



Webinar Synthesis: Supporting Rater Accuracy and Consistency in Classroom Observation

Observation and evaluation systems lie at the heart of reform efforts underway across the nation. They create rigorous frameworks for analyzing the work of teachers and administrators, and create significant opportunities for professional growth.

These systems are discussed in a series of six webinars, *Supporting Rater Accuracy and Consistency in Classroom Observation*, conducted in October 2011 by the National Center for Teacher Effectiveness (NCTE).

The systems, developed on the statewide and local levels, provide the framework for rigorous analysis of educational practice. Ratings developed through the systems are then used in some districts for decisions on promotion, tenure, and performance pay. Once aligned with professional development, the systems are designed to influence teacher behavior, and improve student learning.

[Click here to hear more from Cambridge Education about aligning evaluation to professional development](#)

[Click here to hear more from Kristan VanHook of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching about the goals of improvement through evaluation](#)

Where already implemented, these systems have created significant cultural changes in school districts, where each teacher gets observed up to four times a year, and are given specific recommendations for improvement. Data from initial reports from the evaluations systems, many of which are funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Race To The Top competition, show substantial numbers of ineffective teachers—far more than traditional evaluations.

To be effective, the systems must be rigorous, valid, reliable, and trusted by all stakeholders. Intensive observer training and state certification is required in districts that use the ratings for high-stakes decisions. That training can be in classroom workshops or in online courses. The development of systems have presented major challenges for states and districts, which must set up an instructional framework, train administrators to conduct observations with the evaluation rubric, and create professional-development opportunities that build on evaluation results.

[Click here to hear more about the New Teacher Project's research on the distribution of effective teachers](#)

[Click here to learn more about how self-evaluations are used in teacher evaluations, from NIET's Anissa Rodriguez](#)

The evaluations aim to improve feedback between administrators and their teachers. Built into the systems are pre- and post-observation meetings, which provide a focus for the administrator's analysis, and then an opportunity for the teacher and evaluator to determine the next steps for improvement. In some systems, teachers are asked to complete a self-evaluation of the observation, which provides more



fodder for the ensuing discussion.

The systems are based on instructional frameworks, which break down teaching practice into certain domains, such as instructional practice, classroom management, planning and preparation, professional responsibility, teacher reflection, and teacher-student interactions. Each domain is then broken down further into several indicators, with some frameworks including up to 60 indicators of teaching practice.

Indicators can include such teaching issues such as providing academic feedback to students, asking questions that lead to higher level thinking, modifying instruction in response to data, or building a positive learning-focused classroom environment.

It's up to the administrators and peer reviewers to score the teachers—typically on a scale of 1 to 4—on “evidence” they see during the classroom observations. These scores are then fed into a data system's psychometric model to produce teacher ratings. Some observers use tablets or laptop computers to record their findings electronically.

Data systems are essential parts of every evaluation and observation system, which can have multiple factors. In some states, state legislatures have set parameters for the ratings, with up to 50% of a teacher's rating based on student performance on standardized state exams, or other district- or classroom-based tests. Many districts use a value-added model to show student growth from one year to the next.

Some evaluations are the responsibility of one administrator, while others use multiple observers. Some have mandated observations by both peers and administrators.

Many evaluation systems link the ratings directly to professional development opportunities. One system allows teachers to log into an online portal to view their ratings, which include suggestions for courses, or online videos to help them address their areas in need of improvement. Other districts develop learning modules directly linked to the instructional rubrics.

[Click here to hear more from Pearson's Kelly Burling about the connection between teacher evaluations and targeted professional development.](#)

Summary prepared by David McKay Wilson.

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