Implementation Spotlight: Taking a Look at the Relationship between Student Growth and Educator Practice, A New Approach in Wakefield

This month’s Spotlight comes from the Wakefield Public Schools. Educators in Wakefield are working on a promising new way to think about evaluating educator impact on student learning. A special thanks to Superintendent Kim Smith for authoring the piece.

The Wakefield Public Schools began implementing a new educator evaluation system during the 2012-13 school year. Led by a district-wide steering committee of teachers and administrators, we ultimately adopted the model system developed by the state, but we chose to adapt the model performance rubrics. This decision proved important to a smooth implementation the following year because our teachers had a voice in defining the language behind the system. Union leadership and other educators helped us refine the rubrics to “make them our own,” which led to deeper understanding, buy-in, and ownership.

Our steering committee has continued to meet monthly over the past four years, providing recommendations for each new aspect of the system, including the implementation of district-determined measures (DDMs) and student/staff feedback. The committee also developed an Educator Resource Manual to assist faculty in navigating the new system, including homegrown forms, examples of evidence, and a DDMs organizational tool. Our efforts are grounded in the goal of building an evaluation system that helps Wakefield educators grow and improve. By owning the process, we have avoided a compliance mindset.

This sets the stage for the most recent, and perhaps most complex, addition: the Student Impact Rating. The committee took this on with the same vigor it brought to the other aspects of educator evaluation, beginning with the 1,000-foot view of what it is that we are being asked to do, and why this is important for our students. We frame the goal of the Student Impact Rating in this way: How do we help educators view their practice through the lens of student performance, and examine ways that their instructional practice impacts student growth? When we learned that ESE was offering the opportunity for districts to build an alternative pathway, we seized the opportunity to make this Wakefield’s own.

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So we started by examining the obstacles, astutely captured by teachers on our committee:

- “DDMs and educator impact seem disconnected from the rest of the 5-step cycle, making it seem like another huge initiative to take on.”
- “Why did they change the rating from the proficiency scale to high, moderate, and low? If my rating suggests that I have a ‘moderate impact on student learning’, I think I will quit my job!”
- “My teaching practice is so much more than what two DDMs can show; I know that there are many things I do with kids every day that set the stage for learning and growth.”

With these thoughts in mind, we decided to explore the creation of a Standard 5, one that would be part of the 5-step evaluation cycle and interact with the other four standards, provide a connection to the proficiency scale that is familiar to our educators, and expand our thinking about student growth to include qualitative measures. We explain Standard 5 as a distinctly different standard than Standards 1-4; where Standards 1-4 are about what teachers do, Standard 5 is about what our students do.

- **Like the Student Impact Rating, Standard 5 is used as a companion rating** with which to examine the relationship between teacher practice and student growth and does not affect the ratings educators earn on Standards 1-4 (the final Standard 5 rating determines only whether the educator continues on a one or two year growth plan).

- **For transparency, we built out rubric descriptors for Standard 5 that are fully incorporated into the rubric we have been using for Standards 1-4.** In order to do so, we had to create a set of Indicators to break down the Standard:
  - 5A. Students exhibit/share performances and make their work public
  - 5B. Students use dialogue/discourse to demonstrate understanding
  - 5C. Students assess their progress through individual & collaborative inquiry
  - 5D. Students demonstrate learning through performance on growth measures (this is where we incorporate our DDMs and statewide growth measures)
  - 5E. Students demonstrate academic behaviors

- **For consistency, the rating scale for Standard 5 is the same used for Standards 1 - 4:** Exemplary, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Unsatisfactory. We have mapped the four ratings onto the high, moderate, and low scale for reporting purposes, but our educators appreciate the consistency across Standards 1-5.

- **Standard 5 balances quantitative measures of student growth, like DDMs, with qualitative measures** that involve educators looking for emerging patterns of students demonstrating the behaviors in the elements described in the rubrics. In fact, some elements of Standard 5 are observable in the classroom, meaning evaluators will collect evidence during observations, just as they do for elements of Standards 1 and 2.

We are excited about our model. We believe we have struck a balance that reflects the value we place on factors that test scores often cannot show: for example, our evaluators now observe how educators create an environment where students feel safe to ask questions and take risks, or how they develop students’ resilience, confidence, creativity, and curiosity as part of Standard 5. We also decided that qualitative measures provided a great opportunity to advance some of the work we are already doing in the Wakefield Public Schools.

Our journey continues. As the Steering Committee puts the final touches on Standard 5, we are now discussing the communication and implementation phase, and how we can best support our teachers in this meaningful work moving forward.

For more information about the Alternative Pathways Proposal that Wakefield used to build out Standard 5, see the Quick Reference Guide and visit our website to learn about the Student Impact Rating.

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**Registration Open—Attend ESE’s Spring Convening on May 16th or May 17th**

There’s still space available for educators to attend the Spring Convening—hear from MA educators about promising practices related to educational equity, curriculum, assessment, and educator effectiveness!

Registration is open to all educators and there are no longer limits on how many team members from a district, prep program, or statewide organization can attend. Each individual should register online at: [http://bit.ly/ESE2016SpringConvening](http://bit.ly/ESE2016SpringConvening). Learn more about the Convening and session topics online.
Apply for ESE's Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets!

