

# Beyond Teacher Evaluation: Prioritizing Teacher Instructional Effectiveness with Meaningful Professional Development



Research Report

July 2014

Sponsored by: School Improvement Network

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## About this Report

This independent study, conducted by EdNexus Advisors, LLC, was sponsored by **School Improvement Network** to better understand each state policy on providing and funding meaningful teacher professional development tied to teacher evaluations. Further, states were surveyed on the state relationship with districts on requiring or recommending professional development and to what extent districts were providing professional development tied to mandated evaluations under NCLB federal waivers. School Improvement Network's goal was to inform state and district leaders on the need to be proactive in providing continuous professional support for teachers if mandated evaluations are to be tools for improving teacher performance. Evaluations alone will not be effective in improving teaching. States and LEAs must meet the challenge of supporting their educators who are now charged with

meeting new, more rigorous instructional goals. In the few states leading the way in the challenge, technology delivered individualized professional development was central to program implementation.

**School Improvement Network is the world's largest provider of online, on-demand professional learning and training resources for educators and** partners with schools, districts, and states throughout the US, Canada, and overseas to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

School Improvement Network believes that by providing teachers with quality, differentiated training based on best practices from master teachers and experts, they will be better equipped to help students master skills essential to their preparation towards college or a meaningful career and their growth as individuals and contributors to society. With this training, teachers find increased capacity to personalize their teaching, and meet the growing needs of students, no matter their race, origin, language, or socioeconomic status.

Edivation is School Improvement Network's premier online, on-demand professional learning platform that creates a highly personalized learning experience for educators by delivering the resources and support they need to continually improve classroom practice and engage students to drive measurable achievement.

## Edivation

Edivation is an on-demand professional learning platform that offers professional learning tools and resources including thousands of award-winning videos showing master teachers demonstrating best practices in the classroom, lesson plans, an online professional learning community of more than a million educators worldwide, and more. Edivation, which encompasses products like PD 360, also gives administrators the management tools to create personalized professional learning plans for a single educator or an entire system, with full implementation, training, and ongoing management support.

## Observation 360

Observation 360 turns the observation and evaluation process into a meaningful educator growth experience. It offers administrators every tool they need to conduct effective observations and evaluations, create personalized professional learning plans, track results, and create custom observation templates to fit any framework.

## LumiBook

LumiBook is an e-reading platform that surpasses the static information of any other reading experience. It enables real-time author updates, collaborative conversations between readers and authors, and a rich content experience that is enhanced by all the resources available on the web.

## Educator Effectiveness System

The Educator Effectiveness System is a holistic approach to supporting the development of educators that allows leaders to establish and manage goals, processes, observations, learning, and progress. With EES, leaders can give their educators the precise support they need to stimulate dramatic and measurable improvement in the classroom.

School Improvement Network has been recognized by many national and state organizations, including Ernst and Young, for the company's leadership in education, innovation, and growth.

For more information on this report, contact Christina Erland Culver, President, EdNexus Advisors, LLC, 202-538-9031. For more information on School Improvement Network, go to [www.schoolimprovement.com](http://www.schoolimprovement.com) or call toll-free at **800-572-1153** to speak to a sales representative.

## Introduction

In response to the call for improved teacher evaluation systems<sup>i</sup> as a key to improving teacher effectiveness, states have invested millions of dollars to modify their existing systems or create a new one. Consequently, teachers are often required to make tremendous shifts in their instructional practice in response to new evaluation frameworks, often at breakneck speed. Considering that many states are also implementing Common Core or their own College and Career Ready State Standards for the first time, state departments of education, LEAs (local education agencies), and teachers are all stretched thin.

As national teacher-quality organizations like the National Council on Teacher Quality and education associations such as The American Federation of Teachers have emphasized<sup>ii</sup>, teacher evaluation systems that lack well-crafted, meaningful teacher professional development components—specifically, professional learning for teachers that is aligned to their evaluations—will become toothless policies at best and bureaucratic quagmires at worst. States and LEAs must meet the challenge of supporting their educators who are now charged with meeting new, more rigorous instructional goals.

