EVALUATING TEACHERS:

Kentucky's Approach to Creating a Successful System

JUNE 2013

When Kentucky education officials drafted the state's first application for federal Race to the Top funding, they included plans to develop a system for evaluating teacher performance. Kentucky did not receive a Race to the Top award during that initial phase, but officials decided to move ahead with the evaluation system as part of the state's overall program of improvement that included more rigorous academic standards, revamped assessments, better data collection and other initiatives.

As part of its review of issues related to effective teaching in Kentucky, the Team on Teacher Effectiveness of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence has taken a close look at the development of the state's teacher evaluation system, known as the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System, or PGES.

Evaluation is a key element to ensure educator effectiveness, but it is important to note that it is one part of a framework that includes additional areas of focus. These include teacher preparation, recruitment, professional standards, compensation, working conditions, professional learning and others.

This brief provides an overview of PGES, the elements involved in its development, the participation of various stakeholders and considerations as the system evolves in broader pilot stages.

OVERVIEW

According to the Kentucky Department of Education: "The PGES is designed to measure teacher and leader effectiveness and serve as a catalyst for professional growth and continuous improvement. …" It is a requirement of the state's flexibility waiver under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is also known in its most recent reauthorization as the No Child Left Behind waiver.

The development of PGES in Kentucky has been informed by insights from the Measures of Effective Teaching project, known as MET, which involves more than 3,000 teachers in seven urban districts nationwide. During a presentation to the Team, Andy Baxter, vice president for educator effectiveness of the Southern Regional Education Board, explained MET's systematic study of varied ways to measure teachers' impact on student learning, including:

- Student surveys focused on specifics of their classroom experience.

- Teacher observation using a variety of respected rubrics and new 360-degree video cameras to allow multiple observers to see the same instruction.

- Student academic growth data based on randomized classroom assignments, using both common standardized tests and assessments of higher-order thinking.

Reports from the MET research indicate that each of the approaches noted above has strengths and limitations, leading to calls for future evaluation systems to combine multiple measures of observation and evaluation. Specific lessons learned from the three-year MET project included:[1]

- Student perception surveys and classroom observations can provide meaningful feedback to teachers. They also can help system leaders prioritize their investments in professional development to target the biggest gaps between the teachers' actual practice and the expectations for effective teaching.

- Implementing specific procedures in evaluation systems can increase trust in the data and the results. These include rigorous training and certification of observers and, in the case of student surveys, the assurance of student confidentiality.

- Each measure adds something of value. Classroom observations provide rich feedback on practice. Student perception surveys provide a reliable indicator of the learning environment and give voice to the intended beneficiaries of instruction. Student learning gains (adjusted to account for differences among students) can help identify groups of teachers who, by virtue of their instruction, are helping students learn more.

- A balanced approach is most sensible when assigning weights to form a composite measure. Compared with schemes that heavily weight one measure, those that assign 33 percent to 50 percent of the weight to student achievement gains achieve more consistency, avoid the risk of encouraging too narrow a focus on any one aspect of teaching, and can support a broader range of learning objectives than measured by a single test.

- There is great potential in using video for teacher feedback and for the training and assessment of observers. The advances made in this technology have been significant, resulting in lower costs, greater ease of use and better quality.

PGES emphasizes several of these lessons, including the use of multiple measures, noting that "teaching is too complex for any single measure of performance to capture it accurately." The Kentucky system includes:

- Observation – A principal is trained and certified to objectively identify effective teaching and document a teacher's professional practice on multiple occasions, both formally and informally, to provide high-quality feedback that can be used to improve practice.

- Peer Observation – A trained colleague observes and documents another teacher's professional practice to increase observation reliability and provide supportive and constructive feedback that can be used to improve practice.

- Reflection – A teacher performs critical self-examination of practice on a regular basis to deepen knowledge, expand a repertoire of skills and incorporate findings to improve practice.

- Professional Growth – A teacher engages in professional growth planning specific to individual needs based on feedback and data from multiple sources and self-reflection.

- Student Growth – The impact a teacher has on a student or set of students as measured by multiple sources of data over time.

- Student Voice – Student perception surveys provide a reliable indicator of the learning environment and give voice to the intended beneficiaries of instruction.

The Kentucky Department of Education also notes that "a common language and understanding of effective teaching" is the foundation of the PGES. To ensure this commonality, the state adopted the 2011 Framework for Teaching based on the work of Charlotte Danielson. The indicators address four domains of practice: (1) planning and preparation, (2) classroom environment, (3) instructional duties and (4) professional responsibilities; student growth is added as a fifth domain for state use.

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

As the design of the system began, the state department proactively sought the participation and input of stakeholders through steering committees for teachers and principals. The committees provided guidance on the development and recommendations for deployment of the PGES.

