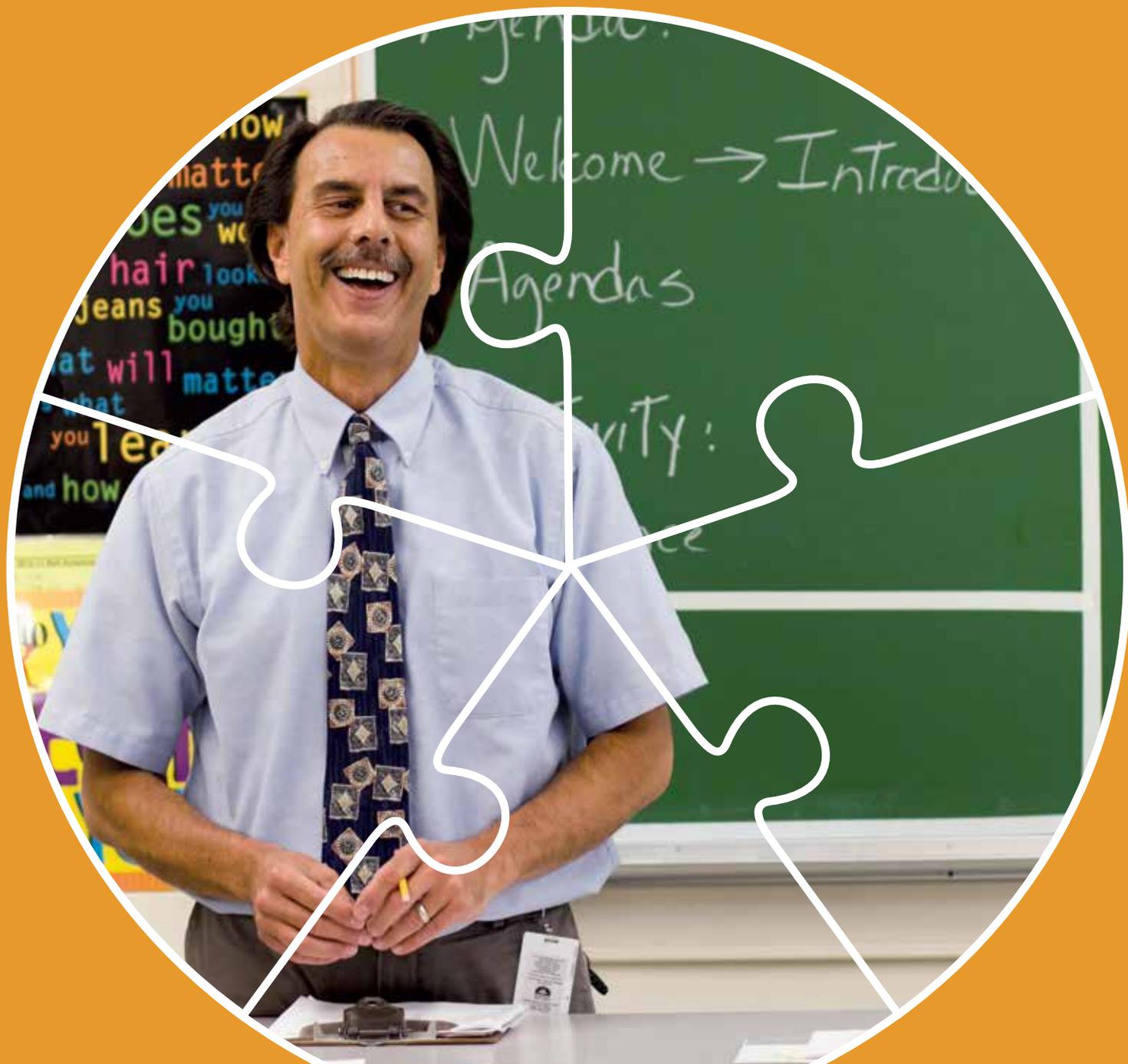


# Giving Teachers the Feedback and Support They Deserve



## Five Essential Practices

Education First, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is pleased to release this report as part of a series focused on teacher effectiveness titled *Evaluation & Support: Strategies for Success*. The series comprises an introduction and six briefs that provide district and state leaders with practical advice for implementing high-quality evaluation systems. These briefs include:

- [Introductory Brief](#)
- [Classroom Observations](#)
- [Student Surveys](#)
- [Student Learning Objectives \(SLOs\)](#)
- [Professional Learning and Support](#)
- [Communications and Engagement](#)
- [Using Data from Multiple Measures](#)

To access this report and the executive summary, please visit [www.education-first.com/teacher-and-school-leader-effectiveness-resources](http://www.education-first.com/teacher-and-school-leader-effectiveness-resources).



Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy consulting firm with unique and deep expertise in education improvement and reform issues. Education First strives to improve public education by helping leaders to innovate, think bigger and achieve more on behalf of students. Our work gives our clients—educators, policymakers, nonprofits and funders—greater knowledge and stronger skills to succeed. We helped design new teacher evaluation systems for school districts and states, including Baltimore, Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nashville, Ohio and Tennessee. We worked closely with Race to the Top states, districts and their educators on many of their most challenging evaluation implementation issues, including educator engagement, communications, principal capacity, data analytics and rater accuracy.



Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Susan Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Why Feedback and Support?	2
The Five Essential Practices	4
Essential Practice 1: Promote a Culture of Feedback	5
Essential Practice 2: Develop Your Team	9
Essential Practice 3: Give Them the Right Tools	12
Essential Practice 4: Offer Teachers Options	15
Essential Practice 5: Use Technology Well	19
Putting the Five Essential Practices Together	22
Appendix	25
Acknowledgments	31

# Why Feedback and Support?

Your district's improved evaluation model is in place and evaluation ratings are in. The quality of observations is improving all the time. Teachers and principals have access to increasingly powerful data from observations and walkthroughs. What your district does next has the potential to propel teaching to new heights. Evaluation systems that include high-quality, actionable feedback help teachers realize their potential. These systems have the power to elevate the level of teaching in every classroom in your district. A good evaluation model alone will not get you there. Giving teachers the feedback and support they deserve is what will turn well-meaning evaluation systems into systems of improvement that can be sustained over time.

Over the past four years, 30 states have changed how they evaluate teachers; another 14 states are slated to do so in the next two years.<sup>1</sup> States and districts have focused their efforts on getting the language of their observation rubrics right, improving the reliability and consistency of observations, developing student growth measures, using the right combination of measures, and assigning the right weights to those measures. As a result of this initial focus, we have more—and increasingly better—data about teaching practice than ever.

As many of those states are learning, simply developing new evaluation tools is not enough. To raise student achievement and improve practice, states and districts must now commit the resources needed to implement those tools with fidelity. That means shifting their attention to the end goal of evaluation systems: giving teachers the feedback and support that will help them improve their instructional practice and therefore improve student outcomes.

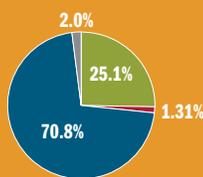
This report uses the experience of five districts to explore what that commitment and these shifts look like in practice.

<sup>1</sup> NCTQ, "State-by-State Evaluation Timeline Briefs," October 2014. Available at [http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/Evaluation\\_Timeline\\_Brief\\_Overview](http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/Evaluation_Timeline_Brief_Overview).

## SITE VISIT DISTRICTS AT A GLANCE

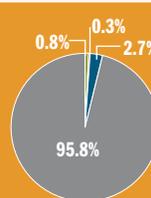
### ALDINE, TX

- Suburban (Houston)
- 78 schools
- 4,200 teachers
- 67,450 students
- 84.3% economically disadvantaged



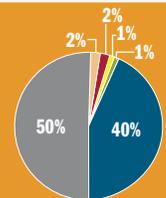
### GREENE COUNTY, TN

- Rural (northeast TN)
- 16 schools
- 469 teachers
- 7,300 students
- 62.3% economically disadvantaged



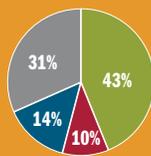
### SALEM-KEIZER, OR

- Suburban (Portland)
- 65 schools
- 2,156 teachers
- 41,099 students
- 59% economically disadvantaged



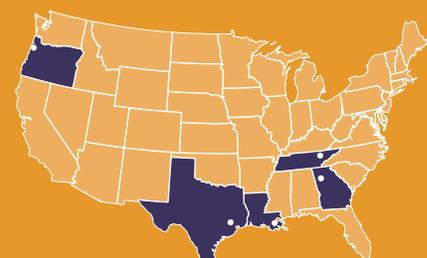
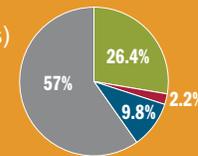
### FULTON COUNTY, GA

- Urban (Atlanta)
- 101 schools
- 6,800 teachers
- 96,297 students
- 45.8% economically disadvantaged



### ST. BERNARD PARISH, LA

- Suburban (New Orleans)
- 11 schools
- 446 teachers
- 6,285 students
- 76.2% economically disadvantaged



**KEY** African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, White

If they miss this opportunity to implement well and provide thoughtful feedback, leaders can expect a high level of anxiety to persist among teachers who sense that evaluation systems are intended to weed them out rather than help them grow. And the encouraging progress to strengthen the teaching profession may stagnate as teachers are left to make their own sense of the evaluation ratings they receive. But if teachers consistently receive feedback that helps improve their instruction, many more will value and support evaluation systems and feel ownership of their results.

What will it take to pivot in the right direction? Evaluation systems are providing teachers, principals, districts and states with increasingly powerful data about instructional practice and student outcomes. Those data—from summative evaluations, informal walkthroughs, classroom observations and/or ongoing coaching—have the power to transform what happens in classrooms to help teachers get better results for students, *but only if the information is put to good use.*

The theory of action is simple. Use multiple measures to evaluate performance. Analyze the data. Use the information to provide relevant, actionable feedback and support. Use the feedback and support to improve teaching practice. Improved instruction, in turn, will lead to improved student outcomes.

While the theory may be simple, implementation is anything but. It requires significant investments of people and time—and sustained leadership at every level. Everybody has a role. *Principals* must know which areas of growth to focus on and how to help teachers improve in those areas. *Teachers* must know what improvement looks like and what resources they can access to help them improve. *Teacher leaders* must facilitate learning for individual teachers and support the collaboration of groups of teachers as they pursue a shared learning agenda. *District leaders* must use the data on trends in teacher performance across the district to inform and improve professional learning opportunities for teachers and to support principals whose teachers do not show improvement.

