

Case Study Addendum

The purpose of the case study was to provide an in-depth look at the design and implementation process six Illinois school districts developed for their PERA-compliant evaluation systems. Seventy interviews were conducted between February and August 2014 with the following staff roles: principal, teacher, district administrator,¹ union representative, teacher evaluator, and principal evaluator. This supplement incorporates the sixth school district's (District 6) findings to the case study results previously published².

Initial Case Study Findings

Five major themes developed in the initial case study analysis were confirmed when analyzing data from District 6. The major themes were: (1) leveraging evaluation results for professional development, (2) perceiving evaluation system validity, (3) communicating about and training on the evaluation systems, (4) developing educator trust and collaboration on the evaluation systems, and (5) finding adequate time and resources to complete evaluations. As reported in the full interim report dated September 17, 2014, the case study highlighted the following findings related to the teacher evaluation system:

- Teachers felt the new system yielded an ongoing cycle of evaluation over the course of the school year, with multiple data points and methods of data collection, and therefore a fairer process.
- Teachers expressed concern about the validity of the evaluation system in four areas: (1) the way in which student growth objectives are set or the ways in which student growth is measured, (2) the timing (during the SY) of student assessments used to determine student growth, (3) the frequency and ratio of planned versus unplanned observations, (4) the inconsistency in how evaluators collect and consider additional artifacts to determine a teacher's rating on the two domains of the Danielson Framework that cannot easily be observed (primarily Domains 1 & 4).
- Most teachers reported introductory training on the evaluation system; however, few indicated that their district had plans for using evaluation findings to improve professional practice.
- Districts had varying levels of trust and collaboration regarding the teacher evaluation system. Districts with a high degree of trust tended to include a variety of stakeholders in all stages of the design and implementation processes.

¹ Please note that discussions with administrators as a respondent group do not refer solely to principals, but may include school-level administrators such as principals and assistant principals, as well as district-level administrators with a firm understanding of their PERA-compliant teacher/principal evaluation systems, such as superintendents and/or human resources administrators. In many instances, participants "wore more than one hat"; for example, a superintendent may have been a principal evaluator, but also a district-level administrator.

² Please see *Evaluation of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act: Interim Report*, starting on page 89, for more information on the case study sampling approach, domains covered in interview guides, and in-depth results.

- Teachers expressed their concerns regarding the lack of time to design, receive outside support, and prepare for the evaluation system rollout.

In addition, the case study revealed the following lessons learned regarding the principal evaluation system:

- Although some principals felt the evaluation practice standards could be overly vague and/or too numerous, they indicated that the evaluation system was fair, rooted in evidence, and captured their overall duties.
- Administrators reported that the more varied and abstract nature of principal duties, as compared to teachers, made it difficult to develop an evaluation system that was truly relevant and easy to use.
- Principals expressed concerns regarding the validity of the principal evaluation system, specifically: (1) the under-developed nature of the indicators used to define principal practice in some of the frameworks, (2) the utility and amount of documentation required as a part of the principal evaluation process, and (3) the role of evaluation on retention and/or dismissal.
- Principals also expressed concerns regarding the lack of time to design, receive outside support, and prepare for the evaluation system rollout.

District 6 Findings

As stated above, District 6 confirmed the major themes and findings reported in the initial case study. Below are highlights where District 6 contributed to the conversation around the major themes and one theme that was unique to the district.

On Opportunities to Leverage PERA-Compliant Evaluation for Teacher Development:

One principal articulated the potential opportunities of the new evaluation system to inform teacher development if the evaluation results are used with that intention.

“I believe in forcing administrators to have a concrete look at individual teachers. [For example] Jimmy and Susie both teach the exact same class; they use the same curriculum. Jimmy’s kids are doing extremely well, Susie’s aren’t. The answer isn’t to say now we need to get rid of Susie, it’s what do we need to do to get her more exposure to what Jimmy’s doing with kids in the classroom or those types of things to help her become a better teacher to raise those scores.... If we’re using the information for those types of talks, I think it will be very good. If all we’re going to use it [for is] as a rubber stamp, it seems like it just could be more detrimental than anything else.”

On Perceptions of System Validity:

While District 6 teachers, like other teachers, wanted more unplanned observations to enhance validity and utility of observations, several District 6 teachers identified a limitation to unplanned observations. One teacher summed up the limitation with this statement:

“I think that a weakness would be they usually end up coming in the same time every day whether it’s the beginning of the class or end of a class, it just seems like whoever is observing comes in about the same time and I know it’s just because they are free that time, but usually you end up doing the same thing over and over and they are not seeing you teaching to your full capabilities”

On Trust/Collaboration:

District 6 principals reinforced trust by approaching the summative evaluation meeting in a collaborative manner with teachers. All teachers interviewed valued the collaborative approach evaluators took when discussing specific evaluation findings. One teacher describes his/her experience as such:

“[The principal] is so willing and open to work and she even when we are sitting talking about my post observation she said I didn’t see this, and I said this happened when, and I name the situation ...there was something she hadn’t witnessed and she hadn’t remembered in her notes, but it had gone on when she was there, but to have that open-minded communication is crucial and when that happens, it will lead to fix the things that she suggest you fix.”

On Being an Early Implementer of a PERA-Compliant Evaluation System:

Administrators and staff spoke about the challenges they encountered as early implementers of a PERA-compliant evaluation system, which was identified as a unique theme absent from the other case study districts. District 6 began designing its PERA-compliant evaluation system during the 2009–10 school year and focused on student growth measures simultaneously with vetting teacher observation measures. Administration and teaching staff alike struggled with developing appropriate Type 3 assessments, while receiving minimal outside professional development or support. Ultimately, these assessments were developed incorrectly, resulting in an erosion of trust that the student growth measures were valid and weighted appropriately in teachers’ overall evaluation scores. Administration addressed these concerns by providing professional development on Type 3 assessments to all staff, creating a committee for student growth measures, involving more teachers on that committee, and designating an additional year (school year 2014–15) as a “no-stakes” year.

A principal expressed this challenge in the following statement:

“The biggest barrier we had was probably the unknown because we went in pretty green and not knowing what we were doing.”

One teacher outlined the issue of being in an early implementing district through this quote:

“Our administrators fully admit we haven’t known where our end goal is supposed to be and so that’s why we had to go back and change things or fix things, and I think that has created confusion and frustration.”

These quotes above illustrate commonalities experienced across the six districts interviewed for the case study and confirm the overall findings. When reading these findings, it is clear

that designing and implementing a PERA-compliant evaluation system poses both benefits and challenges to administrators and teaching staff in districts across Illinois. For the final evaluation report, the case study will continue exploring the stated themes in order to document lessons learned and best practices, which could be used to inform technical assistance and professional development at the local and statewide levels.