

Research Brief: Early Implementation of the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework



Across the country, nearly all states and most local districts are changing their educator evaluation systems. The new Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework stands out among the many emerging systems in its explicit emphasis on promoting educator growth and development. Unlike systems that use percentages or weighting strategies to determine a single evaluation rating, the Massachusetts model provides every educator with two separate ratings that reflect the nexus between educator practice and student achievement, while ensuring opportunity for professional judgment (Exhibit 1). Massachusetts also stands out for a development process that involved all key stakeholder groups, resulting in a comprehensive system that addresses shared objectives and values across educators. This collaborative approach led to a phased-in implementation timeline (Exhibit 2) and continues to inform the state's supports and resources to districts.

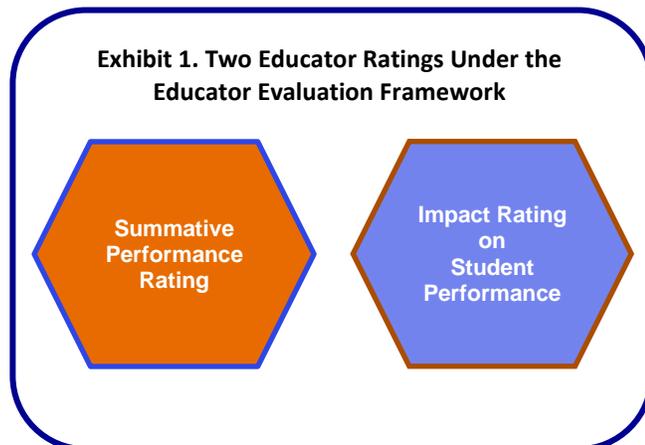
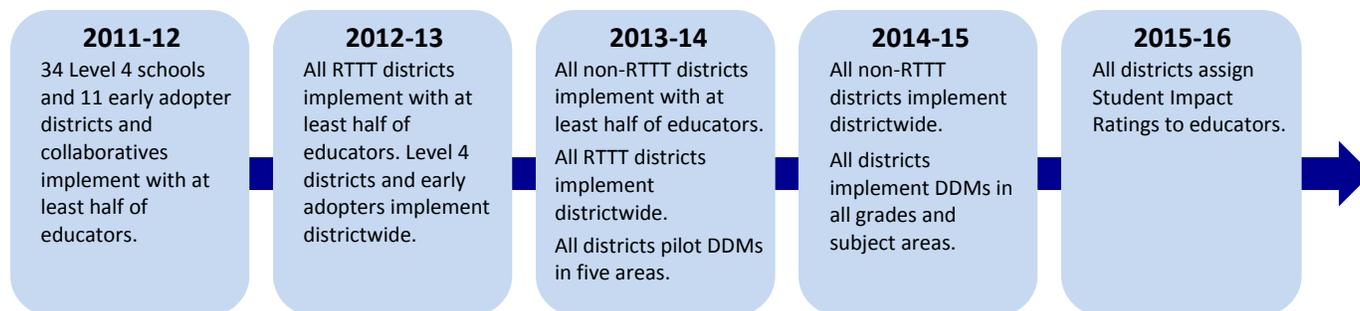


Exhibit 2. Educator Evaluation Framework Implementation Timeline



SRI International and its research partners Abt Associates, Nancy Brigham Associates, and J. Koppich and Associates are evaluating the implementation of the Educator Evaluation Framework. Data collection during the 2012-13 school year was through educator interviews in 14 Massachusetts RTTT districts, educator focus groups in 7 of those districts, and a statewide survey of principals and school staff from RTTT districts.¹ This brief summarizes the following key findings from this first year of the independent evaluation:

- The majority of educators expressed generally positive views of the new evaluation system and reported that the new system has significant advantages over past evaluation practices.
- Administrators and school staff reported that they understood the components of the evaluation cycle; both groups, however, wanted more training and guidance on goal-setting and evidence collection.
- Educators had mixed views of the fairness of the new system. Concerns focused on possible mismatches between school staff and their assigned evaluators, inadequate evaluator time for thorough evaluations, and inconsistent expectations among evaluators.
- Labor-management relations based on collaborative resolution of implementation issues enhanced the rollout of the new evaluation system.
- A majority of educators found this new evaluation system to be a significant increase in workload and time for evaluators.
- In nearly all districts, educators are still working to integrate the new evaluation system with other district reform initiatives and goals derived from their strategic plans.