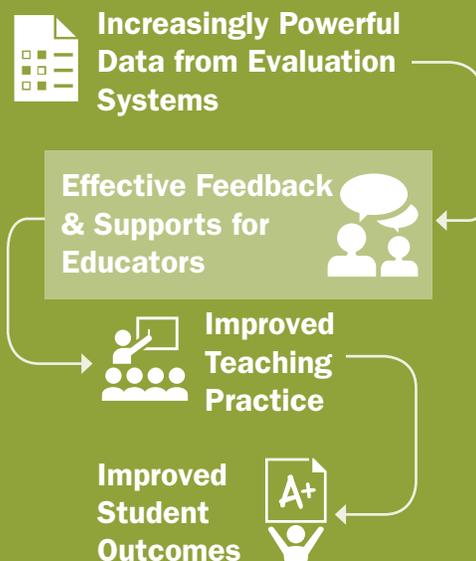
This report features emerging success stories of new educator evaluation and support systems that are improving educator effectiveness and student outcomes. It features districts where teachers are often embracing these evaluation and support systems. Teachers are critical partners in these efforts, and their engagement is necessary to making any evaluation and support system work. And the report showcases districts where the quality of feedback and support provided to teachers appears to be driving significant changes in instructional improvement and positive growth in student outcomes.

This report highlights districts that are not regularly in the spotlight but whose practices and the lessons learned through implementation are worth sharing more broadly. As described in the graphic on page 2, the districts are diverse and representative in geography, size, and student population. They are urban, suburban and rural, serving between 6,000 and 97,000 students.

The Education First team visited these districts in October and November 2014 to learn how they use data from classroom observations and evaluations to personalize professional learning for their teachers. We co-observed in classrooms and spoke with teachers, principals, instructional coaches and district leaders. We sat in on professional learning sessions with teachers and principals. We learned a great deal about the possibilities for delivering high-quality feedback and support to teachers, as well as some of the outstanding challenges.

## HOW IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

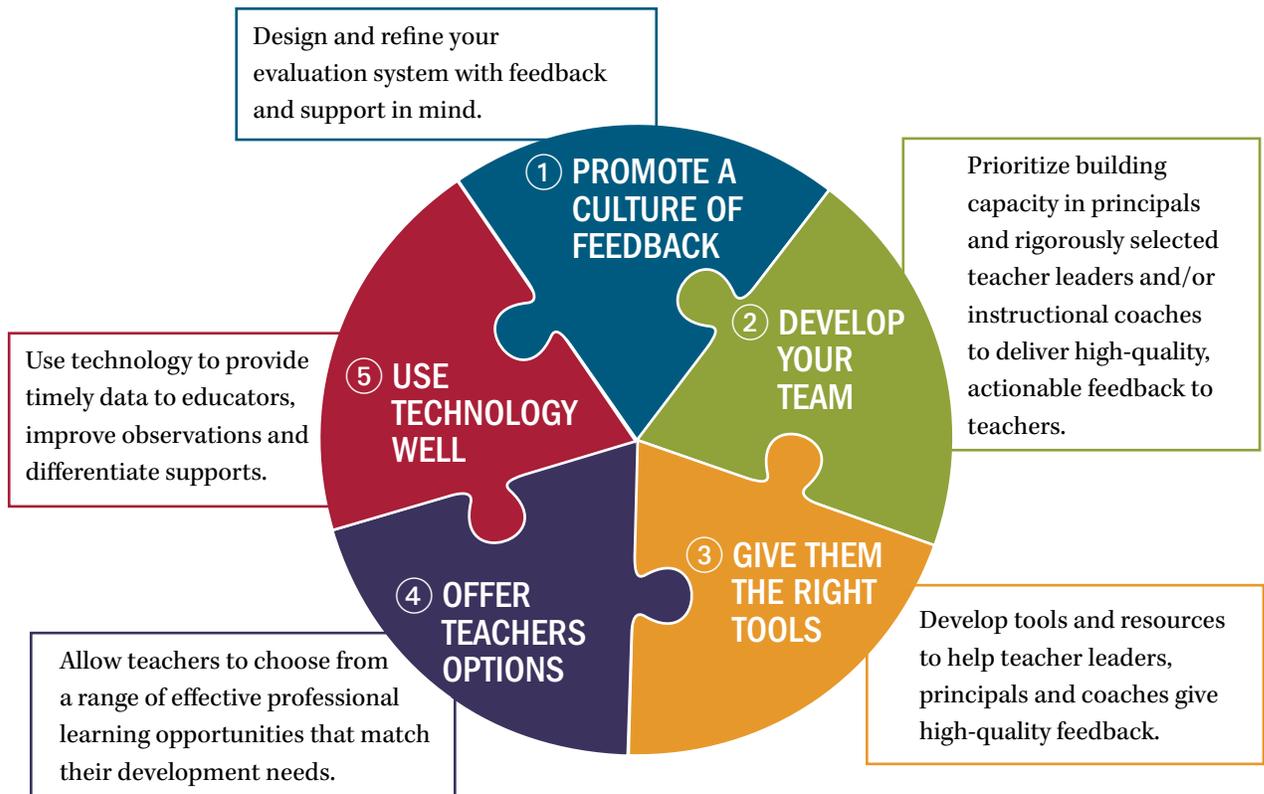
*Getting Feedback and Supports Right Is the Key*



**The theory of action is simple. Use multiple measures to evaluate performance. Analyze the data. Use the information to provide relevant, actionable feedback and support. Use the feedback and support to improve teaching practice. Improved instruction, in turn, will lead to improved student outcomes.**

## The Five Essential Practices

During the district visits, we identified five essential practices that help ensure that teachers receive effective feedback and support from their evaluation systems:



Few districts will read this report and find they have put all of these practices in place. This should not be surprising since it takes a lot of hard work to implement these practices well. Ultimately, districts will need to implement *all five* of these elements to build a robust system of feedback and support that maximizes impact on teachers and students. But don't make the perfect the enemy of the good. Our advice to district leaders: Start where you are. Compare your own evaluation and support systems to this list of essential practices, and use this report as a guide to prioritize next steps.

District leaders will need to adapt these practices to their own context. To give readers a sense of the variety of ways that each practice might be implemented, we have included several examples for each practice.

These practices will not strike readers as particularly new or surprising. But each of these five districts is unique because of the people, time and funding they have invested to implement these practices well. This report describes the “why” and the “how” of these five practices and provides a roadmap for districts that want to prioritize or improve upon one or more of them.

# Essential Practice ①

Design and refine your evaluation system with feedback and support in mind.

One of the major improvements of new evaluation systems is that they are organized around new instructional frameworks that offer clearer and more specific expectations for teaching practice and student outcomes. The power of these newer systems is their focus on teacher growth. The more that school leaders use these frameworks to provide regular, ongoing feedback to all teachers, and to help teachers at all performance levels to improve, the more normal it will feel for teachers to get feedback and use it to improve their practice.

Aldine Independent School District's evaluation system, INVEST, has had a positive impact on educators. "INVEST has changed the culture of feedback at my school," said one Aldine principal. "It used to be that you only got called into the principal's office when you were a struggling teacher. Now everybody has one-on-one conversations with me about performance. It took some time to overcome this ingrained idea that only the lowest performers come to my office to talk about what's working and what can be improved."

## Lessons from Leading Districts

### Prioritize feedback and support to influence how school leaders deliver—and teachers receive—feedback.

One of the clearest messages from educators and district staff alike is that the superintendent sets the vision and tone for evaluation system implementation at the district level. How the evaluation system will be implemented by principals and perceived by teachers depends on how the superintendent communicates about its purpose and importance. And whether teachers receive high-quality feedback as a result of the evaluation depends on whether and how a superintendent chooses to disseminate

resources to support this effort. In three districts—**St. Bernard Parish Public Schools**, **Salem-Keizer Public Schools** and **Greene County Schools**—teachers, school leaders and district staff all said that their superintendents were why teachers were receiving high-quality feedback and support. "What has made this a success is the attitude and vision of our superintendent," said one **Greene County** principal. "She has had a positive 'we can' attitude, and that has made all the difference."

In addition to communicating about the importance of high-quality feedback and giving instructional leaders training, tools and resources to successfully incorporate it into their practice, district leaders should hold principals accountable for the quality of feedback they give their teachers. This is important so that the district can provide additional supports to principals when needed. There are many ways districts can do this. In **Greene County**, the superintendent and other district leaders conduct co-observations with principals and give them feedback on the feedback they give teachers. Sometimes they model for principals what that feedback should look like.

District leaders also cited the importance of involving educators in the design of the new evaluation system and ensuring that all educators understand the components of the evaluation system and how they work. In **Aldine**, the district has been working with Operation Public Education (OPE), based at the University of Pennsylvania, to redesign its evaluation system. OPE introduced district leaders to external experts who have been helping with the system redesign. With the help of Lynn Sawyer from the Danielson Group, Aldine created a working group

---

"It used to be that you only got called into the principal's office when you were a struggling teacher. Now everybody has one-on-one conversations with me about performance."

---

comprising principals and teachers from 17 schools to “go from an instrument to a system.” The district had already decided to adopt the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching, so it went deep to create a shared understanding of what the framework says.

Likewise, Aldine partnered with John Schacter from the Learning Growth Network to design the student growth portion of the evaluation and ensured that every Aldine educator understands—and passes a test on—how it is calculated. Sawyer and Schacter also have engaged all principals and assistant principals in learning about the framework and student growth percentiles. This early and ongoing effort to conduct such serious engagement of educators seems to have paid off in many ways, the most striking of which is the remarkable consistency with which Aldine educators and district leaders describe the intention behind and the promise of INVEST.

### Create multiple opportunities throughout the year for teachers to engage in feedback conversations.

The five featured districts offer multiple opportunities for observation, feedback and collaboration. Classroom observations by school and district leaders are so routine that teachers and students have become used to them and do not interrupt their lesson when an observer walks in the classroom. For example:

- **St. Bernard Parish and Fulton County Schools** principals conduct frequent quick walkthroughs of their teachers’ classrooms to observe curriculum implementation. These provide valuable opportunities for principals to give teachers brief, informal feedback between formal observations. This ongoing feedback is important for teachers to sustain their growth and development and helps build a supportive culture where feedback is normal and expected.
- Pre- and/or post-observation conferences are required in all five districts, although not for every observation, which helps address the time challenge. In **Aldine, Salem-Keizer** and **Fulton County**, teachers and principals cited post-observation conferences as the most powerful support for teachers. One teacher in **Salem-Keizer** said, “Previously, my evaluation was more of a checklist with positive personal comments. The conversation I have now is specific and positive. There is much more conversation, not just a pat on the back. LEGENDS (Licensed

Educator Growth, Evaluation, and Development System) doesn’t give you a feel-good fuzzy feeling, but you have specific ways to improve. I appreciate the specific things, although the pat on the back is nice.” As a result of these conversations, said a Salem-Keizer principal, “we have an evaluation system that is more about sitting side by side and improving your craft.” The pre-conference is another helpful tool that gives teachers the opportunity to explain to principals what they will see in the formal observation and to ask the principal for targeted feedback on a specific aspect of the lesson. The pre-conference also gives teachers—particularly those who are new—the chance to develop their planning skills in collaboration with their principal.

