

Implementation of the Educator Evaluation Framework in Massachusetts

In 2011, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts launched an ambitious effort to restructure how educators are evaluated, with its new Educator Evaluation Framework (EEF). The EEF's primary purpose is to promote educator growth and development; it incorporates multiple measures of educator practice and student learning, recognizes excellence in teaching and learning, sets a high bar for Professional Teacher Status, and shortens timelines for improvement.¹

It also incorporates student learning through a separate Student Impact Rating that determines the length and intensity of an educator's evaluation plan, an element distinct from educators' Summative Performance Rating.² This aspect of the EEF stands in contrast to other states' educator evaluation systems, which include specific formulas and base up to 50 percent of educators' ratings on student outcome measures, such as test scores.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) began its phased implementation of the EEF during the 2011–12 school year, with early-adopter and Race to the Top districts implementing it first.³ By the end of the 2014–15 school year, all districts across the Commonwealth had been implementing new evaluation systems aligned with the statewide EEF for at least 2 years.⁴ As of spring 2015, districts were in the midst of phasing in two remaining evaluation components designed to provide additional measures of an educator's practice and impact on student outcomes: the Student Impact Rating, which is based on District-Determined Measures (DDMs), and student feedback.

Since 2012, ESE has been working with SRI International and its partners (Abt Associates, Nancy Brigham Associates, and J Koppich & Associates) to study the implementation of the EEF. Specifically drawing on stakeholder feedback and findings from the independent study, ESE has provided guidance and training materials, convened districts, shared best practices, established professional networks of educators, and revised EEF timelines and expectations.

This research brief presents educator experiences with and perceptions of the EEF and highlights promising practices from districts across the Commonwealth. The brief summarizes findings from survey and case study data from the 2014–15 school year and offers the following key findings⁵:

- Educators were divided about whether the evaluation system in their district is focused on professional growth and development. Their experiences with and perceptions of the EEF appeared strongly linked to districts' communication efforts about its purpose and uses.
- Educators had mixed views of whether individual components of the EEF improved instruction. Staff and principals valued the components of the framework that provided opportunities to collaborate and reflect on instructional practices, such as goal setting, observations, and feedback.
- Districts have made significant progress on developing and implementing DDMs, though educators had mixed perceptions about their utility and fairness. Interviewed staff and principals were more likely to report positive perceptions of the implementation of DDMs when they had been involved in the identification and development process and when their districts had emphasized the purpose and uses of the DDMs for informing practice.
- Surveyed principals and staff were confident that evaluators had the appropriate knowledge and skills to effectively conduct evaluations. Nevertheless, evaluators indicated that they struggled to balance their responsibilities and ensure consistency. Perceived inconsistencies have led educators to question the EEF's fairness.

