



Message from the President

Our Favorite Teachers are the Most Effective

Think back to your favorite teachers. Not the cool ones or the ones with the easiest tests, but your favorites. You liked them because they really knew how to teach. They challenged you and drew out your potential.

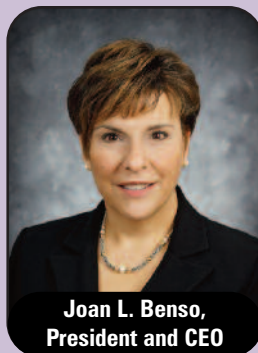
Shouldn't every student have a teacher like that — every year, in every classroom?

Great teachers emerge from quality training, meaningful evaluations, useful feedback and solid professional development, and they have the ability to impact overall student achievement in every classroom where they teach — especially in high-needs schools where students face the greatest challenges.

Defining an "effective teacher" can be difficult because there are many intangibles, but let's start with this working definition: An effective teacher ensures every child learns at least one year's worth of knowledge for every year spent in the classroom.

An effective teacher is the single most important classroom element in assuring a child's academic success, and a growing group of Pennsylvanians is working to improve teacher effectiveness. On behalf of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, I'm pleased to announce our contribution to this effort, a new initiative we call "Making the Grade: Effective Teaching in Every Classroom."

Our goal is to create awareness and spur a public dialogue about the importance of teacher effectiveness



Joan L. Benso,
President and CEO

and its impact on our children — higher student achievement, college- and career-readiness and the ability to shape a globally competitive workforce.

Getting there is a challenge, but an achievable one. We have many dedicated teachers eager to thrive and grow on objective feedback. The Pennsylvania Department of Education already is examining our teacher evaluation system to yield information on classroom performance that translates into productive dialogue among teachers and administrators, and targeted, meaningful professional development.

We asked Carolyn Dumaesq, Pennsylvania's deputy secretary for elementary and secondary education and a respected educator, what impact teacher effectiveness has on student achievement.

"Everything," she said. "The more effective the teacher is in the classroom in delivering instruction and state standard content, the better the students will do on state standards, the better they'll do on the test, and more importantly, the better equipped they are for the world of work and higher education."

As the state works with pilot sites to rebuild its teacher evaluation system into a robust instrument for improving teacher practices, Dr. Dumaesq has heard from teachers who finally see how they can improve. They tell her, "There's a clear roadmap for me that I didn't have before."

Teacher effectiveness equals teacher growth, and isn't that what we want for every teacher? Teachers grow and gain respect for their commitment as career professionals. Students grow and enter the world as capable, responsible adults. Communities grow with new ideas and new businesses, and Pennsylvania grows as a terrific place where families — and children, especially — can thrive.

In this edition of Partnerships, read more about the elements of effective teaching, state and national teacher-effectiveness initiatives, and how you can help.



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The Elements of Effective Teaching

Ensuring every Pennsylvania child has an effective teacher, every year in every classroom, requires several elements working together to build teachers' skills and distribute effective teachers equitably. Pennsylvania is fortunate to already have many of these elements, but they are not yet aligned and consistent.

These elements can be used as a starting point toward our goals:

• Improved public school funding

Until the most recent state budget, the Commonwealth had been taking aggressive steps to ensure funding adequacy and equity in K-12 education. Increasing the state's share of public education funding — and targeting that funding toward evidence-based practices designed to boost student achievement — will help ensure that every child receives a quality education regardless of community wealth.

• Internationally benchmarked academic standards

Pennsylvania is among more than 40 states that have adopted the Common Core academic standards in English language, arts and mathematics. These evidence-based standards are internationally benchmarked to ensure our graduates are college and career ready and able to compete in the global economy.

• Supports for students

Supports should motivate and engage students and ease the transitions from elementary to middle to high school. Currently, Pennsylvania school districts can use the 4Sight Benchmark Assessments tool to gauge students' content knowledge in math and English language arts — essentially diagnosing if students are on grade level or falling behind. Using these assessments, teachers can adjust their instruction to keep students on pace to learn a year's worth of knowledge each academic year. Additionally, academic remediation is provided for K-5 students who aren't proficient in math or reading and to students in the state's 10 graduation requirement courses or locally validated assessments.