“Previously, my evaluation was more of a checklist with positive personal comments. The conversation I have now is specific and positive.”





- Student surveys provide an additional means of feedback for teachers in **Fulton County**. It is up to principals to decide how they want to incorporate these tools. Some principals decide to give surveys once a year, while others use them more frequently. These surveys help inform the teachers' final ratings and provide another form of feedback to help teachers improve their practice.
- In **Aldine**, observations using video from in-classroom panoramic cameras called Lucy cameras are a powerful input. Teachers use videos they capture with the Lucy camera to assess their own practice, and they share the video with principals to support ongoing development conversations (see Essential Practice 5).

### Align expectations for teacher performance and student outcomes.

In virtually all new evaluation systems, teachers are being held accountable for student outcomes, which often represent a significant portion of a teacher's final evaluation rating. Expectations for teacher performance should align with those for student outcomes. In other words, the instructional framework that a principal uses to observe teacher performance should describe instructional practices that lead to improved student outcomes, as opposed to those that have little or even a negative relationship to student outcomes. A district should then expect to see that teachers who are able to achieve above-average growth in student outcomes also earn above-average ratings on classroom observations.

**“We’re trying to make principals instructional leaders instead of task leaders.”**

In the early days of these new evaluation, feedback and support systems, discrepancies are common, with observation ratings tending to be much higher than student growth. These five districts are working to close those gaps. For example:

- In **St. Bernard Parish**, district leaders ensure that the district curriculum and evaluation system are in alignment and that principals are instructional experts in their school buildings. “We’re trying to make principals instructional leaders instead of task leaders,” said one district staff member. “The way we decided to face that challenge was to show them what they’re supposed to see in the first 30 minutes of a lesson, and pop in for five minutes to check. We gave them the tools to do that. That was a challenge we decided to undertake this year so teachers could look at them as curriculum leaders.”
- In **Greene County**, the county school board created a set of districtwide student outcome goals and competencies that describe the teacher actions that will produce them. Teachers and principals incorporate these competencies and goals into their individual PLPs every year. The competencies also are aligned with the state Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model rubric, so a teacher's formal evaluation helps inform the PLP process and identification of competencies for growth. At the district level, leaders examine observation and student growth data at each school and work with principals when they are out of alignment.





## Essential Practice ②

**Prioritize building capacity in principals and rigorously selected teacher leaders and/or instructional coaches to deliver high-quality, actionable feedback to teachers.**

The success of any evaluation and support system completely depends on the skills and talents of those implementing it. Instructional leaders—including principals, instructional coaches and teacher leaders—who are highly skilled at assessing teacher performance and giving clear and actionable feedback are the linchpin. Not surprisingly, investing in their skill development is a top priority for leaders in the five featured districts.

District leaders defined clear roles for instructional leaders to observe teachers and provided them with feedback and resources to improve. They invested time and resources to help instructional leaders provide better feedback to their teachers. That meant raising expectations for instructional leaders to know good teaching when they see it, identify the areas of strength and most important areas for growth, and communicate to teachers how they can continue to hone their craft. The districts we visited also stressed the importance of ensuring that evaluators were calibrated. They did this through ongoing professional learning where they regularly reinforced evaluators were working from a common set of expectations.

### Lessons from Leading Districts

#### Identify which leaders will be evaluating and/or providing feedback.

---

Districts can begin this work by identifying who is currently well-positioned to provide teachers with high-quality feedback. In most districts with evaluation and support systems, principals are an obvious starting point. Most evaluation and support systems require that principals regularly observe their teachers and assess their performance using a rubric to assign ratings in various categories. For many principals, this has drastically shifted their role from spending time on many tasks to focusing on one major task: providing teachers with feedback and support. Giving better feedback to teachers is a natural extension of the work they are already doing as evaluators and observers.

Some districts may have other personnel who are authorized to observe and evaluate teachers. Assistant principals, department chairs or master educators often can increase the capacity of a school's leadership team, particularly in high schools. These staff members, like principals, are in an excellent position to provide high-quality feedback to teachers.

Some districts staff schools with additional instructional leaders, such as instructional coaches, teacher leaders or mentors. These staff may not be authorized to evaluate teachers, but they can support teacher development at the school level. They might observe teachers, provide them with instructional support, and identify curricular or instructional resources for their colleagues, among other priorities. Usually, these staff members are veteran teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness in their own classrooms and have been tapped to serve as leaders because of their instructional expertise.

These expanded roles offer numerous benefits to school leaders and teachers. First, they add capacity so principals can spend more time giving high-quality feedback rather than trying to complete a large number of observations

---

**Giving better feedback to teachers is a natural extension of the work principals are already doing as evaluators and observers.**

---

## ALDINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Aldine Independent School District is a suburban district located outside of Houston, Texas. Dr. Wanda Bamberg, the superintendent, joined Aldine more than 30 years ago as a teacher. Aldine won the Broad prize in 2009, which is awarded to urban districts that have made significant progress to close student achievement gaps. The district also has been the subject of two *Harvard Business Review* case studies, which examine the system's efforts to sustain and accelerate the significant increases in student performance.

During the 2011–12 school year, Aldine developed its teacher evaluation system (INVEST) to differentiate teacher performance and maximize teacher professional growth. INVEST has two measures: observation of teaching practices, using a performance rubric based on Charlotte Danielson's [Framework for Teaching](#), and student growth, measured by Aldine's Growth Model for teachers in tested grades and subjects and by student growth objectives for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects. Aldine includes both of these measures separately, rather than combining them, in a teacher's overall rating.

Aldine has focused on principals as the key lever to improve teaching practice. The system invested a significant amount of time and effort to help principals deliver high-quality feedback to teachers. INVEST requires principals to use data to provide feedback to teachers. In the first six to eight weeks of school, principals and teachers engage in conferences using data from the previous year, set goals for professional growth that are aligned with the instructional framework and create action plans for achieving the goals. After goal-setting is complete, principals begin conducting formal observations and then follow up with post-conferences. When principals conduct subsequent walkthroughs, they use the performance rubric and refer back to the teachers' goals. Principals then provide differentiated school-based support depending on what they observe during the walkthroughs and formal observations. District-level supports for teachers include online professional learning modules through Teachscape Learn that align with the Danielson framework and access to panoramic, in-classroom cameras that teachers can use to observe their own teaching.

District leaders also have taken great care to ensure clear and consistent messaging about the importance of INVEST's role in supporting teacher growth, resulting in a significant level of districtwide coherence about the role of the evaluation and support system.

on their own. Second, these observers are often better positioned to give high-quality feedback because they are (or recently were) excellent teachers themselves. For example:

- **St. Bernard Parish** has hired at least one full-time instructional coach for every school building (and several for each of its high schools). Teachers say they lean on their instructional coaches more than anyone at their school or district office for support, and the advice they receive from their instructional coaches consistently helps them improve their practice. "I like that they'll sit in for 30–45 minutes," said one high school teacher. "They leave the sticky note with one thing you did really well and one thing you can change. We meet during planning period where they share feedback. Instructional coaches know a lot of practices." Another noted that he had "seen a huge difference in the environment in the school since having instructional coaches available to us."
- A group of teacher leaders at every school in **Greene County** provides mentorship, training, and resources to their fellow teachers. These teacher leaders go through a rigorous application and selection process and must reapply every year for the position.

Across these districts, instructional leaders combine their own instructional expertise with the data they (and sometimes their school leaders) collect from regular classroom observations to design and lead school-level professional learning. For example:

- In **St. Bernard Parish**, instructional coaches lead weekly team meetings by grade or content area. They also lead regular data team meetings where teachers can review benchmark assessments, analyze assessment items and discuss strategies they will use to re-teach concepts.
- In **Greene County**, teacher leaders design and lead school-level professional learning based on the needs of their teachers. For example, in conjunction with the principal, they may determine that a majority of teachers could use development on grouping strategies. They will then plan a session, introduce resources and have teachers practice during a regularly scheduled, school-based professional learning session.

### Clarify the skills your leaders need.

A good first step is to identify what high-quality feedback looks like in practice and then observe principals and other instructional leaders in action. Principal supervisors should learn how to look for and develop feedback and coaching skills in principals, much as a principal would assess a teacher on his or her instructional practices. For example:

- In **Aldine**, Lynn Sawyer from the Danielson Group trains area superintendents to model the feedback behaviors they want principals to use in post-observation conferences. She recently worked with district leadership to audit observations with principals to provide them feedback on the quality of the evidence they collected and help them calibrate their ratings.

- Likewise, in **Fulton County**, regional superintendents model feedback conversations when they conduct their evaluation of principals. They demonstrate the process for giving feedback and reflect on that process with principals, who can then apply the same practices with their teachers.

### Build their skills.

---

Just as it is important to think about the most effective way to deliver supports to teachers, district leaders must be thoughtful about how to build skills in principals and other instructional leaders that enable them to give teachers high-quality feedback. It is important to talk with instructional leaders about giving teachers high-quality feedback on an *ongoing* basis and provide regular time and space to promote the development of this skill. For example:

- **Salem-Keizer** holds regular principal clinics to promote skill development. On the day that we visited the district, all principals engaged in a role-play of two versions of a post-observation conference: one that was artfully done and another that was not. Meeting participants debriefed the differences in the conferences and planned for upcoming post-observation conferences with the lessons of the role-play in mind. This session was part of an ongoing series of modules based on [Learning-Focused Supervision](#)<sup>2</sup>—a supervisory and coaching model adopted by the district—and intended to develop powerful feedback skills in principals.

Good professional learning includes opportunities to practice the skill being taught. Principals and principal supervisors say that having a chance to actually practice giving each other high-quality feedback has been the most valuable part of their training. In addition, content-specific training allows principals to give feedback on *what* is being taught, not just *how* it is being taught. For example:

- In **St. Bernard Parish**, district curriculum advisors train all principals on the curriculum in both math and English language arts so they understand the context of the teaching practices they observe. District leaders also have principals conduct walkthroughs to assess how well the curriculum is being taught, a practice that lends itself to regular observation and opportunities to provide feedback. “The change in the way that our teachers have to teach has been the biggest issue over the last few years,” said one principal. “To address it is to constantly be able to talk about it.”

