

Engaging Educators

A Reform Support Network Guide for States and Districts

Overview of the Guide: Toward a New Grammar and Framework for Educator Engagement

A wave of reforms over the last several years has refocused the education community on the connection between teacher practice and student learning. In particular, States and school districts have tied teacher evaluation to student learning and other measures of effectiveness, such as student feedback and demonstrations of specific instructional practices.

Ambitious policy changes, sometimes characterized by divisive debate, and tight implementation timelines for new evaluation systems, however, have made it difficult for States and school districts to engage educators in these initiatives, leaving many feeling defensive about the reforms.

The case for engaging educators is simple and compelling. If students are to meet the expectations of college-and-career-ready standards and we are to close achievement gaps, it will be because committed educators—teachers, principals, district leaders and State leaders—empower themselves to work together to this end. Educator engagement is necessary for successful implementation of reform, but its purpose is greater: ultimately, educator engagement is the basis for advancing the profession in education and improving student performance.

Effective educator engagement is difficult to pull off even without the stress of reform. Often, States, school districts and reform-minded foundations and

nonprofits use underdeveloped engagement strategies. As a result, teachers perceive that they are being asked for their involvement to lend credibility rather than expertise. In other cases, key decisions have in fact been made by policy makers, and the practitioners are left trying to figure out how to execute policies they might not understand or find suspicious.

Unions are also critical organizations when engaging educators. Leaders in SEAs, LEAs and other reform organizations are frequently uncertain how unions work and how to collaborate with them. On the one hand, unions have experience and capacity dedicated to engaging their members. Because unions are recognized by many teachers in the field as the only democratic organization that interacts with them, they can bring a degree of trust and credibility to the reform conversation. On the other hand, some perceive union support for reforms to be limited or qualified, and that their methods for educator engagement are not always designed to support implementing reform. As a result, leaders in other organizations are often uncertain about how to partner with organizations that are potential assets in the ongoing project of engaging educators.

Faced with these challenges, leaders fall back on the most common language in the field of educator engagement. Think about all the times we have heard the expressions, “We need teachers to buy into our reform agenda,” or “We want teachers to get on board.” As the language implies, we have made teachers the objects or instruments of our activities, not the subjects and authors of them. In order to really improve student performance and close achievement gaps, we literally have to change the grammar of educator engagement, moving teachers from the objects of our sentences to the subjects. Teachers themselves must affirm the vital role they play in developing, implementing and refining major education reform initiatives such as Race to the Top.

To this end, we are proposing a framework for educator engagement that views engagement from the perspective of a teacher. Looking from that viewpoint, we then propose new roles that State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) and State and local union affiliates can play to support their engagement.

Although this publication focuses on using the framework to engage teachers specifically, States, school districts and unions readily can apply the framework to other groups of educators, including building- and district-level administrators. Likewise, although the framework can be applied to any reform initiative, the focus of this discussion will be engaging teachers in evaluation reforms. The publication begins with an explanation of the framework, followed by specific strategies, including using feedback loops, that States, school districts and unions can employ to implement it.

A New Framework for Engaging Educators

The framework recognizes a progression of four domains of educator engagement. Each domain establishes the teacher as an active subject, the primary actor in a sentence that begins, “**I know**,” “**I apply**,” “**I participate**” and “**I lead**.” Each domain expects levels of mastery and involvement. Each domain involves different habits of mind. If we are to expect educator engagement to become a force that drives the improvement of student achievement, we must intentionally engage educators across all four of the domains.

Here are examples of how the four domains play out in a teacher’s work as an engaged participant in the implementation of a teacher evaluation system:

I Know. I know how the evaluation system in my district works. I also know the rationale for the changes in policy. I understand the observational

framework used to assess my performance and I understand how it intersects with student growth measures. I know that my school district will make a final determination about my performance by combining my observation score with two other ratings, one for my students’ growth and another for their feedback. I understand the rating system and how my rating informs career milestone decisions, ranging from advancement to dismissal for ineffective performance. I know to whom I can turn for support in order to improve. In short, the evaluation system is a set of clear signals I use to guide the improvement of my performance.

I Apply. I apply what I know about the evaluation system to improve my practice and get better results with the students I teach. I think through the expectations of the observation rubrics and apply those expectations to the design of my lesson plans. I also use information from other measures, such as measures of student growth, to set expectations for my students, and to decide how to differentiate instruction. I use feedback from observers and consider my strengths and weaknesses as a practitioner. Moreover, I use that feedback to prioritize different opportunities for professional development. I also use that feedback to collaborate with my instructional coach and team members to identify new instructional strategies. I use student data and other forms of feedback to assess my own performance and consider what to do to continue improving the results I get with my students.

I Participate. I participate in the development, implementation and refinement of my district’s teacher evaluation system at both the practical and policy levels. At my school, I work with leaders and colleagues to set shared expectations for how evaluations will be conducted. I collaborate with coaches and team members to review the observation rubric so we can understand what it means for us. I work with my coach and colleagues to interpret student data to inform instructional decisions. As my district



determines how to apply State guidelines, I respond to surveys and participate in focus groups. Moreover, as a member of my union, I participate in union-management collaborative sessions to calibrate video teaching samples using the observation rubric, and I work with union and district leadership to reflect on how the new system will change the way my colleagues and I will use our time in my school. I am also a member of a communication team that visits nonpilot schools to explain the new evaluation system to my colleagues, presenting facts, answering questions and offering my opinion.

