

# **INTERDISTRICT DESIGN TEAM**

## **Accountability Model**

### **Spring 2001**

#### **Introduction**

The Interdistrict Design Team is made up of teachers, administrators and school board members from five Southeastern Pennsylvania school districts. This group of educators has engaged in a year-long process of shared learning and dialogue on issues related to accountability in a standards-based environment.

In Fall 2000, the team members independently participated in the first study group series sponsored by the *Program in Educator Accountability* (now known as *Operation Public Education*). By the time the group was formed in February 2001, it had the accumulated knowledge from three of four study groups: Educator Quality, Student Assessment and Compensation.

From February through May, the Interdistrict Design Team took part in additional information-gathering and collaboration. The group heard from the superintendent and union president of Coventry (Rhode Island) Public Schools, the president of the Columbus (Ohio) Education Association, value-added assessment pioneer Dr. William Sanders and two representatives from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, including a Board-certified teacher.

The team then turned to the task of developing a model accountability system that describes the roles and responsibilities of teachers, administrators and other education stakeholders. What follows is the outcome of their consensus-based design process.

#### **Focusing on Student Learning**

The central goal of any school reform initiative must be to increase student learning in a standards-based environment. The group approached the subject of accountability from this assertion; their accountability model is designed to sustain all educators' focus on their roles as instructional leaders – whether at the classroom, building or district level.

Accountability is one crucial aspect of a system that will achieve the desired end of increased student achievement. Thus in order to be fair and meaningful, it must occur within an appropriate standards-based context and with the necessary resources and supports.

#### *A System Aligned for Standards*

There are several prerequisites before a district can hold its educators accountable for student learning. The district must have clear standards for students, including mastery of the problem-solving skills that the future demands; there must be annual assessments aligned with those standards; and schools need an appropriate curriculum aligned with both the standards and the assessment. Teachers and administrators can then focus on successful instructional practice with the confidence that it will result in high student achievement as measured by standardized tests and other assessments, and that graduates will be adequately prepared for the world into which they enter.

### *Professional Development*

Sustained professional development is the key to a corps of high-quality teachers and administrators. Districts must invest in long-term, meaningful staff training that emphasizes pedagogical skills and collaboration among peers. Professional development for all educators must include continuous work in standards-based instruction, data-driven decision-making and the creation of portfolios to encourage reflection on practice. As they advance, teachers should also have access to support that prepares them for National Board certification and training for peer mentoring. Administrators additionally require professional development in evaluation – both for classroom observation and portfolios.

### **Teacher Evaluation**

The classroom is the locus of student learning, and teachers' evaluation must therefore be based largely on whether they are succeeding in helping children learn. Evaluation should also encourage teachers to reflect on their practice.

Three types of data sources ought to be used in a teacher's annual evaluation:

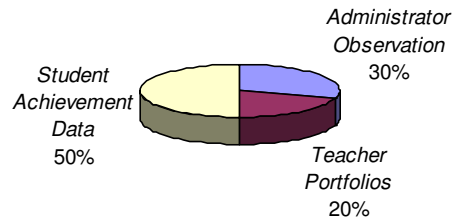
#### *Student Achievement Data (50 Percent)*

Student achievement data provide the most direct measure of a child's learning. The problem has traditionally been that absolute scores on standardized tests reflect exogenous factors like family income much more than the impact of teaching. Educators in wealthy school districts therefore virtually always have students with higher scores than their counterparts in poorer districts. Using this type of data to evaluate teachers is unfair.

Value-added assessment, however, now provides a fair and meaningful way to measure the impact of teaching on learning. Teachers should be held accountable for providing their students with *one year's growth in one year*. Whether a child enters the class at grade level, below grade level or above grade level, it is the teacher's responsibility to help him or her advance over the course of the year. Each student's classroom growth expectation is based on his or her achievement in prior years – not on an absolute standard. Teachers must also work to move all children toward the standard.

Teachers should also have the opportunity to develop additional goals for the year based on student achievement data. For example, a teacher may examine her students' test scores from the year before and realize that there is a significant gender gap in performance. She may therefore decide to set a data-driven goal of reducing her classroom's gender gap over the course of the year. Another teacher may choose to focus on working with his bottom-quartile students so that they make more than one year's gain and thereby shrink the gap with higher-performing students. In either case, the teacher uses student data to identify a specific goal, develops a plan to achieve that goal over the course of the year, and then can determine whether he or she has succeeded based on end-of-course assessment. Principals must approve each goal and work with teachers to achieve them, as well as evaluate the ultimate outcome.

