

Overview

The Opportunity

On June 28, 2011 the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new regulations to guide the evaluation of all educators serving in positions requiring a license – teachers, principals, superintendents, and other administrators¹. The regulations are designed first and foremost to promote leaders' and teachers' growth and development. They place student learning at the center of the process using multiple measures of student learning. By 2013-14, every district in the Commonwealth will be phasing in evaluation processes and procedures that are consistent with the new regulations.

To do so will require changes in culture and practice in many schools and districts. The Task Force that crafted recommendations for the regulations found that in many schools in the Commonwealth—and nationwide—the educator evaluation process is ineffective. Too often, they found, the process is divorced from student learning and is superficial, ritualistic and passive, experienced by many as something “done to them.” Fewer than half of teachers and administrators polled described their own experience of evaluation as a process that contributed to their professional growth and development.

The new regulations are designed to change all this when well-implemented. Each educator will take a leading role in shaping his/her professional growth and development.

Every educator will assess his/her own performance and propose one or more challenging goals for improving his/her own practice. A formal process for reflection and self-assessment creates the foundation of a new opportunity for educators to chart their own course for professional growth and development.

Every educator will be using a rubric that offers a detailed picture of practice at four levels of performance. District-wide rubrics set the stage for both deep reflection and the rich dialogue about practice that our profession seeks.

Every educator will also consider their students' needs using a wide range of ways to assess student growth and propose one or more challenging goals for improving student learning. They will be able to monitor progress carefully and analyze the impact of their hard work.

Every educator will be expected to consider team goals, a clear indication of the value the new process places on both collaboration and accountability.

Every educator will compile and present evidence and conclusions about their performance and progress on their goals, ensuring that the educator voice is critical to the process.

These and other features of the new educator evaluation system hold great promise for improving educator practice, school climate and student learning. To turn promise into reality, every educator—and the teams they work with—will need to be supported to do this new work effectively and efficiently. This Implementation Guide aims to provide support for school leadership, evaluators of school staff, and educators as they plan for and implement the new regulations.

¹ For the full text of the regulations, see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr35.html>

Educator Evaluation Framework

In August 2010, BESE convened the Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators to develop recommendations for revised evaluation regulations. Six months later, the Task Force issued a report recommending a “Breakthrough Framework.”

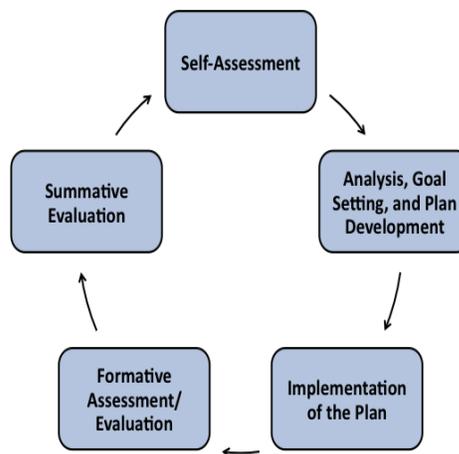
In June 2011, BESE adopted new educator evaluation regulations consistent with the Task Force recommendations. In the regulations are five key design features put forth in the Task Force report:

- 1. Statewide Standards and Indicators for Effective Administrative Leadership and Teaching Practice.** The Task Force proposed a set of Standards and Indicators intended to promote a statewide understanding about what effective teaching and administrative practice looks like. The process included an extensive comparison of relevant state and national standards. According to the report, “They serve as the spine of the new evaluation framework, and will do so in the evaluation systems that districts adopt.” The regulations define Standards and Indicators for Effective Teaching Practice and for Administrative Leadership Practice ([603 CMR 35.03](#) and [603 CMR 35.04](#)). Detailed information can be found in Part III of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (henceforth referred to as “the Model System”).
- 2. Three Categories of Evidence.** To assess educator performance on the Standards and Indicators, the Task Force called for three categories of evidence to be used in every district’s educator evaluation system. The regulations describe: multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement²; judgments based on observation and artifacts of professional practice, including unannounced observations of practice of any duration; and additional evidence relevant to one or more Performance Standards ([603 CMR 35.07\(1\)](#)).
- 3. Statewide Performance Rating Scale.** The performance of every educator is rated against the Performance Standards described above. All educators earn one of four ratings: *Exemplary*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, or *Unsatisfactory*. Each rating has a specific meaning:
 - *Exemplary* performance represents a level of performance that exceeds the already high standard of Proficient. A rating of Exemplary is reserved for performance on an Indicator or Standard that is of such a high level that it could serve as a model. Few educators are expected to earn Exemplary ratings on more than a handful of Indicators.
 - *Proficient* performance is understood to be fully satisfactory. This is the rigorous expected level of performance; demanding, but attainable.
 - *Needs Improvement* indicates performance that is below the requirements of a Standard but is not considered to be Unsatisfactory at the time. Improvement is necessary and expected.
 - *Unsatisfactory* performance is merited when performance has not significantly improved following a rating of Needs Improvement, or performance is consistently below the requirements of a standard and is considered inadequate, or both.

² The final regulations approved by BESE include a more explicit focus on student learning, adding a statewide scale for rating educator impact on student learning as low, moderate, or high. Beginning in 2013-14, district will use “district-determined measures of student learning which must be comparable across grade or subject district-wide” to determine impact. This is distinct from the use of multiple measures as a category of evidence to rate educator performance. Also starting in 2013-14, additional evidence relevant to one or more performance standards will include student feedback, and will include staff feedback with respect to administrators.