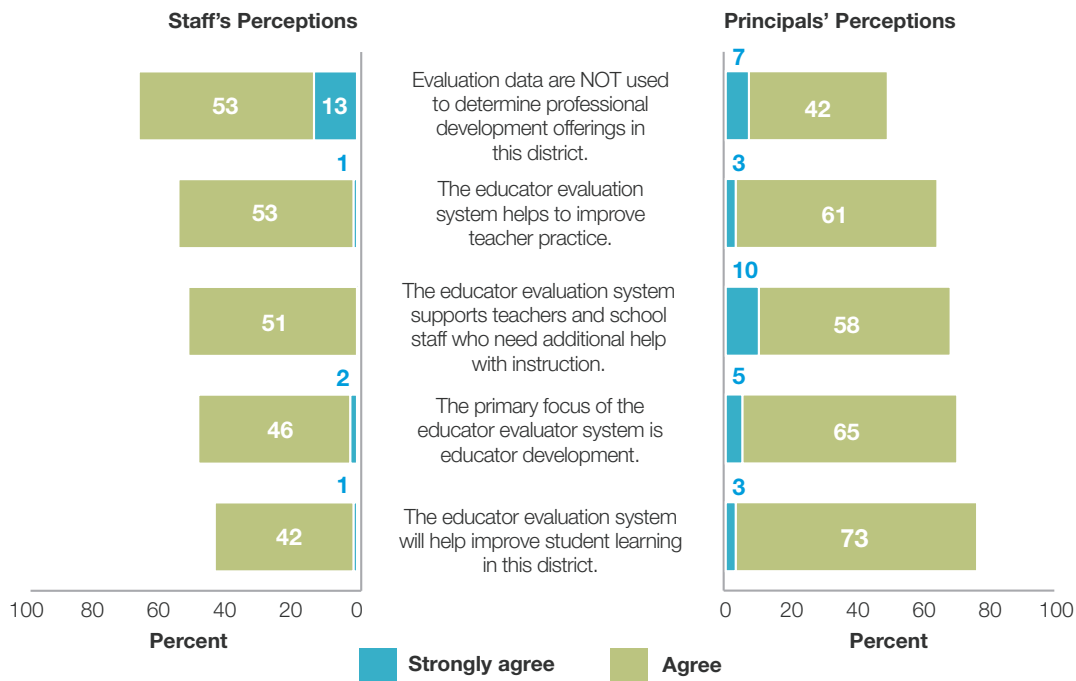
Perceptions of the Framework as a Whole

Consistent with previous years' findings, 2014–15 survey results revealed that school staff were divided about whether the evaluation system focuses on professional growth and development, although principals were more positive than staff. A majority of surveyed principals agreed or strongly agreed that the primary focus of the evaluation system in their district is educator development, whereas less than half of surveyed school staff did so.

A slight majority of surveyed educators reported that the new evaluation system in their district helps to improve teacher practice (Exhibit 1). Interviewed educators appreciated that the evaluation system has enabled administrators to have a clearer understanding of their school staff's classroom practices and has facilitated more conversation and collaboration about curriculum and instruction.

Interviewed educators' experiences with and perceptions of the EEF appeared strongly linked to districts' communications efforts. When districts involved multiple stakeholders in framing the EEF as a means for promoting professional growth, the system benefited from more widespread support. For example, school staff in two case study districts carried out systematic communications plans—including ongoing training, stakeholder involvement, and school-level communications. In these districts, strong communications about the purpose of the EEF helped make the paradigm shift to an evaluation culture focused on growth. For more information about promising communication strategies, see the callout box Shrewsbury Public Schools' Approach to Communication of Evaluation System Activities.

Exhibit 1. Educators' Perceptions of the Purpose of the Evaluation Framework



Note: Number of total respondents = 44–564. Missing = 2–67. Margins of error range from 0.5 to 43 percentage points. Source: The Educator Evaluation Framework Staff Survey and the Educator Evaluation Framework Principal Survey. Survey question: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the educator evaluation system in your district?

Shrewsbury Public Schools' Approach to Communication of Evaluation System Activities

In Shrewsbury Public Schools, administrators focused on a set of three messages about the evaluation system at the beginning of the implementation process:

1. We are all in this together; we will support each other through this change.
2. Mistakes are a given and growth is the goal.
3. We can show how we make a difference for students.

