



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK
POLICY PRIORITIES FOR TEACHER EVALUATION

(Last revised October 18, 2011)

Based on our review of relevant research and interviews with experts in the field, as well as 13 focus groups conducted with 147 parents, teachers, and students in communities throughout New York City,¹ we identified six priorities for New York's new teacher evaluation system.

Most of the people with whom we spoke expressed fear that the state's formula, to the extent it relies heavily on standardized tests, will yield inaccurate data and harm students with disabilities and English Language Learners. However, because the state's formula is established in law, we focused on policy priorities that may be accomplished within the law's established framework:

- **Parents and students should have a voice in evaluating their teachers.**

Parents and students, and a number of teachers, supported the use of student surveys in teachers' evaluations, and parents felt strongly that parent surveys should be used as well. Without input from parents, the evaluations will lack critical information on important aspects of teachers' performance, including whether they communicate effectively with families, how they impact their students' attitudes towards school and learning, and whether they use homework effectively. As one immigrant parent commented during a focus group, "If [the school] doesn't care what the parents say, it is as if they don't exist. But they do exist. That is why our children are there."

- **Parents and students should have opportunities to provide input on the teacher evaluation system as it develops.**

As of this point, teacher evaluation has been a matter largely negotiated by school districts and unions. The panel appointed by the state to recommend how the system should be implemented did not include any parent or student members. Parents and students have an important perspective to provide and based on our conversations in focus groups, are eager to share it. We suggest that the state include parents and students on future task forces addressing this issue, and that the city consider forming an advisory committee of parents and students to provide input on the development of teacher evaluation practices as they evolve.

¹ The vast majority, or 89%, of focus group participants were immigrant parents, parents of English Language Learners (ELLs), and/or parents of students with disabilities; students with disabilities and/or ELLs; or teachers of those student populations.

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- **State test scores should not account for more than 20 – 25% of a teacher’s rating, as contemplated by state law.**

Parents expressed concern that using state tests to rate teachers would encourage more “teaching to the test,” discourage teachers from working with children with disabilities and ELLs, who often struggle with these assessments, and increase overuse of alternate assessments and segregated classrooms. One parent of a student with a disability asked, “When the principal asks the teachers who will take [my son] into their classroom, who will raise their hand?” Also, teachers said that the tests do not adequately measure progress for ELLs, who are working on language acquisition as well as academic content, and students with disabilities, who are working towards the academic, social/emotional, and physical goals articulated on their Individualized Education Programs as well as the regular curriculum. Even more broadly, experts have questioned the ability of these tests to measure value added in general.

Other assessment options, like portfolios of student work, and specifically for ELLs, gauging performance on oral presentations, may provide alternative ways to measure student growth that would better reflect the progress of these populations.

- **To the extent that state law requires the use of value-added measures of student achievement based on state standardized test scores, steps must be taken to account for the facts uniquely applicable to teachers who have English Language Learners and/or students with disabilities in their classrooms.**

ELLs and students with disabilities may have different patterns of growth than their peers, and expectations for achievement need to be adjusted to reflect those differences. Also, for these populations, any formula for determining value-added scores must account for students in co-teaching classrooms, students who take alternate assessments, and students who do not have baseline test scores because of recent immigration. In addition, any formula must take into consideration that there are serious questions as to the validity of standardized tests currently being used to assess these populations due to their special needs.

- **Evaluators must have expertise in, and understand, key behaviors and skills required of teachers working with students with disabilities and English Language Learners.**

For example, observers must have expertise needed to assess teachers of ELLs for their ability to incorporate English language instruction and native language supports where appropriate. Observers need to be able to assess teachers of students with disabilities for their ability to work effectively with their students’ families and service providers and to match instruction to interventions recommended on IEPs. Importantly, observers must be able to assess teachers of both populations for their skill in designing and delivering instruction that is culturally relevant and appropriate



to the specific individualized needs of their students. Opportunities for peer review by experienced educators should be considered as a supplement to observations by principals or designated evaluators. We also note that inter-rater reliability in classrooms with ELLs and students with disabilities must be addressed.

- **The state and the local districts must ensure that schools have sufficient time and resources to implement the new system and provide professional development for teachers who are found in need of improvement.**

Conversations in some of our focus groups echoed the concerns that we heard from experts in the field about the challenges of implementing this new program at a time when schools and districts are facing significant budget cuts. Evaluators must have adequate training and time to conduct classroom observations in a timely, accurate, and thorough manner. Principals must have the resources to orient teachers, parents, and students to the new system, and importantly, to link the teachers who receive lower scores to effective professional development opportunities.