



HR Pilot Project Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 2

February 2013

Seven Levels of Reform

- Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement
- Comprehensive Induction
- Professional Development
- Supervision and Evaluation
- Teacher Leadership
- Organizational Structure
- Adult Professional Culture

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A Systemic Approach to Evaluation

One year ago, this newsletter focused on issues related to supervision and evaluation in the pilot districts and beyond. It was a time of great uncertainty for many Massachusetts districts, as union leaders and administrators began their conversations about how the new state evaluation system would be enacted.

Over the last twelve months, we have been privileged to accompany the three districts involved in the Human Resource Pilot Project as they begin their implementation of the new system. While each district has made choices that reflect its own unique context, all are united in their inspiring vision of the new evaluation as an opportunity for increased dialogue around teaching and learning. Through proactive processes that involve clear communication with a wide range of stakeholders, led by an empowered guiding coalition, the pilot districts have risen to the challenge.



Meaningful Conversations Fuel Revere's Evaluation system

The Revere central office team of Superintendent Paul Dakin and Assistant Superintendents Dianne Kelly and Chris Malone met with us after spending their lunch meeting deep in discussion about the vision behind the new evaluation system; additional fine-tuning of that vision would soon be undertaken with administrators and teacher leaders. Such continual and collaborative reflection has been a hallmark of Revere's implementation of the new system. From the initial research stage to ongoing discussions about the finer points of implementation, teachers have been at the table. Underlying the collective decision-making about evaluation procedures, Dr. Dakin detects a common desire shared by union leaders, teachers, and administrators: to be leaders, not followers, in the changes that lie ahead for the education profession.

Teacher evaluation leaders serve as point people in each building to answer teachers' questions about the evaluation process or rationale. These teachers, several of whom have been involved

with the evaluation through their supervision and evaluation pilot subcommittee, received two full days of training in the new requirements over the summer. Evaluation leader Lisa Caponigro explains that she and her colleagues, as non-evaluators with extensive knowledge of the new system, act as a non-threatening source of information and advice for teachers who are navigating the process for the first time. Evaluation leaders also provide professional development to both the teachers and the administrators in the building, a welcome disruption of more traditional hierarchies. After planning and facilitating a full day of professional development in the fall, they have gone on to manage regular meetings throughout the year.

Besides their building-based work, the evaluation leaders periodically convene as a district-level team to ensure the consistency of their message and to discuss questions and concerns that have arisen in their buildings. The program has been so successful that Dr. Dakin hopes to double the
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Revere's Evaluation System, continued

Rather than aiming for mere compliance with the regulations, Revere has focused on developing innovative structures that may have lasting effects.

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number of evaluation leaders in the district to 50. According to Dr. Kelly, the appointment of teacher evaluation leaders has been one of the district's best decisions. Ms. Caponigro agrees, enthusiastically recommending the model to other districts: "It's a good way to ensure that all of the schools are getting the same information at the same time."

An open, growth-oriented evaluation fueled by frequent communication depends a great deal upon skillful implementation by administrators, and Revere has developed a three-part professional development plan to support principals and assistant principals in their navigation of the new process. The central office team holds a monthly meeting with principals and directors,

and another with assistant principals, giving all administrators the opportunity to hear the same information and engage in vision-building activities. In addition, building-level teams meet with district-level directors to discuss low-performing teachers. Finally, David Castelline of Teachers21 is conducting walk-throughs with school principals followed by discussions of how they would write about what they saw.

Every aspect of the evaluation system maintains this keen focus on supporting conversations about teaching and learning, down to the district-developed electronic evaluation platform [see inset]. Designed to promote ongoing communication, the system facilitates immediate feedback and allows teachers to respond to comments or questions posed by the evaluator. All administrators who evaluate a particular teacher have access to the same comment thread, so that multiple evaluators can continue the same conversation. Ms. Caponigro explains that, while the switch from a paper-based to an electronic system was initially a concern for many teachers, most have since come to see the benefits of the user-friendly platform. "Technology can be a vehicle for constructive dialogue about teaching and learning," says Dr. Dakin, "as long as both the administrator and the teacher realize that it's a space to trade ideas."