Finding time to provide high-quality feedback and support is a challenge. Principals who also are responsible for completing paperwork, overseeing student discipline, managing the school schedule and responding to parent concerns have little time to invest in observing teachers in their classrooms. District leaders can help principals and other instructional leaders prioritize this aspect of their practice over others. For example:

- In **St. Bernard Parish**, instructional coaches are able to spend the majority of their time in classrooms or planning and facilitating professional learning because the district has taken everything else off their plates. Because they are instructional experts, they can also fill in for teachers who want to observe their peers in the classroom. “One of my new teachers needed to see what a small group could look like in her classroom,” said one instructional coach. “I will take over her class while she goes to observe another teacher implementing that practice.”
- In **Greene County**, principals can deploy teacher leaders within their school building to help observe and coach new teachers and design professional learning sessions. The Tennessee Department of Education has made changes at the state level to increase principal capacity to conduct observations, including a reduction in the number of observations for teachers who are consistently effective and a request to district leaders to limit the amount of time principals spend outside their school building.<sup>3</sup>

---

District leaders must be thoughtful about how to build skills in principals and other instructional leaders that enable them to give teachers high-quality feedback.

---

---

2 MiraVia, “Learning-Focused Supervision,” 2013. Available at [http://www.miravia.com/resources\\_supervision.html](http://www.miravia.com/resources_supervision.html).

3 Tennessee Department of Education, “Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee: A Report on Year 2 Implementation,” 2013. Available at [http://team-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/yr\\_2\\_tchr\\_eval\\_rpt.pdf](http://team-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/yr_2_tchr_eval_rpt.pdf).

# Essential Practice ③

Develop tools and resources to help teacher leaders, principals and coaches give high-quality feedback.

In addition to skill-building, principals and other evaluators need tools and resources to help them observe teachers, conduct pre- and post-observation conferences, and help teachers identify resources to act on the feedback.

In the five featured districts, leaders worked with school leaders to create a set of observation tools and post-conference protocols that have increased (1) the quality of post-observation feedback and support and (2) the time that principals can spend on this essential part of the work.

## Lessons from Leading Districts

**Use a limited number of powerful, common tools across schools.**

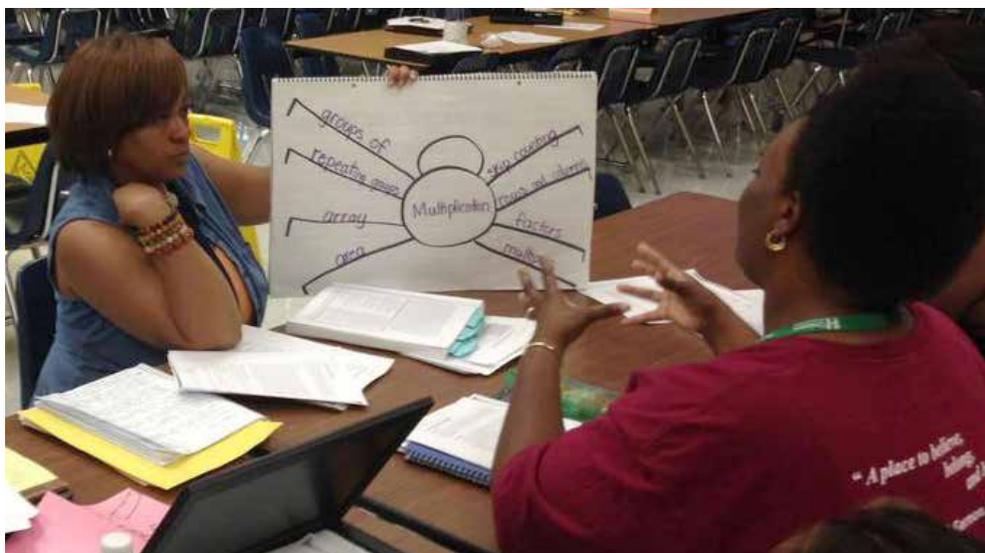
Streamlined observation tools can provide sharper clarity for principals and teachers, help them focus on specific strengths and growth areas, and foster consistent practices. For example:

- In **Salem-Keizer**, district leaders discovered that, because the district had not provided a standard observation form, more than 40 versions of observation forms and protocols were in use across their schools. The district created one common form that everyone now uses to conduct observations. Not only does this create consistency in the data collection and conversations throughout the district, but it also means the district can provide more effective training and support on conducting observation debriefs since all principals use this one tool.
- In **Greene County**, every teacher must complete a PLP with their principal. The PLP contains one area of reinforcement or strength and one area of refinement or growth. This helps the principal *and* teacher focus their post-observation conversations on one strength and one area of growth (see excerpt below and the full PLP in the Appendix).

**AREAS OF REFINEMENT AND REINFORCEMENT** (CODE Data)

Refinement: ACT-activities closely related to assessments; PIC-directions are clear and detailed; and GRP-assign roles/structure to each group.

Reinforcement: MS-students are motivated by stations.



## FULTON COUNTY SCHOOLS



Fulton County Schools is an urban district located in Atlanta, Georgia. Robert Avossa has served as superintendent since 2011.

In 2012, the district adopted Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES), the statewide evaluation system.

Fulton made minor adaptations to fit the context of the district, but its focus was on implementing the new system with fidelity. District leaders spent a year before implementation training teachers and principals on the new system. During this training, they emphasized that TKES is a growth instrument intended to support teachers and improve their practice. TKES is composed of three components that contribute to an overall Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM): Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards, Surveys of Instructional Practice (student perception surveys), and Student Growth (student growth percentiles and student learning objectives).

Walkthroughs are one of the primary ways that Fulton County teachers receive feedback. Principals, peers and leadership team members give teachers targeted feedback aligned with professional learning needs and tailored to improving teaching practice. They also stress the importance of pre-and post-conferencing.

Fulton County is focused on the principals' ability to identify and deliver the supports teachers need to continue their professional growth. The district has empowered principal supervisors to strengthen their principals' ability to provide feedback and support. For example, principal supervisors model for principals how to deliver high-quality feedback and support during principal evaluations. Additionally, the Human Resources department trains principals to provide high-quality feedback to teachers through online and in-person modules. Principals also use Edviation, the district's online professional learning platform, to provide support to teachers. The content is organized by standards for instructional practice, and principals can push out professional learning based on the needs of teachers within their schools.

Teachers say this targeted approach helps them make informed decisions about what professional learning options to pursue. "After my evaluation, I meet with my [assistant principal] and we go over my scores. After the first year, my area of refinement was grouping. In my second year, it was questioning. He suggested books to read and materials that I've spent time looking through," said one teacher. For principals, this focus helps them know what specific growth to look for when they next observe a teacher's practice.

### Use tools that help focus observations and feedback conversations.

Protocols and agendas that shape post-observation conferences can help improve the quality of feedback that observers give teachers. These districts have created tools that save principals valuable time during the observation process. For example:

- The Tennessee Department of Education developed an optional post-observation conference protocol that gives principals a script for facilitating the conversation. In **Greene County**, some principals are using or have adapted this script for leading post-observation conferences with the teachers they had recently observed. "When I pick out an area of refinement, I want to provide evidence and a support or resource they can use to follow up—a suggested teaching technique or someone in the school who does that skill well," one principal said. "If I don't provide that as a follow-up, I haven't done my job."
- Similarly, principals in **Aldine** use a [Learning-Focused Conversations template](#) that helps them determine the specific needs of each teacher they observe and ensure that the post-observation conference is structured and facilitated in ways that help the teacher set and meet his or her targeted goals.<sup>4</sup> Additional resources from Aldine on how to plan post-observation conferences are in the Appendix.

"When I pick out an area of refinement, I want to provide evidence and a support or resource they can use to follow up ... . If I don't provide that as a follow-up, I haven't done my job."

4 MiraVia, "Learning-Focused Conversations Guide," 2013. Available at <http://www.miravia.com/documents/LearningFocusedConversationsGuide.pdf>.

- **Salem-Keizer** has developed a sample agenda for principals to use in post-observation conferences (see Appendix). The sections of the agenda are aligned to the district’s Learning-Focused Supervision model, reinforcing the importance of using coaching language and sequencing a feedback conversation in ways that the teacher can hear it. As more principals adopt transparent sample agendas like this, teachers should feel there are fewer “surprises” in their post-observation conversations.

### **Aspirations for Future Practice**

Even in these leading districts, principals’ ability to conduct high-quality feedback conversations is inconsistent. In the future, more districts should create or adopt tools such as the ones mentioned here to help principals be more consistent and effective in giving teachers useful feedback.

With the adoption of new college- and career-ready standards in most states, teachers are modifying their instructional practices to reflect the shifts in content and new expectations for student learning. Principals and teacher leaders must be able to recognize these shifts and give teachers feedback on *what* they are teaching in addition to *how* they are teaching it. In other words, they must have an equally strong set of content and pedagogy lenses to use when they observe teachers in the classroom. For many principals, just getting used to new instructional frameworks and observation rubrics can be a tall order. Fortunately, several organizations have created tools and resources to help principals look for and provide feedback to teachers on content-specific instructional practices. For example, Student Achievement Partners has created a set of [Instructional Practice Guides](#) that helps teachers and those who support them build their understanding of Common Core State Standards-aligned instruction. The Louisiana Department of Education has adapted these tools for its academic standards in both [math](#) and [English language arts](#).

Many state and district observation rubrics are overly comprehensive and can be overwhelming for a principal who is conducting either a formal or informal classroom observation. TNTP has developed a [streamlined observation rubric](#) that focuses on a few key indicators of classroom performance to help observers better assess teacher performance and give teachers supportive feedback. The University of Washington’s Center for Educational Leadership also offers [frameworks](#) that reflect core elements of effective teaching and instructional leadership.





# Essential Practice ④

Allow teachers to choose from a range of effective professional learning opportunities that match their development needs.

The optimal evaluation process is a cycle of inquiry during which a teacher and instructional leader work collaboratively to reflect on the teacher’s practice, examine the evidence about the relationship between the teacher’s work and student outcomes, and make changes that improve learning for that teacher’s students. The best processes continuously circle back to assess the teacher’s and students’ performance and growth and use that learning to shape the teacher’s next areas of focus. For this process to work, teachers need to own their instructional growth needs as well as their student growth targets.

