Best practices in the era of ever-changing teacher supervision and evaluation models

Exploring the role of rubrics, data-gathering, technology, professional learning and more in improving educator effectiveness

By Lisa Andrejko, Ed.D.
It was recently reported that as many as 88 percent of U.S. companies plan to rethink performance management systems to help their employees and their organizations realize their full potential. That alarming statistic indicates that K-12 education isn’t alone in performance management struggles — but due to ever-changing state and federal requirements, K-12’s challenges are unique.

For example, during the Race to the Top era, schools struggled to balance best practices in teacher supervision and regulated accountability with many state teacher evaluation initiatives requiring research-based evaluation rubrics and student data as part of their accountability planning. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the requirement of using student data was removed, and many states are rethinking supervision and evaluation processes to adapt.

Despite the many changing requirements, education leaders’ primary responsibility is to improve instructional quality between classrooms across a school system to affect student learning — compliance and other responsibilities must be secondary.

Unfortunately, education leaders too frequently default focus to compliance and policy requirements rather than focusing time and attention on best practices in evaluation and support, which foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Tony Davis, Ph.D., consulting director at McREL International and my frequent co-presenter, believes effective education leaders nurture a school and district culture that inspires teachers and staff to carry out the mission of increasing the odds of success for all students. He writes, “effective use and application of the processes, procedures and protocols of evidence-based evaluation systems strengthen the potential of schools to accomplish the goals and objectives related to the mission.”

Tony and I also agree that by leveraging the latest developments in evaluation system design, education leaders can guide teachers and staff along a pathway to improved performance. Such systems identify what teachers should know and do, rather than taking a deficit approach that attempts to identify all the ways teachers might struggle.

By restructuring performance management processes in these five ways, education leaders can align systems while sustaining district priorities and improving teacher effectiveness:

1. Casting a wide net when gathering evidence

2. Incorporating student achievement data as part of teacher evaluation

3. Adapting rubric-based effectiveness models

4. Improving documentation and management visibility and efficiency

5. Using data to inform professional learning
Casting a wide net when gathering evidence

There is a difference between teacher supervision and evaluation. Supervision is the everyday collaborative work between teachers and supervisors. It is formative in that adjustments, reflection, and focused conversations about improvements occur on an ongoing basis. Evaluation is that “snapshot” in time — usually yearly — that gathers information from the formative data to create a summative documentation of teaching proficiency.

They are related but distinct processes. One informs the other with an end goal of attaining proficiency in the domains or components.

Data which measure teacher effectiveness should include responses not only from the observer, but also from the student, the parent/guardian, and even self-reflection from the teacher.

Final summative evaluations are most effective when multiple sources of data inform the ratings. These data rely on classroom observations; however, observation alone is problematic — in thinking about the number of classes a teacher conducts over the course of a school year, there may be hundreds of opportunities for an observation. One, two, four or more observations are not enough of a sample to provide an accurate representation of what may actually occur every day in classrooms.

With performance management solutions designed specifically for K-12 education, such as TalentEd Perform, educational leaders can access an evidence table that provides visibility into all evidence collected throughout the supervision processes, recognizing that not all indicators are observed in one lesson.

Additionally, the multiple components of the rubric-based models are not always observable. For example, an observer certainly will not see parent communication, professional learning, or even appropriate assessments in a classroom observation. Teachers need to gather evidence of the “off stage” activities for their supervisors.

Data which measure teacher effectiveness should include responses not only from the observer, but also from the student, the parent/guardian, and even self-reflection from the teacher. These data can be gathered from surveys, from interactions at meetings, artifact portfolios, instructional audits, anecdotal records and more.

It would be a mistake to assume one evaluation method or supervision style fits all education professionals. Multiple processes, varied rubrics, on cycle/off cycle models and other methods of differentiation must be considered, and must all follow district protocol.
Incorporating student achievement data as part of teacher evaluation

As state departments of education submit their new ESSA implementation plans to the U.S. Department of Education, many are also revising their teacher evaluation systems.

Some states have chosen to continue to use student data as a percentage of final evaluation. Some have eliminated student data in their teacher evaluation plans. Still other states have determined student data be used in a modified manner, such as eliminating scores from high-stakes testing in favor of more curriculum-based assessments, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), or reflective practices in collaborative student achievement data analysis as part of teacher supervision.

Student data need to be part of teacher supervision. While rating teachers on student performance remains controversial, student growth at a minimum must be part of the teacher reflective practice. Student results are a piece of evidence that can contribute to a more holistic perspective of teacher performance, and inform effectiveness levels in the rubrics. For example, aggregated student learning growth scores and data can be easily uploaded into TalentEd Perform and utilized as part of the calculation process if desired.

