



Professional Learning and Support

Linking Evaluation Data to Teacher Support and Improvement

4 of 6 in the series

Evaluation without support is like planting a tree without watering it. Throughout this series, we have emphasized the complementary nature of evaluation and support: Evaluation measures help teachers identify their strengths and areas for growth, and support and professional learning help teachers improve their teaching skills. But while many states and districts have made significant progress toward developing new, more rigorous evaluation systems, they have not made as much progress to change how they support educators. This lack of support threatens to undermine the hard work school systems have done to improve teaching and learning. States and districts should seize the opportunity before them to create a growth-mindset culture where teachers are empowered to drive their own professional learning and school systems emphasize and reinforce continuous improvement. In this kind of culture, state and district leaders collaborate to deliver professional learning to teachers and prioritize only relevant and effective professional learning opportunities.

Changing the culture of professional learning will take time and sustained effort, but teachers deserve the support and feedback they need to improve their practices. This brief contains four recommendations that states and districts can implement to change how they support teachers and build a culture of professional learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Empower teachers to drive their own professional learning.

Teachers typically attend district-led professional learning sessions as a requirement—not as a choice—and they usually have no input into the content. Furthermore, professional learning is generally deficit-oriented, focusing on gaps in skills or knowledge rather than on opportunities for teachers to drive their own growth and development. To shift the professional learning paradigm away from filling gaps and toward continuous improvement, states and districts need to empower teachers to seek out resources for their own growth.

- **Encourage teachers to write individual development plans.** At the beginning of the year, teachers should develop individual learning plans that identify two or three growth areas based on evaluation data from the previous year. This strategy signals to teachers that they can guide their own professional learning and helps principals provide their teachers with targeted feedback.
- **Use technology that allows teachers to see their evaluation data and choose professional learning opportunities that improve their practice.** Teachers need access to detailed data about their instruction throughout the year, rather than receiving a single report at the end of the year. Teachers can use these data to monitor their progress and adjust their professional growth

Source: Denver Public Schools. Available at <http://bit.ly/1ogJ965>.



goals. States and districts can enable teachers to engage in this type of goal-setting by building technology platforms that display targeted professional learning recommendations to teachers based on their evaluation data. Arizona is developing a statewide platform that secures and displays confidential student achievement data, while districts like [Denver Public Schools \(DPS\)](#), [Shelby County Schools](#) and [Long Beach Unified School District](#) have developed portals that connect teachers with individual learning plans, webinars, modules, videos, blogs and instructional materials. States and districts also can incorporate student data into these professional learning portals to allow districts, school leaders and teachers themselves to track the impact of specific instructional strategies on student outcomes.

- ➔ **Ask teachers, school leaders and instructional coaches to design and deliver professional learning.** Instead of a top-down, district- or state-led approach, many school districts and charter management organizations are asking teachers and principals to lead professional learning opportunities for their peers. In DPS and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), professional learning is delivered by school leadership teams. Fresno Unified School District has begun rolling out a new system in which teachers deliver professional learning to their peers, and in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Fulton County Schools, teams of instructional coaches deliver professional learning. [Shelby County Schools](#) has launched a tiered coaching approach that provides varying levels of support to teachers based on their experience and effectiveness as determined through classroom observations.

These strategies help empower teachers to take ownership of their professional learning. But teachers may also find that reflecting on their practice and developing professional learning plans take time. States and districts should be prepared to remove administrative or non-instructional responsibilities from teachers' plates so they can focus more on professional learning and improving their practice.

Make professional learning routine, embedded in existing job responsibilities and much more frequent.

In a culture of continuous learning, teachers need structures, roles, protocols and data loops that provide them with real opportunities to practice, collaborate and get feedback. But in most school systems, these structures simply do not exist. Ideally, teachers should have collaborative planning time to share instructional strategies and discuss student performance, opportunities to observe master teachers in the classroom, and time during the school day to model effective instructional techniques and share feedback. These strategies enable teachers to become continuous learners. States and districts can further support teachers by collecting data on teachers' formative assessment practices and noting which practices lead to student achievement gains.

School systems can take other steps to provide teachers with ongoing, real-time opportunities to improve their instruction, such as:

- ➔ Rather than sending teachers to a sit-and-get session about their district's observation framework and rubric, a district could organize teams of teachers with strengths on certain competencies of the framework and ask them to model best practices for their peers who need support on those skills.
- ➔ Instead of convening staff for a typical half-day, in-person session on a competency in the observation framework, such as conducting effective checks for understanding, a district could administer an adaptive online program that allows teachers to learn at their own pace and access at their convenience.
- ➔ Educational technology tools (such as [Edmodo](#)) and social media offer new opportunities for teachers and school and district leaders to create, gather and



Source: Edmodo. Available at <http://bit.ly/1rtFirn>.



access instructional resources; customize student and teacher learning; and integrate information about teachers and students across multiple systems.