While the new evaluation procedures represent a major transition for teachers and administrators, Revere's growth-oriented culture contributed to the district's readiness for the change. As a result, rather than aiming for mere compliance with the regulations, teachers and administrators in Revere have been able to focus their efforts on innovative structures that may have lasting effects on teaching and learning in the district. Dr. Kelly believes that the frequent, real-time feedback encouraged by this evaluation has the potential to improve student achievement. Dr. Dakin has his sights set upon an even deeper change: the transformation of the teaching profession itself, from the inside out. If we can move away from a dichotomous relationship between the administrator as evaluator and the teacher as subject, he says, "if we can have the administrator in the circle, on the inside, discussing teaching and learning," the profession will become a more open and collaborative one in which teachers and administrators are united in a single goal.

Excerpt from Revere's online evaluation system:

Jan 03, 2013, 02:26:50 PM, from Assistant Principal

Here is some feedback from my unannounced observation on 1/3/2013: During the ELA reading block, all of the students were attentive and actively engaged in the lesson. Each one of the seven students at the teacher table participated in the discussion at least twice during the time that I observed. The Agenda was clearly posted on the board in student friendly language. For ELA it stated "Today we will review vocabulary, verbs and our skill (compare/contrast) to prepare for our test". Further, "Today we will use QAR strategies" was posted by the teacher table with an explanation of 4 types of reading comprehension questions "Right There", "Think and Search", "Author and Me" and "On My Own". Students demonstrated the ability to independently identify at least 2 of these types of questions from a given text using post it notes. I noticed that the group was comprised of both general education and special education students. How was this particular grouping pattern determined?

Jan 03, 2013, 03:28:56 PM, from Teacher

Thank you so much for the feedback. In response to your question, grouping is based on the needs of the particular student. The group that you observed met the benchmark for fluency however they have weaknesses in comprehension. Because Ms. X and I are both special education teachers, we have divided the students amongst us based on their area of primary need. We continually monitor the students' progress to be sure that the students are placed in an appropriate intervention.

Jan 09, 2013, 05:41:38 PM, from Principal

Thank you for presenting information to staff at the staff meeting on 1/7/13 explaining key concepts from the ANSWER training that you attended. This opportunity to share is a good reflection on how you work to engage your students and collaborate with your colleagues.

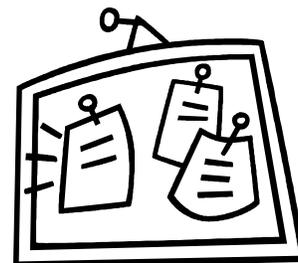
Pilot Network Convenes Around Evaluation Issues

Two pilot district network activities shared a focus this fall, as approximately forty participants met in various configurations to discuss challenges and hopes surrounding the new evaluation system.

On December 12, Jon Saphier facilitated an engaging colloquium entitled “A Systemic Approach to the New Educator Evaluation.” Throughout the day, participants from the three districts’ steering committees and lever sub-committees engaged in dialogue spurred by rich video exemplars of teaching and supervision provided by Research for Better Teaching. Several district and school administrators have since expressed their intention to use the exemplars in their own evaluation-related professional development activities.

The following week, on December 18, union leaders from the three districts convened for the pilot project’s inaugural Role-Alike meeting. The Role-Alike group is a new format for the pilot project, meant for those with similar roles in the pilot project to share resources, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and ensure that their constituents’ voices are heard in systemic reform efforts. December’s meeting was expertly facilitated by MTA president Paul Toner. Over the course of the half-day session, union leaders collectively devised a series of talking points related to the evaluation to be shared with administrators and constituents. Role-Alike meetings for union leaders and school-level administrators will occur several more times during this school year, and will continue to respond to issues identified by participants as timely and critical.