• Student-achievement growth measurements

Over the last four years, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has provided school districts with PVAAS — Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System — as a tool for statistical analysis of Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) results. PVAAS measures student growth, not just achievement, and it helps educators plan interventions and allocate resources.

• Graduation requirements

By 2015, every Pennsylvania student must demonstrate proficiency in core subjects to earn a high school diploma. Assessments will align with Common Core and state academic standards, preparing more students for postsecondary education and reducing the need for noncredit remedial courses in college.

• Professional development for school building leaders

Great teachers benefit from great leaders. Since 2007, the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) Initiative has provided research-based, standards-aligned professional development for new and current principals. Principals are trained to think strategically for student success, implement standards-based reforms, and use data to guide decision making. Pennsylvania students in schools led by PIL-trained principals achieved at higher levels in reading and mathematics than those in schools without a PIL-trained principal. Since 2008, all new principals and assistant or vice principals have been required to participate in GROW, an induction program related to PIL.

• Teacher certification

In the past, Pennsylvania certified teachers for broad grade spans that didn't recognize how children learn and develop in distinct phases. New regulations narrow and reclassify grade spans and require that, by 2013, all teacher certifications align with research on child development and learning needs. Early childhood education certificate holders will teach pre-K through fourth grade, elementary/middle level certificates cover grades 4-8, and secondary certificates span grades 9-12. The new regulations also recognize the needs of diverse learners by requiring that teachers with special education certificates also obtain certification in one of the new grade spans.

These existing elements, combined with our growing efforts to craft a more meaningful, substantive teacher evaluation system, can help us reach the goal of giving every student an effective teacher. But high-quality teacher evaluations are not the only work in progress.

We also need to:

- Create and use incentives to make sure the most effective teachers are helping the highest-need students.
- Develop alternative pathways to teacher certification for those who want to join the profession, and develop better pathways within the profession for teachers to advance.
- Build a public dialogue on teacher effectiveness that goes beyond academic circles and involves parents, business and community leaders, students and the many others who are directly impacted by the quality of our teachers and schools.

You can find information in this newsletter on how you can join the discussion. **P**

Pittsburgh Teamwork Drives Empowering Effective Teachers Initiative

One national leader on the teacher-effectiveness front is homegrown. Pittsburgh Public Schools is reaching deep into its well of resources and people to make the most of a \$40 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and a \$37.4 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant.

Pittsburgh's Empowering Effective Teachers Project is the linchpin of a comprehensive effort to boost teacher effectiveness by understanding performance measures and responding to the differences amongst teachers, said Sam Franklin, executive director of the Office of Teacher Effectiveness.

"Once you actually measure teacher effectiveness, you enable your organization to act in entirely different ways," he said.

Three categories of measurement best capture teacher effectiveness, Franklin said. The first is teacher practices — "the skills, the techniques, the knowledge that teachers bring into the classroom every day." To measure this, a new system of teacher evaluation called RISE — Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation — is now in effect. RISE is based on a highly regarded model developed by renowned educator Charlotte Danielson.

The second part is academic growth, measuring the impact of teacher practices on student learning. The district's newly developed value-added measures will be modeled at the end of this school year and implemented next year.

"Value-added measures are fundamentally about making predictions," Franklin said. "Capture all the information about the students, predict where they would have achieved, and look at the difference where they would have been predicted to be and where they are actually — and the teacher gets credit for that difference. That's why it's fairer than an attainment model."

Third, the district is exploring ways to capture objective input on student perceptions and classroom atmosphere — those less tangible but critical components of teacher effectiveness. The findings might not factor into the teacher's evaluation, but the information could help in targeting professional development areas, Franklin said.

Together, the revised measurements will factor into such decisions as professional development and compensation incentives that encourage highly effective teachers to work in high-need schools or take team leadership roles.

Pittsburgh's monumental shift happened when all players — administrators, teachers, and community members — aligned in the effort to make teaching the best it could be. Each member of a 150-person stakeholders' group "had an equal voice," said Nina Esposito-Visgitis, new president of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, succeeding the recently retired John Tarka, who helped initiate the movement.

