

# Establishing a strong evaluation program

**This document is intended as a brief synopsis of key elements of an evaluation system supported by NJEA. It does not reflect the totality of our position or beliefs on what makes up a comprehensive evaluation system, nor does it completely describe the elements proposed.**

NJEA has long supported high standards for students and teaching staff members. It believes the current system can be improved by scrutinizing collaborative ways to improve teaching and learning and the resources that support those enterprises, not by imposing artificial numerical formulas.

**Any proposal to change current New Jersey teacher evaluation programs, regulations, and statutes, including negotiated procedures, must:**

- **reflect and align with the Fair Evaluation Principles (contained in Appendix B);**
- **be heavily validated by research across the broad spectrum for reliable use in public schools and not subject the entire state to experimental or unproven criteria or systems;**
- **be piloted, on a voluntary basis for multiple years by a limited cadre of public school districts,** with participation contingent on a collaborative process between the school board and affected school employee;
- **after being piloted, be subjected to careful scrutiny and critical review by recognized independent educational researchers and renowned teacher evaluation experts** for recommendation prior to any final proposal being submitted for adoption;
- **be supported by commensurate state funding for professional development opportunities and a support team structure** to make up for school districts' constrained fiscal resources and expenditures and to ensure appropriate professional resources and supports for educators focused on successful instructional practice;
- **be linked to ample state funding for public schools.**

***RATIONALE:** Student learning requires significant curricular resources and other tools critical to 21st century learning. The state and district must provide the necessary curricula, materials, environment, and other essential elements for effective teaching and learning if teachers are to be held accountable. Teachers should not be blamed for deficiencies in student learning and curricula resulting from economic cuts in programs and staff. Also, before statewide implementation, any new evaluation system must be piloted first on a small scale, evaluated, and then extended, modified, or discarded based on an assessment by independent researchers/evaluators.*

- 1. The system must reflect expectations of teachers that are realistic and align** with the programs, tools, and other resources provided by districts and schools to both students and teachers to encourage and support student learning and achievement.
- 2. Evaluation criteria must be broadly defined and backed by supports for teachers and administrators integrated within the daily school structure.** Such supports might include professional development opportunities, professional learning communities, collegial coaching, modeling, curriculum review, lesson study, and other collaborative resources geared toward improving teaching and learning.
- 3. Statewide evaluation criteria and standards must reflect a comprehensive approach. Criteria must be based on the following four domains** – preparation/planning, classroom environment, instruction (including assessment), and professional responsibilities-- and frameworks developed by nationally recognized evaluation researcher and author Charlotte Danielson, whose work is already tied to nationally-based standards that are reflected in the current N.J. Standards for Teachers.
- 4. Multiple measures of student progress must be used and reviewed in conjunction with professional standards of practice. While high “student achievement” is the goal of all educators, that term should not be limited to nor be considered synonymous with student standardized test score results.**

These multiple indicators of student progress and growth (as identified by Danielson) should include, but not be limited to:

- Teacher-set goals for student learning
- Student performance assessments, including portfolios, projects, problem-solving protocols, and internships
- Observations of and discussions with students by the teacher
- Teacher-developed tests and quizzes
- Valid and reliable standardized assessments
- District-established assessments.

## 5. Frequency of formal evaluations:

- **Nontenured teachers** – Shall be evaluated a minimum of four (4) times a year, including pre-conference, formal observation, and post-observation conference, plus an annual summary conference and written evaluation of the teacher’s total performance.
- **Tenured staff** – Shall be evaluated two times a year, except those who receive “highly effective” ratings for two consecutive years shall have an option, if bargained locally, to undertake an alternate professional evaluation process for up to two consecutive years. At the end of the two-year “alternate” period, the formal evaluation shall be reinstated. This process shall be cyclical. The tenured teaching staff member would again qualify for a two-year locally bargained alternate evaluation program following each subsequent two consecutive years of “highly effective” ratings.
  - o The formal evaluations shall include a pre-conference, formal observation, and post-observation conference, plus an annual summary conference and written performance report.
  - o Voluntary alternate professional evaluation processes for those individuals who are eligible must be bargained between the local school board and majority representative. These “alternate” approaches should be used in place of regular observations and should be followed by a brief report to the certified supervisor of the professional activity undertaken, but not include typical evaluative reviews or ratings as conducted by certified supervisors in the regular evaluation processes. Individuals must be permitted to opt to return to the regular evaluation process without penalty at any time.
  - o The collaborative experiences (teaching staff member with teaching staff member) could include, but would not be limited to, such approaches as:
    - a) “collegial coaching” (staff members teamed in pairs observe each other in a teaching period, providing feedback to each other in a structured, confidential process – revolving around issues identified by the staff member being “coached”);
    - b) collaborative development of teaching materials;
    - c) engaging in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification process;
    - d) action research (a structured collaborative approach using scientific principles to explore solutions to a specific instructional and professional challenge and advance professional inquiry) by a group of colleagues over a specified period of time;
    - e) a “critical friends” interactive support group to share constructive suggestions, share materials, and collaborate on challenges;