Teacher evaluation should include value-added (for the entire class) *and* specific goal components. Each teacher should have the opportunity to choose the relative weight of these two pieces in the 50 percent of evaluation that is based on student achievement, although value-added must always be weighted more heavily than the goals (it must be at least 26 percent of the total



evaluation). For example, one teacher may decide to weight value-added at 40 percent and the goals cumulatively at 10 percent. In cases where traditional testing is not possible – such as for special education, music and art – the teacher must develop goals that reflect the impact of instruction on classroom growth, using student work as evidence. These goals will necessarily vary greatly depending on the educator’s range of responsibilities and the desired student outcomes.

#### *Administrator Observation (30 Percent)*

A smaller portion of a teacher’s evaluation should be based on observation by administrators. In order to be fair and meaningful, though, observation must be 1) of sufficient length and frequency, 2) based on clear standards for teaching, and 3) result in detailed feedback.

One of the most often-voiced criticisms of many current observation systems is that classroom visits are of such short duration and incidence that they cannot provide administrators with reliable information about what is occurring in the classroom. In order to be useful in evaluation, observations should occur numerous times in different parts of the school year and last a significant amount of time.

In addition, observations must be based on clear criteria for quality teaching practice. Under the current system, observations are often seen as nothing more than a chance for teachers to put on a “show” while administrators gauge whether the blackboards are clean and the students are quiet. Instead, observation must be based on agreed-upon standards for best practices and gauged on a detailed rubric. The Danielson Framework is one example of adequate teaching practice indicators; a similarly well-developed set of criteria is used in Coventry, Rhode Island. Observation practices should be aligned with the aims of a standards-based classroom and must be student-centered – examining how the teacher furthers the learning of the children in the classroom.

In addition to a meaningful observation system, teachers must receive feedback from each classroom visit by an administrator. Continuous improvement is only possible when teachers and administrators discuss the observation and the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher’s classroom practice.

#### *Teacher Portfolios (20 Percent)*

There are several aspects of teachers’ professional roles that cannot be measured by student achievement data or administrator observation. A comprehensive evaluation system should therefore also feature two teacher portfolios.

The first would be an Instructional Portfolio focused on the teacher’s reflective practice and use of data-driven decision-making. This would be a focused and limited compilation of student work, authentic assessment and other data accompanied by the teacher’s articulations of how she/he used this information to drive practice. The Instructional Portfolio thus encourages teachers to use various sources of data and to continually reflect on instruction and how it impacts student-learning growth.

A second portfolio would be dedicated to Professional Practices. The portfolio should include evidence and commentary on the teacher’s role as a member of the school community and the larger community. Of particular importance is how the teacher takes advantage of professional development opportunities – especially collaboration with peers – in evaluating and improving her or his own classroom practice.

These portfolios will be evaluated based on a detailed rubric by a panel of three teachers and two administrators. Two of the teachers would be appointed by the teacher being evaluated;

the third should be named by the administration. As noted above in the *Professional Development* section, teachers must be trained in developing portfolios and evaluating their peers' portfolios. In addition to serving as a source of evaluation data, these portfolios provide a basis for ongoing discussion of teachers' professional growth. The portfolio creation and evaluation processes function as tools in making teaching public and advance the concept of the school as a learning community.

### Administrator Evaluation

Administrators' evaluations should reflect their role as instructional leaders in their building or in the district. They must therefore be symmetrical to teachers' evaluation. This section details an evaluation system for administrators with instructional responsibilities – including superintendents, principals, assistant principals and curriculum supervisor. Three types of data ought to be used in their evaluation:

#### *Student Achievement Data (50 Percent)*

All evaluation systems should be primarily focused on student learning. To that end, half of administrators' evaluations would be based on the school or district's value-added score. Administrators would thus be held accountable for the students making one year's growth each year. In addition, evaluation at the school and district level should also be based on decreasing performance gaps among the student population so that all students have the opportunity to achieve at high levels over the course of their K-12 education and ultimately perform at the standard. Administrators must create an environment in which all children meet standards, not just move forward each year. This encourages an allocation of resources based on student learning needs.