¹ The survey was administered in January and February 2013 before educators had gone through the full five-step evaluation cycle. The research team surveyed 206 principals and 610 teachers; response rates were 66 percent for principals and 46 percent for teachers. Because the survey was administered to a sample of principals and teachers in RTTT districts and was not intended to be representative of the state, the survey results are not generalizable to all principals and teachers across the Commonwealth.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

EDUCATOR OPINIONS

In winter 2013, the majority of surveyed principals, teachers, and other school staff reported that the new evaluation system would provide them with opportunities to reflect on their practice, to grow and improve, and to receive meaningful feedback on their practice (Exhibit 3). In late spring 2013, a majority of interviewed educators reported that the new evaluation system has more potential value as a tool to improve teaching than previous

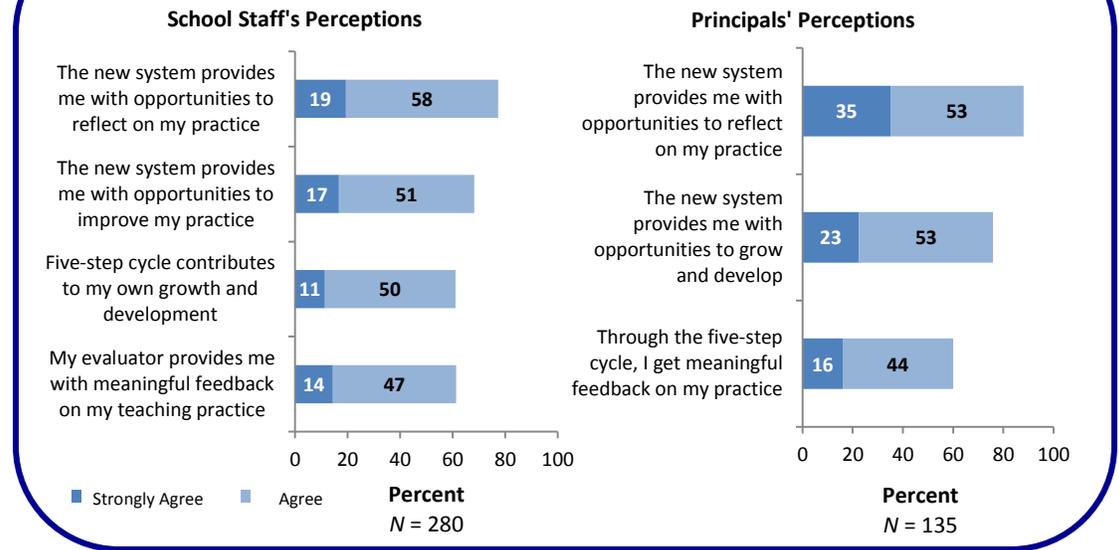
systems. Teachers were generally willing to see how well the new system unfolds, although they were sometimes unclear about the objectives of the new system and expressed some concerns about implementation thus far (as discussed below). Teachers of non-core academic subjects and noninstructional staff were the most likely to express concerns about the value of the new system. Administrators held the most positive overall views of the system.

EDUCATOR UNDERSTANDING

To prepare educators to implement the new Educator Evaluation Framework and build knowledge about it, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) produced a comprehensive set of guidance documents, created modules and webinars for district and school leaders, developed a series of training workshops for teachers, and identified multiple technical assistance providers.