"(Teachers) do need to be evaluated. We should be accountable," said Esposito-Visgitis. "It's about teacher

growth. For the first time, it's not 'Let's get rid of our teachers.' It's 'Let's grow our teachers.' If you need some tweaks, we'll help you. You may have to move on to another field, but we're going to try to help you first. It's not a gotcha."

The teacher evaluations are based on objective, observed factors, and the results lead to dialogue between teachers and administrators. "It's all evidence-based, so teachers can trust it more," Esposito-Visgitis said.

Seeing teachers take leadership roles has been "one of the most fulfilling parts" of the initiative, Esposito-Visgitis said. "We have so many good teachers. They're stepping up because we have so many opportunities to be a leader."

The teachers' union is evaluating the rollout of the new system in 35 volunteer schools and sending feedback to the administration, Esposito-Visgitis said.

Pittsburgh's initiative grew from "a good timing of community demand for change, and a superintendent who was courageous and visionary, and a board that realized it needed to support him," plus a union that "didn't dig in its heels," said Carey Harris, executive director of the local education foundation A+ Schools. The original superintendent, Mark Roosevelt, has moved on, but his successor, Dr. Linda Lane, is "fearless" in continuing the work, she said.



A+ Schools, an advocate for improving public education in Pittsburgh, issued its own teacher-effectiveness research, "Tools, Rules, and Schools," shortly before Pittsburgh Public Schools released its "Empowering Effective Teachers" report, but the two aligned in many ways. A+ Schools reviewed school staffing and found that students with the highest need attended schools with the most teacher turnover.

Community volunteers help A+ Schools evaluate implementation of the new plan and track school board performance.

"We are trying to moderate, to be that independent, honest broker of information in the community," Harris said. "There is a very important role for the public to play. We just can't cede all this important work. They need the public's perspective, and they need parents."

As teacher effectiveness takes hold statewide, other districts can emulate Pittsburgh, said Esposito-Visgitis.

"The bottom line is about teacher voice and a belief that you want teacher growth," she said. **P**

The Pennsylvania Story: A Groundswell of Support for Teacher Effectiveness

While Pittsburgh Public Schools plied a unique set of circumstances — a history of philanthropy and reinvention in a small-city setting — to establish itself as a teacher-effectiveness pioneer, other Pennsylvania school districts and policymakers have been fine-tuning the details meant to transform teacher effectiveness from theory into reality.

“It’s becoming very apparent that we must address this issue and not shy away from it if we are going to drive the academic needle,” said Pennsylvania Education Secretary Ron Tomalis.

With a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation \$800,000 Momentum grant awarded in 2009, the Pennsylvania Department of Education pilot tested teacher evaluation reforms as the basis for the next steps in teacher effectiveness. Currently, Pennsylvania uses a satisfactory-unsatisfactory system that yields almost universal satisfactory ratings for the state’s teachers. Through the Momentum project, a steering committee of educators and stakeholders, businesspeople, and researchers chose to test the aforementioned Danielson model, with its four, more precise domains of performance — distinguished, proficient, needs improvement and unsatisfactory.

In 2010-11, three school districts — Allentown City (Lehigh County), Cornell (Allegheny County) and Mohawk Area (Lawrence County) — and Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit 5 stepped up to test and help refine the evaluation model. This school year, more than 100 education entities, including 77 school districts, will further test the results culled from the completed Momentum pilot.

Participants will be trained in using the model this fall and will start using the new evaluations in January. Their feedback will help refine new evaluations to be implemented statewide for the 2012-13 school year. Under the new system, half of an educator’s evaluation would come from multiple measures of student achievement, including growth, and the rest from traditional areas such as classroom observations. The department also is developing rubrics for non-classroom educators, such as librarians and guidance counselors.



The system will encourage teachers to excel and give us a better handle on how to weed out those teachers that are not effective, and also to mentor and encourage those teachers that need some professional development to bring out the best in them.

PA Sen. Jeffrey Piccola

The state’s role is “to create a system where we can have an accurate and effective measurement of teacher performance, shine the spotlight on people that are doing great, and where we can, at a state level, direct professional development responsibilities to known weaknesses,” said Tomalis. Evaluations that recognize excellence and pinpoint areas for professional development will help attract top talent to teaching, he said.

