



The Ohio Teacher Evaluation System: An Overview

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INTRODUCTION

The journey to a statewide teacher evaluation system in Ohio began in 2009 with House Bill 1. HB 1 required the Educator Standards Board¹ to recommend model teacher evaluation systems to the state board of education.² This bill was a key part of Ohio's efforts to win the second round of the Race to the Top funding program.³ In fact, Ohio's Race to the Top application mentions HB 1 and a teacher evaluation system that the state was "already developing" at the time.⁴ This move included the state board's creation of a standards-based framework for teacher evaluation. The Ohio Revised Code requires that the framework do the following:⁵

1. Provide for multiple evaluation factors
2. Require at least two formal observations by the evaluator of at least thirty minutes each, as well as classroom walkthroughs
3. Assign a rating on each evaluation
4. Require each teacher to be provided with a written report of the results of the evaluation
5. Identify measures of student academic growth for grade levels and subjects that cannot use value added; implement a classroom-level value-added program developed by a nonprofit in grade levels and subjects that can use value added
6. Provide professional development to accelerate and continue teacher growth and provide support to poorly performing teachers
7. Provide for the allocation of financial resources to support professional development

The Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) was created in alignment with this framework through a collective effort by teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, representatives from Ohio's professional associations, and national experts.⁶ The process took place over approximately two years, between 2009 and 2011. During this interval, members of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation Writing Team examined evaluation systems throughout the country and studied nationally recognized research. OTES officially went into effect on December 31, 2011. It was designed to function fairly and transparently in all of Ohio's districts, including small, large, rural, suburban, and urban districts.

Beginning in 2014, districts and schools were permitted to choose between using the original evaluation framework or an alternative evaluation framework outlined in House Bill 362.⁷ The alternative framework was later revised in the state budget passed in June 2015.⁸

Evaluations are required for all traditional public school teachers, but not charter or private school teachers. Local boards of education may decide not to conduct evaluations of teachers who submit notices of retirement on or before December 1 of the school year, or of teachers who spend 50 percent or more of the school year on leave.⁹

ORIGINAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

In the original framework, a teacher evaluation comprises two components: a teacher performance rating and a student academic growth rating. Each component is weighted at 50 percent.

Teacher performance rating

The teacher performance component is determined by the Teacher Performance Evaluation Rubric.¹⁰ This rubric is based on the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession,¹¹ which Ohio colleges and universities are required by law to incorporate into their teacher preparation programs.¹² A teacher's scores on this rubric are determined using evidence gathered during at least two formal observations (each lasting thirty minutes), periodic walkthroughs, and conferences.¹³

The determination of a teacher's performance rating is made following a year-long sequence of activities conducted by the evaluator. Informal observations and walkthroughs should be scattered throughout the year, but evaluators are required to conduct two formal observations. Whether these observations are scheduled or announced is a district decision.¹⁴ The first formal assessment must include a thirty-minute observation and the completion of the performance rubric. The department recommends (but does not require) pre- and post-conferences between the evaluator and the teacher.¹⁵ The first formal observation sequence is followed by a mid-year review and conference between the evaluator and the teacher. The second formal observation cycle occurs in similar fashion: a thirty-minute observation (which must be completed by May 1) and the completion of the performance rubric (again, pre- and post-conferences are encouraged but not required). A written report by the evaluator must be completed and provided to the teacher by May 10,¹⁶ and a final summative review and conference between the evaluator and the teacher occurs after the final report. The final report must be signed by both teacher and evaluator after they have discussed the teacher's summative rating.

Teachers are permitted to provide additional information to evaluators within ten days of receiving their summative rating, which becomes part of the record. Teachers may also request a second conference with their evaluators. Challenges to the summative rating must follow the procedures that are outlined in applicable collective bargaining agreements.

Student growth measures rating

The student growth component determines how much academic growth students make between two or more points in time.¹⁷ Because of the differences in subject matter, grade levels, and assessment requirements, various ways for measuring student growth are necessary. There are three ways to measure student growth in accordance with the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System.