- f) collaboratively researching, developing, reviewing, assessing, implementing, and reexamining formative assessments to reflect evolving standards.

**RATIONALE:** *Several school districts and associations had established such “alternate evaluation” programs before they were ruled impermissible under current laws and regulations. Rather than being top-down evaluative models, these collegial interactions work to enable and encourage colleagues to exchange ideas, formulate strategies, and create innovative solutions in an open, non-threatening environment.*

**6. Additional components of evaluation:** An effective teacher evaluation system does not occur in a vacuum. Teacher evaluation is impacted by a broad spectrum of conditions over which the teacher has little or no control. These local conditions must be considered and given due weight in the evaluation of teaching staff members.

**7. Ratings** – The following four possible ratings shall be established:

- “Highly effective” – Individual who receives this rating for two consecutive years would have the option to use alternative evaluation approaches – where developed by the district and local association. Option could include collegial reflection and review that would not be submitted to a supervisor/administrator but would be used to develop the professional development plan to try innovative approaches.
- “Effective” – Individual has satisfactory performance.
- “Approaching effective” – Individual’s performance found to be in need of improvement. Individual is referred to Professional Support Team for intensive assistance within a specific timeline.
- “Ineffective” – Individual is in danger of negative consequences and referred to Professional Support Team for intensive assistance on a shorter timeframe.

**RATIONALE:** *The “approaching effective” rating reflects a more positive approach than the state-proposed rating of “partially effective.”*

**8. The individual Professional Development Plan should remain part of the evaluation,** with the goals of the plan mutually developed between the teaching staff member and the individual’s certified supervisor as currently is the case.

**9. An ongoing, collaborative support network, termed the Professional Support Team, shall be established.**

- This program will be available to all teaching staff members, both novice and experienced. Individuals can:
  - a) be referred through evaluation by a certified supervisor or
  - b) voluntarily, without judgment or repercussion, seek opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills through

the support structure when they face new assignments, new challenges, or simply seek confirmation of a “best practices” approach to their teaching methodology.

- **Timeline for obtaining follow-up support as a result of evaluation** - Ongoing intensive support followed by additional evaluations shall be provided for those teachers receiving either “ineffective” or “approaching effective” ratings. A specific timeline of 120 days for the intensive support to occur following administrative referral shall be established, after which the individual would be evaluated again by another certified supervisor other than the one conducting the evaluation that led to required support. The individual would then be deemed as:
  - o having overcome the identified deficiency to obtain an “effective” rating,
  - o having progressed but needing additional time to work with the Professional Support Team, or
  - o not demonstrated sufficient progress and subject to progressive discipline.
- Time must be allotted in the work day for the support to occur.
- The program would be flexible to enable it to operate districtwide, through a “support consortium” for small districts, or through a combination approach.
- Team member requirements -- Only certified teaching staff members may serve on the Professional Support Team (PST) based on the following criteria and responsibilities:
  - o Any teaching staff member with at least five years of experience who has received “effective” or “highly effective” ratings could serve on the PST.
  - o PST members would not evaluate or provide any information that would be used in an evaluation conducted by the certified supervisor, but would work with the individual in supportive, collaborative experiences designed to enhance teaching and learning.
  - o Team members would be selected jointly by the district and the association based on the criteria above.
  - o The Support Team members shall be identified prior to the start of the school year and shall be provided release time or assigned full time to provide the requisite support services.
  - o Team members – whether assigned to the team on a full-time or part-time basis – will continue to accrue seniority credit based on their most recent assignment(s) under their instructional or educational services license endorsement.
  - o Service on the team would be for a specified, limited term – based on an agreement between the school district and the majority representative -- to enable individuals to serve on a rotating basis. Provisions may

be bargained to allow individuals to reapply to serve on the PST after a specific interval.