Members included the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, Kentucky School Boards Association, Kentucky Education Association, Jefferson County Teachers Association, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, Education Professional Standards Board, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and colleges and universities.

The result was more than two dozen draft recommendations, ranging from training and certification for observers to the need for teachers to establish student growth goals. These recommendations will be considered by the Kentucky Board of Education for inclusion in a statewide regulation.

TIMELINE

The schedule for full implementation of the evaluation system has been intentionally deliberate, allowing time for multiple field tests, a statewide pilot, educator feedback and evaluation. "The timeline allows the state to learn from national research and other states while gaining Kentucky-specific research," noted KDE Associate Commissioner Felicia Cumings Smith. "Diffusion of a strategy for educator effectiveness has created a group of districts who become the advocates for this work given their 'on the ground' implementation experience."

Field tests of the system have been underway in 54 districts during the 2012-13 school year; the state department is using a web-based data collection system to gather information from participating teachers and administrators. The Prichard Committee's Team heard from six field-test participants during its review of the PGES. The reviews were positive.
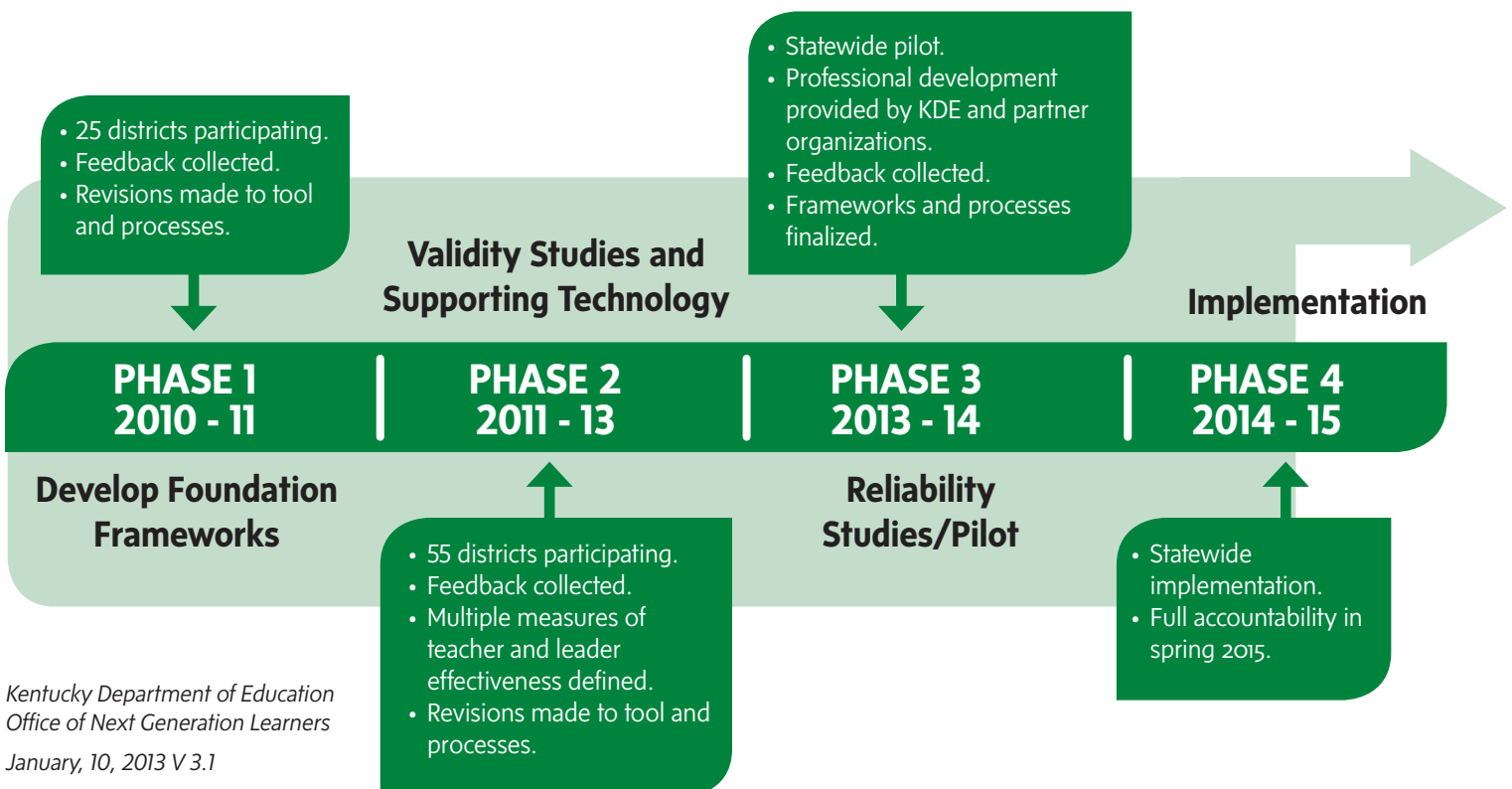
Brandy Beasley, an Emma B. Ward Elementary teacher in Anderson County, said the system "helps me see strengths and see weaknesses leading into my professional growth plan." Her principal, Amanda Ellis, has found that the new system "is pushing me to be more objective and more specific" and make observations that reflect "not what I like, but what's effective for students."

