checklist or rubric that both SEA and district-level staff can use to verify alignment between state requirements and district designs.

Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Has the district completed the following tasks related to stakeholder engagement and communication?

☐ Established and used a stakeholder committee to design and implement the evaluation system.

☐ Developed a communication plan that ensures that all educators are aware of and informed about the new evaluation system.

☐ Provided multiple opportunities for educators to offer input and feedback on the evaluation system design and implementation plan.

Performance Rubrics

Has the district completed the following tasks related to performance rubrics?

☐ Selected or created a rubric to evaluate teacher and leader practice.

- Are the rubrics on the state's approval list?

- If a district is using a rubric not on the approved list, has it demonstrated that the rubric aligns with state standards of teaching practice or leadership?

- Does the rubric align with the state's system in terms of the number and the descriptions of levels of performance (e.g., basic, developing, proficient, and distinguished)?

☐ Developed a plan for training evaluators to use the rubrics with a high degree of accuracy and reliability.

Measuring Student Growth

Has the district completed the following tasks related to measuring student growth?

☐ Completed a thorough review of its data systems to ensure that data exist to accurately link teachers to students.

☐ Developed a plan to use state-provided results from standardized tests in teacher evaluation scores.

- Developed a process to ensure accuracy, such as teacher verification of class rosters.

- Used state guidance and requirements to develop processes for measuring teachers' contributions to student learning growth in nontested subjects and grades.

- Determined procedures for providing guidance and monitoring to teachers in selecting, scoring, and reporting results from local assessments.

☐ Determined how the student growth component will fit into the overall evaluation system and performance rating.

☐ Developed training and communication plans to assist staff in understanding growth scores, learning how to use student learning data, and identifying or designing assessments.

Summative Ratings

Has the district completed the following tasks related to summative ratings?

- ☐ Identified a process for determining summative evaluation ratings that meet state requirements (e.g., scoring procedures or weights of measures).

- ☐ Selected summative evaluation rating labels that align with state requirements.

- ☐ Developed a plan for collecting, securing, and analyzing educators' summative evaluation ratings.

Piloting, Validating, and Evaluating the System

Has the district completed the following tasks related to piloting, validating, and evaluating the system?

- ☐ Developed a piloting process prior to rolling out the system for full implementation with high-stakes consequences.

- ☐ Developed a plan for validating the system by examining trends in correlations between measures of educator practice (e.g., observation, portfolios, and perception surveys) and measures of student learning.

- ☐ Developed a plan for periodically evaluating the system by gathering feedback from stakeholders and educators on the validity and the utility of the evaluation system for both evaluating educator effectiveness and supporting educators' professional growth.

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For more examples or information on this topic, please e-mail gtlcenter@air.org.

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