It is important that districts track the activities teachers undertake in pursuit of professional growth. This approach will help districts get smarter about the effectiveness of the professional learning opportunities they provide. Ideally, this tracking would go beyond attendance but would also include frequency of coaching and mentoring, access of videos, involvement in peer collaboration and any other ways teachers take advantage of professional learning opportunities.

## Lessons from Leading Districts

Create individualized teacher growth plans tied to evaluation data that empower teachers to pursue their own development.

One-size-fits-all feedback is not helpful. Instead, leading districts are investing the people, time and money to help teachers create customized professional learning plans. For example:

- Every teacher in **Greene County** must complete a PLP with his or her principal. Although typically the teacher is primarily responsible for developing the draft plan, these PLPs offer an opportunity for principals and teachers to collaborate on a teacher’s development. Together, the teacher and principal identify three instructional competencies the teacher will work to refine and agree on how he or she will do so. The teacher in the example below has targeted the following competency for refinement: “Students are working on a variety of literacy activities that are engaging, authentic, and differentiated.” The teacher identified three upcoming professional learning events that she thinks will help her meet this goal. She also committed to meeting with an English language arts content expert on a staff development day.

“If you’re choosing your professional development, you put more into it.”

COMPETENCY #3: K-5: Students are working on a variety of literacy activities that are engaging, authentic, and differentiated.	
Activities/Resources/Time Frame	Documentation
Students will be working in groups at centers while I am performing my small group instruction. The students will be engaged with a variety of literary activities. The choice for these activities will stem from the Benchmark testing done at the beginning of the year.  Attend webinar and June 11 textbook training for the new HM ELA series.  Meet with the ELA department on a staff development day.  I will attend an ENI inclusion training June 4-5.  I will also attend a Common Core training July 23-25.  August 2013-May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student work</li> <li>• Plans</li> <li>• Assessments</li> </ul>

Teachers in Greene County appreciate that they have greater control over their professional learning. “My principal will create the PLP and identify areas to focus on, but you get to choose how you address them,”



## GREENE COUNTY SCHOOLS

 Greene County Schools is a rural district in northeastern Tennessee. The district superintendent, Vicki Kirk, has led the district since 2010.

Like all other teachers in Tennessee, teachers in Greene County are evaluated under the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) evaluation system. Tennessee adopted TEAM in July 2011 and first implemented it during the 2011–12 school year. For teachers with individual growth scores, 50 percent of the evaluation is based on student achievement data, including value-added scores (35 percent) and additional measures of student achievement selected by the teacher and evaluator (15 percent). The other 50 percent of the evaluation is composed of qualitative measures including teacher observations and student surveys. For teachers who do not have individual growth scores, 40 percent of the evaluation is composed of student achievement data and the remaining 60 percent is determined through qualitative measures.

Teachers in Tennessee receive frequent observations during which the evaluator uses the TEAM rubric to assess a teacher's instructional practice. Teachers also receive feedback from evaluators through pre- and post-conferences. Prior to announced observations, observers must conduct a pre-conference meeting to obtain context about the lesson plan and students and to address any potential areas of concern before the lesson. During the post-conference, the teacher and evaluator use the [TEAM rubric](#) indicators to identify what is working well in the classroom (area of reinforcement), where there is room for improvement (area of refinement), and options for professional learning to support continued growth. These are incorporated into a personalized learning plan (PLP) for every teacher in the district.

Greene County has identified principals as the primary drivers of instructional improvement at the school level. Principals collaborate with teachers on their PLPs and design school-level professional learning based on the needs of their teachers. Greene County has provided additional school-based instructional support through teams of teacher leaders. It also has redesigned its professional learning program to align with evaluation results and give teachers the ability to opt into professional learning activities based on their areas of growth.

said one teacher. “If you're choosing your professional development, you put more into it.”

- In **Aldine**, teachers start the year by creating [goals and action plans](#) and reviewing them with principals. During the year, they use these plans to guide their ongoing development. The principals say that the experience of sitting with their teachers to create goals based on classroom- and student-level data allows them to work with teachers in more focused ways. The time they take in the first six weeks to ensure that every teacher has clear goals and solid action plans for achieving them is a worthwhile investment that yields benefits downstream—both during observations throughout the year and in the summative review. Principals refer back to action plans before conducting observations, and the goals and action plans serve as a foundation for observations and feedback conversations. “I work with my teachers to make sure that the goals are linked to data,” one principal explained, “but I spend most of my time with them working to make sure the plan is real and actionable. Then, before observations throughout the year, I refer back to the action plan to focus my feedback.”

### Analyze observation trends and create tailored professional learning opportunities, for both individuals and groups of teachers, based on diagnosed needs.

In addition to teacher-specific plans, leading districts also are helping school leaders develop schoolwide plans to address more global needs identified during the evaluation process. For example:

- In **Greene County**, district leaders ask principals to develop a school-based professional learning plan that outlines the professional learning needs of the teaching staff and how the principal plans to address them at the school level. The principal analyzed evaluation data, school and student achievement data, professional learning survey results and feedback from the leadership team, including teacher leaders. As a result of this analysis, the principal identified areas of focus and professional learning goals for the entire school team for the following school year. The plan includes a method of delivery for professional learning and steps to monitor progress toward goals. District leaders also invite principals to the district office for a meeting in the spring with the superintendent and instructional supervisors to discuss the school-based professional learning plan and instructional trends at the school. Based on these conversations, district leaders create a summer calendar of professional learning opportunities that are aligned with the needs of teachers across the district. Teachers

are required to fulfill a certain number of professional learning hours, but they can opt into specific sessions based on the growth competencies in their PLPs. “The district used to have a top-down approach,” said one district official. “Two principals and 15 teachers designed the PLP process. The idea is that all professional development should come from the ground up and should be teacher-based. If we never do anything more than what we’re doing right now, it’s better than what we’ve done.”

- District leaders in **Salem-Keizer** look at big-picture trends in evaluation data and [design professional learning offerings](#) that address teachers’ areas of growth. They use summative evaluation ratings by LEGENDS indicator to complete initial professional learning planning for the coming year. The result is a menu of district-level options—offered on the district’s Academy of Teaching and Learning platform and in person—that teachers can opt into and that principals use to develop their on-site professional learning options.
- In **Fulton County**, Principal Adrienne Grainger-Smith at Oak Knoll Elementary uses student-level data and evaluations to drive professional learning in her school. She starts by analyzing grade-level data with the entire staff. During this discussion, teachers get very specific about what they are doing well and where they need to improve. Grainger-Smith then conducts weekly walkthroughs with her leadership team, when they coach teachers in areas of improvement. They also ask teachers to create their list of professional learning needs. The leadership team meets weekly to discuss the overall trends and create differentiated learning opportunities for teachers within the building. They also identify targeted district-level training to support teachers in areas they identified for growth. Oak Knoll has focused on creating a culture of feedback and support and has seen positive student achievement gains.

### **Involve top teachers, teacher leaders and principals in providing professional learning opportunities.**

Leading districts use multiple experts, not just staff from the “professional learning department,” to conduct training. For example:

- In **Greene County**, educators at every level are involved in designing teacher-, school- and district-level professional learning opportunities. Individual teacher PLPs roll up to school-based professional learning plans, which inform summer professional learning offerings that teachers can select. This approach gives teachers a sense of autonomy over their professional learning options, but it also ensures that the supports they receive directly address the areas of growth their principals have identified.
- In **St. Bernard Parish**, instructional coaches at the school level design weekly content or grade-level team meetings based on their classroom observations during the week. If, for example, a high school instructional coach observes that English language arts teachers are having difficulty teaching a particular writing concept such as subject-verb agreement, he or she may develop a session for teachers on that topic. Coaches also facilitate data team meetings that give teachers the opportunity to analyze student assessment data and create a plan to modify their instructional strategies in response to the data.



---

“Two principals and 15 teachers designed the PLP process. The idea [in Greene County] is that all professional development should come from the ground up and should be teacher-based.”