- o Compensation and any other terms and conditions of employment relative to this assignment shall be subject to collective bargaining between the board and the majority representative.
  - Referral to the PST does not negate the responsibility of the certified supervisor to continue to provide the teaching staff member with the needed support, assistance, and resources to enhance teaching and learning.
  - The N.J. Department of Education shall be required to provide team members with intensive training in effective support techniques and advanced professional development experiences focused on successful instructional practice.
- 10. Improved training for supervisors, principals, and other administrators who evaluate teaching staff members must be required.**
- These individuals must be trained in the evaluation criteria and procedures utilized by the district. They should also be trained to serve as instructional leaders.
  - They should be able to demonstrate techniques and other actions they want those being evaluated to emulate. They should know how to identify those who need help, as well as provide support. At the very minimum, they should be able to direct educators to other resources and staff to help polish their knowledge and skills.
- 11. A “Teacher Leader” endorsement on the instructional certificate should be designed.**
- This state-issued credential would enable teaching staff members to serve in roles such as – but not limited to -- instructional coaches, professional development coordinators, facilitators, family-community involvement coordinators, and facilitator of the Professional Support Team.
  - Requirements would include:
    - o Coursework equivalent to 12 graduate credits will be developed collaboratively by the statewide teacher associations/unions, with other approaches to ensure requisite skills are attained. The certification programs offered through the N.J. Center for Teaching and Learning and the N.J. Principals and Supervisors serve as models of how such approaches currently work.
    - o Five years of teaching experience.

**Summary:**

Effective, comprehensive teacher evaluation systems seek to:

- build on and improve individuals' knowledge, skills, and practice to enhance student instruction, programs, and services;
- ensure and enhance student learning and growth;
- inspire school staff to remain in their professions;
- provide opportunities for professional growth for each school staffer to ensure our educational programs remain current and relevant; and
- offer targeted support and assistance, when required.

Armed with research-based standards, criteria, and tools, we can build a strong statewide system. By adding greater accountability through enhanced observations and conferences, extensive training for both evaluators and those being evaluated, an intensive support mechanism for those who require assistance, resources to implement the plan and, when all else fails, using disciplinary tools already at our disposal, we create a strong system that places improved instruction at the forefront. This system would not only identify and assist those who are struggling, it would further enhance student learning by strengthening the skills of effective teachers who make up the overwhelming majority of those working in our schools.

Finally, the plan provides flexibility through the optional alternate evaluation process for those identified as most skilled, enables educators to seek enhanced leadership opportunities while remaining in teaching, and promotes a cohesive, successful school community in which instruction to enhance student learning and success is the focal point.

**This document should be viewed in conjunction with the evaluation standards and principles identified in Appendix A and B for a better understanding of the elements of a comprehensive system.**

**Appendix A**

# Standards, principles, and a framework for teaching and evaluation

Consistent with contemporary research, tremendous benefits are derived from defined standards for teachers, established principles around which an evaluation program can be built, and a framework for professional practice. These benefits include:

- a common vocabulary for professional conversations as teaching staff members and administrators seek to enhance teaching skills;
- a foundation for the school's or district's mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation processes, linking those activities and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners;
- a way to communicate to the larger community the array of competencies needed to be an effective teacher.

Neither standards nor an evaluation framework can use a single measure to capture important information and the many significant ways that teachers contribute to the success and well being of their students, classrooms, and schools. By considering the priorities of the school and the intended purpose of evaluation, school districts and school staff — working through the majority representative — can identify evaluation measures and procedures to create a comprehensive fair system that accomplishes various goals.