4. **Five-Step Evaluation Cycle.** This Implementation Guide is organized around the five-step cycle required for all educators, a centerpiece of the new regulations designed to have all educators play a more active, engaged role in their professional growth and development.

Under the regulations, evaluation begins with self-assessment and concludes with summative evaluation and rating of the educator’s impact on student learning³. It also is a continuous improvement process in which evidence from the summative evaluation and rating of impact on learning become important sources of information for the educator’s self-assessment and subsequent goal setting.



5. **Four Educator Plans.** The Task Force prioritized differentiating evaluation by both career stage and performance. The regulations define four different Educator Plans. The following three plans apply only to “Experienced” educators defined as a teacher with Professional Teacher Status (PTS) or an administrator with more than three years in an administrative position in the school district:

- The *Self-Directed Growth Plan* applies to educators rated Proficient or Exemplary and is developed by the educator. When the Rating of Impact on Student Learning is implemented (beginning in 2013-14), educators with a Moderate or High Rating of Impact will be on a two-year plan; educators with a Low Rating will be on a one-year plan.
- The *Directed Growth Plan* applies to educators rated Needs Improvement and is a plan of one school year or less developed by the educator and the evaluator.
- The *Improvement Plan* applies to educators rated Unsatisfactory and is a plan of no less than 30 calendar days and no longer than one school year, developed by the evaluator.

Few new educators are expected to be Proficient on every Indicator or even every Standard in their first years of practice. Therefore, the fourth plan applies to teachers without Professional Teacher Status, an administrator in their first three years in a district, or an educator in a new assignment (at the discretion of an evaluator):

- The *Developing Educator Plan* is developed by the educator and the evaluator and is for one school year or less.

³ The Rating of Impact on Student Learning will be implemented beginning in 2013-14.

Priorities for Implementing the Framework

“Simply put, poor evaluation practices are a missed opportunity for promoting better leading, better teaching, better learning, and better schools.”

This statement by the Task Force highlights the underlying principles of these regulations: the purpose of evaluation is to promote student learning by providing educators with feedback for improvement and enhanced opportunities for professional growth. To achieve this, all educators—school and district alike—must maintain a focus on creating the conditions that can realize this vision. This requires an approach that is both thoughtful and strategic so that evaluation can be seized as an opportunity.

Approaching educator evaluation thoughtfully and strategically requires attention to **coherence, connection, collaboration** and **conversation**. Attending to each will help create the synergy needed to ensure that the new educator evaluation system will achieve its twin goals of supporting educator growth and student achievement.

Coherence

Create coherence and leverage opportunities to reinforce it. Without explicit linkage to other priorities and on-going work, the new educator evaluation regulations will be both perceived and undertaken as an “add on” that is disconnected from daily practice and big picture goals for the school and district, limiting opportunities for feedback and growth. Linking the data analysis, self-assessment, goal setting, and evidence collection activities required for educator evaluation to key activities already underway in the school is one way to build this coherence.

For example, all schools and districts are transitioning to the new MA Frameworks in Mathematics and English Language Arts. Team goal setting in the evaluation cycle can be used to advance this work: teacher teams can share the common professional practice goal of learning “backwards design” principles and applying them to design together a unit that aligns with the new Frameworks. Department, grade level and/or faculty meetings can provide opportunity to share and critique models.

Similarly, a school may be revamping parent-teacher conferences. In this case, the evidence collection component of the evaluation cycle—for both evaluators and educators—could focus on collecting and analyzing data about the implementation and impact of this change in practice. At one faculty meeting, indicators for Standard III (Parent Engagement) can be “unpacked” and new expectations for the conferences developed; at a later one, faculty can share their experiences and the feedback they solicited in order to refine the practice for the future.

Connection

Connect individual educator goals to school and district priorities. Connecting individual educator goals to larger school and district priorities is critical to effective implementation. Strong vertical alignment between individual, team, school and district goals will accelerate progress on the goals. For example, when a district is determined to build a strong tiered system of support in mathematics, it makes sense to ask individuals and their teams to focus self-assessment and goal setting on areas most closely associated with that work. When the benchmarks of progress detailed in Educator Plans are connected to the benchmarks in school and district improvement plans, their achievement will reinforce and accelerate progress. As important, when individual educators and teams are having trouble meeting their benchmarks, stakeholders will have a signal that school and district plans may need review.

Collaboration

Support teacher and administrator teams to collaborate throughout the cycle. Grade-level, department and other teams can use the steps in the evaluation cycle to help focus their work and learn from one another more systematically, thus enhancing opportunities for professional growth and feedback for improvement. “Unpacking” several specific indicators and elements together as part of the self-assessment process can lead to identifying models and agreeing on team goals. Analyzing formative assessments or other student learning data together will sharpen each member’s insights and can lead to decisions to refine the action steps for the student learning goals. Similarly, team members can share

individual professional practice goals and make plans to develop model lessons or units and observe each other's classes.

Conversation

Engage everyone in on-going conversation about improving practice. Creating a shared understanding of effective practice is not limited to teams, however. Encouraging reflection and dialogue among teams, individuals, colleagues, and school leaders around the rubrics, student data, and teaching strategies is at the heart of the new educator evaluation process. Create time and space for those conversations throughout the evaluation cycle—during common planning time, faculty meetings, and professional development sessions—and in classrooms, hallways and faculty rooms. On-going, focused conversations about practice following frequent, short classroom visits are essential. So, too, are conversations in well-structured faculty and team meetings and through review and analysis of products and practices. All of these conversations will help create a shared vision of effective practice, a critical ingredient for nearly every strong and improving school.