I Lead. I lead my colleagues to improve their performance and to improve the evaluation system as we go forward. I am recognized as an excellent practitioner, whose classroom performance and student growth results stand out. At my school, my principal and colleagues seek me out for my expertise. I open my classroom as a demonstration site, and I am called on to deliver model lessons. I mentor new teachers and support other teachers as they develop. I create novel approaches to district curricula that are appropriate for the students in my school and share them with my colleagues across the district. I sit on joint labor/management committees at my school and make sure that new programs, like the teacher evaluation system, meet high expectations and produce good results for students and teachers. At the district level, I collaborate with leaders from other schools, the union and district administration to improve the faculty's understanding of how to improve the evaluation system. I serve on joint union/management committees that integrate the expectations for college-and-career-ready standards with those of the evaluation system, or that use data to align expectations across grades and content areas. I help revise policy through collective bargaining or other processes to make sure it is good for students, teachers and other educators. With other leaders, I visit schools around my district and help others know, apply, participate and lead. I make sure that things are done with teachers, not to them. I like to get out front and lead, pushing for reforms before they are pushed on us.

Effective efforts to engage teachers will consider how teachers and leaders will develop the habits of mind described in all four domains, not as tools of the purposes of reform, but as the active authors of reform in the work they do in various classroom, school and district roles. States, school districts and teacher unions should consider fostering engagement in all domains to ensure that teacher-leaders are knowledgeable partners; co-creators; crew—not passengers; responsible parties and subjects—not objects—of sentences.

In what follows, we unpack each of these four domains. We remain focused on teacher engagement in the development, implementation and refinement of teacher evaluation systems. For each domain we ask the same question: What can SEAs, LEAs and unions do to foster engagement? And we answer by offering clear and actionable strategies and citing specific examples of those strategies from the field. We also include feedback loops, or specific strategies used to assess the effectiveness of educator engagement.



I Know

Knowledge is the foundation on which all of the other domains are built. If teachers do not “know” the evaluation system, they will not use it as the guide for their own improvement, and they will not be able to participate in or lead its implementation at even the most basic of levels. Therefore, developing knowledge is the base on which SEA, LEA and union teacher engagement strategies are built, and SEAs, LEAs and unions are all responsible for building knowledge. When successfully engaged in this domain, teachers make use of tools and strategies that provide access to information. At the same time, they guard against misinformation, which undermines both practice and the aspirations of reform initiatives. Feedback loops in this domain check for understanding and correct misperceptions.

Supporting Knowledge Development

Get the Word Out

The sheer number of educators in a given State or district, coupled with limited State and district communications staff and resources, makes it difficult to communicate with educators and to monitor the effectiveness of the communication strategies they employ. Guidebooks, frequently asked questions (FAQs), publications promoting facts and addressing myths (designed to address misinformation and misinterpretation), websites, newsletters and emails can be effective tools for disseminating information about new evaluation systems. Regional information sessions employing train-the-trainer models, add-on sessions at pre-existing trainings or convenings and webinars can also be effective delivery options. Op-eds, letters to the editor, blast messages, social media, press releases and regular briefings reinforce communications aimed at in-house audiences.

States and school districts across the country have been particularly inventive at implementing strategies to ensure that teachers are aware of significant changes in evaluation policy. For instance, Tennessee established an online rapid response system to provide immediate answers to questions about the State's new evaluation system. At its peak, the system received approximately 75 questions a day, each of which State staff responded to within 2 days. The State also issued an FAQ email every week that included answers to questions asked three or more times in a week through the rapid response system. The publication also highlighted best practices around evaluation reforms.

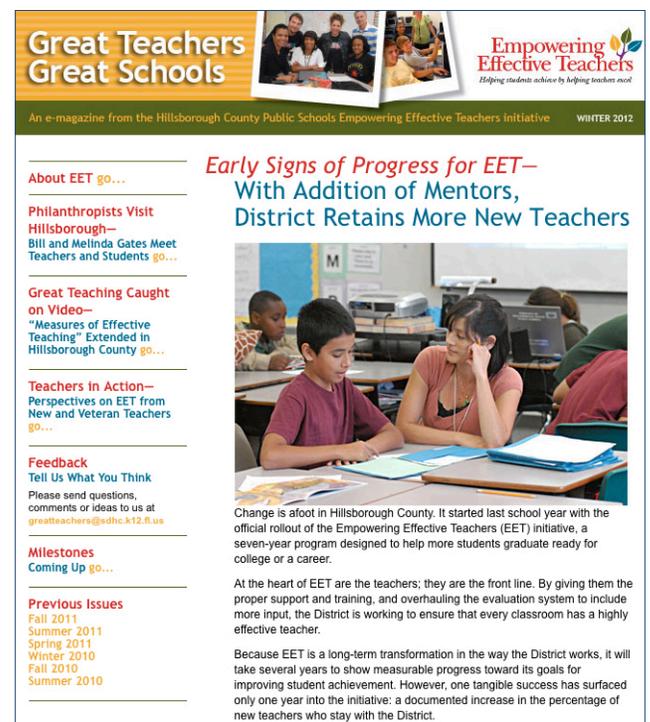
The District of Columbia developed individual guidebooks for each of the 19 categories of educators identified in the District's IMPACT evaluation system. The guidebooks clearly explain how student

“You can never communicate enough, and you can never be overprepared.”