After identifying critical teaching elements and studying teacher standards developed by various respected national organizations (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and other states, the N.J. Professional Teaching Standards Board crafted the N.J. Standards for Teachers. The State Board of Education first adopted these standards in 2003 and approved their inclusion in the state teacher licensing regulations (N.J.A.C. 6A:9-3).

These standards cover the following elements deemed important to successful teaching:

1. Subject Matter Knowledge
2. Human Growth and Development
3. Diverse Learners
4. Instructional Planning and Strategies
5. Assessment
6. Learning Environment

- 7. Special Needs
- 8. Communication
- 9. Collaboration and Partnerships
- 10. Professional Development
- 11. Professional Responsibility

Identified for each standard are what the teacher should:

- Know and understand (knowledge);
- Value and is committed to (dispositions);
- Apply or engage in activities to (skills).

The regulations recognize that not all teachers will meet all these standards at the same time in the same way, but that they must be considered differently at different stages of a professional's career.

That continuum is acknowledged by educational researchers, including Charlotte Danielson who has written extensively about teacher evaluation and developed sample evaluation frameworks to reflect the broad components of teaching. Her work in many ways influenced both New Jersey's Standards for Teachers, as well as creation of the N.J. Professional Development Standards.

#### **Use principles of fair evaluation**

Besides standards of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, every evaluation program should reflect specific principles that outline the basic assumptions, ethical standards, and critical elements key to its design.

NJEA has identified the principles for comprehensive, fair evaluation. These principles reflect both the goals of evaluation and the complex nature of teaching and learning essential for consideration in development of an evaluation system.

#### **Creating a framework**

Both the standards and principles should be integrated as part of an evaluation framework using these key elements.

#### **1. Planning and preparation**

- The components outline how a teacher organizes the content of what students are expected to learn --- how the teacher designs instruction aligned with the N.J. Core Curriculum Content Standards and the district or charter school's curricula.
- The teacher demonstrates knowledge of content and pedagogy and how to teach it to a variety of learners.
- The teacher shows his or her understanding of student developmental characteristics, approaches to learning, student knowledge and skills, interests, and cultural heritage.
- The teacher selects appropriate instructional goals and planning for assessment of student learning.

#### **2. Classroom environment**

- The teacher creates an atmosphere in which learning is valued.
- The teacher has clearly defined procedures for managing learning time, transitions between learning events, and routines that maximize learning.
- The teacher establishes a creative learning environment and behavioral expectations of respect and rapport among all students.
- The teacher responds to student behavior in appropriate and effective ways with defined consequences while maintaining a safe learning environment.

#### **3. Instruction and assessment**

- Content is appropriate, clear, and linked to student knowledge and experience.
- The teacher communicates clearly and accurately, using questioning and discussion techniques, engaging all students in learning, while providing feedback.
- The teacher has a repertoire of instructional strategies and makes use of them to make modifications to lessons as needed.
- The teacher differentiates instruction based on learner characteristics and achievement data.
- Student success is defined by a range of multiple measures. The components are what constitute the core of teaching – the engagement of students in learning content. Although student scores on standardized tests can be useful gauges of a teacher's effect, they should not be the sole or primary criterion. Test scores do not give a full picture of teacher contributions and student circumstances, not to mention which students get tested and on what content.

#### **4. Professional responsibilities**

- The components represent the wide range of a teacher's responsibilities outside the classroom. These include maintaining accurate records, communicating with families, contributing to the school and district, growing and developing professionally, and showing professionalism.
- The teacher chooses and participates in professional growth that is aligned with his or her professional needs; aligned with the needs of the school, district, or charter school, or students; and aligned with the New Jersey Standards for Teachers and the Professional Development Standards for New Jersey educators.
- The teaching staff member engages in reflective thinking as an individual, as a team participant, or as a school community member with the goal of improving instruction and learning for all students.

**Basic considerations:**

- **There is no single measure** that will provide valid information on all the ways teachers and other certified school staff contribute to student learning.
- **The contexts in which teaching staff members work differ greatly** across subjects, grades, groupings and subgroupings of students, among schools with different student populations, and student needs. Teacher effectiveness should be considered in light of the different contexts and incorporate measures that take into account differences in subjects, activities, backgrounds, characteristics, schools cultures, and organizations.
- **Different expectations for professionals must be based upon career stage and the purpose of the evaluation.** Effective evaluation systems help professionals grow through the course of their career. This means that effective teacher evaluation systems should hold somewhat different expectations for teachers at the time of licensure and hiring, at the time tenure is granted, and at various points throughout an educator’s career depending on the individual’s assignments and professional development needs.