---

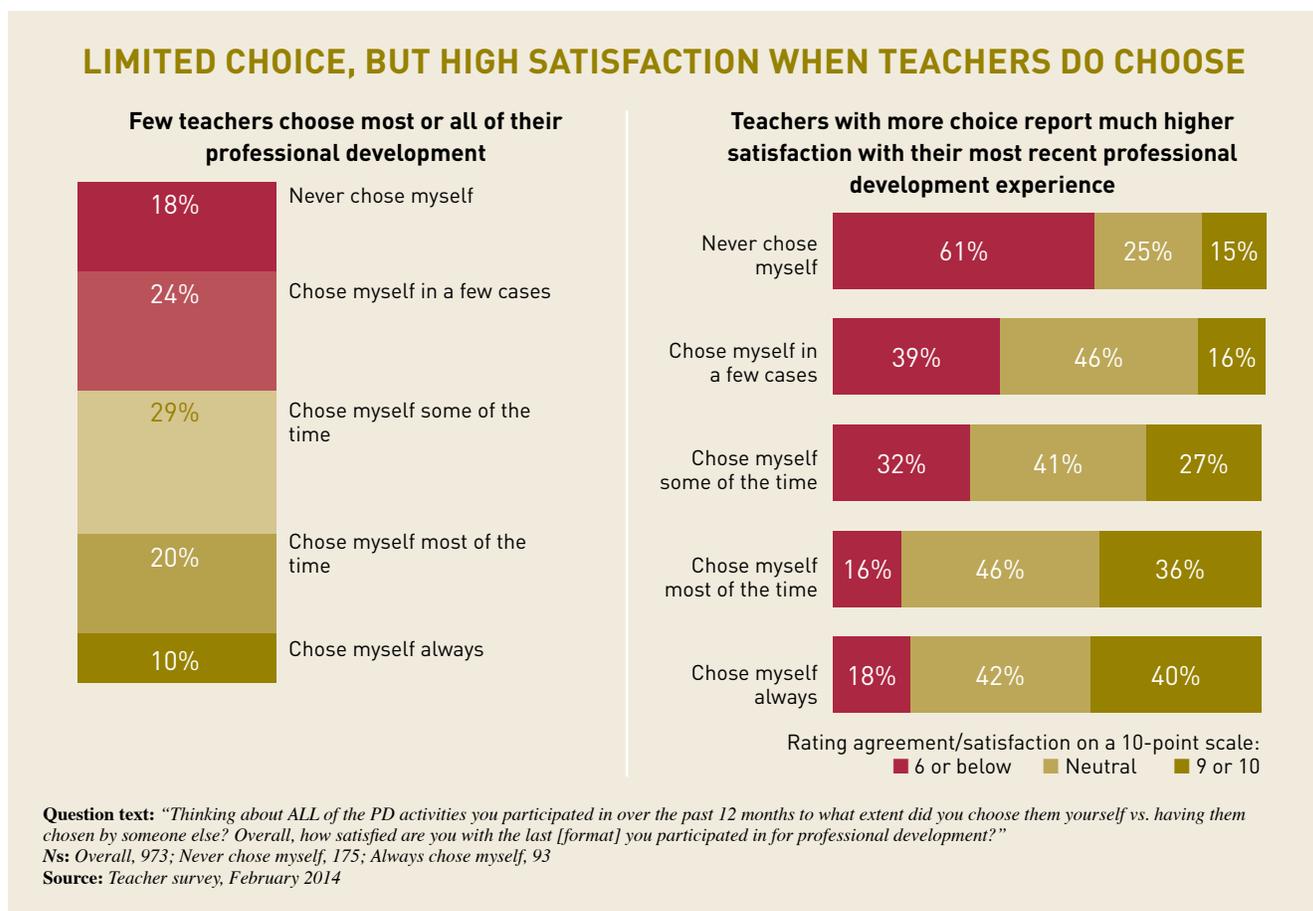
## Aspirations for Future Practice

A February 2014 survey of 973 teachers found that:<sup>5</sup>

- Few teachers (29 percent) are highly satisfied with current professional development offerings.
- Few teachers (34 percent) think professional development has improved with new evaluation systems.
- Fewer than one in three teachers (30 percent) choose most or all of their professional learning opportunities.
- Nearly one in five teachers (18 percent) never have a say in their professional development.

However, teachers with more choice report much higher levels of satisfaction with professional learning. Those who choose all or most of their professional learning opportunities are more than twice as satisfied with professional learning as those with fewer options.

5 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “Teachers Know Best: Teachers’ Views on Professional Development,” 2014. Available at <http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/article/teachers-know-best-teachers-views-professional-development>.



Source: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “Teachers Know Best: Teachers’ Views on Professional Development,” 2014. Available at <http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org/article/teachers-know-best-teachers-views-professional-development>.



## Essential Practice ⑤

Use technology to provide timely data to educators, improve observations and differentiate supports.

New evaluation and support systems are producing an enormous amount of helpful data for teachers, school leaders, district leaders and states. They also demand substantial time of school and district leaders. For every formal observation they conduct of teachers, observers must enter ratings and feedback in a timely manner. This allows teachers access to relevant feedback while the memory of the lesson is still fresh. It gives district- or school-based instructional staff access to trends at the school level so they can create school-based professional learning opportunities. It also allows district leaders to see the rate at which observations are being completed and analyze trends in teacher performance in order to respond to the data at the broader, district level.

But it takes time to produce all of these benefits. Technology can improve and simplify the process that teachers, school leaders and district leaders use to collect, analyze, and respond to this observation and evaluation data.

### Lessons from Leading Districts

**Provide online, standards-based resources for just-in-time professional learning.**

Leading districts are making increased use of online platforms to supplement face-to-face professional learning. For example:

- **Salem-Keizer** provides online professional learning modules, organized by standard, for teachers through its Academy of Teaching and Learning. **Aldine's** [Teachscape](#) and [Edivation](#) platforms include Danielson-aligned videos and modules. In both districts, principals describe helping teachers to identify online resources as part of post-observation conferences. Because their systems do not yet “push out” relevant resources to teachers based on observation data and ratings, principals spend time playing the matchmaker role.
- **Fulton County** also uses Edivation, a professional learning platform that contains more than 2,500 instructional videos covering 125 topics with examples from real classrooms. Teachers can select a specific Common Core standard and see how that specific standard progresses from kindergarten to grade 12. They can also see videos of other teachers teaching each standard at each grade level, along with lesson plans and reflection questions. Finally, Edivation can be used to “create a [professional learning] plan where users can set goals, track their learning and provide evidence of growth.”<sup>6</sup>

One leader in the district cited many positive attributes: “anytime, anywhere access; great support for [assistant principals]/principals as they are giving feedback; and the district can create courses, study groups and ways to collaborate, and good formative assessments.” Others discussed areas for improvement, notably the need to create more content that is customized to reflect the needs of the county’s students and teachers. One high school principal said, “Within Edivation, there are not enough examples from high schools or urban settings.” A teacher noted, “We are encouraged to use Edivation. It’s helpful, but the videos aren’t always relevant and current.”



6 EdSurge, “Edivation,” 2014. Available at <https://www.edsurge.com/pd-360>.

## ST. BERNARD PARISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS



St. Bernard Parish Public Schools is a suburban district in the greater New Orleans area of Louisiana. Doris Voitier has served as the superintendent since 2004. The community of St. Bernard Parish was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which destroyed every school building and all the homes in the parish. Within 11 weeks, the school district welcomed 344 students back to class at one unified school, and today 11 of the original 14 schools have reopened.

Like all teachers in Louisiana, teachers in St. Bernard Parish are evaluated under the state Compass evaluation system. Half of a teacher's evaluation rating is based on achievement of student learning targets, and the other half of the evaluation is based on classroom observations by the teacher's supervisor using the [Compass rubric](#). The Compass rubric is a modified version of Charlotte Danielson's [Framework for Effective Teaching](#). Nine districts and one public charter school piloted the rubric during the 2011–12 school year, which resulted in a more streamlined version of the Compass rubric.

The state does not prescribe how districts implement the evaluation system beyond a core set of minimum requirements, including those described above. Districts must also provide individualized professional learning opportunities to teachers based on the results of the evaluation process. All teachers complete professional growth plans at the beginning of the school year, which evaluators are expected to consult throughout the year as part of the observation process to see whether teachers are on track with their action plan.

St. Bernard Parish is heavily focused on supporting principals to improve classroom practice through high-quality feedback. It convenes principals for monthly professional learning, where it builds their knowledge of the curriculum and skills needed to successfully implement the evaluation process, including how to conduct informal walkthroughs and analyze teacher and student performance data. It also has deployed instructional coaches to every school. The coaches observe teachers in the classroom every day, serve on the leadership team and communicate about trends in teacher performance to the principal, and facilitate weekly professional learning sessions at their schools by grade and content area.



### Offer videotaped lessons and observations for a powerful additional data source.

Some districts are using videotaped lessons to sharpen and deepen the feedback. For example:

- In **Aldine**, panoramic classroom cameras (Lucy cameras) at Stehlik Intermediate School have changed the quality of conversations and given teachers a new tool for self-assessing their practice. The principal, Christi VanWassenhove, advises those using the camera to record an hour of practice and select the best 20 minutes to share with her. That sets a solid foundation for the teacher and herself; the teacher feels empowered to showcase his or her best 20 minutes, and even before the conversation, VanWassenhove has a good idea of what that teacher considers to be his or her best work. She then asks the teacher to use the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching to self-assess the video. Then she and the teacher share observation notes. Although they come together to co-assess what they see, VanWassenhove observes that “the camera can take the appraiser out of teacher improvement,” because even without her, this practice helps her teachers to improve and own their own improvement.

### Aspirations for Future Practice

None of the five sites have technology systems that push out resources to teachers based on observation ratings, which is a clear benefit of having a system that combines evaluation data and professional learning offerings. Some districts have implemented such systems, including [Denver Public Schools](#), [Long Beach Unified School District](#) and [Shelby County Schools](#). The Academy for Urban School Leadership and the Teaching Channel teamed up to create an [online portal](#) where teachers share videos of their practice and lesson plans and get customized coaching and mentoring in return.

## Districts have to build what they can afford, but there are effective approaches at every cost level.

Districts have several technology options based on resource availability. Silver represents the easiest lift in terms of resources; many districts should be able to achieve this within a year or two. Within three to five years, many districts may be able to reach the gold and platinum levels, recognizing that the platinum level requires a significant investment.

### Silver Level

1. Provide online and in-person professional learning modules aligned with evaluation domains
2. Organize online modules in a teacher-friendly way

### Gold Level

SILVER LEVEL, PLUS:

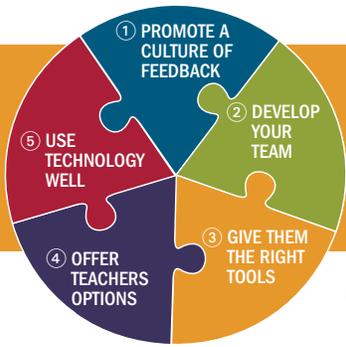
1. Connect the online modules to the evaluation platform
2. Push out resources to teachers based on development areas

### Platinum Level

GOLD LEVEL, PLUS:

1. Incorporate teacher- and school-level student outcomes data
2. Provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate online





# Putting the Five Essential Practices Together

Getting feedback and support right is the key to making evaluation systems work for teachers, leaders and students. First, providing stronger feedback and support improves the quality of instruction and therefore student outcomes. Second, shifting the culture around feedback and growth makes evaluations more meaningful for teachers and leaders and ensures that they are much more than a compliance exercise.

As districts work to build their team of instructional leaders, they have to determine who is best positioned to support teachers and invest in rigorous and ongoing training to ensure that they are well-equipped to provide high-quality and actionable feedback. Leading districts have developed effective tools that instructional leaders can use to help focus feedback conversations. Once evaluation results are in, teachers are choosing high-quality professional learning opportunities that help them improve their practice. In more and more districts, technology systems help organize evaluation results and offer a comprehensive set of related supports for teachers.

Giving teachers better feedback and supports that are ongoing and relevant to their practice will ensure that they feel valued as professionals and are able to reach their full potential. Districts will be able to retain their most effective teachers, which will pay dividends in improved student performance over time.

## Assessing the District's Efforts

While the necessary steps are clear, high-quality feedback is difficult to give and receive. Most districts have not yet established a culture of feedback. Instructional leaders may not yet have the skills or time to provide teachers with the focused feedback they need and deserve. It is up to districts to change these conditions for instructional leaders; the self-assessment in the Executive Summary guides district leaders in evaluating their efforts.

Districts can use the self-assessment to determine how they are doing on each of the five essential practices. For instance, some may be strong in Essential Practices 3 and 5 but struggle when it comes to Essential Practices 2 and 4. This self-assessment process can help districts create a customized roadmap for improvement.



Once districts have completed the self-assessment, how can they work to put more of the essential practices in place? They can probably improve in a few areas right away (e.g., create better feedback tools) without making major changes. But, as the five districts here exemplify, the real benefits come when districts go “all in” by building out an entire system of the five interlocking essential practices. That effort will require careful thought and planning and often a realignment of the school system’s most critical resources—people, time and money.