The majority of surveyed principals (at least 75 percent) and almost two-thirds of surveyed school staff reported that they mostly or completely understood each separate step of the five-step evaluation cycle. In interviews and focus groups, educators specifically cited a need for additional training and guidance on creating professional practice and student learning goals and collecting and evaluating evidence of educator progress related to goal attainment and the Statewide Standards of Effective Practice.² In particular, they were looking for consistent expectations about the amount and quality of the evidence and clarification on how to assess the evidence.

Exhibit 3. Educator Perceptions of Impact on Practice



PROMISING STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EDUCATOR UNDERSTANDING AND BUY-IN

Districts supported educator buy-in and understanding by having principals model the evaluation cycle for staff, using their own evaluation as an example. Engaging teacher leaders in communication and training efforts also effectively built teacher buy-in. In Revere Public Schools, 25 teachers have been trained as Evaluation Leaders to support the rollout of the new system; each school has at least two Evaluation Leaders to address teachers' questions about the system and directly assist teachers who are having problems. Interviewed teachers reported that this strategy was helpful because Evaluation Leaders were onsite resources who could quickly respond to their concerns or questions and could also provide ongoing feedback to district and school administration on implementation progress.

² As part of the five-step cycle, Massachusetts educators develop at least two goals: a professional practice goal and a student learning goal.

EDUCATOR VIEWS OF FAIRNESS

The majority of educators perceived the new evaluation system as fair. Eighty-three percent of principals and 62 percent of school staff survey respondents reported that the new system evaluates educators more comprehensively than the previous system. Most interviewed school staff felt the new system is fairer and more robust than previous locally designed teacher evaluation procedures because evaluators rely on multiple data points to inform the evaluation rating, school staff are active participants in the process, there are common rubrics, and the process is more transparent.

In general, administrators were more confident than school staff in the objectivity of the new evaluation system. Concerns about fairness stemmed from school staff's perceptions that their evaluator lacked adequate time to conduct a thorough evaluation and that evaluators' practices across and within schools were inconsistent. In interviews and focus groups, teachers of non-core academic subjects (e.g., career and technical education, music, art, PE), as well as noninstructional staff (e.g., nurses, counselors), were more likely than other school staff to report that their evaluator lacked appropriate knowledge of their subject or role to evaluate them fairly. Noninstructional staff were particularly dubious about how their practice could be fairly observed and assessed because rubrics, training resources, and exemplars were geared toward classroom teachers and thus not aligned with their particular responsibilities.

PROMISING STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS CONCERNS WITH EVALUATOR CONSISTENCY

To calibrate evaluators, Springfield Public Schools required all evaluators to participate in 15 hours of interrater reliability training during the school year. An external technical assistance provider facilitated the training, placing evaluators in small cohorts to conduct evaluations and share results. A second external technical assistance provider analyzed the quality and consistency of observations and feedback (e.g., targeted feedback with immediate strategies for improvement, accurate and appropriate citation of rubrics). Administrators valued the opportunity the training provided to discuss and share interpretations of classroom practice with other administrators. One administrator explained, "It was real life experience. We were in a school. We all saw the same things, and we were able to bounce ideas off each other."

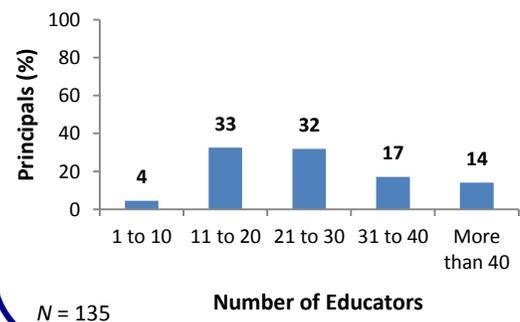
LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

Districts that made the most progress in implementing the new evaluation system typically brought union leadership into discussions about the new evaluation system from the earliest planning stages and maintained an open dialogue. Reaching agreement before the start of the school year gave educators the time they needed to complete most of the evaluation steps by the end of the school year. Some districts, however, did not settle negotiations with the teachers' unions until late in the 2012-13 school year, making it difficult to complete all steps of the evaluation cycle. The experience of early implementers suggests that ongoing communication and collaboration between labor and management will be critical, especially as districts determine measures for assessing student learning.