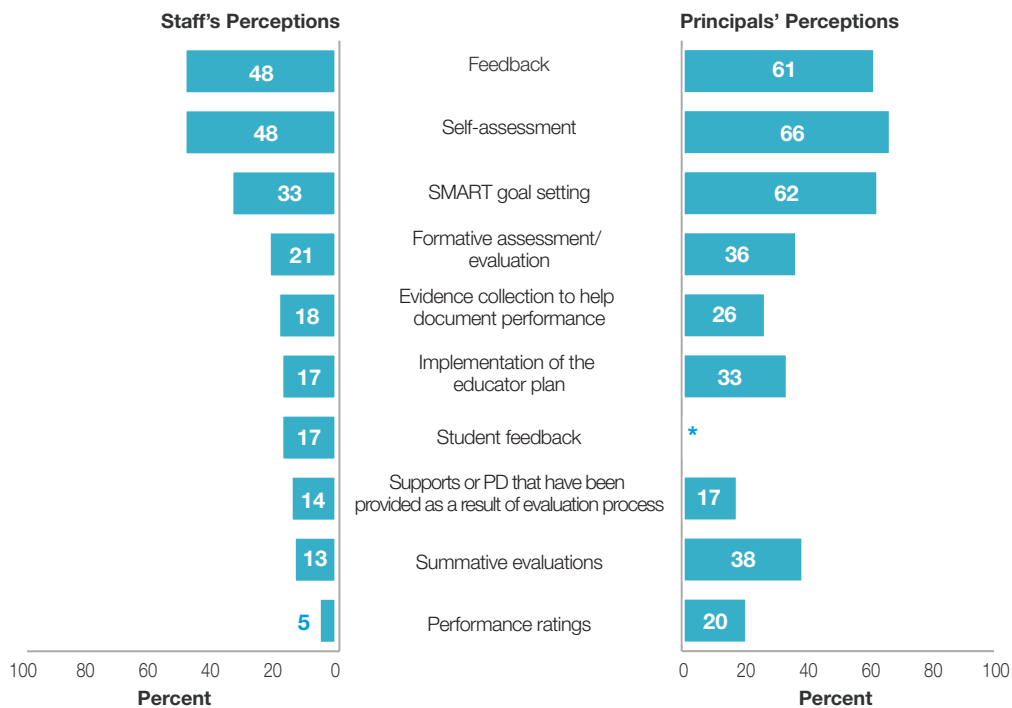
Educators at every level in this district reinforced these messages. District administrators and principals included these messages in superintendent communications, faculty meetings, and conversations between evaluators and educators. School leaders—both principals and teacher leaders—played an important role in communicating about the system to staff at the school level. Educators in this district generally felt supported by district leadership and comfortable learning from mistakes.

Experiences with Measures of Educator Practice

Surveyed staff had mixed perceptions about whether individual components of the EEF influenced practice (see Exhibit 2). Staff members were most likely to agree that self-assessment, SMART goal setting, and feedback from observations improve classroom practice.⁶ Interviewed staff members and principals valued the components that provided opportunities to collaborate and reflect on instructional practices. For example, regarding self-assessment, one teacher stated, “In any profession, it’s important to sit down and be self-reflective. To think about what I want to be as a professional and want to accomplish. . . . If you have that, it’s your rudder. You have a focus for the year.”

Not all components were perceived as valuable, however; educators considered evidence collection a distraction from classroom practice. Eighteen percent of surveyed school staff and 26 percent of principals perceived evidence collection as a tool for improving their practice (Exhibit 2). In addition, school staff commonly described the collection and submission of evidence (either online or in print) as too time consuming and reported inconsistencies across evaluators in the amount and types of evidence required.

Exhibit 2. Educators' Reports of Evaluation Framework Components That Improve Classroom Practice



*Item not asked on principal survey. Note: Number of total respondents = 42–564. Missing = 1–2. Margins of error range from 1 to 46 percentage points. Source: The Educator Evaluation Framework Staff Survey and the Educator Evaluation Framework Principal Survey. Survey questions: Please indicate which parts of the new evaluation process have led you to improve your classroom practices (Staff Survey). Please indicate which parts of the evaluation process from this or last year led you to improve your administrative and instructional leadership practices this school year (2014-15) (Principal Survey).

Surveyed school staff reported feeling positive about their own Summative Performance Ratings—84 percent of staff members reported that they were satisfied with the ratings they received in 2013–14. However, the majority of surveyed educators reported that the Summative Evaluation creates anxiety for teachers and staff (83 percent of school staff and 67 percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed). Staff members' anxiety might stem from concerns about the transparency and accuracy of the ratings and the process for determining them, as half of surveyed staff agreed or strongly agreed that the process for determining Summative Performance Ratings is transparent.

