

Continuous



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Improvement

The school board's role in moving Educator Effectiveness forward

Peggy Hill-Breunig

Editor's Note: Peggy Hill-Breunig is president of the Waunakee Community School Board and was a member of the Principal Practice Work Team that helped develop the Educator Effectiveness standards for principals.

Among the challenges and opportunities Wisconsin school districts will manage in 2014-15 is the local implementation of the statutorily required Educator Effectiveness System (EE System).

As reported last September in *Wisconsin School News*, the system has been in development since 2010. Members of design and work group teams have included representatives from the WASB, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, the Wisconsin Education Association Council, and the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, among others.

As a member of the Principal

Practice work team, I can attest to the real collaboration and hard, detailed, work behind the scenes by everyone involved in staying true to the goal of developing an evaluation system that in the words of State Superintendent Tony Evers is “fair and valid, and informs professional development.”

■ School Board's Role

The Educator Effectiveness System is designed to support the continuous improvement of educator practice that leads to improved student learning.

However, because the system represents a change from how most teacher and principal performance evaluations have been conducted in

the past, it can lead to a range of expectations and perceptions among staff members and the public if left unaddressed.

If the conversations focus on high-stakes human resource decisions, rather than the intent of an effective evaluation system, it can have a negative affect on implementation and staff morale. Therefore, whether your district has chosen the Department of Public Instruction's state model, the CESA 6 Effectiveness Project (EP) or other equivalent model, it is important, as school board members, that we understand our role and what we should do to support an effective transition to this new system. (Note: References made to the DPI State EE Model should not be interpreted as an endorsement of that system over equivalent models.)

As the publication *The Key Work of School Boards* tells us, as leaders of public education in our communities, our role is to improve student achievement and increase community engagement to promote student achievement. We share responsibility with district staff in creating optimal conditions for teaching and learning within our school districts.

To effectively do our jobs, we need to understand the issues, align resources, and foster a culture that supports and rewards the work of



Photo courtesy of the Whitnall School District

principals, teachers and students in improving student performance. We need to hold ourselves accountable along with others, articulate the educational mission, and engage the public to garner support for that mission.

As school leaders, the question is what are our roles and responsibilities with respect to implementation of this new evaluation system?

■ Understand the Purpose

Board members who understand the purpose of the system and how it's designed are better positioned to make decisions that will enable effective implementation. As stated earlier, the Educator Effectiveness System is

designed to support the continuous improvement of educator practice that leads to improved student learning.

The evaluation system enables feedback and self-reflection to inform professional growth, utilizing evidence from multiple data measures of educator practice and student outcomes collected over a period of time.

Feedback from school districts participating in test pilot programs of the Educator Effectiveness System has shown the system changed the nature of conversations in the districts around teaching and learning and enabled educators and evaluators to personalize and customize professional development in ways



Photo courtesy of the River Falls School District

New Educator Effectiveness System in Action

Two Wisconsin superintendents from school districts that piloted the DPI Educator Effectiveness System share their feedback.

► What are some of the positive aspects of the Educator Effectiveness System?

CRYSTAL RITZENTHALER, superintendent of the Baraboo School District: “The shift from teaching to learning is now reflected through the teacher evaluation process as it should be. Implementing the Educator Effectiveness System in a thoughtful way, we will build a professional learning community focused on continuous improvement. In addition, all professionals will be using the same language which will deepen our understanding of effective teacher and principal practices.”

COLLEEN DICKMANN, superintendent of the Wisconsin Rapids Public School District: “I think that conversations [with teachers] are now focused and we have common terminology and common rubrics. We are discussing assessment in a more deliberate fashion. I think our school district had a sound teacher evaluation system in place prior to this but the Educator Effectiveness System has tightened it up—there will be more consistency.”

► What could be improved with the new Educator Effectiveness System?

RITZENTHALER: “The workload for evaluators and educators is tremendous. The Educator Effectiveness System will require ongoing time for training, support and implementation of all of the components of the system. Required components may need adjusting after the first year of implementation. Professional educators and leaders also need time to build positive relationships with students, staff, families and community partners. Unfortunately, some districts are using EE for high-stake decisions, which create

a competitive, not collaborative school culture. With only one SLO (student learning objective) now being required, that goes against best practice for using multiple sources of data to accurately measure student learning.