MaryEllen Elia, Superintendent
Hillsborough County Public Schools

growth is incorporated into the system, what the components of the system are, how they fit together and what educators can expect at each stage of the evaluation. The guidebooks are written from the educator's point of view in a question and answer format that reads honestly and informatively. They also include curricular and instructional resources for educators.¹ Rhode Island's *Guide to Evaluating Building Administrators and Teachers* includes timelines for educators that indicate the phases of the evaluation throughout the school year, checklists for developing student learning objectives, a glossary of terms, a quick reference table to help explain the system and useful tools for observers and educators.²

Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools revamped its website to relay information about the new evaluation system. The site includes podcasts entitled “The Things You Need to Know” that are delivered by the superintendent (in both long and short forms), updates, FAQs and links to press coverage. The district also developed an “Empowering Effective Teachers” e-zine that provides basic information on the system in a reader-friendly format.³



Hillsborough County Public Schools “Empowering Effective Teachers” e-zine

Hillsborough left nothing to chance, employing multiple delivery methods in addition to its website as it rolled out its new evaluation system to great effect.

Communicating through these diverse channels represented an expenditure of time and resources, but the multiple methods of delivery were critical for securing engagement, feedback and, ultimately, support. They ensured that teachers had plenty of options and opportunities for obtaining information, getting training in the new evaluation process as well as making their voices heard.⁴

The Role of Unions in Building Knowledge

State and local union affiliates are often better situated than State departments and school district central offices to communicate directly with teachers, providing a trusted voice to sift through a complex and ever-evolving process. Their involvement can be integral to successful development and implementation of these new systems and signals to teachers that “we are all in this together.” Unions can be particularly effective in countering misinformation that emerges at the building level.

There are numerous examples of State and local union affiliates taking on the responsibility of building the knowledge base of teachers and collaborating with SEAs and LEAs to do so. The Illinois Department of Education embraced this approach by reaching out to two unions—the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers—to involve leaders in early discussions around the evaluation system, well before decisions had been made. This message of joint creation resonates with teachers’ union leaders and can position them to readily engage their members in reform efforts. The Illinois Education Association, for example, implemented extensive outreach to its staff and members to inform them of the new evaluation laws and clear up misinformation about the new system.⁵

Similarly, during the development and implementation of their groundbreaking teacher compensation system between 1999 and 2005, the Denver Classroom Teachers’ Association and Denver Public Schools deployed union members to schools to meet with teachers and discuss the new compensa-

tion system before teachers voted to adopt it. They learned through this deployment that often the best way to build knowledge in the teaching corps is to provide opportunities for face-to-face, teacher-to-teacher communication. In the spring of 2011, as the district and the union developed and implemented a new teacher evaluation system, the partners had to advance from a handful of early adopter schools to an expanded pilot of nearly every school in the district. They needed to ask teachers to affirm the pilot at the school level, holding elections to determine whether schools would participate, but they knew that teachers in schools that had not employed the new evaluation system did not have the knowledge to cast an informed vote. To address this gap in knowledge, the association identified a cadre of teacher leaders from pilot schools and the district released a union leader—an elementary school music teacher—full-time to meet with faculties in nonpilot schools in advance of the vote. The team and the full-time release director of this communication effort presented information on the various components of the evaluation system and how it had worked for them during the first pilot year, and answered questions. The end result was that in the second year, 92 percent of district schools participated in the pilot.⁶

Get the Language Right

Teachers are not policymakers, philanthropists, chambers of commerce or editorial boards. Messaging about evaluation that works for those stakeholders won’t work for teachers. Leading communications with the notion that the new evaluation system will allow school districts to fire poor performers will create an instant communications barrier. To build deep knowledge of the evaluation system among teachers, the focus of communications about the new system should not be on sorting and firing; it should be on supporting and inspiring excellent practice. It should be about improving instruction and increasing student achievement. When preparing communications for teachers, States, school districts and unions need to pay close attention to language and even consider testing the message with educators. Some districts and unions have paid close attention to the matter of word choice.