EVALUATOR WORKLOAD AND CAPACITY

A majority of educators found the new evaluation system to be a significant increase in workload and time for evaluators. Surveyed educators felt that most principals did not have adequate time to complete the requirements of the new system. As of winter 2013, 89 percent of surveyed principals reported that the new evaluation system significantly increased their workload as administrators, and 66 percent disagreed with the statement that they have adequate time to evaluate the teachers in their schools. In addition, 55 percent of principals reported that they spend more than 25 percent of their time on evaluation activities. A majority of principals also reported that they are responsible for evaluating over 20 educators (Exhibit 4). Several case study districts were addressing this by distributing evaluation responsibilities across a range of administrators, including department chairs, curriculum coordinators, and/or program directors.

Exhibit 4. Number of Educators Principals Reported They Were Responsible for Evaluating



Although the legislation encouraged districts to use teacher peer review to boost the capacity of the system to conduct high-quality evaluations, most districts had not discussed or had dismissed the idea of teachers evaluating other teachers.

PROMISING STRATEGIES TO EASE EVALUATOR WORKLOAD

- Chelmsford Public Schools allows contributing evaluators (i.e., an educator with expertise in the subject matter being evaluated) to support primary evaluators by conducting classroom observations, analyzing evidence, and providing feedback, although contributing evaluators cannot write the formative or summative reports.
- Springfield Public Schools deployed retired principals to serve as mentors to current administrators, accompanying them for observations and completing the follow-up paperwork.
- Multiple districts relied on technology platforms, such as TeachPoint or Baseline Edge, to improve evaluator efficiency, as they allowed for immediate evaluator feedback and quick access to educator files.

INTEGRATION OF DISTRICT INITIATIVES

While the new evaluation system is a significant reform effort, it is one of many state and local initiatives. Each of the case study districts had multiple initiatives and a strategic plan, and individual schools had their own set of priorities, yet most educators were unable to explain how the new evaluation system fit with the other reform efforts under way. A few case study districts did make explicit connections between educator evaluation and other priorities. For example, district leaders in Reading Public Schools communicated to staff the interconnectedness of the district's three priorities: (1) implement the Common Core State Standards, (2) improve the social and emotional well-being of their students, and (3) implement the new educator evaluation system. District leaders then set the expectation that each educator's evaluation had to include SMART goals corresponding with the first two district goals. In Attleboro Public Schools and Revere Public Schools, evaluation is one of the seven areas the districts are focusing on to improve human resources policies and teacher quality, resulting in substantial connections between evaluation and professional development, teacher leadership, and school culture.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND THE FIELD

Despite early implementation challenges that districts are working hard to address, the Massachusetts evaluation system shows promise. Findings from this evaluation suggest that successful implementation might reflect the following strategies:

- tailoring communications among principals, teacher leaders, teachers, and other school staff to explain the new policies and model expected practices;
- adapting evaluation procedures and materials for noninstructional staff;
- distributing evaluation duties beyond the principal and adopting appropriate technology platforms to increase system capacity;
- integrating key strategic goals from district improvement plans with the evaluation system; and
- sharing decision-making for the implementation of the new evaluation system among school administrators, teachers, non-instructional staff, and union officials.

As of spring 2013, the available evidence pointed to both the remarkable progress Massachusetts districts had made in implementing the new evaluation system and the significant challenges ahead. As all districts proceed with the new system, lessons from the early adopter and RTTT districts may help other districts successfully implement and transform educator evaluation. SRI and its research partners are continuing their evaluation of implementation throughout Massachusetts in the 2013-2014 school year.

Additional Resources on the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework

- For general information and guidance documents on the Educator Evaluation Framework: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/>
- To receive the monthly Educator Evaluation e-Newsletter, subscribe at <http://eeval-newsletter-signup.org/>