

# Shrewsbury Public Schools' Approach to Using Evaluation Data in Human Resources Decision-Making

As part of an evaluation of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework (EEF), SRI and its partners (Abt Associates, Nancy Brigham Associates, and J Koppich & Associates) visited Massachusetts school districts in spring 2015 to identify and share exemplary evaluation practices. The research team visited Shrewsbury Public Schools, a medium-sized suburban district, to learn about its use of evaluation data to inform human resources practices and policies.<sup>1</sup>

Shrewsbury is a district with stable leadership (three superintendents in 39 years) and a dedicated and results-oriented human resources director, who is building on the excellent practices established by the former human resources director and the current and previous superintendent. The district had a variety of strong human resources practices in place before the adoption of the EEF, such as a rigorous hiring process for educators (including multiple interviews with parents, teachers, and students on interview panels and demonstration lessons in actual classrooms) and dedicated meetings between the superintendent, human resources director, and each teacher's evaluator to discuss renewals for non-professional status teachers each spring. These structured conversations have always incorporated evaluation data (from the district's prior evaluation system), including observation reports. However, administrators now use data from the new evaluation system to better inform decisions about renewal for beginning or struggling teachers. Moreover, both new and experienced educators have leveraged evaluation data to inform instructional improvement.

This brief begins by explaining how Shrewsbury's district communications about implementation of the new evaluation system influenced staff's attitudes and practice and helped ease the transition from the previous evaluation system. Then we describe the district's strategies for incorporating evaluation data into the preexisting human resources practices and policies, and how the district's tone in approaching the evaluation system helped educators focus improvement efforts on professional growth. The brief ends by outlining how Shrewsbury's approach to using evaluation data for human resources decision-making might serve other Massachusetts districts.

## About This Brief

This brief describes **Shrewsbury Public Schools'** promising strategies for using educator evaluation data for human resources purposes under the Massachusetts' Educator Evaluation Framework.

Since 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has contracted with SRI International, Abt Associates, Nancy Brigham Associates, and J Koppich & Associates to study the implementation of the Educator Evaluation Framework. This Case Study Brief Series highlights promising strategies for implementing the framework in districts across the Commonwealth.

For more information on the study, please visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/resources/study/default.html>.

<sup>1</sup> As part of the case study, the research team visited the district for two days and conducted interviews and focus groups with district leadership, school principals, and teachers.

## Messaging the Educator Evaluation Framework

Before EEF implementation began, the 14-member School Leadership Team, consisting of the Central Office administration and principals, prepared the following three-pronged message for all educators in the district. This message was subsequently discussed at a meeting of the larger 45-member District Leadership Team:

1. We're all in this together; we're not in this alone.
2. Mistakes are a given, and growth is the goal.
3. We can show how we make a difference for students.

The superintendent introduced the messages to educators in his annual opening day speech to all staff as a means of framing the evaluation system as focused on instructional growth.

We were trying to determine how the messages resonated with educators in the district so we could take from [the Educator Evaluation Framework] what we wanted to accomplish. More importantly, we wanted to use it as a way to improve professional practice.

—*Superintendent*

A district administrator called this set of messages a “preemptive approach to managing the [Educator Evaluation Framework] change process.”

District administrators and principals have reinforced those messages at every step in the implementation process, including in superintendent communications, faculty meetings, and conversations between evaluators and educators. Most teachers can recite the messages verbatim. New teachers learn them as part of their introduction to the district. This systematic and consistent communication effort was vital in laying the foundation for human resource practices to further evolve with the use of evaluation data.

In addition the district instituted a new opportunity for “Educator Evaluation Facilitators,” teachers at each school who, in return for a small stipend, agreed to participate in training to become early adopters of the new evaluation system, experts in the new processes, co-presenters at staff training with their building principal, and providers of teacher-led support for their peers. The district leadership felt it was critical that teacher voices were included in this very public and concrete way, as they were committed to leveraging teacher leadership as a key component of this important change in practice.