Throughout the development and implementation of the Pittsburgh Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation, for instance, district leaders recognized that many educators held the view that evaluation was based on a “gotcha” mentality, as suggested by one district administrator. District leaders worked with the teachers’ union to build and disseminate messaging around evaluations as tools for growth. They recognized the importance of this messaging from the beginning, as well as the need for a culture change around evaluation.⁷

In addition, working in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Education Association chose to present the new evaluation system in terms of student learning. They talked with teachers about how the new system would help them identify what was going on in their classrooms and see whether student learning was occurring at the levels it should be, as opposed to using accountability or the sorting language that is often a part of these discussions.⁸

Teachers also understand when States and districts engage in “happy talk” in an attempt to mask the real challenges that major reforms present. Denver Public Schools recognized the need for honest communications around the rollout and piloting of its new evaluation system and chose what a district leader called a “keep-it-real” communications strategy. District leaders deliberately avoided language that would imply that the new evaluation system was the best possible thing to happen to educators. Instead, they acknowledged the challenges that the new system presented and honestly communicated to stakeholders the ongoing need for refinement.⁹

Establish Feedback Loops: Assess Existing Perceptions, Test for Understanding and Revise Communications

Feedback loops are strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of educator engagement approaches. They include techniques such as surveys or focus groups for assessing what educators have heard. They also include other methods of determining the success of engagement activities like systematically looking for changes in practice—demonstrated mastery of instructional techniques or creation of instructional

tools aligned to new expectations. Finally, they consider whether engagement strategies themselves are successful, looking, for instance, at whether teachers go to a website and use the tools it offers when they plan or teach. System leaders should use information from feedback loops to inform the continuous improvement of their engagement activities in the same way that we expect teachers to use feedback and student performance information to make adjustments to their classroom practice.

When developing teacher knowledge and understanding of evaluation systems, States and school districts should consider assessing teachers’ perceptions at the beginning of the evaluation development stage so they can address any misinformation or absence of understanding that a survey might reveal. They might pursue the same tactic as they move from pilot to full implementation, as the teachers in nonpilot schools may not know a thing about how the new system will differ from the old one. Teachers in nonpilot schools might even be fearful, suspicious and negative about the proposed changes, so communications should be nuanced, honest and forthcoming from the start. Hillsborough County Public Schools implemented a survey at the start of the evaluation development phase to determine attitudes toward evaluation, and then used the results to inform priorities.¹⁰

Finally, States and districts can improve their strategies in the knowledge domain by tracking and reviewing their progress toward ensuring that all teachers know what they need to know about the new evaluation system as it unfolds. By cataloging messages that have already been disseminated and assessing educators’ perceptions of the system, States and districts can evaluate and revise their communications delivery processes and messages. Again, Hillsborough County Public Schools conducted anonymous surveys—“pulse checks”—to understand the degree to which educators comprehended the evaluation system. The surveys included questions on whether and how much information had been relayed to them and how beneficial it was. Results from the study, which included 3,600 teacher responses, suggested an increase in teacher understanding of the new system.¹¹



I Apply

Application is the domain that has the most immediate bearing on improving student performance. Teacher evaluation systems are the important set of

signals that SEAs and LEAs send to teachers to tell them how to do well at their jobs. Application is the habit of mind teachers use to follow those signals, to put them to practical use in their classrooms. As with the other domains, SEAs, LEAs and unions share responsibility for supporting application. When fostering application, SEAs, LEAs, unions and other organizations should think about the support structures that need to be in place so teachers can follow through on the feedback they get from their evaluations. Feedback loops in this domain should focus on changes in instructional practice, teacher satisfaction and the use of LEA/SEA and union-developed supports.

Supporting Application

Provide Teacher Supports

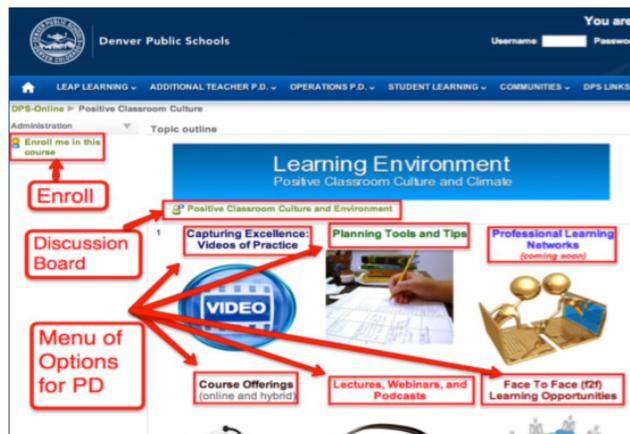
States and especially districts are responsible for ensuring high-quality instruction in their classrooms. To that end, they are responsible for making available to educators resources and tools that are aligned to the evaluation systems because, without them, it would be very difficult for teachers to apply what they learn from their evaluations. Examples of tools include model lesson plans aligned to learning standards for students, instructional coaching and other professional development activities aligned to observation frameworks, interim assessments so that teachers can monitor student learning, exemplar student learning objectives and assessments and videos of high-quality instruction, to name a few. With these tools—videos on differentiation, for instance—a teacher can make the decision to model her own practice after the effective instruction she watched in the privacy of her home or classroom.

We want to highlight here one very promising district practice in support of teacher application that acknowledges district responsibility for creating opportunities for teachers to apply what they learn from their evaluations and teachers' responsibility for their own learning so that they can improve instruc-

tion and student outcomes. A very welcome development—and one that could also be implemented at the State level—scores of districts have created or are creating online professional development portals, single sources for all the above-mentioned tools and resources and many more.