PILOT DISTRICT UPDATE



Attleboro: Supporting and Modeling Continuous Growth

Last February, an article about Attleboro’s adoption of the new evaluation requirements anchored the Supervision and Evaluation issue of this newsletter. The district’s philosophy of change, as Superintendent Pia Durkin then described it, involved “three C’s: collaboration, calibration, and communication.” One year later, it is abundantly clear that the three C’s are still present in Attleboro’s supervision and evaluation efforts, but in broader and deeper form. As they work to implement a supervision and evaluation system that emphasizes growth and reflection, Attleboro’s administrators and steering committee members have simultaneously modeled what such growth might look like on a structural level.

Collaboration has characterized the new evaluation system from the outset; even before it was implemented, the system’s success hinged upon meaningful collaboration among stakeholders. While Attleboro had a head start in the adoption process due to the fairly close alignment between its previous evaluation system and the new regulations, Dr. Durkin was well aware of the inherent challenges of navigating the transition in a way that would lead to sustainable change. In particular, she recognized the need to involve the teachers and union leadership. “We had to be candid enough and humble enough to say, ‘we’re going to make mistakes, and we’ve got to work together,’” she reflects. The union leadership’s “leap of faith,” as Dr. Durkin describes it, was built on years of work to define what constructive collaboration would look like.

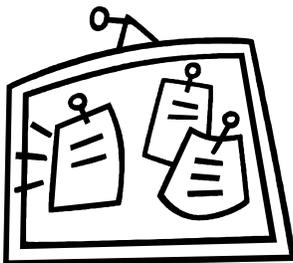
The resulting structure reveals the district’s commitment to responsive, growth-oriented processes. Building upon the intensive leadership training that had been undertaken as part of Attleboro’s previous evaluation system, the district invited its former evaluation work group to become the work group for the new evaluation system. After a year of talks with the central office administration, that work group turned into the negotiating group; Dr. Durkin stresses the importance of preceding the formal negotiation process with conversations, informal discussions, and collaborative opportunities. Now that negotiations are complete, the erstwhile work/negotiation group is now an implementation group. The group’s role has evolved over the last several years, keeping the conversation consistent but ensuring that key stakeholders are always in a position to shape district policy.

While Attleboro has long promoted evaluations based on conversations about teaching and learning, the district has also gained a number of new administrators who are familiarizing themselves with both their roles and the evaluation system that will guide their discussions with educators. A growth-oriented evaluation entails a new role for evaluators; the system depends upon their understanding, skill, and comfort with facilitating constructive conversations about teaching and learning. Dr. Durkin uses the term “reciprocal accountability” to describe the evaluator / educator relationship: just as educators are accountable for participating in an improvement-

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PILOT DISTRICT UPDATE



***“It energizes
everybody to see
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-Dave Sawyer,

Assistant

***Superintendent,
Attleboro***

Attleboro: Supporting and Modeling Growth, continued

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oriented evaluation process, administrators are accountable for conducting appropriate, effective, and fair evaluations. In a context where teaching is public, safeguards and clear expectations ensure that the system is not a burden imposed upon teachers from above, but a forum in which all parties work together towards a larger goal.

This need for a shared conception of evaluation makes calibration a truly vital part of Attleboro’s ongoing work. The central office and implementation group have responded to needs and questions from educators and evaluators as they arise; for example, Dr. Durkin has coached individual principals in giving feedback that supports the goals of the evaluation, and teachers and administrators have had opportunities to discuss strong examples of evidence. Setting forth a clear vision of successful implementation is one part of the process, but Attleboro’s evaluation leaders have taken it further by refining and clarifying that vision as the context and needs change.