A few states—some of them with limited financial resources for professional development—have made strides in creating systems that support teachers around new evaluations. In Kentucky, where they are piloting the Danielson Framework this school year, the state's professional development funds have been drastically cut, yet the department of education has implemented strong teacher professional learning tools and resources related to the evaluation system. Although Connecticut is just in its first full year of implementation, its department of education has focused tremendous attention on developing a tiered, coordinated approach to professional learning that involves the department of education, LEAs, school leaders and teachers. To help build district and school capacity around New Jersey's new evaluation system (which gives LEAs autonomy when selecting a teacher practice evaluation instrument), evaluation implementation managers travel around the state to gather information on best evaluation practices. And South Dakota, still in pilot stage, has collaborated with statewide education associations to

create a menu of professional learning offerings and tools for teachers.

Unfortunately, these examples of collaborative efforts between departments of education and local education agencies related to implementation of evaluation-related professional support for teachers are the exception. Race to the Top and NCLB waiver guidelines related to professional learning are broad, so state responses vary. Consequently, as a Fall 2013 School Improvement Network survey indicates, the vast majority of states—most of whom defer control over evaluation and its components to local education agencies—could only speculate about LEA activities related to building teacher capacity around evaluation, particularly with respect to development of individualized professional learning plans.

### *Three factors seem to serve as explanations:*

- States do not feel responsible for oversight. Departments of education regard themselves as technical assistance providers, not compliance trackers.
- State education agencies frequently lack the capacity – financially or otherwise – to support LEAs around teacher evaluations. Consequently, their focus has been on adhering to tight timelines and ensuring compliance with state regulations.
- A good number of states are in the nascent stages of implementation and thus have not begun collecting data on LEAs' teacher support activities. However, the best-practice models outlined in this paper weaken the case for states to rely on early implementation solely as a reason for decoupled implementation efforts.

This paper will outline the efforts of Kentucky, Connecticut, and South Dakota—all strong local-control states—as examples of best practices that other states and LEAs can borrow from when developing evaluation-related professional learning opportunities for teachers. The paper will then summarize findings from the Fall 2013 SINET survey of state teacher evaluation-related PD. The paper will conclude with questions for further exploration and recommendations for states and LEAs.

## Best practices in evaluation-related professional learning for teachers

### *Kentucky: A collective focus on scaling up using technology*

In Kentucky, where PD funds were dramatically reduced, most evaluation-related PD is supported through Title II funds or Race to the Top III grants, which districts can use to opt in to the state evaluation system and its implementation. Despite financial challenges, Kentucky's department of education spent the past few years developing structures to help build teacher capacity so that evaluations help ensure teacher professional growth and continuous improvement.

Every Kentucky LEA is participating in the statewide pilot of the Danielson Framework (each LEA must have 10 percent of its schools participate; for most districts, this is equivalent to just one school). All teachers complete a self-assessment in response to the Danielson Framework and then submit a professional growth plan based on the self-assessment. To help ensure that teachers receive the support they need to achieve the goals in their professional growth plans, the Kentucky Department of Education has provided technical assistance and other resources to LEAs in support of professional learning. For example, it has encouraged peer observations at the local level and asked districts to include in their evaluation plans how they select and train peer observers. To support LEAs' work, the DOE has developed modules related to these peer observations to support continuous instructional improvement. Kentucky teacher evaluation personnel report that thousands of Kentucky teachers have signed up to use the modules.

In addition, Kentucky's online platform for system delivery is connected to on-demand professional development resources, such as PD 360, which provides personalized learning for teachers through high quality videos of education experts demonstrating best practices in the classroom. Principals and other evaluators can access a feature called PD Planner, which helps them funnel support resources to teachers that are aligned to the Danielson Framework, and teachers can also register for PD via PD

Planner. For example, if during an observation a principal notes that the teacher needs support with formative assessments, the principal can use the platform to both enter the observation report and search for professional learning tools and resources to support that teacher's learning needs. Additionally, when teachers receive evaluation-related student feedback, they can use the platform to find professional learning resources aligned with the results of that feedback.

Kentucky teacher evaluation personnel report that the numbers of teachers participating in these professional learning opportunities far exceed the state's minimum requirement. They credit LEAs with proactive planning so they are ready to implement Danielson at scale after the pilot year. "They're thinking ahead about how to scale up," said Cathy White, teacher and leader effectiveness branch manager.