In my former home state of Pennsylvania, half of a teacher’s evaluation includes evidence from domains and components, usually gathered from classroom observations and other methods of data gathering. The other half of the evaluation considers student achievement data from state and/or local testing, AP course scores, building level scores, SLOs and elective data.

Consider what has worked well for your school or state in the past and use that as a baseline for determining the most effective ways to incorporate student data in supervision and evaluation activities.
Adapting rubric-based effectiveness models

A positive carryover from Race to the Top in ESSA state plans is the use of rubric-based effectiveness models.

Some of the more prevalent models from McREL, Danielson, Stronge and Marzano serve as the research base for state and school district rubrics. These effectiveness models serve as the “standards” for teaching. However, due to the cumbersome nature of the models, few can be effectively used as designed.

In response to the hardships, schools, states and researchers seek ways to make the supervision and evaluation process easier, without compromising the fidelity of the research. Danielson and Marzano have suggested adaptations to using the multiple components in everyday supervision of teachers.2,3

McREL also recognizes the need for calculated flexibility, as Tony explains. “Evidence- or research-based rubric-driven evaluations systems serve to simplify the complex task of teaching by articulating a combination of knowledge, skills and dispositions. Educators must work on ways to adapt the processes, practices and procedures in a time efficient yet robust way to collect performance data, without compromising the fidelity of the research captured in the rubric.”

School leaders must pick the rubric that works best for them, and selecting technology solutions that meet their unique needs without entirely committing to one specific, cumbersome model can help improve performance management overall.

This is where TalentEd Perform’s agile, self-service model is really valuable. TalentEd Perform delivers evaluation tools that fit districts’ current models, and can be easily reconfigured to meet a district’s future needs as school leaders continue to improve upon practices, processes and procedures.
Improving documentation and management visibility and efficiency

One major challenge educators face is how to manage multiple sources of evaluation and supervision data to provide accurate and reliable evaluations. McREL advocates using multiple data sources to construct a meaningful profile of teacher performance, and Tony recognizes that without the right tools, “casting a wide net to collect, manage and report the data is quite exhausting.”

A sophisticated-yet-intuitive technology platform is key to managing and optimizing supervision and evaluation data collection, analysis and feedback. In addition, the platform must offer a way to track the varied processes, house the rubric, and store and retrieve artifacts and evidence supporting teacher performance.

For example, TalentEd Perform features a dynamic rubric tool, which allows districts to define their rubrics and use them as reference throughout the evaluation process, align both artifacts and observed evidence to their rubrics, quickly organize and manage scripting notes and provide clarity on how collected evidence maps to the district’s rubric so principals and teachers are confident that a well-informed judgement was made. Overall, this tool makes it easier for principals and teachers to manage, organize and align evidence to their district rubrics and improve confidence in evaluation outcomes.

Perform’s intuitive features empower expert organization, and the solution offers many state-specific supervision and reporting features to empower districts to easily demonstrate compliance without making that the focus of supervision and evaluation activities.
Using data to inform professional learning

The time and effort that evaluation and supervision takes must result in improved teaching and learning to make it worthwhile.

Education leaders use teacher effectiveness rubrics, SLOs, standardized assessment data, elective data, and more as evidence to make accurate-as-possible judgements about how teachers fulfill the performance expectations detailed in the rubric. The interpretation of the data and the results determine summary ratings, which should inform subsequent performance improvement plans.

Tailored professional learning can occur districtwide, at the building or campus level, and even individualized to a specific teacher based on analysis of teacher supervision and evaluation data. Administrators or teams of teachers can drill down to discover patterns, trends and areas for growth, then plan teacher learning accordingly.

Using rubrics to organize professional development makes it easy to map to a district’s alignment and use evaluation data to inform targeted professional development. Districts that use both TalentEd Perform and Thrive — TalentEd’s professional development management solution — find it easy to align competencies to professional learning opportunities.

Data-driven professional development can provide the platform for educators and administrators to continually evolve, grow and master their teaching and administrative skills throughout their entire career.

The mechanics of supervision and evaluation should never distract supervisors from achieving district goals. Focusing on compliance and management activities can jeopardize the holistic supervision of teaching as an art, which is why observers should not enter the process with a goal of “tagging evidence” or “completing forms.”

The goal of educator evaluation and supervision is always to advance student learning and teaching excellence. Processes are the means to the end, but not the end itself.

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3 The Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model. Beverly Carbaugh, Robert Marzano, Michael Toth. The Marzano Center, West Palm Beach, FL. March 2017

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