District-Determined Measures and Student Impact Ratings

Districts have made significant progress in developing and implementing DDMs, the measures of student learning, growth, and achievement that will inform Student Impact Ratings. As of the 2014–15 school year, the majority of surveyed school staff members reported implementing DDMs for their position (69 percent).

Surveyed educators reported limited understanding of DDMs and Student Impact Ratings, which may be due to educators' minimal experience with them. School staff were less likely than principals to report that they understood these components. For example, 46 percent of staff agreed that they understood how DDMs would be used this year as part of the educator evaluation system; 74 percent of principals agreed with this statement. Data from the case study districts suggested that educators' understanding of the EEF's components deepened over time—interviewed principals and school staff reported a solid understanding of and comfort with self-assessment, goal setting, and observations and feedback, components that all districts have been implementing for at least 2 years.⁷

Surveyed staff members and principals had mixed or negative opinions about the utility and fairness of DDMs. For example, 38 percent of school staff members and 49 percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed that DDMs are a valuable component of a robust educator evaluation system. However, in case study districts where staff members and principals were involved in the

Promising Strategies in Developing DDMs

Administrators in Attleboro, Reading, South Hadley Public Schools, and Whitman-Hanson Regional School District recognized the need to make DDM development a teacher-driven process to promote collaboration and teacher ownership. In these four districts, teachers worked collaboratively in grade-level or subject-area teams to develop and implement their DDMs. Reading, for example, established cross-school professional learning communities of teachers led by trained facilitators to guide DDM development and implementation. This type of strategy helped build teachers' ownership of the process by allowing them to develop DDMs that were relevant to their instructional practice.

identification and development process, they were more likely to perceive DDMs positively (see the Promising Strategies in Developing DDMs callout box).

Communication and support from district administrators about the purpose and uses of the DDMs (to support classroom practice) also fostered educator buy-in for them. In four case study districts, administrators stressed that the goal of DDMs was to support classroom practice in their communications to staff. Case study data also suggested that school staff members' perceptions of DDMs correlated with the level of support they felt they had received in using information from them. For example, three case study districts created or used existing structures to facilitate meaningful educator analysis of DDM data in grade-level and subject-area teams. Staff members who participated in these analysis groups appreciated the opportunity to make data-driven decisions with their colleagues.

DDMs are intended to inform educators' Student Impact Ratings. Given ESE's timeline extensions and alternative pathways to generating ratings of impact, most case study districts had not yet begun the work of determining how to implement the impact ratings.⁸ However, both survey data and case study interviews suggested that

educators remained anxious about how the Student Impact Rating will affect their evaluations and skeptical about its potential utility: 63 percent of surveyed school staff and 55 percent of surveyed principals agreed or strongly agreed that they were anxious about how the rating will affect their job security. In addition, the majority of staff and approximately half the principals did *not* agree that Student Impact Ratings would help improve student growth, learning, or achievement (68 percent of school staff and 48 percent of principals disagreed or strongly disagreed).

Evaluator Capacity

Under the EEF, school administrators are responsible for evaluating the performance of their staff while supporting their professional growth. To carry out these responsibilities accurately and effectively, evaluators must have adequate capacity. Evaluator capacity encompasses (1) the knowledge and skills to conduct fair and comprehensive evaluations, (2) adequate time to complete all evaluation activities, and (3) consistency of evaluators across schools, grades, and subjects.

Knowledge & skills. As in previous years, surveyed principals and staff generally agreed that evaluators had the appropriate knowledge and skills to conduct evaluations effectively. In 2014–15, 90 percent of surveyed principals reported feeling prepared to evaluate staff outside their content area expertise. A slight majority of evaluators indicated that they were comfortable conducting evaluations of noninstructional staff, such as counselors and nurses (57 percent). School staff agreed that their evaluators had adequate skills and knowledge to evaluate them. In addition, most staff agreed or strongly agreed that their evaluator’s assessment of their practice was fair and accurate (81 and 78 percent, respectively).