Online portals, such as the one in use in Denver Public Schools, align supports directly to an educator's area for improvement as identified in the evaluation. Instead of simply relaying the conclusion that a teacher is, for instance, struggling in developing a positive classroom culture, Denver can provide direct assistance so that the teacher can address this area of growth.

The following screenshot shows the Denver portal, which includes a discussion board on the topic, videos of effective practice, planning tools and tips, course offerings and more—all pertaining to developing a positive classroom culture. The same options are available for each indicator in the district's evaluation system.



Denver Public Schools' Professional Development Portal

While States and districts may not have the capacity or resources to create such sophisticated portals, tools such as videos can still live online. For instance, the District of Columbia Public Schools has filmed more than 100 videos of teachers demonstrating effective teaching, covering each standard in their framework. Each video clip was vetted by District master educators to ensure alignment to the standards, and the videos are available to all educators in the District through its online portal. The District is in the process of developing a data and professional

development platform for streamlined access to supports aligned to the evaluation system.¹² Employing a similar tactic on a smaller scale, the Hillsborough County Teachers Association, through its union-run, teacher-driven Center for Technology in Education, has given cameras to teachers participating in a professional learning community so they can film their own teaching. They then use the videos with their colleagues to align their instruction to the Hillsborough observation framework.¹³

Feedback Loops: Assess for Change in Instructional Practice

At the end of the day, evaluation reform is about helping teachers improve their practice and get better results with the students they serve. States and districts can inform their support strategies by looking for the number of teachers in each district who are applying specific practices in their classrooms. By studying variance among schools, States and districts can offer supports not only to teachers, but also to instructional leaders. Alternatively, districts, States and unions can collect additional data on teacher satisfaction with evaluator feedback and the number of formal and informal feedback opportunities and other activities that support teachers to determine whether districts and schools are adequately assisting teachers as they apply what they learn from their evaluations to their practice.



I Participate

Participation is a collaborative habit of mind. Teachers who demonstrate this state of mind work together with colleagues to put reforms such as teacher evaluation

systems into practice. This is not a simple task. It is one of adaptation and refinement as educators make sense of new systems in their school and classroom contexts. Together, they develop the practical details that policy-makers can never imagine as they pass laws or bargain rules. Work in the participation domain takes the form of design teams, study groups and committees focused on practice and policy development and refinement. Its product is a more thorough common understanding of the work of reform. In the context of teacher evaluation,

perhaps the best example of participation is the work that teachers and leaders do together to calibrate performance levels or identify appropriate measures of student learning. Participation requires a commitment from leaders in SEAs, LEAs and unions to carefully allocate a scarce resource—time—so that participating teachers and leaders are using it well together. Feedback loops in this domain look for evidence of people working together and making changes in collective practice, assess the difference that collaboration makes and use feedback from teams to replicate strong practice on a system wide basis.

Supporting Participation

Provide Multiple Opportunities for Educators to Participate in Feedback Loops

One thing that States, districts and unions need for successful implementation is feedback, the most basic and simple form of teacher engagement as it relates to participation. Without it, they won't know if the system is working or how to make it better.

If they are able to secure email addresses for teachers, both States and school districts can promote participation by creating and executing quick online surveys designed to collect feedback on issues ranging from how many times teachers were actually observed, to the perceived quality of the feedback, to whether they are receiving support to apply what they are learning about their instruction through the evaluation system. Unions can help by issuing similar

What is a Teacher Voice Group?

Over the past few years, teachers, former teachers and nonprofit leaders have started what have come to be known as “teacher voice groups,” nonprofits devoted to helping teachers inform public policy as it relates to the teaching profession. These groups include Teach Plus, the Center for Teaching Quality's New Millennial Initiative, Educators for Excellence, Teachers United and Hope Street Group, among others. Many teacher voice groups operate in Race to the Top grantee States.

surveys to their members and providing results to their school districts. Better yet, union and school districts can collaborate on the development and dissemination of survey tools to create a common source of information and minimize the number of surveys requested of educators in the field.

Other, more personalized, tactics are also available to States, districts and their unions. They can partner with teacher voice groups and other organizations to gather feedback on key issues. For example, the Illinois State Board of Education worked with Teach Plus, a teacher voice group, to implement teacher feedback forums across the State. Board staff attended each forum, and participants heard about evaluation options and rated them, which provided invaluable feedback during the development process.

Other States and districts have partnered with teacher voice groups to gather ongoing feedback on evaluation, from development through the implementation stages. For example, the Center for Teaching Quality's New Millennium Initiative, launched in 2009 and operating in several cities, provides an online portal for teachers to discuss and contribute solutions to a variety of challenges, including evaluation, presented by teacher effectiveness reforms. The Hillsborough County New Millennium Initiative pairs effective teachers with district and union leaders in an online community to examine and share thoughts on the new evaluation system.¹⁴ Hope Street Group has partnered with several States to provide a monitored online feedback process that allows teachers to respond to specific concerns and challenges in the development and implementation of new systems.¹⁵ And Teach Plus surveyed more than 1,400 educators in Illinois to garner feedback on the State's new system.