**Multiple measures to consider in teacher evaluation:**

- **A set of challenging standards to define appropriate practice.** When professional standards form the basis of an evaluation system, administrators know what to measure and teachers know what to demonstrate. Both teachers and administrators are able to reflect on good practice, and teachers are able to revise their work with a clear goal in mind. Consequently, tying evaluation to professional standards produces more positive change than simply evaluating teachers on test score results.
- **The flexibility to relate the teaching standards to local organizational goals.** Within the context of statewide standards, effective teacher evaluation systems allow schools and districts to prioritize specific teacher behaviors, knowledge, and skills. These specific teacher characteristics may correspond with district priorities in terms of curriculum and instruction, or may be the result of changing student demographics or policy directives. In evaluation terms, these desired teacher behaviors need to be clearly defined, and teachers need specific supports to help them develop knowledge and skills specific to local needs.
- **The flexibility to relate the teaching standards** to different stages of a teacher’s career.
- **Examining a strong and diverse body of evidence.** Teaching is multifaceted, and the greatest amount of work is often the intellectual planning that leads to a particular teacher behavior or instructional event. Consequently, the evaluation of educators’ work needs to sufficiently capture the complexity of the work. In teacher evaluation, this means examining:

- o How instructional strategies apply to curricular content, goals, and student needs
- o Ability to adjust and focus instruction based on student and curricular needs and data
- o Classroom observations
- o Classroom artifacts
- o Interactions between students and teachers
- o Portfolios of teacher work
- o Analysis of teacher assignments
- o Analysis of teacher-designed units and assessments
- o Analysis of student work and other evidence of student learning
- o Documentation of the teacher’s positive contributions to the school
- o Documentation of teacher leadership, including mentoring, leadership on committees, involvement in planning and presenting professional development opportunities
- o Communication with parents/guardians
- o Performance of routine duties
- o Implementation of professional development plans
- **Giving teachers ample opportunities, resources, and time to improve.** Evaluation should be used as a positive force to improve teaching and learning.

**Appendix B**

## The basics: Fair evaluation principles

Based on the extensive work of education researchers and academicians focused on teacher evaluation, as well as practitioner experience, feedback through its Certification, Evaluation, and Tenure Committee, and decades of policy groundwork on this and related issues, NJEA has identified the following key elements in a fair, effective, and constructive evaluation system.

**Goals** – The goals of evaluation are:

- to build on individuals’ knowledge, skills, and practice;
- to ensure and enhance student learning and growth;
- to inspire school staff to remain in their professions;
- to provide opportunities for professional growth for each school staffer, and,
- to offer targeted support and assistance, when required.

**Principles** – A fair, comprehensive evaluation reflects all the components below. These principles are designed to be viewed in concert with each other and not individually or in isolation. Together, they promote teaching and learning.

**1. Interrelates all components** – Professional evaluation programs shall be based on clear standards and varied criteria, promote and enhance professional growth throughout one’s career, enable collaboration, require school district supports, take into account barriers to effective work, be evidence-based, reflect multiple and valid research-based sources to identify evidence of success, and empower school staff to examine their own work in a positive, reflective, and supportive environment.

**2. Depends on commitment & support** – Effective evaluation requires a broad commitment by the school district and the majority representative in creating and implementing policies and procedures that:

- a) reflect a participatory process between the certified supervisor and staff member; and
- b) establish an ongoing supportive culture within the school and district to enable educators and other school staff to learn, create, reflect, respond, and adapt to meet the emerging and changing needs of their students, the community, and society at large.

**3. Is clearly stated & understood** – The purpose, process, and procedures of the evaluation program shall be clearly stated in writing and understood by the evaluators and those who are being evaluated.