East Jessamine High School principal Janet Granada described the observation rubric as "phenomenal" and said it "shows even our teacher of the year how to improve." Teachers Natalie Allen and Michelle Purcell agreed and shared examples of how they have already improved their own work with students. Jessamine Superintendent Lu Young pushed for attention to strengthening teachers rather than just measuring their current work. "The rocket science" part of the process will be "using the data for professional development that is differentiated for each teacher," she noted.

Mary Ann Blankenship, executive director of the Kentucky Education Association and a member of the teacher steering committee, notes several strong elements in the process, including the state's deliberate planning, development and implementation timeline, which included stakeholder input. The field tests and statewide pilots mean that, by the time the system is fully implemented, some teachers will already have experience with it.

"Kentucky is really working hard to do this right," Blankenship said. "The part that keeps me awake at night is how we provide, as a state and as an organization, sufficient levels of training for both evaluators and teachers in what the system is, how it operates and how to use it" to achieve teacher effectiveness.

Timeline for Deployment of the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System

- 25 districts participating.
- Feedback collected.
- Revisions made to tool and processes.

Validity Studies and Supporting Technology

- Statewide pilot.
- Professional development provided by KDE and partner organizations.
- Feedback collected.
- Frameworks and processes finalized.

Implementation

| **PHASE 1** 2010 - 11 | **PHASE 2** 2011 - 13 | **PHASE 3** 2013 - 14 | **PHASE 4** 2014 - 15 |

Develop Foundation Frameworks

Reliability Studies/Pilot

- 55 districts participating.
- Feedback collected.
- Multiple measures of teacher and leader effectiveness defined.
- Revisions made to tool and processes.

- Statewide implementation.
- Full accountability in spring 2015.

Kentucky Department of Education
Office of Next Generation Learners

January, 10, 2013 V 3.1

The complexity of the system requires "significant levels of skill and knowledge and attitudes that are different from what both administrators and teachers have generally had, so my concern with this is really how we do it right when we take it to scale."

The system will be piloted statewide in 2013-14 when at least 10 percent of the schools in each district are to implement PGES. The system will be fully implemented statewide in 2014-15 with accountability in 2015. At that time, districts will report their percent of effective and accomplished teachers and the percent of their effective and accomplished principals.

Meanwhile, the 2013 Kentucky General Assembly enacted legislation clearing the way for the evaluation system to be used for all certified personnel in the 2014-15 school year, with a limited option for districts to use alternative models if they can show that their designs have equal or greater rigor.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

As the state moves toward full implementation of the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System, the Prichard Committee's Team on Teacher Effectiveness has identified several issues that it believes warrant further inquiry.

The process for the design and implementation of the system has allowed time for field tests and pilots, giving some teachers an opportunity to understand its provisions before full implementation statewide. However, most teachers cannot be expected to understand the specific elements of the system and how they will be administered.

- **What steps can be taken to inform and help educators understand and use the system in the best ways to improve their teaching?**

Although student growth has been identified as part of the framework the state is using as the basis of the system, it is unclear how that indicator will be incorporated into teachers' evaluations. Student growth measures must be a "significant" portion of teacher evaluation under the state's ESEA waiver, and it is included in legislation enacted in 2013, but Kentucky has yet to define what student growth measures will be used and how "significant" will be defined.

This is particularly important since only about 30 percent of Kentucky teachers have students who are tested under the state assessment system, one source of student growth data.

- **Should the measurement of student growth be consistent for all teachers? If so, what instrument or process should be adopted?**

- **How will student-growth data be incorporated into the overall evaluation system?**

The MET project has found value in the use of student surveys as part of a teacher evaluation system, and all Kentucky districts will be administering student voice surveys during the statewide pilot.

- **How should the results of student surveys be incorporated into the evaluation of teacher effectiveness under Kentucky's Professional Growth and Effectiveness System?**

The Teacher Team is also looking at issues related to teacher pay, raising possible questions about the relationship between effectiveness evaluations and compensation.

- **Should an evaluation of teacher effectiveness be included as one of multiple factors to determine teacher compensation?**

[1]*Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching: Culminating Findings from the MET Project's Three-Year Study,* Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, January 2013.

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This issue brief is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.