However, there is nothing more disengaging than for feedback to be ignored by those collecting it. Collecting feedback can be an enormous undertaking for States and districts already taxed by the day-to-day management of programs, so they may want to look at various options for sifting through the information, such as appointing facilitators (who could also be educators) for online feedback groups or engaging an organization to manage the feedback.

Following up with educators who have provided feedback is crucial—but is often neglected, given the abundance of feedback and the capacity at the State or district level. States and districts can start with thank-you emails, but ideally should eventually provide a summary of the feedback, which would include how the feedback informed or could inform decision making. States can employ teacher voice groups to assist with this time-consuming but essential task.

A case study of Hillsborough County Public Schools' evaluation development and implementation processes emphasizes the importance of providing multiple opportunities for feedback:

The ability to address and resolve problems quickly was paramount in gaining buy-in from stakeholders. Effective problem-solving—resolving challenges as they arise in such a way that they do not occur again—enhanced the credibility of leadership and the new evaluation system, while giving all participants greater confidence and trust in the process and outcomes. It also ensured that problems did not become systemic and entrenched.¹⁶

Beyond this important but more basic opportunity for teachers to engage lie two important high-yield opportunities for participation that States and districts can make available to teachers: oversight committees and communication teams.

Communication Teams

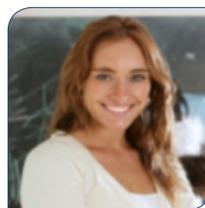
There is no more powerful form of communication than peer-to-peer interaction. Written communications placed into teachers' boxes often find their way into the circular file and even emails, when piled up with others, have a habit of getting lost. To that end, SEAs, LEAs and unions—especially LEAs and their local union affiliates—should consider developing communication teacher SWAT teams that can be deployed at key junctures of the development, implementation and redesign of evaluation systems. This can be done through the provision of release time or the use of stipends. Denver Public Schools and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association are expert practitioners of the art of teacher-to-teacher communication, deploying it in two major change initiatives, one for teacher compensation and the other for teacher evaluation. As we discussed earlier,

the union and the school district in Denver deployed teams of teachers from first-round pilot schools and a full-time release union leader to nonpilot schools to inform teachers about the new evaluation system in advance of a vote that would determine whether individual schools would participate in the second year of the pilot. Ninety-two percent of district schools voted to join the pilot, results that demonstrate how effective the strategy was. Other States and districts have highlighted educators on panels and in presentations at regional forums and institutes.

Identifying Teachers for Additional Roles and Responsibilities

Identifying cadres of teachers who want to be more involved in the development, implementation and refinement of the new system is an important and conscious step that SEAs, LEAs and unions should take to promote participation. Some States and districts have been successful at working with teachers' unions to identify educators and union leaders who want to be more involved. Tapping into existing networks of educators—such as National Board Certified teachers, Teach for America cohorts, State Teachers of the Year, TNTP Teaching Fellows, members of teacher voice organization and others—can be a good first step. Cultivating leadership teams of teachers from pilot schools can be another. Or States and school districts can simply identify participants on a case-by-case basis, depending on the opportunity for participation.

Those opportunities are limited only by our imagination and what teachers have the skills to do or can be trained to do. Real, substantive and authentic opportunities for participation are already unfolding in Race to the Top grantee States and their LEAs, where teachers are or soon will be conducting evaluations as certified evaluators, training colleagues on components of the new evaluation system and working on collaborative teams charged with developing assessments for nontested grades and subjects, as well as tools and guidance documents for the implementation of student learning objectives. These are real opportunities for joint creation, substantial and important responsibilities and signs that teachers haven't just "bought-in" but are truly engaged.



I Lead

Leadership is the highest order of educator engagement. It comes when educators take ownership of reforms not as external mandates, but as the basis for improving student performance and advancing their profession. SEAs, LEAs, unions and other organizations foster leadership because, without it, reform is not sustainable. Like participation, leadership is a collaborative habit of mind, focused on working with others to develop, implement and improve initiatives such as new evaluation systems. It is distinctive, however, in two ways: first, it makes a point of identifying excellent practice. Teacher leaders are good at their work and recognized by their colleagues for their effectiveness. Second, it is the means for creating shared ownership for results.

Teacher leaders can play a role at the school, district and even State levels to develop others so they can get results and improve their practice. They are the teachers policy leaders go to in order to make sure that laws and rules are well conceived and that they do not run awry when implemented. They are also the teachers instructional leaders turn to when they are counting on ways to make sense of data trends in schools, or to support faculties in developing new ways to reach their communities' students. They help adapt and innovate and are full participants in the continuous improvement of reforms. Some choose their unions as the institutions from which they will lead; others choose the schoolhouse, the district or all three. Fostering leadership, therefore, requires the ability to identify successful practitioners and place them in roles where they can reach other members of the faculty, teachers across schools and colleagues in their unions. Although there are strategies that SEAs, LEAs and unions can use to promote teacher leadership, ultimately it is the teacher's responsibility to pursue and accept the challenges that go along with this endeavor. That pursuit starts with an understanding that teachers themselves are responsible for their profession, that with their partners in State and district offices, union halls and teacher voice groups, they can co-own efforts to strengthen it—in this case by participating in the development, implementation

and refinement of evaluation systems that are more closely aligned to the demands of the 21st century and the goals of school systems, the most important of which is to advance student learning.