During the month of May, ESE will be accepting applications for the 2016-17 Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets. Educators on these cabinets provide crucial feedback and input on ESE policies and resources! Members increase their knowledge of state education policies, build relationships with ESE staff and educators across the state, and position themselves as go-to resources and leaders in their districts. Additionally, members will work closely with ESE staff on a year-long project aligned with a key educator effectiveness initiative.

*In the first week of May, applications will be posted online and are due on May 31st.*

The **Teacher Advisory Cabinets** are open to all educators who work with students across grade levels and content areas—including specialists, coaches, and specialized instructional support personnel.

The **Principal Advisory Cabinets** are open to all school-level administrators, including principals, assistant principals, department chairs, and charter school leaders.

When applying, educators will have the option to select a Cabinet in the eastern part of the state (meeting in Malden) or the central/western part of the state (meeting west of Worcester).

The cabinets will meet 5 times during the 2016-17 school year, beginning with a full day kickoff meeting in September. Meeting dates and times will be listed in the applications.

Hear from members of ESE’s Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets about their experiences and how they’re giving input on state policy.

Be one of the first to know when applications are posted—**sign up for Teachers’ Top Three from ESE**! To learn more about the Cabinets, check out the 2014-15 [Teacher Advisory Cabinet Summary](#) and [Principal Advisory Cabinets Summary](#).

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Developing Common Assessments: Content Area Professional Organizations Lending Expertise and Support

One of the most critical components of effective teaching is having a clear vision of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors students should be able to demonstrate after receiving instruction. This clarity is the foundation of rigorous and well-aligned assessments. As districts continue to identify and refine common assessments, content area professional organizations are a great resource for expertise and support.

ESE has collaborated with several professional organizations to promote the development of high quality common assessments. These organizations possess deep content expertise to ensure that common assessments are aligned to the MA Curriculum Frameworks. The **Massachusetts Foreign Language Association (MaFla)** has been an early leader in developing common assessments and sharing those assessments with their members. The current edition of *The Language Educator*, the national journal for the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, features foreign language educators from Arlington, Andover, and Wellesley, leaders of MaFla who, with support from ESE, refined current assessments for use as common measures. In addition to the article, the example assessments are available on the [MaFla website](#). Districts can use these assessments as they were originally developed, or as educators from the Lynn public schools used them, as a jumping off point for their own foreign language educators to develop and refine common rubrics for use across the district.

ESE is continuing to look for other content area professional organization partners to support the development of common assessments. This is an excellent opportunity for teacher leadership and cross-district partnerships. Interested professional organizations are encouraged to reach out to [Craig Waterman](#).
Mark Your Calendar

**Spring Convening: Expanding Opportunities for Every Student, Every Educator, Every School**

May 16th and repeated on May 17th. The conference will take place at the Best Western Royal Plaza in Marlborough.

**REGISTER TODAY!**

Registration is open to all educators and there are no longer limits on how many team members from a district, prep program, or statewide organization can attend. Each individual should register online.

Applications for ESE’s Teacher and Principal Advisory Cabinets

Applications will be open during the month of May and are due on May 31st. More information will be posted online on May 2nd.

Designate a District Contact for Induction and Mentoring

We’ve created a new function in ESE’s Directory Administration system for Induction and Mentoring Contacts. Each district is asked to select at least one person to serve as the point of contact for the district’s induction and mentoring program for beginning educators.

With these contacts, ESE will share important updates, reminders, and new resources related to induction and mentoring. In June, contacts will receive a link to the 2015-16 annual induction and mentoring report districts must submit to ESE by July 31st, 2016. For more information about designating a contact, visit the Induction and Mentoring Webpage.

Licensure Working Group Update

Starting on May 10th, the Department will engage a working group of 15-20 individuals, including Prek-12 educators, individuals involved in preparing new educators, and school and district leaders, to review the existing “academic” licensure regulations (603 CMR 7.00 and 44.00).

This work is aligned with Governor Baker’s Executive Order 562 to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden. The group will participate in four meetings to discuss the requirements to obtain a temporary, preliminary, initial and professional license as well as the requirements of license renewal. Workgroup recommendations will go through a public vetting process before the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopts any changes to licensure regulations.

Contact Us!

Contact the Educator Evaluation Team at EducatorEvaluation@doe.mass.edu or individual team members:

- Claire Abbott
- Susan Berglund
- Matt Holloway
- Kat Johnston
- Simone Lynch
- Ron Noble
- Craig Waterman

Contact the Educator Development Team at EducatorDevelopment@doe.mass.edu.

Contact the Educator Preparation and Assessment Team at EdPrep@doe.mass.edu.

Contact the Office of Educator Licensure at 781-338-6600 (Monday-Friday 9am-12pm & 2pm-5pm).

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to preparing all students for success in the world that awaits them after high school. Whether you are a student, parent, educator, community leader, taxpayer, or other stakeholder interested in education, we invite you to join us in this endeavor. **We are guided by this mission...** “To strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.”

**And by these goals...**

- Strengthen curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Improve educator effectiveness
- Turn around the lowest performing districts and schools
- Use data and technology to support student performance
- Support the social, emotional, and health needs of students and families