

Starting the Journey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
January 2015

Progress Report on Colorado's Educator Evaluation and Support System

Great teachers aren't born. They are trained and encouraged throughout their career. Classroom teaching and school leadership are the strongest school-based factors impacting student achievement. Every Colorado child in every classroom deserves to have excellent teachers and school leaders who are supported in their professional growth. That means educators need clear, frequent feedback about how their teaching and leadership impact student learning.

To meet these goals, in 2010 Colorado lawmakers passed Senate Bill 10-191, changing how principals and teachers are supported and evaluated with the goal of ensuring college and career readiness for all students. It also requires evaluating educators based on statewide standards of practice and measures of student learning (for teachers and principals) or student outcomes (for specialized service professionals).

This report provides an update on how the model evaluation and support system for teachers and principals is being implemented in 26 school districts that have been piloting the system since 2011. And it describes how the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) continues to make improvements as the new system is now rolled out in all of the state's 178 districts.

PRELIMINARY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RATINGS

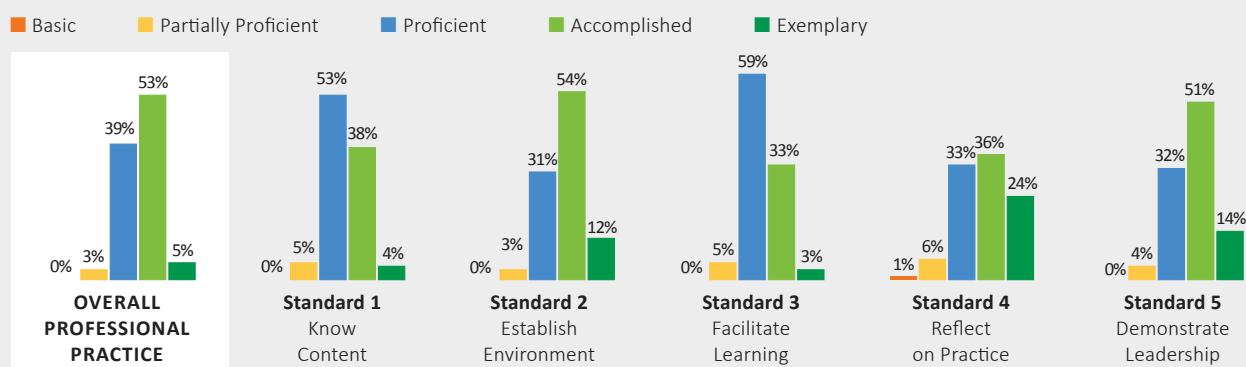
During the first two years of the phase-in, the pilot districts rated teachers and principals on a five-point scale (from *basic* — well below state standard — to *exemplary* — well above state standard) based on their professional practice in several areas (as measured by a rubric). They also practiced measuring student growth. The following results are based only on the ratings given for the professional practices and should be considered preliminary because districts are still in various stages of implementation.

TEACHERS. In 2013–14, 39 percent of teachers in the pilot districts were considered *proficient* (meeting state standard)

based on the five Quality Standards, and 53 percent were *accomplished* (above state standard). Only 5 percent received the top rating of *exemplary*, and 3 percent were deemed *partially proficient* (below state standard).

PRINCIPALS. In 2012–13 (the 2013–14 data are not yet available), 48 percent of principals in the pilot districts received one of the top two ratings based on the six Quality Standards, and an additional 46 percent were considered *proficient*. Only 5 percent were deemed *partially proficient*.

Distribution of Teacher Ratings, 2013–14



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.
Source: Colorado State Model Evaluation System for Teachers: 2013–14 Pilot Report

For both teachers and principals:

- The ratings vary based on the district, school level, subject taught, probationary status, experience and demographic characteristics. For example, early childhood educators received the highest ratings, followed by elementary, middle and high school teachers.
- Teachers performed differently across different elements, indicating that the elements capture distinct aspects of teaching rather than measuring the same thing.

- The variability in the distribution of ratings suggests that evaluators are able to differentiate among teachers and among principals.

Considering the combined state model for teachers and principals, these initial findings provide evidence for validity and reliability. There are areas that CDE is tracking in an effort to improve validity and reliability over time.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIRST THREE YEARS

Based on surveys, interviews, focus groups and data submitted from the pilot districts, several overarching patterns have emerged.

The new model system is generating actionable feedback for teachers and principals. Nearly 80 percent of principals and 60 percent of teachers say that the model system is influencing their practice. Approximately 70 percent of principals and about half of teachers say that the new system provides actionable feedback and is useful in making instructional decisions.

The model system is causing more focused conversations among educators. Surveys of teachers found that 76 percent agree that they have meaningful opportunities to confer with their principal/evaluator about their practice, and 76 percent agree that the information helps identify areas for improvement.

The model system is helping educators take more ownership of their professional growth. Many teachers say that the system helped “push them out of their comfort zone” and write more ambitious goals, according to focus groups conducted by the

Colorado Education Initiative. For example, teachers are able to be more intentional with planning and more frequently incorporate technology into instruction.

Pilot participants, especially principals, are more supportive of the system as they gain more experience with it. On every measure, principals surveyed in spring 2013 strongly believe the model system is superior to the system they were using in fall 2011. The increase in positive responses ranged from 44 to 65 percentage points.

Challenges remain. At the end of the 2012–13 school year, 80 percent of teachers and 94 percent of principals said that the system is at least *somewhat effective* (thus there is room for improvement). Key concerns include how time-consuming the more detailed observations and feedback sessions are, the validity and reliability of the measures, and whether the same system can accurately measure the performance of all teachers in all grades and subjects.

GOING FORWARD

CDE will continue being transparent, accountable and committed to continuous improvement based on lessons from the field. In the coming year, CDE is focusing on four major priorities.

Validating the rubrics to ensure that the evaluation system is fair for all educators and measures what it is intended to measure. CDE also is studying how the measures of student learning are being used.

Ensuring more consistent evaluations, using tools such as Elevate Colorado, an online system to help promote common

interpretations of teacher quality and help evaluators provide consistent, useful and actionable feedback to educators.

Helping reduce the time burden by creating an online performance management system to reduce the paperwork. More than 90 local education agencies (LEAs) are using the system, and additional LEAs are considering it.

Evaluating specialized teachers (early education, special education, art, etc.) by developing guidance that provides informal advice to help teachers and their evaluators understand the evaluation process within their specific context.

THE BOTTOM LINE: A change of this magnitude clearly is challenging but already is making a difference in classrooms across the state. This is hard work but worthwhile. Colorado is making progress, and there is room for continued improvements.