Communication is central to any change effort, and those charged with spreading information about the evaluation have ensured that their messages are clear and consistent. While two-way communication about the new system has been present throughout the negotiation and early implementation period, the conversations surrounding the system have revealed an expanded perspective of late. Assistant Superinten-

dent Dave Sawyer describes one way in which consistent communication has led to a more widespread understanding of supervision and evaluation as a part of the systemic process. Mr. Sawyer has made a concerted effort to present the seven levers of the HR Pilot Project as interconnected, and that message has been taken up by the steering committee, the lever subcommittees, and even stakeholders who are not directly involved with the project. As a result, people at all levels of the system have begun to identify and articulate connections between the evaluation and other levers, such as professional development. “It energizes everybody to see how all of this fits together,” says Mr. Sawyer.

Continued attention to, and development of, the three C’s has helped Attleboro to prioritize its actions around the new supervision and evaluation system. Ultimately, though, the collaboration, calibration, and communication that characterize Attleboro’s work are permeated by a powerful underlying belief in the importance of relationships. Through two-way communication structures, responsive trainings, and collaborative efforts that honor the voices of all stakeholder groups, district leaders have established a climate of trust and reciprocity. As those involved in the design and implementation of the evaluation system undergo their own process of reflection and growth, their actions proclaim a commitment to supporting the development of schools, educators, and students throughout the district.

Brockton: Poised to Implement a Growth-Oriented System

On February 25, Brockton Public Schools and the Brockton Education Association will meet to ratify contract language surrounding the new educator evaluation system. While intensive teacher training has been on hold pending ratification, the district has prepared for the transition with targeted support and a clear sense of purpose.

To date, all district administrators have undergone the mandatory training associated with the new evaluation. Those administrators are now engaged in the process of unpacking the administrator rubric and setting their own evaluation goals. According to Elizabeth Barry, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning and steering committee co-chair, “We wanted to make sure that the administrators had the opportunity to experience some of the same activities that the teachers were going to experience” in order to pave the way for administrators to support

teachers in their use of the new system. In addition, members of the district steering committee found Jon Saphier’s December colloquium (p. 3) to be a helpful vision-building activity. Ethan Cancell, Associate Director of Accountability, Planning and Technology and steering committee co-chair, came away from the colloquium with new ideas for framing the evaluation “in a way that focuses on the growth of teachers so that it is not an exercise in compliance.”

As Brockton begins to implement its evaluation training at the building level, district administrators will certainly be guided by the rich conversations already underway in the district. More importantly, Brockton’s keen focus on teaching and learning will help to situate this new initiative within a cohesive context and ensure that the new system is seen as an essential part of all educators’ work.

What Can Be Gained from the New Evaluation?

When the Working Group for Educator Excellence convened in December, the new evaluation system was a primary topic of discussion. After WGEE leaders proposed that the organization take an active role in assisting districts to optimize their implementation of the evaluation system, two members shared their unique perspective on the opportunities inherent in these new guidelines. Tom Scott, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, and Celine Coggins, founder and CEO of Teach Plus, offered initial impressions of the evaluation system.

Superintendent's Perspective—Tom Scott
Dr. Scott spoke of his positive experience on the 40-member evaluation task force. The task force had several goals in designing the new system. For one, it needed to be statewide, with some consistency of application. In order to impact educator performance, it had to be meaningful enough to spur reflection on practice. It had to support constructive improvement for teachers who were not performing at proficient levels. Finally, the task force wanted a system that would encourage a more reflective goal-setting process—one that moved beyond individual student or classroom goals and allowed entire school systems to focus on improving specific aspects of student performance.

In addition to the product that ultimately came from the task force, Dr. Scott identified several important features of the process itself. The collaboration that characterized the task force served as a model for a healthy evaluation system: superintendents and principals engaged in meaningful, ongoing conversation with educators about performance. Dr. Scott urged that the state and individual districts continue the conversations that they started, in which multiple stakeholder groups met to grapple with central questions about teaching and learning.

In order to continue the culture-building work that began with the task force, Dr. Scott advocated for regular meetings between school groups (comprised of unions, superintendents, school committee members, etc.) and the Commissioner of Education. Such meetings would hold the department and districts accountable for implementation, and would bring districts into conversation around common questions and models of successful implementation.