“When you treat people like widgets and you don’t acknowledge their skills or deficiencies, it makes it a little bit more difficult to say that this is a great career at which you can shine,” Tomalis said.

Before the plan fully rolls out, state law must be revised to allow measures of student performance to be factored into teacher evaluations. State Sens. Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin) and Andrew Dinniman (D-Montgomery), co-chairs of the Senate Education Committee, have introduced S.B. 1087 to revise evaluations statewide and, they believe, lay the groundwork for comprehensive steps toward teacher effectiveness.

“The system will encourage teachers to excel and give us a better handle on how to weed out those teachers that are not effective, and also to mentor and encourage those teachers that need some professional development to bring out the best in them,” Piccola explained.

Dinniman, who authored language now in law to help second-career professionals follow alternative pathways to teacher certification, said current and future legislation is meant to “develop a system that effectively evaluates teachers on how well they educate students while improving educational practices and boosting academic performance.”

“The quality evaluation of teachers and principals is a critical foundation for improving educators’ practice and raising student achievement,” he said. **P**

Across the Nation: Gates Foundation and Others Promoting Teacher Effectiveness

There are more than 15,000 school districts in the United States. Today, eight of them are working with the Gates Foundation to develop the tools, resources and policies for putting an effective teacher in every classroom.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is a leader in a nationwide movement. The foundation has invested \$500 million in states and schools to fundamentally improve the way we develop, evaluate and assign the teachers of our children.

"The goals of the foundation are super clear," said Ebony Lee, Gates Foundation senior program officer. "We're trying to get 80 percent of kids college-ready. When we asked what would get us to that goal, effective teaching emerged as a strong pillar."

The work is unfolding in "a slow realization," said Nathaniel Brown, a Gates Foundation program officer responsible for supporting Pittsburgh Public Schools' implementation of its teacher-effectiveness grant. Initial attention has focused on teacher evaluations, but the follow-up, such as growing teacher practice to the point where every student has access to highly effective teachers, will be "really hard," Brown said.

"If you have the goal of eliminating the achievement gap and establishing equity, then you've got to be deliberate about distribution in areas such as workforce management and connecting teachers' talents with the needs of students," he said.

The information needed for making those decisions is falling into place through research and efforts such as Gates' MET Project, the Measures of Effective Teaching that is developing and testing multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. "They're just getting smarter on how all these pieces relate," Brown said.

The Gates partner sites are expected to share their findings with other districts and serve as demonstration points for other districts and states "about how to do this work in a careful, thoughtful way so there would be a path for states without going through the bumps and bruises that other districts have done," said Lee. "They can serve as guideposts, and folks can learn from them and accelerate based on what was done in these other places."

In the four most intensive Gates partnership sites, including Pittsburgh, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors is supporting Communities for Teaching Excellence to build broad-based support for teaching effectiveness and equity efforts. Public engagement that drives improved policies through community engagement, policy and research, communications and collaboration "can yield a new era in public education," CTE states.

The collective work of educators, communities, parents and policymakers will start showing results in the effectiveness of teachers, but there's "no silver bullet," said Brown.

"How you increase the number of effective teachers, how you put them in front of the students with the highest need, how you think about compensation systems and reward-and-recognition systems out there, the way that effective teachers are supported and developed, that's still very much a nascent field," he said. "There is research that guided our sites to make the decisions they make, but it's not a silver bullet. We all try to stay humble about the work and allow the information that bubbles up to inform our decisions." **P**

What's Next: Having Your Say

The teacher effectiveness movement and PPC's Making the Grade initiative are both in their early stages. You can get involved now through these avenues:

- Making the Grade: Virtual Town Hall Meeting, 7-9 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 1. Many districts statewide are involved in teacher effectiveness efforts, but how do the pieces fit together to make teachers more effective? Making the Grade is convening key players to discuss the first statewide conversation on findings in the field and the next steps needed at the state and local levels. For information, visit www.papartnerships.org/work/k12/making-the-grade.
- PPC's e-blasts are biweekly updates, sharing news, policy progress, research, and happenings on the teacher-effectiveness front. You can sign up by [CLICKING HERE](#).

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