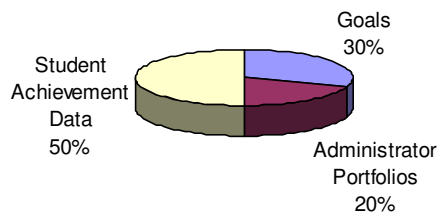
#### *Goals (30 Percent)*

Administrators are also responsible for executing numerous goals set by the district (the superintendent and/or school board) or in coordination with their supervisor. Evidence of the satisfactory completion of these district- and individual-defined goals should make up a large part of administrators' evaluation. It is important that these goals span the entirety of an administrator's responsibilities. They should specifically include her or his role as an instructional leader in the school or district, as well as other managerial functions. Supervisors would determine whether the goals have been met.

#### *Administrator Portfolios (20 Percent)*

Two portfolios should also be used in the evaluation process. They will be judged using a rubric based on standards for best practices in administration.

The first portfolio would be dedicated to Professional Growth. In this portfolio, the administrator would detail how she/he took advantage of professional development opportunities. The primary focus would be on how they impacted her or him in working toward increased student achievement throughout the school or district. The portfolio process should provide the opportunity for reflection on practice and growth.



An administrator's second portfolio would directly reflect her or his responsibility for advancing Instructional Growth. Administrators would compile evidence and commentary on how they worked with teachers and/or subordinate administrators to improve classroom practice. This again emphasizes the administrator as an instructional leader. For building-level administrators, this practice provides symmetry to the administrator observation component of teacher evaluation. Administrators must use this portfolio to demonstrate how they used observation and feedback to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses and help them in continuous improvement.

Similar to teacher portfolio evaluation, the process for administrator portfolio evaluation should encourage discussion around leadership, student learning and best practices. There must be clear standards for the portfolios, and administrators need to receive training in their development and evaluation. A panel of an administrator's peers should judge the portfolios (with the exception of the superintendent's, as she/he reports directly to the school board).

### **Differentiated Evaluation**

Once the evaluation process is completed, the results will be weighted as indicated above. Teachers and administrators will each fall into one of four categories: Distinguished, Proficient, Provisional or Unsatisfactory. The requirements for each level will be predetermined; there is to be no quota or limit to the number of educators who can be in any one category. As a result, educators will not be competing against one another for recognition and rewards. Likewise, there is not a minimum number of educators who will be placed into the lowest rating levels. The system is designed to mirror student standards: educator evaluation is based on reaching a certain bar, not on a comparison to peers.

### **Rewards and Recognition**

Educators should have the opportunity to receive additional recognition and compensation for demonstrating excellence in instructional practice and leadership. There are two formal methods of accomplishing this goal: advanced certification and bonuses based on evaluation. In addition, districts should pursue strategies of encouraging excellence beyond compensation. These intrinsic rewards can include selection for academic committees and opportunities to attend conferences on behalf of the district.

#### *Advanced Certification*

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers teachers a process through which they can demonstrate mastery of the knowledge and skills that characterize superior classroom instruction. National Board candidates undergo a rigorous application procedure that is in itself a valuable professional development experience. Moreover, preliminary evidence from Coventry Public Schools in Rhode Island indicates that Board-certified teachers are able to achieve greater student learning gains than their non-certified colleagues. Though Board certification is an indirect proxy for teacher performance, educators, policy-makers and business leaders throughout the country have expressed confidence in its validity.

The state should encourage top teachers to pursue National Board certification by covering the full application fees. In addition, the state and individual school district should together allocate between \$2,500 and \$5,000 in bonuses per year for teachers who are recognized by the National Board. This bonus would last for the lifetime of the certification (10 years) and be in addition to the standard salary and any other supplementary pay.

It would also be beneficial for the National Board or an organization with equal credibility to develop an advanced certification process for administrators. Principals, superintendents and other school and district leaders should have a similar opportunity to strengthen and demonstrate their instructional leadership skills.

#### *Bonuses Linked to Evaluation*

The differentiated evaluation systems discussed above must be linked to rewards and sanctions in order to be meaningful. All teachers and administrators who fall into the Distinguished category would each receive a \$2,500 bonus. As was the case for the evaluation system itself, it is important that the bonuses for teachers and administrators be symmetrical. This will lead to an increased perception of fairness among the district's educators.

