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Executive Summary of

Teacher and Principal Perceptions of the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System

Final Evaluation Report

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TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA EDUCATOR EVALUATION SYSTEM: FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary

To enhance North Carolina's competitiveness in receiving federal Race to the Top (RttT) funds, the North Carolina State Board of Education agreed to include a measure of student growth for teachers and principals in the existing North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES). The Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation–North Carolina (CERE–NC) evaluated the Race to the Top (RttT) initiative to integrate and fully implement the addition of a student growth measure into the NCEES process for teachers. The goal of this evaluation report is to examine teachers' and principals' perceptions of the addition and implementation of the student growth measure to the evaluation process.

Changing the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Processes

Addition of a Student Growth Measure to the Evaluation Process

Prior to RttT, the NCEES, developed with the input of teachers and principals, consisted of five standards for teachers. During RttT, the state adopted a Student Achievement Growth Standard (Standard 6) for teachers that is based on value-added measures of student growth. By including this standard, state, district, and school leaders will be able to assess educator effectiveness using objective measures of student growth in their efforts to improve overall student achievement.

Teachers receive separate ratings on each standard. To be proficient, teachers must receive a rating of proficient or above on the existing standards and a rating of either Meeting Growth Expectations or Exceeding Growth Expectations on the Student Achievement Growth Standard.

In order to receive a rating for the Student Achievement Growth Standard, teachers must generate three consecutive years of student achievement growth scores. School leaders are required to meet with teachers and develop a Performance Development Plan (PDP) for those whose scores indicate inadequate student growth. The United States Department of Education approved an initial implementation timeline in which school year 2012-13 was the first year of data collection; therefore, school year 2014-15 was the first year for which three-year effectiveness scores were available.

Measuring Student Growth

Education Value-Added Assessment System. In 2012, the State Board of Education selected SAS Institute's Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) to measure student growth. In addition to providing the student growth scores, the online system serves as a single repository for related tools, such as classroom observations, self-assessments, and PDPs. This online system provides educators with access to valuable information across Local Education Agencies (LEAs), regions, and standards. Concurrent with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's examination of alternative measures for student growth, CERE–NC conducted an evaluation of the current evaluation system that compared alternative value-added measures of

student growth and found that the EVAAS measure was one of three top-performing approaches.¹

Calculation of the student achievement growth scores. In 2011, the state proposed a plan to calculate teacher effectiveness that was based on a weighted average of individual teachers' value-added scores and school value-added scores using EVAAS estimations.² An analysis of this approach revealed that low-performing teachers in high-performing schools scored higher, while high-performing teachers in low-performing schools received lower scores.³

As a result, in May 2013, the State Board of Education approved an amendment that altered the calculation of teacher effectiveness. A teacher's growth value now is based only on the student growth values for the individual students taught by that teacher. If an education does not have test scores for his or her individual students, the growth value will be based on the data for the entire school. The amendment also determines the effectiveness of principals by including Common Exam data in their evaluation scores.

Methods and Sample

The Evaluation Team conducted 140 structured interviews with principals and teachers during Fall 2013 and Spring 2014. The purpose was to determine the extent to which North Carolina educators are using EVAAS data to inform practices, as well as to collect participants' perspectives on the use of growth data in evaluations.

Evaluation Questions

The findings in this report address the following questions:

1. How are teachers and principals using EVAAS data for evaluation purposes and to inform teaching practices?
2. What are teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of the use of growth data in the evaluation?

Summary of Findings

1. *How are teachers and principals using EVAAS data for evaluation purposes and to inform teaching practices?*
 - a. Teachers and principals appreciated receiving and giving, respectively, feedback on improving instructional strategies, although both agreed that post-evaluation sessions felt rushed and lacked detail about the evaluation scores. Teachers articulated that including information that centered on the meaning of their scores would have been helpful for improving their instructional practices.

¹ Henry et al. (2015); <http://cerenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/0-FINAL-Evaluation-of-NC-Teacher-Evaluation-9-3-15.pdf>

² The weights chosen were 30% school value-added and 70% individual teacher value-added.