**4. Reflects diverse indicators** – No single measure – including student test results – shall be used as the primary criterion for evaluating a school staff member’s performance or effectiveness, and no one indicator shall be used to generate a less than effective rating. Instead, multiple indicators of student progress should be used in the evaluation process. Multiple measures may include, but are not be limited to, formal and informal evaluation techniques, observations, cumulative pupil records, formal and informal student assessments, student engagement, portfolios, and other demonstrations of student knowledge and skills collaboratively determined by the district and the majority representative.

**5. Has an authentic foundation** – The evaluation program shall be based on:

- the local and school general goals, curriculum, and program objectives;
- the responsibilities of the staff member, as defined in his or her individual job description, with these responsibilities defined through a process that ensures broad participation by all levels of staff;

- activities and processes essential to the performance of the assignment(s);
- for teaching staff members, the New Jersey Standards for Teachers.

**6. Advances the teaching continuum** – The New Jersey Standards for Teacher will be viewed with an understanding that the level of mastery shall be on a continuum from pre-service and novice through veteran. The individual’s experience in working in a specific position, with specific content, at a specific grade level, and with specific groups of students will be considered in both using the Standards for Teachers and in the evaluative process.

**7. Incorporates local decision-making through collective bargaining** – All procedures must be bargained by the school board and the majority representative, including but not limited to any forms used, pre- and post-conferences, prior notice, and materials used or provided as part of the evaluative process.

**8. Aligns with statutes and policies** – The evaluation program shall comply with all prevailing state laws and regulations, district policies, and the collective bargaining agreement.

**9. Depends on trained, certified supervisors** – Evaluation must be conducted by a certified supervisor who regularly supervises the individual being evaluated. However, when a staff member has received either an “ineffective” or “approaching effective” rating, the individual must be evaluated by a certified supervisor other than the one conducting the evaluation that led to the required support. In all evaluations, the evaluating supervisor must be properly certified, trained in the process of evaluation and supervision, and be a full-time employee of the school district. The supervisor should have experience working in the content area and at the level being supervised, as well as be familiar with the context in which the staff member is carrying out the duties. Supervisors must be able to model the skills and practices demanded of staff.

**10. Stimulates continuing dialogue** – Evaluations shall be formative, not merely summative. The process shall analyze teaching or other responsibilities to improve the educational services provided to students, taking into account influences on the work environment, such as professional development, materials, and other resources provided by the district.

**11. Promotes a positive, constructive approach** – The self-image and self-respect of staff shall be maintained and enhanced throughout the process. Positive self-concepts and professional growth are fostered by an effective evaluation plan. The evaluation process shall make ample provision for clear, constructive, and timely feedback tailored to the individual, recognize achievements, and enhance professional growth.

**12. Encourages risk-taking** – The nature of the evaluation shall be such that it encourages creativity and experimentation in planning and guiding the experiences provided for students, whether children or young adults.

**13. Develops and sharpens professional skills** – The district and the supervisor, as an outgrowth of the evaluation process, shall provide district assistance to the teaching staff member who is attempting to acquire new skills, refine/enhance current skills, seeking to meet challenges, or seeking to address identified, documented deficiencies.

**14. Is rooted in professional growth** – The Professional Development Plan (PDP) component of the evaluation shall be jointly developed by the staff member being evaluated and the evaluating supervisor.

- It shall support high-quality professional development for the staff member by identifying professional growth goals of the individual in enhancing current knowledge and skills, in acquiring new knowledge and skills, and in addressing identified needs in providing and enhancing student learning, knowledge, and skills.
- In development of the plan, state standards for school staff shall be considered, and both individual and collaborative experiences encouraged and supported.
- The plan shall reflect how the district, school, and supervisors will support the individual in meeting the goals.
- Expectations shall be practical and able to be carried out in the required framework and timeframe.
- Professional development experiences addressed in school and district professional development plans, driven by school and district goals, shall be applicable to individual professional development plans. To be meaningful, districts and schools should identify how those goals relate to individual positions and assignments if reflected in the individual PDP.
- Effective professional development enables teachers to refine their skills, reflect on their work and student performances, and implement needed changes to promote teaching and learning.

**15. Identifies goals, not means** – Evaluation shall identify the goals of an individual. The staff member shall use professional judgment to determine the specific means by which he/she pursues these goals in strengthening his/her knowledge and skills.