

Teacher Effectiveness & Student Achievement

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Pennsylvania
Partnerships for Children



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I – THE RATIONALE FOR TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

There's a growing awareness that having an effective teacher in every classroom is one of the missing links in assuring that every child learns – every day – from kindergarten until he or she graduates from high school ready for the rigors of college and careers.

In Pennsylvania, more and more teachers, principals, school board members and union leadership agree: It's time to continue building on our student achievement gains by making sure that all teachers and principals have the opportunities and supports needed to be highly effective professionals. Evidence of this movement can be found in national initiatives with state participants.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded hundreds of millions of dollars to states and school districts – including the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pittsburgh School District – to develop credible measurements of teacher effectiveness and improve the incentives for quality job performance.

The MET Project, or the Measures of Effective Teaching initiative, recruited more than 3,000 teachers, including nearly 200 from Pittsburgh, to help develop fair and reliable teacher evaluation measurements. Researchers are studying student performance data, watching videotaped classroom lessons, reviewing teachers' subject knowledge, and collecting students' perceptions of classroom environments.

What is an effective teacher? The definition of “effective teacher” remains elusive because of many intangibles, but a working definition is: *An effective teacher ensures that each child learns at least a year's worth of knowledge for every year spent in the classroom.*

Many Pennsylvania teachers and school leaders are highly committed professionals dedicated to student success – but this doesn't always translate into “highly effective.”

Pennsylvania should strive for an effective teacher, guided by a highly effective building leader, for every child, in every classroom every year. Research shows why:

An effective teacher is the most important school-based factor influencing school achievement – more important than class size, school size, afterschool program quality, or which school a student attends.ⁱ

School building leadership helps set the direction for schools as positive and productive workplaces for teachers and vibrant learning environments for children.ⁱⁱ

Teacher evaluation and compensation have long been driven by traditional elements such as experience, postgraduate degrees, and state certification, but leading education researchers agree that these classic standards for evaluating teachers aren't enough to determine effectiveness.

Pennsylvania has adopted many elements of a renewed and enhanced teacher evaluation system, but the single elements aren't braided into one, reliable system to credibly evaluate performance and, in turn, heighten the effectiveness of every teacher. Assuring that every teacher is effective requires aligning the strategies that include teacher training and ongoing professional development, induction and mentoring programs, certification, classroom observations, and measuring growth in student achievement.

Pennsylvania education officials, school districts, teachers, parents, and students have made great strides in boosting academic achievement from the elementary grades through high school. But far too many children still move from elementary school to middle school and onto high school without the foundational math and reading skills as evidenced on state assessments. In 2010, more than 35,000 students fail to graduate with their classes. Our state's economy requires a credentialed workforce, and achievement on the K-12 education pathway assures that every young person becomes a productive member of that future workforce.



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II – PENNSYLVANIA'S EFFORTS TO DATE: THE PIECES NOW IN PLACE

Pennsylvania teachers, administrators, and policymakers have a longstanding commitment to steady improvements in teacher effectiveness. Many of the pieces are in place in Pennsylvania but not yet aligned.

Recent efforts in our state include improved public school funding, rigorous academic standards, student supports, measurements of growth in student achievement, graduation requirements, professional development for building principals and teachers, and revised teacher certification.

Improved public school funding:

With the exception of the most recently enacted state budget, the Commonwealth had been taking aggressive steps to improve K-12 education funding for every student. Increasing the state share of public education funding has been the bedrock of this foundation. Adequate and equitable public school funding helps ensure that every child, regardless of community wealth, has an equal chance for a quality K-12 experience. But money alone isn't the answer. Coupled with increased investments have been state requirements that large infusions of new funds be spent on evidence-based practices designed to improve student achievement, such as pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, reduced class size, math and reading coaches, and technology.

Internationally benchmarked academic standards:

More than 40 states, including Pennsylvania, have adopted the Common Core academic standards in English language arts and mathematics. The Common Core standards have been informed by the best evidence across the country and will help ensure students are college and career ready. In addition, the Common Core standards are internationally

benchmarked to help guarantee that graduates can compete in today's global economy. A wide range of stakeholders, including teachers and administrators, helped prepare the standards, which will be fully implemented by July 2013.

Supports for students:

Supports should motivate and engage students with new technologies and other tools. They should ease the transitions from elementary to middle to high school. Currently, Pennsylvania school districts can access 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. With that knowledge, teachers can adjust their instruction and keep students progressing toward the goal of learning a year's worth of knowledge. 4Sight is available for students in grades three through 11.

Academic remediation is mandatory for students in kindergarten through fifth grade who aren't proficient in math or reading. Beginning in 2011-12, mandatory remediation will extend to students falling behind in any of the state's 10 graduation requirement courses or locally validated assessments. However, remediation isn't guaranteed for children after 5th grade and in courses that are not required for high school graduation.