### Putting the Essential Practices in Place

The focus of the previous chapters has been on the *what*—what districts are doing to implement the five essential practices. This section focuses on the *how*—the kinds of difficult decisions they had to make to realign people, time and money. How did they build the will and skill?

The **Greene County** superintendent and school board saw the state’s investment in a new evaluation and support system as an opportunity to drive better local conversations about teaching and learning. The district invested heavily in high-quality training, bringing in a consultant to work intensively with its principals on how to give high-quality feedback. It rigorously selected a group of 3–10 teacher leaders in every school to provide additional supports to teachers and compensated them for their extra responsibilities. It thoroughly reorganized its professional learning opportunities for teachers over three years, creating offerings that teachers could select based on their specific evaluation needs rather than more generic one-size-fits-all trainings.

**Greene County** district administrators have used Title I and Title II funds to subsidize training for the district’s principals and teacher leaders, professional learning opportunities for its teachers, modest stipends for its teacher leaders, and technology supports. More specifically, Greene County uses approximately \$325,000 in Title I and II funds to pay for professional learning opportunities for its teachers, salaries for three academic coaches and stipends for its teacher leaders. The district also pooled some Title I funds previously spent by each school to help offset the costs of new technology software.

**Aldine** has tremendous buy-in and shared understanding of the purposes of the evaluation system—to differentiate instructional practice, improve teaching effectiveness and increase teacher retention—from teachers, instructional coaches, principals and district leadership. Although Aldine was not under any external pressure to update its old evaluation system, the superintendent and her leadership team recognized the importance of taking this step. They brought in external experts to (1) help them design a new evaluation system focused on feedback and support; (2) build broad support and understanding; and (3) boost the internal capacity to have the kinds of coaching conversations that lead to improved practice. The district has spent Title II and local budget funds on ongoing professional learning for administrators, online professional learning modules, teachers and teacher leaders and provides funding for at least one instructional coach at every elementary school in the district.

### Realigning Resources

The practices described in this report represent a significant investment by district and school leaders. Districts will likely need to realign district resources to devote sufficient people, time and money to professional learning, technology solutions and teacher leader stipends, for example. While a few of the five districts used grant funds (e.g., Race to the Top, Teacher Incentive Fund, foundation) to help fund early work, they have all successfully institutionalized funding for these activities using Title funds. For example, the five districts have:

- Used Title I and Title II funding to support teacher leaders to broaden the pool of instructional leaders who can give effective feedback to teachers.
- Used Title I and Title II funding to develop robust and ongoing training to help instructional leaders learn how to give teachers more effective and actionable feedback.
- Used Title II funding to develop more effective professional learning opportunities for teachers during the school year and summer.

- Used Title I funding to build or adopt a technology system that can help organize evaluation data and provide robust supports to educators.

It takes collective responsibility to implement a robust system of feedback and supports. Everyone has an important role to play. *District leaders* must be prepared to think differently about the systems, culture, practices and infrastructure necessary to make their evaluation, feedback and support systems work effectively. They need to diagnose what principals and teacher leaders need, be willing to rethink the role of principals, and be prepared to lead this kind of systems change. *Superintendents* should serve as advocates for this work and ideally model for their principals what high-quality feedback looks like. *Human resource directors* need to buy into these five essential practices and create an aligned implementation plan. *Principals* need to make clear how evaluations can help teachers improve and reorganize their days so they have enough time to provide meaningful feedback. *Teacher leaders* need to seize their opportunity to help fellow teachers improve. If everyone in a district plays their part, then significant improvements can take place quickly.

Evaluation systems are not just about holding educators accountable for the outcomes of students. They are an important mechanism for teachers to receive useful feedback that helps them get better at their craft. Most current evaluation and support systems are struggling to put the “and support” into practice, since they are not yet giving teachers the feedback and assistance they deserve. The good news is that there are more districts like Aldine, Fulton County, Greene County, Salem-Keizer and St. Bernard Parish. Not surprisingly, they have more satisfied educators who are getting better results for their students by improving their teaching. Getting feedback and support right will go a long way toward helping all schools in the 44 states implementing new teacher evaluation systems succeed.

# Appendix

## I. Professional Learning Plan (Greene County)

GREENE COUNTY SCHOOLS Individual Professional Learning Plan	
School: <u>Camp Creek</u>	Teacher: <u>XXXXXX</u> Position: <u>Teacher 4<sup>th</sup> LA</u> School Year: <u>2013-14</u>
<b>SCHOOL FOCUS</b>	
CODE Data: <u>Questioning, Standards (c.c.), Thinking Problem Solving (c.c.), Data Usage/Assess.</u>	
ELA Trajectory: <u>53.5%</u>	Math Trajectory: <u>55.6%</u>
<b>TEACHER FOCUS</b> (Complete appropriate subject information.)	
Student Achievement Data ELA: _____	Math: _____
Student Value Added Data: ELA: _____	Math: _____
ELA Trajectory: _____	Math Trajectory: _____
<b>AREAS OF REFINEMENT AND REINFORCEMENT</b> (CODE Data)	
Refinement: <u>ACT-activities closely related to assessments; PIC-directions are clear and detailed; and GRP-assign roles/structure to each group.</u>	
Reinforcement: <u>MS-students are motivated by stations.</u>	
<b>PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN</b>	
<b>COMPETENCY #1:</b> K-12: Students understand that there is a purpose for each text type to communicate clearly in writing.	
<p><b>Activities/Resources/Time Frame</b></p> <p>Continue to improve on classroom library procedures.</p> <p>June 25-Chris Tiovanni writing workshop</p> <p>Meet one day in the summer with the ELA department.</p> <p>Have a day in which students share their writing pieces.</p> <p>Develop and teach routines the first week of school.</p> <p>August 2013-May 2014</p>	<p><b>Documentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student work</li> <li>• Plans</li> <li>• Assessments</li> </ul>

<b>COMPETENCY #2:</b> K-5: Tier II and Tier III students are getting daily small group guided instruction by teachers in addition to daily intervention time.	
<p><b>Activities/Resources/Time Frame</b></p> <p>Continue using small group instruction on a daily basis. I will determine my grouping by using Running Records and the STAR Reading assessment. Also, provide RTI time for the Tier II and III students.</p> <p>Attend fall running records training at Camp Creek (Mercer).</p> <p>Use the bookroom materials weekly.</p> <p>Commit to a time each day to pull out my lowest level group.</p> <p>Observe videotaped model lesson filmed by Mercer-complete reflection task-Summer 2013</p> <p>Film my own lesson for my own use-complete reflection activity related to competencies-by Oct. 2013</p> <p>August 2013-May 2014</p>	<p><b>Documentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student work</li> <li>• Plans</li> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Schedule</li> <li>• Running records</li> </ul>

<b>COMPETENCY #3:</b> K-5: Students are working on a variety of literacy activities that are engaging, authentic, and differentiated.	
<p><b>Activities/Resources/Time Frame</b></p> <p>Students will be working in groups at centers while I am performing my small group instruction. The students will be engaged with a variety of literary activities. The choice for these activities will stem from the Benchmark testing done at the beginning of the year.</p> <p>Attend webinar and June 11 textbook training for the new HM ELA series.</p> <p>Meet with the ELA department on a staff development day.</p> <p>I will attend an ENI inclusion training June 4-5.</p> <p>I will also attend a Common Core training July 23-25.</p> <p>August 2013-May 2014</p>	<p><b>Documentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student work</li> <li>• Plans</li> <li>• Assessments</li> </ul>



### III. Learning-Focused Conversations (Aldine)

Learning-focused Conversations			
Supervisor/ Specialist	Information, analysis, goals		Teacher
Guiding question	Calibrating	Consulting	Collaborating
<p>What are the gaps/growth areas indicated for this teacher based on present performance levels and the standards?</p>	<p>What information, ideas and technical resources will be most useful to this teacher at this time?</p>	<p>What are some ways to balance my contributions with this teacher's experiences and expertise?</p>	<p>What mental and emotional resources might be most useful for this teacher at this time?</p>
<p><b>Use a pattern of pause/paraphrase/pause and inquire (coach) . . . or shift stance:</b></p>			
<p>Calibrating strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These data indicate a need to...</li> <li>• An essential next step would be...</li> <li>• The standard at this grade level means that...</li> </ul>	<p>Consulting strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several things that might be effective here, include...</li> <li>• Typically, that might be caused by...</li> <li>• Research in this area indicates...</li> <li>• Some ways I think about that are....</li> </ul>	<p>Collaborating strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's brainstorm a list of . . .</li> <li>• Why don't we generate some pro's and con's for . . .</li> <li>• How might we plan for . . .</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Continuum of Learning-focused Interaction</b> is used by supervisors to flexibly shift between four stances to develop teachers' capacities to apply standards, reflect upon data, set goals and expand professional expertise.</p>

