Introduction

On March 31, 2015, new requirements for the evaluation of teachers and principals were passed as part of the 2015-16 New York State Budget, which added a new section, 3012-d, to the existing education law. Under the new requirements, teachers will continue to be observed by their building administrators, but they will also be observed by impartial, independent evaluators.

TNTP supports the decision to include multiple observers in evaluation as one strategy to combat the inflated ratings distributions across the state and to provide additional, important feedback regarding teacher practice. In a study of the peer evaluator system in Hillsborough County, MET researchers found that that increasing the number of observers more than doubles the reliability of a teacher's rating compared to increasing the number of observations performed by the same observer.[i] If implemented well by districts, independent evaluators have the potential to provide an important, non-biased perspective on teacher performance that, when used in combination with principal observations, can lead to more accurate ratings.

This memo presents key considerations for the implementation of independent evaluators in teacher evaluation and examines five school districts which have implemented independent evaluators in recent years.

Key Considerations

The following considerations are based on the multiple evaluator systems we looked at in Washington DC, New Haven, Newark, Denver, and Hillsborough and best practices we have identified from designing and implementing teacher evaluation systems across the county. With the exception of Hillsborough, which was featured in the Gates MET study, to our knowledge, none of the other programs have been formally studied so as to provide conclusive evidence of their effectiveness. Because of this, and because of the many considerations listed below that are specific to local context, we recommend that the SED set some broad criteria, while leaving the majority of design and implementation decisions around independent evaluators to districts.

1. While the primary rationale for implementing an independent evaluator system may be to bolster the reliability of observation ratings, independent evaluators can also serve as an important source of content-specific feedback for teachers. In all five of the districts examined, administrators cite reliability as a key driver behind the formation of a peer/third party evaluator system. However, in at least three of the districts

a strong teacher does not mean that someone will automatically be a strong independent observer or deliver high-quality feedback.

3. The average caseload for an independent evaluator appears to be around 100 teachers or fewer depending on the level of support and development they are expected to provide to teachers. In three of the districts below, caseload of teachers per independent evaluator hovers around 100 or just below. Keeping

Case Studies

Please note that the information below was gathered via public documentation on each system, as available. Although we attempted to include the most recent information on each system, some public documents date back to the initial years of program implementation, and thus, may not include details that have changed over time.

DCPS's Master Educator Program

Background:

Hillsborough's Peer/Mentor Evaluation Program

Background: The Peer/Mentor Evaluation Program was implemented in Hillsborough Public Schools (HPS) in 2011 as part of a larger strategy to change the evaluation and compensation structure in the district and create a teacher career ladder. There are currently about 100-200 Peer and Mentor Evaluators working in HPS.

Role of the Evaluator: Peer Evaluators (PEs) and Mentor Evaluators (MEs) are former HPS teachers who have agreed to leave their schools to serve a two to three-year term as a full-time evaluator before returning to the classroom. PEs are assigned to experienced teachers in HPS based on aligned content-area and are responsible for conducting between two and eight formal observations (depending on the teacher's prior rating and level of performance) each year, along with pre- and post-observation conferences. MEs are generalists assigned to novice teachers in HPS and are responsible for meeting with new teachers weekly, providing targeted support, and conducting evaluations for novice teachers outside of those that they mentor directly. While PEs have a higher caseload of approximately 100 teachers, MEs carry a lighter caseload of 15 teachers to provide them with more time for thoughtful feedback and coaching.[xxi] Peer evaluations now comprise 25% of a teacher's overall rating.

Selection and Training: PEs and MEs are chosen by a selection committee from a pool of teachers with strong evaluations and at least five years of experience. The initial screening committee is comprised of a teacher, an administrator, a curriculum and/or instructional specialist, and the Director of the Peer/Mentor Evaluation Program, but there is a secondary committee consisting of a large and diverse group of teachers, administrators, and representatives from the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association to further narrow down the applicant pool prior to the interview stage. The selection process consists of submitting a resume, cover letter, and essay-style application and then if screened through, an in-person interview and simulation activity. Before assuming their new roles, PEs and MEs complete a six-hour prerequisite online course followed by a week of in-person training which includes rubric calibration and norming, classroom observations and practicing delivering teacher feedback. In the

[iii] DC Public Schools. (2015). Master educator position overview. Retrieved from
http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/About+DCPS/Career+Opportunities/Lead+Our+Schools/Master+Educators/Position+Overview
[iv] DC Public Schools. (2015). Application process. Retrieved from
http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/About+DCPS/Career+Opportunities/Lead+Our+Schools/Master+Educators/Application+Process
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