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. Districts can use the information in two ways: to chart the academic progress of a group or subgroup of students from the previous year, and to project proficiency

by student groups on future PSSAs – sort of Average Yearly Progress (AYP) predictor. As with any tool, PVAAS doesn't provide a complete picture but helps administrators and teachers plan interventions and allocate resources.

Graduation requirements:

By 2015, every Pennsylvania student must demonstrate proficiency in core subjects to earn a high school diploma. The assessments can be through end-of-course Keystone Exams, validated local exams, or Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate exams. Assessments will align with Common Core and state academic standards, preparing more students for postsecondary education and reducing the need for non-credit remedial courses in college. The new approach also includes supplemental instruction for students who fail to achieve the standards as evidenced by performance on the Keystone Exams or locally validated assessments. Other supports for students and districts include model curricula, lessons plans and materials to support student growth, diagnostics that can be given multiple times each year to benchmark student performance to the standards, technical assistance, and professional development for teachers.

Professional development for school building 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 elementary, middle and high schools led by principals who completed PIL achieved at higher levels in reading and mathematics than those in comparison schools without a PIL-trained principal, according to a recent study from Old Dominion University.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since 2008, all new principals and assistant or vice principals have been required to participate in GROW, an induc-



tion program related to Pennsylvania's PIL. With a curriculum developed by the National Institute for School Leadership, school leaders learn to think and plan strategically, create an organizational vision around personalized student success, understand and apply standards-based systems theory and design, and use appropriate data to inform decision-making.

Teacher certification:

In the past, Pennsylvania's broad grade classifications for teacher certification didn't recognize that children learn and develop in distinct phases. New regulations reclassified 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 four through eight, and secondary certificates span grades nine through 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.

In addition, Pennsylvania has a small state-supported effort to help more teachers achieve National Board Teacher Certification.

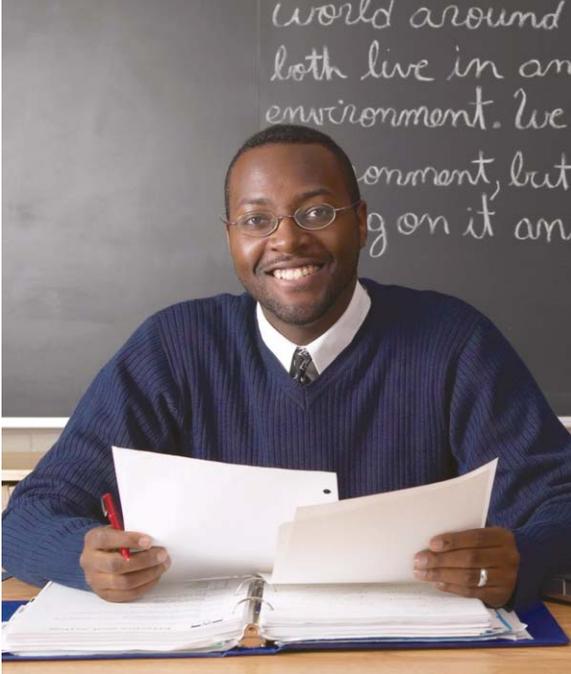
III – WHAT'S NEW: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Though there's much to be done, Pennsylvania has not been standing still on assuring that students are making progress throughout the K-12 experience and ultimately graduating college- and career-ready. The Commonwealth has taken steps toward aligning existing initiatives and guaranteeing an effective teacher for every child.

Pennsylvania's application for federal Race To the Top funding indicated the willingness of a wide array of education stakeholders, from teachers' unions to school administrators and from state policymakers to locally elected school board members, to advance the state's commitment to teacher effectiveness.

The application committed Pennsylvania to a consistent, statewide evaluation system for teachers and principals, high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers, equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals, further improving teacher preparation programs, and supporting the professional growth of teachers and principals. In the application, 120 school districts and their teachers' unions agreed to use student achievement growth in teacher evaluations.

The effort demonstrated the education community's commitment to elevating the teaching profession and assuring that all students are taught by highly effective teachers who are supported by inspired leaders. The application did not succeed, but the work moves forward and some elements have been advanced by the Corbett Administration.



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Developing consistent statewide evaluation measurements:

Many stakeholders agree that schools need reliable, fair and accurate evaluation systems, but what indicators of effectiveness should be used, and what weight should be given to student achievement growth? These questions are being explored through a pilot project funded by a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Momentum grant to the PA Department of Education. In the project, the Allentown, Cornell, Mohawk Area, and the Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit worked to develop tools and protocols for effectively measuring teacher and principal effectiveness. Under the Momentum grant, a state-level stakeholder group comprised of superintendents, principals, teachers, intermediate units personnel, the State Board of Education, teachers' unions, school boards, postsecondary education, and business is identifying the elements of comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation systems, including appropriate measures of growth in student achievement. The Pittsburgh and Philadelphia school districts also contributed lessons learned from designing evaluation systems linked to student achievement growth. The University of Pittsburgh, Mathematica, and the National Institute for School Leadership are analyzing data, reviewing best practices nationwide, determining valid options of measures for student achievement growth, and developing training for the pilot sites.