³ Garland, Johnson, & Preston (2013); <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/common-exams/201303-sbe-update.pdf>

- b. Overall, participants noted that the NCEES helped to increase collaboration between teachers, schools, and districts. Both teachers and principals expressed that the new evaluation system has prompted deeper and more substantive conversations centered on student achievement. In contrast, some participants argued that NCEES has created an unhealthy competitive work environment that has stifled collaboration.
 - c. Generally, teachers said that data pulled from NCEES and other assessments helped them plan for differentiated instruction, highlight areas of strength and weakness within their lessons and instructional practices, and become more reflective educators. Teachers across schools agreed that data from NCEES led to better-informed teaching practices.
2. *What are teachers' and school leaders' perceptions about the use of growth data in the evaluation?*
- a. As indicated in previous reports, both principals and teachers felt unclear about the NCEES measure of student achievement growth. Of the participants who said the tool was useful, the vast majority of principals and teachers alike expressed an interest in receiving additional training that centered on how EVAAS scores were calculated and strategies for improving instructional practices through using student growth data.
 - b. Overall, both teachers and principals shared mixed feelings about the use of student growth data in evaluations. Some teachers agreed that the new process allowed them to fine-tune their instructional practices by addressing weak areas. In contrast, other participants indicated that the data-driven culture reduced flexibility and creativity in the classroom, and prevented teachers from designing instruction based on their own professional knowledge.
 - c. Participants provided recommendations to improve NCEES: 1) account for extenuating circumstances, such as a student's home environment, behavior, and ability; 2) include a section within a standard that evaluates teachers' relationships and interactions with students in- and outside of the classroom; and 3) reduce the weight of the student growth standard. Participants also voiced that the new system created additional stress and pressure on educators.

Recommendations

- *Expand training related to NCEES Standard 6.* Both principals and teachers requested additional information regarding the NCEES and specifically Standard 6, the student achievement growth standard. Principals indicated a desire to have discussions that centered on linking student growth data to instructional practices, while teachers expressed an interest in understanding how administrators calculated Standard 6. Findings reveal that teachers shared similar misconceptions about how the NCEES and Standard 6 were calculated. Some argued that a way to improve the tool would be to include individual growth measures, seemingly revealing their lack of information about the fact that the values for Standard 6 are calculated based on student growth from the previous year. Given these gaps, the Evaluation Team recommends providing more face-to-face and web trainings about how Standard 6 does, in fact, reflect student growth, as well as about how to use EVAAS data to guide instructional improvement. Through these trainings, principals should be better equipped to handle questions about the fairness of NCEES.

- *Continue to seek out teacher input on improving NCEES.* Participants agreed that NCEES could be improved if it accounted for students' extenuating circumstances (such as by including a section evaluating teachers' relationships and interactions with students), and if the weight of the student growth standard were reduced. Participants argued that addressing these components will help create a more accurate assessment of effectiveness.
- *Continue to use feedback loops with teachers.* Occasionally, principals acknowledged an improvement in their teachers' instructional practices and vocally shared these findings with their teachers. Teachers recalled these moments as times that were beneficial to their self-esteem, their profession, and their students. Given the positive response from teachers, the Evaluation Team recommends that principals continue to use the evaluation feedback loop as an opportunity to give positive reinforcement to their staff.
- *Continue to use NCEES as a gateway for teacher collaboration.* NCEES has promoted deeper and more substantive conversations among teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Both principals and teachers agreed that these collaborations have improved PLCs. Teachers indicated using information from feedback sessions to assist their peers and jointly improve upon their instructional practices. Some principals noted witnessing a culture shift within their schools that reflected more of a collaborative network.
- *Consider an additional standard that addresses relational aspects of the teaching profession.* Both teachers and principals shared that a missing aspect of NCEES centered on the relationships and bonds teachers form with their students. Participants indicated that the evaluation did not fully recognize everything that a teacher does with her or his students. Research should be used to determine how a relationship component could be documented, tracked, and calculated, potentially including the use of student surveys, as is the practice in some other states.

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