## Use of Evaluation Data for Personnel Decisions and Instructional Improvement

Shrewsbury has traditionally held annual meetings in March that involve individual discussions between the superintendent, the human resources director, and the primary evaluator to assess the performance of each nonprofessional-status teacher and any professional-status teacher who may

not be achieving proficiency (a very small number). The educator evaluation system has expanded the information available at these discussions. The human resources director creates a spreadsheet with the basic information about each educator, including his or her name, assignment, licensure, and years towards professional status. The principals bring their thoughts and comments, based on their professional judgment, about each educator. As part of the conversation, the team reviews evidence and feedback from classroom and other observations to identify supports the teacher has received and whether he or she is responding to feedback. The evaluator offers targeted mentoring and coaching if the teacher has not responded to initial feedback. The team also has access to the teacher’s artifacts of practice as well as feedback on how the teacher has been coached and whether or not the teacher has responded to the feedback.

According to the human resources director, the educator evaluation system has provided additional information and data to inform these meetings, which had already been part of regular district practice.

This district has a tradition of having nonprofessional status teacher meetings in March. It’s really valuable to have this framework to articulate what these teachers said and did in response to observation and feedback. When evaluators sit down to talk with the superintendent and me, we are able to know if the educator we are discussing is someone who is moving in the right direction in terms of being reflective and accepting of feedback.

—*Human Resources Director*

In addition, the district has framed communication around the new evaluation data as an opportunity for teachers to identify and showcase their strengths. For instance, a teacher’s evaluator or the human resources director might uncover an effective teacher practice of which the evaluation team was unaware. A district administrator explained, “I can read this

## Educators’ Reflections on the Evaluation System

They keep telling us mistakes are a given, so we look at our evaluators as coaches. We’re all in it together because we are all doing it for the first time.

—*Teacher*

All of the evaluation data is used to help support personnel decisions. With the observations and feedback, you have a follow-up conversation, saying here’s what we can do to support you. The directors will spend time coaching people, giving feedback that is specific and direct with recommendations on how to improve. In the end, nothing is left to guessing.

—*Principal*

The greatest success of the new system is seeing teachers be more collaborative, achieving goals as a group. It is seeing teachers come together for the good of their practice and their students.

—*Education Evaluation Facilitator*

[literacy tracking data] and say, ‘I didn’t even know you [the teacher] were doing that....that is awesome!’”

Additionally, many educators use evaluation data to inform improvements in their instruction, though consistent adoption of this practice is still a work in progress. For instance, evaluators propose questions for thought in an educator’s formative evaluation and use these questions as the basis for providing the educator with actionable suggestions for improvement. In addition, one principal emphasized the importance of face-to-face interaction with teachers after an evaluation. Teachers, the principal said, value the chance to brainstorm ideas for improving their practice based on feedback from observations directly with their evaluators.

Finally, Shrewsbury’s district leaders understand that full use of the evaluation data is a work in progress, but they are committed to using the system to improve teacher practice and human resource structures.

## Implications for Other Districts

Shrewsbury’s communications approach for Education Evaluation Framework implementation identified the most important goals of the system and sought to mitigate the anxieties and fears that may be associated with attempting any system change. District and school administrators’ unanimous agreement on and dissemination of these key messages helped

smooth the transition to the EEF and laid a foundation for effectively leveraging evaluation data to enhance existing human resource structures and support educator growth. In Shrewsbury’s case, the conversations around renewal for teachers are now better informed by data from the evaluation system. In addition, the district’s consistent message on the evaluation system helped ease educators into using evaluation data for its core purpose—to improve instructional practice.

Among Shrewsbury’s accomplishments are several practices that may be instructive for other districts:

- The development of a robust messaging and communications plan by a large team of district and school leaders eases the transition into using evaluation data for human resource decision-making.
- The incorporation of evaluation data into preexisting structures enables a district to streamline and strengthen key human resource decisions.
- The introduction of school leaders trained to facilitate questions about the evaluation system enables a district to leverage teacher leadership as a strategy to implement a big change.
- Emphasizing the positive features of the evaluation framework focuses educators on data-driven instructional improvement.