Planning Conversations	Effective paraphrases align the speaker and responder, establish understanding, communicate regard and create connections to whatever follows.								
<p><b>Activating and Engaging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• context</li> <li>• presenting issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Exploring and Discovering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• goals and outcomes</li> <li>• indicators of success</li> <li>• approaches, strategies and resources</li> <li>• potential choice points and concerns</li> </ul> <p><b>Organizing and Integrating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal learning</li> <li>• next steps</li> </ul>	<p><b>Three Types of Paraphrase</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Acknowledge and Clarify:</th> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Summarize and Organize:</th> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Shift Level of Abstraction:</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>So, you're noticing . . .</i></p> <p><i>You're describing . . .</i></p> <p><i>In other words, there are . . .</i></p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>There seem to be two key issues . . .</i></p> <p><i>So, you're comparing _____ with _____ . . .</i></p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Shifting up (e.g., move from Element to Component or Domain)</p> <p><i>So, your activities and assignments are designed for high student engagement.</i></p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Shifting down (e.g., move from Domain to Component or Element)</p> <p><i>Your thinking about using assessment in instruction includes assessment criteria and feedback to students.</i></p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Acknowledge and Clarify:	Summarize and Organize:	Shift Level of Abstraction:		<p><i>So, you're noticing . . .</i></p> <p><i>You're describing . . .</i></p> <p><i>In other words, there are . . .</i></p>	<p><i>There seem to be two key issues . . .</i></p> <p><i>So, you're comparing _____ with _____ . . .</i></p>	<p>Shifting up (e.g., move from Element to Component or Domain)</p> <p><i>So, your activities and assignments are designed for high student engagement.</i></p>	<p>Shifting down (e.g., move from Domain to Component or Element)</p> <p><i>Your thinking about using assessment in instruction includes assessment criteria and feedback to students.</i></p>
Acknowledge and Clarify:	Summarize and Organize:	Shift Level of Abstraction:							
<p><i>So, you're noticing . . .</i></p> <p><i>You're describing . . .</i></p> <p><i>In other words, there are . . .</i></p>	<p><i>There seem to be two key issues . . .</i></p> <p><i>So, you're comparing _____ with _____ . . .</i></p>	<p>Shifting up (e.g., move from Element to Component or Domain)</p> <p><i>So, your activities and assignments are designed for high student engagement.</i></p>	<p>Shifting down (e.g., move from Domain to Component or Element)</p> <p><i>Your thinking about using assessment in instruction includes assessment criteria and feedback to students.</i></p>						
<p><b>Reflecting Conversations (4a)</b></p> <p><b>Activating and Engaging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recollections</li> <li>• perspectives and perceptions</li> </ul> <p><b>Exploring and Discovering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• weigh evidence</li> <li>• search for patterns</li> <li>• compare/contrast</li> <li>• analyze cause-effect</li> </ul> <p><b>Organizing and Integrating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generalizations</li> <li>• applications</li> </ul>	<p><b>Artful questions</b> combine with pausing and paraphrasing to increase the potential of learning-focused conversations. The goal of inquiry is to produce teacher thinking and integrate the self-talk of expertise.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Use invitational stems:</th> <th style="text-align: left; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Include thinking processes:</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>What are some . . .</i></p> <p><i>In what ways. . .</i></p> <p><i>How might you . . .</i></p> <p><i>What seems to be . . .</i></p> <p><i>Given your. . .</i></p> <p><i>Based on . . .</i></p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>What are some <b>comparisons</b> between . . .</i></p> <p><i>In what ways might you <b>apply</b> this . . .</i></p> <p><i>How might you <b>compare/contrast</b> . . .</i></p> <p><i>Based on this lesson, what are some <b>generalizations</b> . . .</i></p> <p><i>Given your experience, what might be <b>causing</b> this . . .</i></p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Use invitational stems:	Include thinking processes:	<p><i>What are some . . .</i></p> <p><i>In what ways. . .</i></p> <p><i>How might you . . .</i></p> <p><i>What seems to be . . .</i></p> <p><i>Given your. . .</i></p> <p><i>Based on . . .</i></p>	<p><i>What are some <b>comparisons</b> between . . .</i></p> <p><i>In what ways might you <b>apply</b> this . . .</i></p> <p><i>How might you <b>compare/contrast</b> . . .</i></p> <p><i>Based on this lesson, what are some <b>generalizations</b> . . .</i></p> <p><i>Given your experience, what might be <b>causing</b> this . . .</i></p>				
Use invitational stems:	Include thinking processes:								
<p><i>What are some . . .</i></p> <p><i>In what ways. . .</i></p> <p><i>How might you . . .</i></p> <p><i>What seems to be . . .</i></p> <p><i>Given your. . .</i></p> <p><i>Based on . . .</i></p>	<p><i>What are some <b>comparisons</b> between . . .</i></p> <p><i>In what ways might you <b>apply</b> this . . .</i></p> <p><i>How might you <b>compare/contrast</b> . . .</i></p> <p><i>Based on this lesson, what are some <b>generalizations</b> . . .</i></p> <p><i>Given your experience, what might be <b>causing</b> this . . .</i></p>								

The Road To Learning

Copyright© MiraVia, LLC • The Road to Learning www.miravia.com

## IV. Learning-Focused Conversations: A Template for Planning (Aldine)

# Learning-focused Conversations

## A Template for Planning

### ACTIVATING AND ENGAGING (1a, 1b)

#### CONTEXT

- What are some things about your students' readiness (social skills, routines, self-management) that are influencing your lesson (unit) design?
- What are some of the skills/ knowledge students will need to bring to this lesson (unit) to be successful?

#### PRESENTING ISSUES

- What are some special areas/ student needs you will need to address?
- What are some issues you anticipate might influence student learning?

### EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

#### GOALS AND OUTCOMES (1c)

- As you think about what you know about your students, and the content, what are some key learning goals?
- What are some ways that these goals integrate with other content learning?
- What are some thinking skills students will need to apply?

#### INDICATORS OF SUCCESS (1f)

- Given these goals, what are some things you expect to see/hear as students are achieving them?
- Given these goals, how will you monitor student learning?
- What kinds of assessments will you use to determine student success?

#### APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES (1d, 1e)

- What are some strategies you're planning that will both challenge students and support their success?
- What are some ways you'll ensure high engagement for all students?
- What are some resources or materials you/your students will need to support and extend student learning?

#### POTENTIAL CHOICE POINTS AND CONCERNS (1e, 1f)

- As you anticipate teaching the lesson, what are some points where students might struggle?
- What are some options for supporting struggling students and enriching those who need greater challenge?
- Should you notice that students' attention is drifting, what are some possibilities for reengaging them?

### ORGANIZING AND INTEGRATING

#### PERSONAL LEARNING

- What are some ways that this lesson provides opportunities to pursue your own learning goals?
- What new learning/skills will you try or exercise in this lesson?

#### NEXT STEPS

- As a result of this conversation, what are some next steps?

# Learning-focused Conversations

## A Template for Planning

### ACTIVATING AND ENGAGING (1a, 1b)

#### CONTEXT

- What are some things about your students' readiness (social skills, routines, self-management) that are influencing your lesson (unit) design?
- What are some of the skills/ knowledge students will need to bring to this lesson (unit) to be successful?

#### PRESENTING ISSUES

- What are some special areas/ student needs you will need to address?
- What are some issues you anticipate might influence student learning?

### EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

#### GOALS AND OUTCOMES (1c)

- As you think about what you know about your students, and the content, what are some key learning goals?
- What are some ways that these goals integrate with other content learning?
- What are some thinking skills students will need to apply?

#### INDICATORS OF SUCCESS (1f)

- Given these goals, what are some things you expect to see/hear as students are achieving them?
- Given these goals, how will you monitor student learning?
- What kinds of assessments will you use to determine student success?

#### APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES (1d, 1e)

- What are some strategies you're planning that will both challenge students and support their success?
- What are some ways you'll ensure high engagement for all students?
- What are some resources or materials you/your students will need to support and extend student learning?

#### POTENTIAL CHOICE POINTS AND CONCERNS (1e, 1f)

- As you anticipate teaching the lesson, what are some points where students might struggle?
- What are some options for supporting struggling students and enriching those who need greater challenge?
- Should you notice that students' attention is drifting, what are some possibilities for reengaging them?

### ORGANIZING AND INTEGRATING

#### PERSONAL LEARNING

- What are some ways that this lesson provides opportunities to pursue your own learning goals?
- What new learning/skills will you try or exercise in this lesson?

#### NEXT STEPS

- As a result of this conversation, what are some next steps?

## V. Sample Post-Observation Conference Agenda (Salem-Keizer)

### Sample Agenda for Conducting a Post-Observation Conversation

#### Phase One – Activating and Engaging

1. Welcome
2. Open Ended Question(s)

*Example: After reflecting on your lesson/the observation notes, what are some things that captured your attention – things you want to repeat and areas you want to refine?*

\*Prepare your space.

\*Do not have a barrier between you and the teacher.

\*Sit at a 90 degree angle, ideally at the corner of a table.

#### Phase Two – Evidence Based Exploration

1. Evidence Based Success

- Refer to third point data
- Formulate question(s) to address the success
- Provide a rationale for the effective practice and recommend continued use

*Example: In the observation notes, I underlined all of the academic words you and your students were using. What are some factors that influenced this?*

2. Evidence Based Support

- Refer to third point data
- Formulate question(s) to address the area in need of support
- Provide a rationale for the effective practice and recommend continued use

*Example: In the observation notes, you see that 5 of the 30 students responded to the questions you asked. How similar or different is that from what you expected?*

Remember to:

\*Paraphrase

\*Pause

\*Consider moving on the continuum of interactions based on needs/responses of the teacher

#### Phase Three – Organizing and Integrating

1. Check for Understanding and Application to Future Lessons through Inquiry

*Example: What are some big ideas that you are taking away from this experience that will influence your practice in the future?*

2. Plan for Needs

- Provide resources if needed
- Plan for a time the teacher will share a new practice with others
- Encourage instructional coaching

Do not forget this phase – it is IMPORTANT! It allows you to check for understanding, and increases application to future lessons.

# Acknowledgments

Education First owes its gratitude to a number of individuals who helped plan site visits, hosted Education First team members at district offices and in schools and classrooms, and provided comments throughout the process of writing this report. In addition to the teachers, principals and principal supervisors who took time from their busy days to engage in our interviews and focus groups, we would like to thank the following contributors to our research, site visits and writing:

## District Staff and Consultants

### Aldine Independent School District, Texas

---

- Gloria Cavazos, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Aldine Independent School District
- Dr. Selina Chapa, Executive Director of Human Resources, Aldine Independent School District
- Claire Robertson-Kraft, Operation Public Education, University of Pennsylvania
- Lynn Sawyer, Danielson Group
- John Schacter, President, Learning Growth Network

### Fulton County Schools, Georgia

---

- Arthur Mills, Executive Director Talent Management and Organizational Strategy, Fulton County Schools

### Greene County Schools, Tennessee

---

- Vicki Kirk, Superintendent, Greene County Schools
- Christopher Malone, Pre-K and Federal Programs Supervisor, Greene County Schools
- Mike Murphy, Educational Consultant, Educational Success Systems
- Bill Ripley, Assistant Director of Academics and Human Resources, Greene County Schools

### Salem-Keizer Public Schools, Oregon

---

- Brett Cheever, Staff Quality Coordinator, Salem-Keizer Public Schools

### St. Bernard Parish Public Schools, Louisiana

---

- Beverly Lawrason, Assistant Superintendent, St. Bernard Parish

## Reviewers

- Michael Copland, Bellingham Public Schools
- Ben Fenton, New Leaders
- Jacquelyn Davis, ED-Volution Education Group
- Max Silverman, Center for Educational Leadership, University of Washington

Education First had the pleasure of visiting five leading districts but we know there are many more effective feedback and support practices being used in other districts. If your school or district is doing something innovative, please contact Rashidah Lopez Morgan at [rmorgan@education-first.com](mailto:rmorgan@education-first.com) to tell us your story.





education**first**  
experience | quality | results

[www.education-first.com](http://www.education-first.com)