



Mitigating Teacher Shortages: Evaluation and Feedback

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The first brief in this series, *Teacher Shortages: What We Know*, explores research on teacher shortages and highlights recent state task force findings. This report is one of five policy briefs examining strategies states are using to address shortages:

1 ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

2 FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

3 INDUCTION AND MENTORSHIP

4 EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

5 TEACHER LEADERSHIP



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Providing teachers with ongoing feedback and targeted professional development following evaluations can be an effective strategy to **retain** teachers. A definition of the evaluation feedback loop is provided, followed by a summary of supporting research on this strategy, state policy examples and considerations for policymakers.



What is a feedback loop in an evaluation system?

Research on employee retention across industries indicates that professional employees are more likely to remain in their roles and be more satisfied when they feel valued and believe that the employer is investing in their professional growth and development.¹

Through teacher comprehensive evaluation systems, school leaders have an opportunity to provide this kind of support to teachers by conducting regular evaluations of teaching, providing ongoing feedback – both positive and constructive – and offering targeted professional development that aligns with individuals' needs and goals. A primary goal of any teacher evaluation system should be to help every teacher – even the most effective – continuously improve.

An effective teacher evaluation system typically serves two distinct purposes:

- **Accountability.** Evaluations are used to monitor teacher performance and ensure they are following established standards and teaching practices. As a summative tool, evaluations are often part of a rewards or sanctions system.
- **Development.** Evaluations are used as a formative tool to enhance teachers' skills. They create a feedback loop that provides ongoing and actionable feedback based on observations during the evaluation, identify areas for growth and link results to targeted development activities.²

Over the years, the rhetoric around teacher evaluations has primarily focused on identifying and removing ineffective teachers rather than retaining teachers by helping them continually improve their teaching practice.

While some state and local evaluation policies tend to be used more as an accountability tool, evaluations have a far greater impact on teaching quality and student achievement when used as a coaching model that emphasizes feedback, corrections and continual improvement.³ Simply put, “evaluation results should form the foundation of teacher development.”⁴

To use teacher evaluation systems as a retention tool, state policies can emphasize the need for frequent classroom observations followed by immediate, concrete and actionable feedback that is linked to high-quality professional growth opportunities.⁵

As with any professional industry, teachers want to feel supported, are open to meaningful feedback and are constantly looking for ways to improve their craft. Providing employees with meaningful performance feedback and supports and recognizing their contributions are important components of retention.⁶

“IF YOU START FROM THE PREMISE THAT TEACHER EVALUATIONS ARE MEANT PRIMARILY TO DRIVE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT, THEN REGULAR FEEDBACK IS ESSENTIAL.”

– Paul Bambrick-Santoya, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development⁷



What does the research say?

Using evaluations to provide teachers with meaningful feedback and aligned professional development opportunities leads to more effective teaching and greater student success.⁸ Many also believe that professional growth opportunities induce teachers to remain in their profession.⁹

It is no surprise, then, that as of 2015, 38 states require that teachers receive some degree of feedback – either verbal or written – following a classroom observation and 31 states specifically require that the results be used to inform and shape professional development for all teachers. This is an improvement from only 12 states in 2011.¹⁰

The number of annual classroom evaluations a teacher receives is directly linked to the frequency of feedback and the amount of target professional development given to that teacher. Only 11 states require multiple observations for all teachers while 27 states require multiple observations only for new or low-performing teachers.¹² High performing teachers may go two or more years without a classroom observation.¹³ Focusing only on the newest and weakest teachers, however, may not be a wise choice. When states and districts invest in the highest achieving teachers, it increases the chances that those teachers will be retained. "The solution is to *improve* retention, not to blindly increase it."¹⁴

In a large survey of high-performing teachers from four large school districts, TNTP found that if those teachers received two or more of the following retention strategies, they would remain in their current school for an average of two to six more years than they otherwise would have.¹⁵ Five of the eight retention strategies listed are dependent on findings from teacher evaluations, including strategies around providing feedback and development and recognizing accomplishments.

In a survey of more than 10,000 teachers from four large school districts, about 75 percent of the teachers surveyed believed that feedback plays a crucial role in improving teacher practice, yet only 3 percent of teachers reported that observations or feedback were the form of professional development that had helped them the most.¹¹

LOW-COST RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR HIGH-PERFORMING TEACHERS

FEEDBACK AND DEVELOPMENT

- Provided with regular, positive feedback
- Helped identify areas of development
- Gave critical feedback about performance informally

RECOGNITION

- Recognized accomplishment publicly
- Informed of being high-performing

RESPONSIBILITY AND ADVANCEMENT

- Identified opportunities or paths for teacher leader roles
- Put in charge of something important

RESOURCES

- Provided with access to additional classroom resources

Source: TNTP. *The Irreplaceables* (Brooklyn: TNTP, 2015), http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Irreplaceables_2012.pdf (accessed April 17, 2016).



State examples

In 2015, 38 states required that teachers receive feedback following their evaluations and 31 states had policies requiring that teacher evaluation results be used to inform teachers' professional development activities.¹⁶ These requirements take different forms in different states.



Arkansas requires that all teachers be evaluated annually with novice and poorly performing teachers receiving a formal summative assessment each year, while all other teachers receive one every four years with an interim appraisal in the remaining years. All classroom observations are to include a pre- and post-evaluation conference with the teacher and evaluator. Teachers and evaluators are expected to jointly develop a professional development plan that links areas of needed improvement with professional development.¹⁷



Louisiana requires that teacher evaluations include the provision of professional development services based on individual teachers' needs and the creation of individual teacher improvement and remediation plans for teachers whose performance is developing or below standard. Evaluations must also provide teachers with opportunities for career development and professional growth.¹⁸



New Jersey recently increased the number of required observations for all teachers from one to at least three per year. Evaluators must provide feedback to help employees improve their teaching effectiveness and include a process for ensuring that evaluation results help inform instructional development.¹⁹



Policy considerations

To use teacher evaluation systems as a retention tool, state policies can consider the following:

- Provide teachers with "frequent and regular feedback" and ensure teacher evaluations are part of an ongoing "feedback loop" between teachers and school leadership rather than administering a one-time assessment at the year's end.²⁰
- Evaluate all teachers regularly, regardless of their experience or skill level.
- Use evaluation results to target professional development to teachers' needs, both individually and collectively.
- Provide both evaluators and those being evaluated with substantive, meaningful training on evaluation tools and processes.²¹
- Include teachers in the development of goals, monitoring of improvements and celebrations of successes.
- Provide teachers opportunities to put what they've gained through professional development into practice.



ENDNOTES

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16. *Ibid.*, Kathryn M. Doherty and Sandi Jacobs.
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