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Lessons Learned from the State Model Pilot and Recommendations

Background

Since spring 2013, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has been partnering with 17 Minnesota school districts and one charter school to pilot Minnesota's teacher development and evaluation model (state model). The pilot was implemented in order to inform improvements to the state model and to offer recommendations to all Minnesota schools as they implement teacher development and evaluation activities in school year 2014-15 and beyond. The 18 pilots began implementing the state model in summer 2013.

Funded by the Joyce Foundation, The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota has completed their study of the pilot program. An initial findings report was published in February 2014 based on the first three months of the pilot, and a final report was published in January 2015. The findings represent the experiences of district and charter pilot educators engaging in complex work that, for many, constituted new ways of thinking about teacher practice and student outcomes.

We encourage you to read the report and reflect on the implications for your local teacher development and evaluation work. You can [access the final and preliminary reports from CAREI at their website](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/Publications/). (<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/Publications/>)

A pilot leadership team of stakeholders (including teachers, principals, school board members and leaders from pilot districts) examined and discussed themes from the CAREI report and recommendations for improvements to the state model. The pilot leadership team agreed that the state model should be streamlined, simplified and clarified as recommended by the principals and teachers participating in CAREI's study. However, the pilot leadership team concurred that the study results did not indicate that significant changes were needed in the model components, definitions, measures, or weights.

Lessons learned and recommendations were formulated by the pilot leadership team based on thoughtful consideration of their experiences with the pilot, the CAREI reports, and emerging practices in teacher development and evaluation. Districts and charters are encouraged to refer to these as they plan, implement, and revise their teacher development and evaluation systems.

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- Pilot teachers responded favorably to the Individual Growth and Development Plan (IGDP) as a tool to focus professional development and their professional interactions with colleagues and evaluators. Additionally, professional learning communities (PLCs) or learning teams helped teachers focus on student data to guide their classroom instruction as well as their own professional growth.
- Although teachers, principals, and peer reviewers indicated that they highly valued their professional conversations, they stated that the required number of points of contact (e.g., classroom observations, feedback meetings) were difficult to achieve. The difficulty was primarily related to the required documentation, the time needed, or both.
- While Student Learning Goals (SLGs) were generally viewed as a beneficial component of the model, teachers and evaluators found the development, approval and evaluation of SLGs to be much more challenging than other aspects of the state model. Also, teachers in instructional support positions (e.g. licensed nurses, counselors, media specialists) experienced special challenges when developing student goals because individuals in these positions typically do not work in classroom settings. Both classroom teachers and teachers in instructional support positions reported a need for further training in the SLG component.
- Pilot districts found success when they aligned teacher development and evaluation activities with goals established for the district, school, ongoing programs, or new initiatives. When this alignment occurred, teachers reported that the goalsetting process was clear and straightforward. In addition, district priorities were reflected in classroom observations and teachers' individual growth plans. Further alignment occurred in professional learning community (PLC) and team meetings where teachers worked together to align their growth plans and student goals with district priorities.
- Pilot teachers and evaluators expressed mixed feelings about the use of student surveys in the state model. Overall, principals placed more value on the survey feedback than did teachers. Teacher support for the use of student surveys in their evaluations fell during the pilot year; however, a majority of teachers (67%) still felt student surveys would provide information that would help them improve.
- Pilot 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. It should be noted that pilot participants received financial support from the legislature and significant technical assistance and training from MDE to implement the state model.

Recommendations

- **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.
- **Considerable professional development is needed to support teacher development and evaluation.** Principals, 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.
- **Teachers value opportunities to collaborate and grow professionally through collaboration.** Collaboration opportunities support teachers as they engage in evaluation activities and should be encouraged. Although this work is complex and demanding, teachers believe interactions with peers about instructional practice and student outcomes to be meaningful contributors to their development.
- **Effective classroom observations—and subsequent conversations about practice—take time.** Measurement experts state that accurate evaluations are insured when multiple, well-trained observers use an evidence-based rubric to conduct multiple observations. Consequently, principals and peer reviewers need training in observation techniques and in construction of evidence-based rubrics. Furthermore, in order to have a positive impact on their instructional practice, teachers need to be provided with specific, timely feedback, opportunities to collaboratively reflect upon the feedback and to apply new strategies with continued support.
- **The development of quality student learning goals (SLGs) require clearly articulated plans as well as additional and sustained training.** Teachers and principals need support to build literacies in standards, assessment, and data in order to construct appropriate and meaningful SLG's.
- **Student surveys must be guided by research and best practice and have a vision that is clearly communicated. The survey process—from selecting and administering a survey through training to reflect on and apply results—must include a systematic review and revision method.** Student surveys have great potential to improve teacher practices and student outcomes, but only when the educators using the data understand and have confidence in the process that created the data. As reported in the [MET Project](#), student survey results are predictive of student achievement gains and produce more consistent results than classroom observations or achievement gain measures. Furthermore, survey data can be used by teachers as well as school and district leaders to reflect, action plan, and determine professional development activities, all in service of improving teacher practice and student outcomes.
- **Local leadership teams – including district school and teacher leaders – can be instrumental in making quality implementation happen.** Leadership teams
 - Align teacher development and evaluation activities to other district initiatives.
 - Evaluate and continuously improve the local plan.
 - Anticipate implementation problems and work together on solutions.

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- Gather, study and respond to fidelity data (are we doing what we said we would do?) and perception data (are we making progress towards our vision?).

The Minnesota Department of Education offers a variety of professional development and technical assistance opportunities that address these lessons learned and recommendations.

For more information, please [contact the Division of School Support](#)

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