How to Support Leadership

Identify Excellent Practitioners and Give Them Opportunities to Lead

SEAs, LEAs and unions are all in a position to identify high-performing teachers and then provide them opportunities to lead instructional reforms as well as policy development and implementation. These leading practitioners can lead work or study groups focused on a particular domain of an observation framework or on the development of assessments that can be used for student learning objectives. They can jointly lead State or school district evaluation advisory committees.

Development and Oversight Committees

Several States, including Colorado, Illinois and Tennessee, launched evaluation advisory committees charged with developing recommendations for the new evaluation system. The committees included teachers and union leaders. The purpose of leadership bodies like these is to gather the advice of leading practitioners to inform the development, implementation and improvement of policy. There is no reason why school districts cannot have similar advisory groups that are a collaboration between districts, teachers and their unions. States and districts can also consider a separate Educator Advisory Panel or committee made up entirely of educators who would gather and give feedback, make recommendations and report back to other educators, giving the evaluation system a teacher face, not just an administrative one. One strength of such committees is that they unite diverse views. It is important to keep this in mind when convening them. There are different ways of doing business on school faculty committees, union work groups, legislative panels and philanthropic advisory boards. It is important to help leaders in representative roles adjust to new leadership contexts if collaborative engagement activities like this are to succeed.

Pay Attention to Culture

If we expect teachers to lead the development and improvement of policy, school districts and States must establish a culture that accommodates disagreement but does not accept the status quo. Race to the Top States and School districts are beyond the point of arguing about whether they should use student growth measures to evaluate teachers. However, they are not beyond the point of discussing how to measure student growth in nontested grades and subjects, for instance. Here there can be rigorous discussion of different options; teachers and others can weigh in on whether it's best to use school wide growth measures, school wide district-generated assessments or student learning objectives. State and district leaders can encourage this kind of engagement. They can appoint teachers to the leadership teams that will inform or make decisions. Through this engagement, they can cultivate collective ownership of critical decisions.

Hillsborough County, for example, has become expert at this practice. During the development of its evaluation system, the district asked a number of teacher leaders from within the union to populate its teacher evaluation committee (about 50 percent of the members were teachers). That group debated, among other topics, whether to use peer observers in their evaluation system and, if so, how much those evaluations would count toward a teacher's overall summative rating. After the discussion, the committee determined that peer evaluations should count just as much as the evaluations conducted by administrators—30 percent.¹⁷ By accommodating debate and discussion, States and districts demonstrate that they care about what teacher-leaders—and other members of the group—think and have to offer.

Encourage Labor-Management Leadership Collaborations and Know How State and Local Union Affiliates Conduct Business

States and LEAs should encourage unions to get out front and lead, to advocate for reform and effective implementation with their members, as detailed in this publication in States such as Illinois and in districts such as the Pittsburgh Public Schools. States and school districts need to understand, however, that

unions are democratic organizations that foster debate and that support for a major initiative cannot be requested on a Tuesday and delivered by Friday. Union leadership needs to have the time to work issues through a process, likely through the union's executive council and then its board. Knowledge of this process will become particularly important again as States and their LEAs begin aligning their evaluation systems to compensation and career milestone decisions.

Reach Out to and Foster the Development of Teacher Voice Groups

Many of the nation's teacher voice groups have been particularly helpful to States and school districts in gathering feedback about the design and implementation of teacher evaluations. Some have also been effective advocates of policy reforms aligned to the goals of State Race to the Top scopes of work. Educators 4 Excellence, for instance, advocates for higher starting salaries for teachers, a professional compensation system that rewards excellent teachers, rethinking tenure as a significant milestone that is achieved on the basis of evaluation and eliminating the practice of last-in, first-out for teacher layoffs. Teach Plus, which operates chapters in California, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Tennessee and Washington, D.C., advocates for strong teacher policy, often through policy papers developed by Teaching Fellows. Teach Plus fellows in Indianapolis and Boston produced a policy paper advocating for evaluation systems that train evaluators effectively, include peer evaluators and identify high performers for leadership and targeted retention. In Colorado, teachers from the New Millennial Initiative network continue to advocate for district-based professional development programs that support teacher development that is aligned to Colorado's evaluation system. Like unions, teacher voice groups can help organize teachers to advance policies aligned to State reform initiatives.

Additional Thoughts on Teacher and SEA/LEA Responsibilities for Fostering Leadership and Assessing the Quantity and Quality of Teacher Leadership Through Feedback Loops

Ultimately, though SEAs and LEAs can create opportunities for the very best educators to lead and to reach out to unions and teacher voice groups to encourage their leadership, teachers and teacher unions must choose leadership with the mindset that

they too are responsible for the success or failure of teacher evaluation and other Race to the Top reform initiatives. SEAs, LEAs and unions, however, must ensure that the feedback loops they create to monitor engagement in the other domains include questions that allow them to determine the extent to which teachers have become leaders in their systems and how they are expressing that leadership. In particular, schools, districts and unions can use that information to determine whether they need to do more to provide leadership opportunities for excellent practitioners.

