

Themes and Messages Regarding Teacher Development and Evaluation

Since spring 2013, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has been partnering with 18 Minnesota school districts and charter schools to pilot Minnesota's example teacher evaluation model. The pilot is being implemented in order to inform improvements to the state model and to offer recommendations to all Minnesota districts as they prepare to fully implement teacher evaluation activities in school year 2014-15. The 18 pilot districts began implementing the model in fall 2013.

The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota has released the first of three reports based on their study of the pilot program. The report, which covers only the first three months of pilot activities, includes a picture of early work and activities of pilot districts as well as some initial perspectives of teachers, principals, and MDE staff regarding pilot activities.

A pilot leadership team of stakeholders (including teachers, principals, school board members and leaders from pilot districts) examined and discussed the initial findings from the report to identify themes and messages about teacher development and evaluation. Based on pilot activities to date as well as the CAREI findings, the pilot leadership team has learned the following:

- School leaders/principals play a significant role in teacher development and evaluation, so support for them is paramount. As instructional leaders, they are responsible for facilitating the evaluation process, gathering and interpreting evidence of teacher performance, connecting this work to other initiatives, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. In many cases, this work will redefine the role of the school leader or principal. The school system/district leadership must recognize and support this role for principals.
- Teachers value opportunities to collaborate and grow professionally through teacher development and evaluation. Collaboration opportunities support teachers as they engage in evaluation activities. Though this work is complex and demanding, teachers believe interactions with peers about practice and student outcomes are meaningful contributors to their development.
- Considerable professional development is needed to support teacher development and evaluation. Summative evaluators, peer reviewers and teachers are learning new ways to work. Not only is significant training needed at the start of evaluation work, ongoing support is needed if evaluation processes are to be implemented successfully.

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- Teacher development and evaluation training is strengthened with these elements:
 - Content is released gradually over multiple, short sessions.
 - Participants have opportunities to discuss and practice during training.
 - Examples of forms and procedures are available across grade levels, content areas and teaching positions.
 - Written resources are provided as a reference source throughout the school year.
- Districts should align teacher development and evaluation to other district initiatives. Pilot districts found success when teacher development and evaluation activities were aligned to current as well as new initiatives. Successful pilot districts aligned activities—such as peer review and student learning goals—with teachers’ professional learning communities (PLCs) by embedding these activities into expectations for PLCs and team meetings. Teachers reported that the goal-setting process was clear and straightforward when aligned with the district and school building goals. District priorities were reflected in classroom observations and teachers’ individual growth plans.
- Pilot districts used teams of school and district leaders, including teachers, to plan, monitor progress, solve problems, collect data, and assess implementation. Teams began meeting and planning well before implementation started at the beginning of the school year. This team continued to meet and made sure that implementation happened. Change and flexibility—based on experience working in the process—should be expected.
- Educators see the value of teacher development and evaluation, and they are concerned about sustainability. Providing meaningful, high-quality development experiences and fair evaluations for teachers requires significant investments of resources. While pilot participants received financial support from the legislature and significant technical assistance and training from MDE to implement the state model, that level of support will not be available for all districts in school year 2014-15.

While these initial findings and themes are very preliminary and offer little guidance for designing teacher support and development processes, we believe that preliminary findings can be useful to non-pilot Minnesota districts. Findings may be used by districts to plan for successful implementation in school year 2014-15. We encourage districts to consider the implications of the initial findings and the themes above for their planning.

You can [access the preliminary report from CAREI at their website](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cehd/carei/).
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