Break down silos and collaborate across organizations to deliver high-quality professional learning opportunities.

States, districts, school leaders and teachers have distinct, but critical, roles in the design and delivery of high-quality professional learning (see table below). School systems may need to clarify their own roles and responsibilities and those of teachers and school leaders. Consider the strategies below:

- ⇒ **Connect the dots between evaluation and professional learning.** Communicate the link between evaluation and professional learning, and show teachers the types of supports they will receive. Teachers will experience evaluation as an authentic tool for their development if they see a clear alignment between the evaluation system and high-quality professional learning opportunities.
- ⇒ **Work cross-functionally within school systems.** States and districts often assign a single department purview over major reform initiatives such as new educator evaluations or college and career readiness standards. But this practice can impede collaboration across offices that deliver professional learning, implement new evaluation policies, collect and analyze evaluation data, and oversee teacher supervisors. To maximize the effectiveness of professional learning and ensure that teachers' needs are met, break down the silos across offices and encourage staff to work cross-functionally.

This table shows one way states and districts can clarify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in planning and delivering high-quality professional learning related to evaluation and support systems.

STATE	DISTRICT	SCHOOL/PRINCIPAL	TEACHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate statewide professional learning goals. • Approve professional learning vendors eligible to work with districts/schools. • Monitor district-level evaluation data and support struggling districts. • Develop and deliver professional learning on evaluation tools used statewide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate districtwide professional learning goals. • Develop portals and tools (video libraries, modules, resource lists, etc.) to help connect teachers with professional learning based on their evaluation data. • Design and deliver evaluation-related professional learning to teachers and principals. • Analyze evaluation data to identify and address districtwide and schoolwide professional learning needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate schoolwide professional learning goals, and identify resources that can help teachers meet those goals. • Confer with teachers about their individual professional learning goals for the year. • Monitor teachers' progress toward their professional learning goals throughout the year. • Observe teachers in the classroom, and provide them with feedback related to their professional learning goals. • Use evaluation data to pair effective teachers with teachers who need mentors or additional support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate and document individual professional learning goals for the year. • Discuss professional learning goals with school leaders, observers, mentors, department heads and other colleagues. • Use evaluation data and feedback to reflect on progress toward professional learning goals. • Access professional learning opportunities on district- or state-provided portals.

Some school systems have established new roles as a strategy to improve the quality of support and professional learning that teachers receive. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) created regional TEAM (short for Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model) coaches to provide on-the-ground support to school leaders and teachers. TEAM coaches build the capacity of school leaders by assisting them with tasks such as conducting co-observations, role-playing coaching conversations, and analyzing school-level data on teacher performance and student achievement. The [TEAM coach job description](#) reflects a high standard



for the skills and experience these coaches must have as well as the prestige that the position carries. Thus far, TEAM coaches have developed positive and productive relationships with the principals they support, and few principals require coaching beyond one year. TDOE continues to refine the TEAM coaching models, but other states and districts should consider this approach as a way to build school leaders' capacity to use evaluation data and support their teachers.

Ban professional learning that doesn't deliver results.

Many states and districts are using evaluation data to support teachers; however, fewer school systems are using evaluation data to analyze the effectiveness of teacher professional learning or other programs. Without this information, many states and districts are unable to answer basic questions such as "What kinds of professional learning lead to improvements in teacher practices and student achievement?"

Some states and districts are starting to use data to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher professional learning. Their work is just getting under way, but a few promising practices are already emerging, including the following:

- ⇒ **Collect data on the impact of professional learning.** TNTP recently analyzed data from thousands of teacher evaluations and [identified a set of skills](#) that are fundamental to becoming an effective first-year teacher. As a result of this analysis, TNTP overhauled its preservice training program to focus on these core skills. Similarly, states and districts should analyze observation data to learn which competencies are strongly correlated with student achievement gains and allocate professional learning resources to programs that can help teachers improve in these areas.
- ⇒ **Ask educators for feedback on the professional learning they receive.** States and districts should solicit feedback from teachers about their experiences with professional learning. Every year, NYCDOE [administers a survey](#) to teachers and principals with questions about the quality of professional learning they receive. TDOE, with support from the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development, administers a [comprehensive survey](#) to all teachers in the state to solicit feedback on a variety of topics, including the impact of professional learning on teacher performance. These feedback loops can help districts and states improve the way they design and deliver professional learning opportunities in the future.

CONCLUSION

States and districts must shift the way teachers and principals think about professional learning by creating personalized professional support systems that align with evaluation data, engage all teachers in continuous learning cycles and empower teachers to own their professional growth. Under this new professional learning paradigm, teachers should view conversations with coaches and feedback from peers as regular and expected forms of professional learning. A high-quality professional learning system should provide a clear and comprehensive measure of teacher effectiveness, timely and actionable feedback, high-quality content and tools to support teacher development, and access to professional learning opportunities as an integral component of a teacher's typical workday.

