



10 Things To Know About Pennsylvania's New Teacher Evaluations

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The 2013-14 school year ushers in a new era for teacher effectiveness, as Pennsylvania rolls out a better system for evaluating educators – one that provides more useful and constructive feedback for teachers so they can better help students achieve. Here's what you should know about Pennsylvania's new teacher evaluations:

1. The evaluation system gives teachers meaningful feedback they can use to improve in the classroom – similar to the constructive feedback we rely on our teachers to give their students so they can improve.
2. The new evaluations go beyond merely categorizing teachers as “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” by rating performance into four ranges: distinguished, proficient, needs improvement or failing. Teachers who are failing or in need of improvement will benefit from a performance improvement plan.
3. Online professional development courses targeted to specific areas where a teacher might need improvement are available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education at no cost to teachers or school districts.
4. Unlike previous evaluation methods, which typically relied solely on classroom observation, the new evaluation system incorporates multiple measures of student achievement to account for half of a teacher's overall evaluation. In other words, it does not rely on any single, high-stakes test to determine if a teacher is performing well in the classroom.
5. The new evaluation system has local flexibility, allowing school districts to incorporate some of their own measures of student achievement to gauge teacher effectiveness.
6. Fifteen percent of a teacher's overall evaluation comes from building-wide measures of student achievement, such as standardized test results, Advanced Placement course participation, attendance, and graduation and promotion rates. Factoring building-level measures into a teacher's evaluation recognizes that student achievement is a collaborative effort among everyone in the school, while also gauging the impact a specific teacher has on students.
7. The evaluations will help principals improve their leadership skills by assessing their planning and preparation, professional development efforts and performance of students in their school. These measures would be used to provide feedback and guidance so school principals can put a stronger focus on keeping effective teachers.
8. A lot of homework went into the new evaluations. Pennsylvania spent years fine-tuning the evaluations through pilot programs involving about 24,000 teachers in hundreds of school districts and some charter schools.
9. Results of the evaluations can be used to match up high-performing teachers with struggling students, helping to ensure students get the most out of their classroom experiences and taxpayers get the most out of their education investments.
10. The ultimate goal is to ensure we have an effective teacher in every Pennsylvania public school classroom helping to educate every student every day!