Teacher's Perspective—Celine Coggins
Teach Plus, the organization founded by Dr. Coggins, is a teacher leadership organization that works to empower teachers to solve problems at all levels of the educational system. Dr. Coggins shared several lessons from her national and local work with teacher leaders that suggested the timeliness and promise of the state's recent conversations about educator effectiveness.

The evaluation is a “game-changer,” according to Dr. Coggins, as it creates the threshold conditions for a performance-driven profession. Young professionals are looking for opportunities for autonomy, mastery, and purpose in their careers, and many promising teachers will leave the field if those conditions are not met. A recognition of the variations in teacher quality could raise the professional status of teaching.

While the new evaluation may be promising, the manner and timing of communication are vital to its success. Teach Plus policy fellows in Boston surveyed teachers in Level 4 schools, and just over 50% felt that they did not have enough information about the new system. 39% said that they had never used feedback from their evaluations, and only 19% said that they had been observed by another teacher. Dr. Coggins suggested that this evaluation system represented an opportunity to envision the next steps in teacher leadership and ownership of the profession.

PERSPECTIVES



The evaluation is a “game-changer,” according to Dr. Coggins, because it creates the threshold conditions for a performance-driven profession.

WORKING GROUP FOR EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE

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Thanks to the following individuals for contributing their perspectives to this newsletter:

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Dr. Celine Coggins
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Dr. Paul Dakin
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Dr. Pia Durkin
Attleboro Public Schools

Dr. Dianne Kelly
Revere Public Schools

Chris Malone
Revere Public Schools

Dave Sawyer
Attleboro Public Schools

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*Massachusetts Association of
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Seeking Your Input: New Newsletter Format

In order to more adequately fulfill our mission of dissemination, the WGEE Pilot committee has decided to shift the content and format of the pilot project newsletters.

Starting with this issue, newsletters will be shorter and more frequent, and will focus exclusively on the activities of the three pilot districts as they relate to a chosen theme. In this issue, that theme is the new evaluation system; future themes will include the integration of various district initiatives, capacity-building for systemic change, and the use of guiding coalitions in the change process.

More frequent publications will allow us to present the most up-to-date information from the pilot districts. In addition, by concentrating on

pilot-related activities, we hope to better capture both the pilot processes and the promising practices that have been generated during the course of the project.

We will continue to synthesize research relevant to the systemic change mission of WGEE. These syntheses will be produced separately from our newsletters, but they will be distributed to all WGEE member organizations.

In order to make this publication as useful as possible for your organization, please share your feedback. What kinds of articles and updates would you like to see? What are some of the broad topics that we should focus on in future issues? Please send comments, suggestions, and questions to Susan Freedman

Mission of the Working Group for Educator Excellence

WGEE is a broad coalition of 60 individuals from 26 statewide organizations who are united in the belief that the most effective way to provide every child with an excellent education is to take a systemic approach to influencing what teachers and educational leaders know and can do. We believe when key elements of the human resource system are strengthened to align with one another and with a common research-based, field-tested core of professional knowledge, the cumulative effect will be improved student achievement and a more efficient and effective system that strengthens teacher and leader expertise.

Human Resource Pilot Project

The pilot project, funded by the RTTT initiative, is a joint effort by the WGEE and DESE to systematically and strategically create, strengthen, and align the key influences on the quality of teaching and leadership in three school districts: Attleboro, Brockton, and Revere. The influences, or levers, include Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement, Comprehensive Induction, Professional Development, Supervision and Evaluation, Teacher Leadership, Organizational Structure, and Adult Professional Culture. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, we aim to determine whether alignment will improve the quality of teaching and leadership. Goals of the project include:

- Increasing student achievement.
- Using cost, time, and resources with greater efficiency.
- Improving teaching and leadership practices.
- Increasing the satisfaction and retention of teachers and leaders.
- Improving school and district culture.