DICKMANN: “There is an enormous time commitment and districts continue to be inundated with multiple new initiatives. In other words, nothing is being removed from the already overflowing plate. The additional step of having to navigate and upload numerous artifacts and forms is cumbersome.”

► What can school board members do to support the Educator Effectiveness System and make it work in their district?

RITZENTHALER: “Board members need to recognize and value the importance of instructional coaching and specific feedback in order for individual teachers to continuously improve their practice. Additionally, the Educator Effectiveness System will require resources to provide targeted professional development that is determined from the EE process. It is important that school boards support the necessary resources for teachers (and principals) to build the capacity in our schools and district-wide.”

DICKMANN: “I think board members will need to be encouraging and patient. I think that they will also have to realize that as we continue to prioritize, some things are going to be put on the back burner and some things just won't get done. Hopefully board members will be supportive and understanding of that. We are overtaxing personnel already due to budget cuts. The implementation of the Educator Effectiveness System is, and will continue to be a big time commitment.” ■

that directly improved instruction. Feedback from test pilot districts also helped DPI make informed changes to the system for the required 2014-15 roll out.

In addition to understanding what the system is (and what it is not), board members should understand accountability measures — what and how data is being collected and how analysis of that data can be used to guide decisions.

Data used to evaluate an individual's performance should measure student growth and those areas the individual can influence. If the data measures outcomes that are unrelated to the efforts and work of the educator, it will become a potential source of conflict and anxiety among even your best teachers and administrators. The EE System is designed to utilize multiple measures and enables educators to also develop goals appropriate for their specific situation(s).

Educator Effectiveness **RESOURCES**

- ▶ **Up to date information** on Educator Effectiveness, including feedback and testimonials from pilot districts using the state model: <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov>
- ▶ **Suggestions on communicating** Educator Effectiveness to internal and external stakeholders: <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/tools/local-comm-toolkit>
- ▶ **Orientation video:** <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/tools/orientation-video>
- ▶ **District tools:** <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/tools/tools-home>
- ▶ **Local decisions and inclusions:** <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov/files/ee/pdf/LocalDecisionsInclusions.pdf>
- ▶ **Fact Sheet:** http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/files/sprntdnt/fs_edef.pdf
- ▶ **Information on the CESA 6 Model:** http://www.cesa6.org/products_services/teacher_leader_effect/

■ Time and Resources

Feedback from pilot districts confirmed early suspicions that the new EE System requires more time to effectively support the teacher and principal evaluation processes. In order to ensure consistency and fidelity, evaluators are also required

to be trained and then demonstrate their knowledge of the system. Each EE System model has an associated online evaluation and observation management tool (Teachscape for the EE model, MyLearningPlan OASYSSM for CESA 6) that require providing staff access and orientation.

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The current state budget has funds available for districts to help offset licensing fees.

Board members need to be sensitive to the impact this process will have on their administrators' time, particularly during the initial roll out. DPI recognizes this potential issue and has developed an Information Brief for an optional district and/or building-level position responsible for providing local support for the EE System (see "Resources" sidebar, previous page).

Support resources are also available through regional CESA Implementation Coaches. Each district's situation will be different.

■ Communicate with Staff and the Public

The system is designed to give edu-

cators ongoing, evidence-based feedback related to their professional practice in order to strengthen student outcomes. It is important to communicate with staff that providing evidence-based feedback is the goal and intent of the system – this will help encourage everyone to

implementation. In communications with the public about EE, boards should emphasize the focus on improving student outcomes.

The advantage of being proactive with your communications will enable you to control the local conversation rather than be influenced by what might be heard from sources outside the district (see "Resources" sidebar, previous page).

While the Educator Effectiveness System is a statewide initiative, local districts and school boards have to determine how to use the

system and its data within their own district's context. DPI, districts, and communities must work together to make implementation decisions that support the purpose of the system. ■

Peggy Hill-Breunig is president of the Waunakee Community School District board of education.

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learn it together and help build trust in the system.

In Waunakee, we have a board member representative on our district educator effectiveness committee. This action illustrates our commitment to understand and do what is required to support effective

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