### *Connecticut: A tiered approach*

Connecticut's teacher evaluation legislation sets forth a proposal for what PD should look like: evaluation-informed, continuous and job-embedded, and a minimum of 18 hours each year per educator. 2013-14 marks the first year of the system's statewide implementation. The state department of education (SDOE) is currently working on generating PD guidelines for supporting teachers and will soon put out an RFP to support districts in building systems and structures to implement the new professional learning guidelines. The guidelines call for a tiered approach so that PD is happening between and among the SDOE, districts, principals, and teachers. In addition, BloomBoard, a data management system that enables users to customize PD, is available to every district, principal, and teacher, although some districts have already contracted with other platforms like Teachscape. In addition, the SDOE is creating web-based PD that teachers can access individually or school leaders can deliver to teachers; the emphasis is on looking beyond external providers and instead at local-level PD providers like the school leader and teacher leaders.

### *New Jersey: Walking the fine line between compliance and support*

New Jersey districts are in the first full year of implementation of the state's new evaluation system, which offers districts autonomy in selecting an observation instrument. The state's evaluation legislation requires each school to establish an improvement panel, which oversees implementation of the evaluation system in that school. To gather information on how the work of these panels is playing out in practice, implementation managers from the state department of education visit schools in New Jersey's 600-plus districts and spend time observing the work of the panels, interviewing members of the panels, and talking to teachers and school leaders to uncover both best practices and challenges—all in an effort to help support individual schools and districts as implementation of the evaluation system unfolds. A DOE official says the implementation managers “walk the fine line between compliance and support. We don't want schools and districts to feel like we're there just to monitor compliance. We truly want to support their work with the new evaluations.”

### *South Dakota: Laying the groundwork during a pilot*

Although South Dakota is piloting its evaluation system during 2013-14, its department of education, in collaboration with the South Dakota Education Association (SDEA) and other statewide education associations, has laid solid groundwork for districts to begin implementing the teacher evaluation system. The DOE and SDEA have developed numerous state-funded trainings for districts to assist them with all of the components of the evaluation system, and LEAs are using any combination of the menu of services available:

- A series of six webinars on the evaluation system are available, along with a stoplight report for districts to help them understand their next steps regarding teacher and principal effectiveness.
- Teachscape Focus for Observer and Teachscape Focus for Teachers licenses are available for all public school district teachers and administrators. Teachscape Reflect licenses are also available for districts and administrators in all public school districts.

- The DOE holds a coaching day for each public school district wherein districts are able to identify a PD topic of their choice and receive professional learning in that area.
- Schools piloting the evaluation system are receiving 3 coaching days to be used as needed.
- The DOE has also developed regional trainings on Common Core, the multi-tiered system of support, and teacher effectiveness systems, and how the three work together.
- The DOE is training individuals across the state on the effectiveness models, Teachscape products, and student learning objectives so they can provide training to districts as needed.

## **The state teacher evaluation PD scan**

From August through November 2013, School Improvement Network (SINET), a nationally recognized online professional development and teacher training company that annually works with more than 4500 school districts nationwide to increase student achievement, administered a survey by phone and email to all 50 states' departments of education about the professional learning component of their teacher evaluation policies (see Appendix for survey protocol). The survey responses indicate that all but four states' teacher evaluation systems include a professional learning provision for teachers.

### *Teacher evaluation systems without a PD component*

- Colorado (100 percent local decision)
  - Idaho
  - Illinois (100 percent local decision)
  - Wyoming (not legislated but strongly advised by DOE)
- Note: Indiana's evaluation system legislation calls for PD only for LEAs that adopt RISE, the state evaluation framework.

Additionally, most states defer control over evaluation and its components to local education agencies<sup>iii</sup>. Consequently, whereas most state education agency personnel could provide an overview of their evaluation

system’s professional learning component, few could do more than speculate about how professional learning, including the development and implementation of individualized teacher PD aligned with the evaluation systems, is playing out locally. Most states either will not collect or have not begun collecting such data. The former stance speaks to the predominance of local control and, perhaps, states’ reliance on local control as a rationale for decoupled professional development efforts between departments of education and LEAs.