The PA Department of Education (PDE) plans to expand the pilot in the 2011-12 school year and is seeking up to 100 school districts and local education agencies to volunteer and roll up their sleeves to work with PDE to refine the tools used in the first pilot and help develop a new teacher evaluation system.

Pittsburgh's groundbreaking initiative:

The Pittsburgh Public School District won a \$40 million Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation teacher effectiveness grant –

one of only three public school districts and a cluster of charter schools that the foundation awarded nationwide – to develop performance pay, provide extra pay for important assignments, overhaul tenure, broaden recruitment, and improve discipline in schools. The district also received a \$37.4 million in federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to support the initiative. The district and its teachers' union, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, are collaborating to redesign curriculum and increase the number of highly effective teachers by reworking classroom observations and feedback, factoring student achievement growth into teacher evaluations, and making tenure a meaningful milestone by linking it to evidence of growth in student achievement.

Other districts also are advancing efforts to reward improved student performance with increased compensation and changing how teachers are assigned to buildings and classrooms as evidenced by recent teacher contracts.

Alternative pathways to certification:

Assuring effective teachers for every child requires filling gaps in high-need schools and meeting critical shortages for teachers in areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields known collectively as STEM. One tool for recruiting motivated, experienced professionals to become teachers is an alternative pathway for earning teacher certification.

Pennsylvania took another step forward this spring by authorizing alternative methods for teacher certification. The law establishes new forms of post-baccalaureate certification and gives the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education the power to evaluate and approve post-baccalaureate certification programs and providers, and establish approval guidelines. Institutions of higher education may be approved providers but the law also gives non-traditional providers the opportunity to gain and seek approval. Required program guidelines include elements such as: subject area educational strategies,

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child development specific to the certificate level sought, accommodating and adapting to students with disabilities, and strategies for teaching English language learners. Candidates would have to meet strict prerequisites for education and

subject matter competency, and programs would have to provide mentoring and coaching to support enrollees when they teach in the classroom.

IV – CALL TO ACTION

Every child deserves an effective teacher. Every teacher deserves a rewarding, enriching working environment that is led by an effective principal and appropriate compensation.

Across Pennsylvania, teachers, principals and superintendents, school board members and Department of Education officials are joining forces to improve teacher effectiveness and ensure students move along the K-12 education pathway with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed as they enter the next phase of their education and ultimately graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

The following action steps should drive an improved teacher effectiveness model:

Design a more effective evaluation system for teachers.

Move away from the common local district model that largely uses ratings of satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Often, excellence goes unrecognized and poor performance goes unaddressed, providing little individualized professional development and support for struggling teachers.

Use multiple measures, including value-added student assessment and observational measures to evaluate teachers.

Utilize the new teacher evaluation system as appropriate to inform school district decisions, such as teacher assignments, professional development and individualized professional development plans, compensation, tenure, retention, and dismissal.

Create and utilize incentives to ensure the most highly effective teachers serve the highest-need students.

Develop alternative pathways to certification.

Continue addressing the importance and challenges of training high school teachers who must be expert in content as well as effective teaching methods.

Expand efforts in teacher induction/mentoring programs.

Develop career pathways for teachers.

The commitment of key policymakers and education stakeholders provides the chance to take additional steps on each of our core strategies – public school funding, standards and accountability, student supports, school building leadership, and teacher effectiveness.

A discussion about teacher effectiveness and college- and career-readiness, should include these critical questions:

What can each person – teacher, administrator, elected official, policymaker, parent, student and citizen – do to assure an effective teacher in every classroom?

How can we bring all players to the table?

What resources can we apply? Where can we find more?

The results of the discussion will boost teacher effectiveness to a priority spot on the education agenda as a key element in our efforts to improve student achievement. The opportunity is here. The time is now to take the steps that will put effective, motivated teachers in every Pennsylvania classroom every day, to prepare students from kindergarten to high school graduation for the rigors of postsecondary education and 21st century careers.

ⁱ Stephen G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanusheck and John F. Kain. "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement." *Econometrica*. Volume 73, Number 2. March 2005. Pages 417-458.

ⁱⁱ Stephen Davis, Linda Darling-Hammond, Michelle LaPointe and Debra Meyerson. "School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals." Stanford Educational Leadership Institute. 2005. Page 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ John A. Nunnery, Ed.D., Steven M. Ross, Ph.D. and Cherng-iyh Yen, Ph.D. "The Effect of the National Institute for School Leadership's Executive Development Program on School Performance Trends in Pennsylvania." Old Dominion University. March 8, 2010. Page 37-38.

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