Time. Consistent with previous findings, evaluators faced time constraints in balancing evaluation responsibilities and other administrative duties. About one-quarter (28 percent) of surveyed principals agreed or strongly agreed that they have adequate time to evaluate the teachers in their schools, and 61 percent reported being responsible for evaluating 21 to 40 educators. (This is comparable

with prior years’ survey results, indicating that evaluator workload remains a persistent challenge.) One case study district implemented promising strategies for addressing evaluator workload. Additionally, during the 2014–15 school year, ESE created a Professional Learning Network of eight districts to address this challenge. For more information about the promising strategies and the Professional Learning Network, refer to the two callout boxes below.

Promising Strategies in Reducing Evaluator Workload

One case study district, Northbridge Public Schools, implemented two promising strategies for reducing evaluators’ workloads, reflecting its expectation that observations would be based on educator experience and need. First, Northbridge reduced the number of observations required in a single year for staff with Professional Teacher Status (PTS). Under the new guidance, evaluators are required to observe non-PTS school staff six times per year and PTS staff at least three times per year (reduced from six). Northbridge also identified a prioritized set of elements from the educator performance rubrics, reducing the number of pieces of evidence school staff are required to submit and evaluators are required to review. Evaluators can request additional evidence from school staff if needed.

Evaluator Capacity Professional Learning Network

Recognizing the need to support districts in building evaluator capacity, ESE worked with eight districts within a Professional Learning Network (PLN) during the 2014–15 school year to develop and implement new initiatives in this area of need. These districts met frequently throughout the year and conducted cross-site visits to learn from each other. ESE presented the PLN’s work at its annual Spring Convening and on its website to provide other districts with resources for their own work on building evaluator capacity. For more information, visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/pln/default.html>.

Consistency. Educators' perceptions of consistency among evaluators across schools, grades, and subjects was the other key challenge related to evaluator capacity. Less than half (42 percent) of surveyed school staff and 55 percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed that educators were evaluated consistently across grades, subjects, and schools. In a majority of case study districts, interviewed school staff reported considerable variation in system implementation across schools. They referred to differences in the number of observations that were conducted, the types of evidence required, and the kinds of feedback school staff received. However, several case study districts implemented promising strategies to develop and support evaluator consistency (see the Promising Strategies in Supporting Evaluator Consistency callout box below).

Promising Strategies in Supporting Evaluator Consistency

Several districts implemented promising strategies to support evaluator consistency. For example, Northbridge addressed consistency among evaluators by convening a group of administrators, union representatives, and school staff monthly to conduct small-group walk-throughs. These groups then discussed what they observed and what feedback they could provide, fostering common understanding of how to implement these components of the evaluation cycle.

Additionally, Revere used monthly administration meetings to provide evaluators with content-specific training in math and English language arts. Curriculum directors facilitated sessions on “what looked good, what feedback [they could] give, what assumptions [they could] not make, which led to [discussions about] what is rigor and what that sounds like.” These trainings incorporated instruction on the state Curriculum Frameworks in addition to sessions dedicated to watching short teacher videos and practicing feedback.

Educators seemed to question the fairness of the EEF because of perceived inconsistencies. As one teacher commented, “If it [the EEF] was consistent, it would be fair, but because there is no consistency, it’s not fair. People should not be able to ask who your evaluator is and then have a good guess that you are either fine or in trouble.”

Implications

Implementing a new and comprehensive educator evaluation system is enormously complicated. Some areas of EEF implementation have been smoother than others. More time and experience will most likely improve implementation, but at least three areas require concentrated time and attention for the still-new EEF to reach its full potential. These are the following:

- **Concentrating on clear and ongoing communication.** With much of the national conversation about educator evaluation systems focused on evaluation as an accountability mechanism, it may not be surprising that the EEF’s stated purpose of promoting educator growth is sometimes overshadowed. Districts might need additional support to underscore the EEF’s purpose as promoting educator growth. Districts’ plans for communication should serve two purposes: reinforcing the framework’s primary purpose and ensuring that all educators understand the EEF as a whole, including all individual components and how they complement each other. Communication strategies could include rebranding the EEF as focused on *growth* rather than *evaluation*.
- **Targeting communication on EEF components that educators have been less likely to find meaningful to their practice.** Educators had varied experiences with the individual components of the EEF. Although they found that some EEF components foster meaningful reflection, such as observations and feedback, they found others to be less supportive of reflection and growth, such as evidence collection and DDMs. These varied perceptions might preclude educators from viewing the entire evaluation framework as a coherent, continuous cycle. ESE and district leaders might redouble their respective communication efforts on these specific components, emphasizing how they can be used to inform practice.