## State survey data

### *Individualized PD aligned with evaluations*

Only eight states were able to confidently say that LEAs are making good progress in developing and implementing individualized teacher PD that is aligned with the evaluation system. (A small handful of states—nine to be exact—are still in the rulemaking or other legislative processes that will give their proposed evaluation systems full approval.)

### LEA progress implementing individualized PD aligned to evaluation system

(list does not include the states whose evaluation systems are in flux)

States where LEAs are making progress	States where LEAs are in early stages or progress not determined
CO (specifically, LEAs with strong capacity)	AK
DC	AZ*
DE	AR*
KY	CT*
MA	GA*
NH	HI*
NJ**	ID
WV	IL
	IN*
	KS*
	LA*
	MD*
	MN*
	MS*
	MO*

	MT*
	NE*
	NV*
	NM*
	NY*
	NC*
	OH*
	OK*
	OR*
	PA*
	RI*
	SC (none is being developed at this time)
	SD (in pilot stage so LEAs currently using state-developed PD)
	TN*
	TX*
	UT*
	VA*
	WA*
	WI*
	WY*

\*Data on LEA development of individualized PD either will not be or has not been collected as of November 2013.

\*\*LEAs that participated in evaluation system pilot are making good progress.

### *Teacher evaluation systems without a PD component*

Teacher evaluation systems still in development/PD component not yet determined	
Alabama	Maine
California	Michigan
Florida	North Dakota
Iowa	Vermont
	Wyoming

### *Funding for evaluation-related PD*

The vast majority of states provide funding for evaluation-related teacher professional support and resources; only 15 states do not provide such funding or offer it on a limited basis.

### *States that do not fund evaluation-related PD for teachers or provide it on a limited basis*

AK	MT (only funds LEAs that adopt state model)
AZ	NE
CO	NH
GA	NJ
ID	NM
IL	OK
IN (only funds LEAs that adopt state model)	RI
KS	SC
LA	TX
ME	UT (unfunded mandate but state using Title IIA funds)
MS	

- As states begin to look at tying teacher pay to performance, teachers need adequate feedback and support to meet the challenge of performance-based pay.
- Teacher preparation must be aligned with new evaluation systems. Pre-service teachers should be introduced to all components of these systems: teacher-practice evaluation rubrics, the concept of value-added and the research on value-added measures of teacher evaluation, and data literacy and use of data in driving instruction.
- States that are behind on implementation of evaluation systems and/or evaluation-related professional learning and states whose evaluation systems do not include a PD component should review best practices from other states and use them to craft a plan for building teacher capacity related to the instructional demands of the new evaluation system. Including technology as resource for delivering instructional supports is an essential part of reaching and meeting every teacher's needs. This must be a priority.

## Implications and recommendations

New teacher evaluation systems alone will not improve teacher effectiveness. Thoughtful, well-developed approaches to supporting the specific needs of individual teachers are the key to improved teacher practice and, ultimately, markedly improved results for students. States and local education agencies must take up the challenge. Specifically:

- States should allocate funding for the development and implementation of teacher evaluation-related professional learning and resources that are individualized and targeted toward improvements in teacher practice.
- States should consider using a multi-tiered approach to capacity building so that state education agency efforts are linked to those at the district and school level. The success of this approach depends on continuous, clear communication at all levels.

## Appendix: School Improvement Network state professional development survey protocol

1. Does your evaluation policy include a teacher professional learning component? If yes, please describe.
2. Does your state fund evaluation-related teacher professional development?
3. What does evaluation-related professional development consist of at the local level (e.g., district-wide workshops, online learning)?
4. To what extent have local education agencies in your state developed and implemented individualized professional learning for teachers that is aligned with their evaluations?
5. What are LEAs in your state doing to build teacher capacity around instruction in low-performing schools?

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i Culver, C.E., & Hayes, Kathleen T. (2013). Teacher evaluations and local flexibility: Burden or benefit? Midvale, UT: School Improvement Network.

ii Doherty, K.M. & Jacobs, S. (2013) State of the States 2013. Connecting the dots: Using evaluations of teacher effectiveness to inform policy and practice. Washington, D.C.: National Council on Teacher Quality. Phillips, V. & Weingarten, R. Six steps to effective teacher development and evaluation. American Educator. Summer 2013, 36-37.

iii Culver & Hayes.