These supplemental compensation approaches are together intended both to encourage and to show appreciation for excellence and to help districts recruit and retain top educators. Thus, a teacher who is both National Board-certified and is rated as Distinguished in his or her annual evaluation would receive at least \$5,000 beyond the standard salary. Teachers and administrators must feel that their work is recognized. While compensation is certainly only one means of do so, it is nonetheless a key component in improving educator quality.

#### **Remediation**

School districts also have a responsibility to help those teachers and administrators who are not succeeding. Evaluation should not be a way to beat up on educators. Instead, districts must establish systems of support and remediation so that low-performers have the opportunity to develop their skills to a sufficient level. It is also imperative that the teachers' union participates as a full partner in issues pertaining to unsatisfactory teachers. Both for the well-being of children and the professionalism of its membership, unions must assume a share of responsibility for educator quality.

As soon as a teacher is ranked Provisional or Unsatisfactory he or she would enter a probationary period. The teacher then meets with an Improvement Team consisting of the principal (or administrator designee) and a union appointee who is a Distinguished teacher, beginning immediately that summer. The team's objective is not to determine whether the teacher should remain in the classroom, but to focus on improving the teacher's instructional skills over the course of the following year. Each Improvement Team would have access to a range of services, including peer mentoring, intensive professional development and university support. In addition, the team members must conduct numerous classroom observations and provide extensive feedback throughout the school year. The teacher's standing would then be determined by the same end-of-year evaluation that other teachers undergo. Teachers who are rated Proficient but feel that they are in need of extra support may also self-refer themselves into an Improvement Team. There would be no penalty in terms of evaluation or bonuses for teachers who voluntarily enter remediation.

No teacher may remain in either probationary category for more than one year, or in a combination of the two for three years. If the teacher has not achieved Proficient by that time, he or she would be discharged. One crucial component is union support for the remediation process and the ultimate employment decision. As noted above, the union must be a partner. Teachers should understand that the evaluation and remediation processes are not "out to get them," but at the same time there are important consequences for unsatisfactory instructional practice.

Administrators who are ranked Provisional or Unsatisfactory would similarly enter a probationary period. The terms of their remediation should be developed case-by-case by their superiors and the school board members. Nevertheless, the principles could be similar to that of teacher remediation; administrators should have access to peers for support and a period of intensive professional development for skill-building. Administrators, too, would be released from their duties if they stayed within the two categories for a total of three years, or in either category for more than one year at a time.

Teachers and administrators who are rated below Proficient would have their salaries frozen. While rated either Provisional or Unsatisfactory they would not receive raises or move along the salary schedule. If there are able to return to the Proficient level, though, their salary would be increased to the level where it otherwise would have been had the educator never been rated into a probationary category.

### **Implementation**

The professional development, evaluation, remediation and compensation systems described above will require unprecedented collaboration between a school board, teachers' union and administration. These groups must jointly focus on increasing student achievement in order for the standards movement to succeed. In addition, the state must provide significantly greater funding to support success for all students.

More specifically, proper implementation of the system suggested here necessitates a multi-year commitment on the part of the school board and teachers' union that is in some cases longer than the duration of standard contracts. Because this new system is so different from current practices, both parties must commit to a five-year implementation schedule. In the first two years, student achievement data will be collected and analyzed using the value-added technique. All educators will receive training in data-driven decision-making (including how to interpret value-added reports) and portfolio creation, in addition to standards-based instruction. The evaluation and compensation procedures will not change during these two years. The third year will serve as a "dry run." Educators will undergo the new evaluation process and receive their results, but the evaluation will not count in any way. This will allow teachers and administrators to know the rating they would have achieved a full year before total implementation. Educators thus have two years of their value-added data and one practice evaluation so that they can gain an understanding of the system and seek help if they believe they need it. Finally, the system becomes fully operational in the fourth year, when both evaluation and compensation run as described above. At that time, there should also be an appeal process so that administrators or teachers have the opportunity to have their evaluation reviewed by an appropriate committee. An additional year (Year 5) must also be provided for so that teachers and administrators have sufficient time to adapt to the changes.

If this model is successful it will lead to a joint union-district commitment to educational reform, to the institutionalization of collaborative of professional development, to an evaluation system that focus on educators' impact on children, and to additional approaches to compensation that allow the most talented administrators and teachers to be recognized and rewarded. Ultimately, though, the paramount criteria is whether student achievement increases. Our challenge is to help all students achieve at high levels and to prepare our children for the world that awaits them; commitment to those goals requires an unprecedented effort to transform our schools into the learning communities of the future.