

Indicator: The LEA/School directly aligns professional development with classroom observations (including peer observations) to build specific skills and knowledge of teachers. (5152)

Explanation: The evidence review indicates that high performing LEAs and schools provide high quality professional development that is aligned to data-identified needs and thereby is crafted and offered according to individual professional needs. Some of the same data collected and analyzed during staff observations and evaluations can influence the types of professional learning opportunities a LEA/school will offer to improve and increase teaching outcomes. Doing so increases the likelihood that teachers will be open and receptive to participating in professional development that is personally differentiated for them. Teachers should have an understanding of evaluation rubrics and their purposes/use prior to observations, and evaluators will likely need professional development regarding optimal ways to provide feedback, and have at their disposal information regarding the various professional learning opportunities available to address teachers' instructional needs.

Questions: What process will the LEA/school use to collect classroom observation data and align and differentiate professional development offerings? What process will the LEA/school employ to address the need to provide professional development for instructional skill building as well as increasing content knowledge? What data will the LEA/school use to identify areas of professional need? How will the LEA/school ensure that professional development is targeted and ongoing? How will the LEA/school ensure that professional development is job-embedded with multiple practice opportunities as well as follow-up debriefing and reflection time?

Teachers often acknowledge that the professional development they receive is of limited usefulness to their daily work and to their professional growth. This is not particularly surprising given that the intensity and duration of professional development typically does not match the level that research has shown is necessary to impact instruction and student learning, and is typically not tailored to teachers' individual professional needs (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Districts must create systems of professional development that genuinely advance the effectiveness of their staff for the benefit of both staff and students. Professional development activities should be collaborative but also differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers (Chambers, Lam, & Mahitivanichcha, 2008).

Teacher evaluation systems provide important data that can help direct professional learning opportunities that address areas in which teachers need to improve their instruction. Rigorous teacher evaluation systems have been created as part of school reform initiatives, and have been a required component of federal funding competitions such as Race to the Top. Many states are revising their teacher evaluation systems to include classroom observation data along with student performance data in order to rate teachers, and in some cases as part of human-capital management decisions (DeMonte, 2013).

Classroom observations by administrators and instructional peers provide valuable data on teachers' performance within an aligned teacher evaluation/professional growth system. However, multiple measures of teacher effectiveness are necessary to also include student learning growth, portfolios, student surveys, and work samples in order to ensure accurate portrayal of teacher strengths and weaknesses (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012; Hill & Herlihy, 2011). Any measures selected should directly and explicitly align with teaching standards, include protocols and processes that make sense to

teachers, allow teachers to participate in or co-construct the evaluation, allow ample opportunity to discuss results with other colleagues, and align with professional development opportunities. Hill and Herlihy (2011) argue that multiple evaluators (not just the principal) are necessary to accurately portray teachers' instructional strengths and weaknesses. These observers and evaluators must receive ongoing training to effectively implement observation systems, and principals and other evaluators will also likely need training to interpret results and make professional development recommendations (Goe, et. al., 2012; Hill & Herlihy, 2011).

Most teacher evaluation systems incorporate some type of post-observation meeting between observer and teacher to discuss the evaluation, and often pre-observation meetings are also used as well to clarify lesson goals and rubrics being used by the evaluator. DeMonte (2013) suggests that these post observation conferences should serve as a launching point for specific and sequenced improvement rather than a simple summation of the teachers' instruction:

A teacher, for example, might be told by an evaluator who has just observed his or her instruction that the teacher seemed to have trouble formulating questions in whole-class discussions that will prompt student thinking. (The ability to frame effective questions for students is an area of teaching practice on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, and is one of the most commonly used observation rubrics.) To assist a teacher in the above example, the evaluator could direct the teacher to view video clips that show exemplary questioning techniques in a classroom. Or the evaluator could suggest that the teacher participate in some collaborative work with a master teacher who is helping design lessons featuring questioning with others in the school or district. (p. 11)

Unfortunately research on post-observation conferences generally has revealed that evaluators often are not providing teachers with the type of feedback that leads to instructional improvement. For example, studies in Chicago, Tennessee and showed that principals often dominated post-observation conferences and provided little or no depth or instruction-specific feedback, and the observation may have been treated more as a compliance activity rather than an opportunity to help teachers learn about their practice (DeMonte, 2013). In order to provide more appropriate, personalized and robust professional learning opportunities, Demonte (2013) suggests that teacher observation/evaluation systems should include the following components:

- Ensure that teachers and evaluators have a shared understanding about the evaluation rubric prior to assessment and observation, including instructional practices included in the rubric and how they will be viewed and assessed. This shared understanding is a necessary first step towards sparking conversations about improving teaching and learning.
- Administrators and/or other evaluators should be provided with professional development in how to provide the kind of feedback that teachers need and deserve in order to improve their teaching.
- Form groups of teachers based on data to collaborate together to improve particular skills and/or content.
- Provide evaluators with knowledge about the types of professional learning opportunities available so that they can have these resources available in post-observation conferences. For example, districts or states can establish research-based lists of opportunities, or video libraries of exemplary teaching practices paired with materials to help teachers improve their instruction.

Researchers at the Education Policy Research Center at Harvard University are currently piloting an alternative approach to traditional classroom observations for teacher evaluation. In lieu of in-person

observations conducted by an evaluator, teachers are allowed to submit their own video-recorded lessons for evaluation purposes as part of the Best Foot Forward (BFF) program. This study involves treatment group teachers using digital video to record and upload to a website self-selected lessons for observer review (including administrators and external content experts) followed by one-on-one discussions of the lessons between teachers and reviewers; control group teachers continue to use in-person classroom observations (Kane, Gehlbach, Greenberg, Quinn, & Thal, 2015). The researchers have concluded that BFF provided several advantages:

In sum, giving teachers control of the video collection and submission process improved several dimensions of the classroom observation process. It boosted teachers' perception of fairness, reduced teacher defensiveness during post-observation conferences, led to greater self-criticism by teachers and allowed administrators to shift observation duties to quieter times of the day or week. Moreover, granting teachers the opportunity to self-select videos changed teacher rankings only slightly; the submitted lessons from the best teachers were still better than the submitted lessons from struggling teachers. (p. 4)

An additional study found that the BFF program led to "instructional de-privatization." Teachers were more likely to share video lessons with colleagues and administrators were more likely to broker peer support among teachers (Quinn, Kane, Greenberg, & Thal, 2015). Subsequent research will investigate whether these improvements were sufficient to produce improvements to student achievement.

References and Resources

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