Applying the Lessons of This Guide to Other Educators and Reforms

This guide describes a variety of strategies to help States, school districts and unions lay the groundwork for teachers to engage in evaluation reforms. With diligence and attention to detail, they can develop and roll out effective educator engagement strategies that result in the vast majority of teachers reaching the "I know" and "I apply" domains and a significant percentage attaining the "I participate" and "I lead" habits of mind. This creates a substantial body of teachers who, as the subject of the engagement sentence, have made a **choice** to become engaged.

Effective educator engagement is challenging. It takes time and effort to rethink policy reforms from the perspective of the practitioner expected to enact them. If done correctly, transparently and authentically, however, the outcome will be powerful: improved teacher practice and student achievement. In the field of teacher evaluation, engaging educators changes the conversation. Instead of focusing on sorting and firing, evaluation now focuses on supporting excellent teaching and inspiring professionals to work together to meet the expectations of college- and career-ready standards.

Effective educator engagement has the same transformative potential for other groups of educators and other reforms. Ultimately, if we are to change the conversation, we must apply the example offered in this guide across the field—with educators in different roles across the vast, sometimes very decentralized systems in our States, and across the many reform initiatives underway.

For example, States and school districts can apply the engagement framework and the examples we used to populate it to other classes of educators as well. Principals, superintendents and other central office personnel need to know, apply, participate and lead—and SEAs and LEAs must lay the groundwork for the development of the habits of mind attendant to these domains. Like teachers, principals and central administrators will **know** about how evaluation reforms work if SEAs and LEAs communicate with them effectively. Like teachers, they will **apply** what they learn about their performance from their evaluations to their ongoing practice if school districts and their supervisors give them the tools to do so. They can **participate** in the development, implementation and refinement of educator evaluation systems at the levels of practice and policy, serving as members of the school’s student learning objective work group, for instance, or as members of the district’s evaluation advisory committee. And they can **lead** by directing school-based efforts to align college-and-career-ready standards to teacher evaluation and as members of State administrative associations by advocating for State policy that allows teachers to become certified evaluators.

We can also apply the framework to other initiatives, such as the rollout of college-and-career-ready standards. For instance, teachers need to **know** about the major instructional shifts that the new standards present and, as a result, SEAs and LEAs need to communicate effectively to teachers what they are. Teachers will need to **apply** their knowledge about these instructional shifts to their practice, which districts and States can support with materials they develop and make available through online venues. Many teachers will **participate** in the successful implementation of the new standards by coaching their colleagues, serving on curriculum development committees and providing feedback to their districts on how their schools are implementing the instructional shifts. Finally, some teachers will **lead** by taking the initiative to explain to parents, community members and even legislators why these instructional shifts are important and establishing and leading school-based work groups designed to support implementation.

Regardless of the educator or initiative, our point moving forward is simple and compelling. If we are to meet the goals of reform—improved student performance and closed achievement gaps—we must engage those whom we expect to do the work. They are thoughtful professionals who, given knowledge, the right tools and opportunities to participate and lead, will successfully accomplish the set of ambitious goals established by their States.

Notes

1. District of Columbia Public Schools website, www.dcps.dc.gov.
2. The Rhode Island Model: Guide to Evaluating Building Administrators and Teachers, 2011–2012, <http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/Docs/RIModelGuide.pdf>.
3. Case Study: Leading Change in Hillsborough County Public Schools, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011.
4. Case Study: Leading Change in Hillsborough County Public Schools, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011.
5. Interview with Audrey Soglin, Executive Director, Illinois Education Association, March 2012.
6. Interviews with Henry Roman, President, Denver Classroom Teachers Association, Jennifer Stern, Executive Director, Teacher Performance Management, and Amy Skinner, LEAP Communications Manager, Denver Public Schools, March 2012.
7. Interview with Sam Franklin, Executive Director of Teacher Effectiveness, Pittsburgh Public Schools, March 2012.
8. Interview with Audrey Soglin, Executive Director, Illinois Education Association, March 2012.
9. Interview with Jennifer Stern, Executive Director, Teacher Performance Management, and Amy Skinner, LEAP Communications Manager, Denver Public Schools, March 2012.
10. Case Study: Leading Change in Hillsborough County Public Schools, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011.
11. Case Study: Leading Change in Hillsborough County Public Schools, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011.
12. District of Columbia Public Schools Reality PD website, accessed via <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/About+DCPS/Career+Opportunities/Teach+in+Our+Schools>.
13. Interview with Sabrina Gates, Peer Evaluator, Hillsborough County Public Schools, April 12, 2012.
14. Center for Teaching Quality website, <http://www.teachingquality.org/nmi/hillsboroughco>.
15. Hope Street Group website, <http://hopestreetgroup.org/index.jspa>.
16. Case Study: Leading Change in Hillsborough County Public Schools, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011.
17. Interview with Sabrina Gates, Peer Evaluator, Hillsborough County Public Schools, April 12, 2012.