- **Building evaluator capacity by reducing workload and ensuring consistency.** Evaluator workload under the new EEF has been a persistent challenge. The Commonwealth is not alone in this regard. Eleven states receiving Race to the Top funds also reported facing capacity challenges, especially related to managing principal workloads and evaluator consistency.⁹ Districts could consider expanding the number of observers for school staff (perhaps by including peer observers), decreasing the required number of observations for all educators if the number is significantly above the state minimum, and staggering evaluation cycles for consistently high-performing teachers. Additionally, to address consistency issues, districts could consider setting aside time on an ongoing basis for evaluators to engage in calibration activities such as conducting walk-throughs, analyzing anonymized feedback, and watching and rating videos of classroom instruction as a group.

Additional Resources on the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework

- For general information and guidance documents on the Educator Evaluation Framework: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/>
- For more information on the study and to access study resources and promising strategies briefs: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/resources/study/>

Notes

1. In Massachusetts, teachers are eligible for tenure status, termed Professional Teacher Status, after 3 years of teaching.
2. In the EEF, every educator receives two distinct ratings. The first rating, the Summative Performance Rating, primarily reflects the educator's individual practice. The second ratings is the Student Impact Rating, a determination of an educator's impact on student learning.
3. Thirty-four early-adopter districts began piloting new evaluation systems aligned with the EEF during the 2011–12 school year, and all Race to the Top districts (approximately 230) began implementing new systems during the 2012–13 school year. In 2013, Massachusetts introduced DDMs (District-Determined Measures) as measures of student learning, student growth, or achievement. DDMs are district assessments designed to inform educators' Student Impact Ratings.
4. The EEF is the regulatory framework that districts base their individual evaluation systems on.
5. During February and March 2015, the research team conducted a statewide survey of educators about their experiences and perceptions of the EEF. The team surveyed all principals and a random sample of school staff from 67 schools in 20 districts about EEF implementation. The weighted survey response rate was 65 percent for principals (44 respondents) and 51 percent for school staff (564 respondents). The research team also conducted in-depth case studies in a purposively selected sample of seven districts. In each case study district, the team interviewed district leaders, principals, and school staff members;

facilitated focus groups of school personnel; and examined extant documents. The research team conducted limited interviews in an eighth case study district, focused specifically on promising implementation strategies to support evaluator capacity. The research team selected case study districts that demonstrated promising practices with DDM implementation (four districts), evaluator calibration (two districts), and the use of data for human resources decisions (one district). The research team conducted telephone interviews in a sample of districts on human resources decision making and implementation of DDMs. Finally, the team collected artifacts of exemplary practices from two additional districts. Throughout this brief, three different terms are used to describe groups of educators: (1) *educators* refers to the entire educator population (district and school administrators, teachers, and school staff), (2) *principals* refers to school principals, and (3) *school staff* refers to teachers and noninstructional staff.

6. As of spring 2015, case study districts were not yet widely implementing student feedback measures.
7. The 2014-15 educator survey did not ask staff members to report on their understanding of the components of the system they have been implementing the longest (e.g., goal setting, observations and feedback).
8. See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=17857> for details on the alternative pathways.
9. GAO, Race to the Top: States Implementing Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems despite Challenges <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/657936.pdf>

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Silicon Valley

333 Ravenswood Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025
+1.650.859.2000
education@sri.com

Washington, D.C.

1100 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 2800
Arlington, VA 22209
+1.703.524.2053

www.sri.com/education