The first method of measuring student growth is via value-added data. Value added is a statistical analysis method that measures how teachers impact students' academic achievement from year to year. Ohio utilizes the EVAAS value-added methodology provided by SAS¹⁸ for state and vendor assessments.¹⁹ Value-added measures must be used by districts if they are available.²⁰ If a teacher instructs only value-added-compatible courses (ELA or math in grades 4–8), then the entirety of the teacher's student growth measure rating is made up of value-added data. If this is the case, teachers must use their composite, rolling average of value-added scores, which start with one year of data and progress to include three.²¹ However, if a teacher instructs value-added courses *and* courses that are not compatible with value added, only a percentage proportionate to the teacher's schedule of value-added courses may be used for the student growth measure rating.

The second method of measuring student growth is via approved vendor assessments. According to Ohio law,²² the state board of education is required to develop a list of student assessments that measure mastery of course content for the appropriate grade level.²³ These can include nationally normed assessments, industry certification examinations, or end-of-course exams. These assessments are used for grade levels and subjects for which value added cannot be used. Districts are required to contact the vendors of their preferred assessments directly for details on how to use the assessment to measure growth.²⁴ The Ohio Department of Education offers a guide to support districts in evaluating the assessments' alignment to district needs and goals.²⁵

The final method of measuring student growth is via locally determined measures. This method is reserved for subjects that are not measured by traditional assessments, such as art or music. There are two types of locally determined measures from which districts can choose:

1. Student learning objectives (SLO) are measurable, long-term academic growth targets set for students by their teachers.²⁶ SLOs are meant to demonstrate a teacher's impact on student learning in the same way that value-added models do; unlike value-added, however, SLOs allow educators to focus on specific objectives and measure growth with teacher-chosen formative and summative assessments. Examples of possible assessments include vendor assessments other than those on the department's approved list,²⁷ career and technical education assessments, performance-based assessments, portfolios, and locally developed assessments. Although the teachers select the assessments, they must be approved by districts.²⁸ Districts have flexibility in shaping SLOs to align with local needs and context, but the department of education recommends a sequence of steps and advises districts on the components of a high-quality SLO.
2. Shared attribution is a student growth measure that can be attributed to a group of teachers rather than an individual instructor.²⁹ In the simplest terms, shared attribution is the practice of evaluating teachers based on test scores from subjects other than those they teach. The department of education has identified three types of shared attribution that districts may use, and it is up to the district to select a type.³⁰ These three types include building- or district-level value added (which the department recommends); building teams (such as content and specialized areas) that utilize a subgroup value-added score from the building or district report card; and building- or district-based SLOs.³¹

ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The alternative evaluation framework was added to the Ohio Revised Code in 2014³² and allows districts to choose between the original evaluation framework and the alternative evaluation framework. This alternative framework was then revised in the state budget that was signed in June 2015. The revisions mandate that, beginning in the 2015–16 school year, the alternative framework assign ratings for teacher evaluations as follows:³³

1. The teacher performance measure must account for 50 percent.
2. The student growth measure must account for 35 percent.

3. The remaining 15 percent of a teacher’s score is determined by one or any combination of the following components: student surveys, teacher self-evaluations, peer-review evaluations, student portfolios, or any other component determined appropriate by the district board or school governing authority. The department compiles a list of approved instruments that districts and schools are permitted, but not required, to use.

THE ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR

The principal of a school building is often the person conducting evaluations, although, according to Ohio law, it is possible for other credentialed evaluators to complete one as well.³⁴ Evaluators must be credentialed in order to complete evaluations.³⁵ To obtain the proper credentials, evaluators must attend a training sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education and pass an online assessment. Initial credentialing expires in two years, at which point evaluators must complete a three-hour module and successfully complete another online assessment. The new credential is effective for an additional two years.

SUMMATIVE RATINGS

During the 2014–15 school year, Ohio began using a six-hundred-point formula that calculates all components of the evaluation system and the final summative rating.³⁶ The purpose of this system is to ensure a consistency for all teachers regardless of whether their districts select the original or alternative OTES framework.

Teachers receive one of four summative ratings based on the combined scores they received for the teacher performance component, the student growth component, and (if applicable) measures included through the alternative evaluation framework. The ratings and their descriptions, according to the department of education, are as follows:³⁷

1. **Ineffective**: A rating of “ineffective” indicates that a teacher consistently fails to demonstrate minimum competency in one or more teaching standards. There is little or no improvement over time. The teacher requires immediate assistance and needs to be placed on an improvement plan.
2. **Developing**: A rating of “developing” indicates that a teacher demonstrates minimum competency in many of the teaching standards, but may struggle with others. The teacher is making progress, but requires ongoing professional support for necessary growth to occur.
3. **Skilled**: A rating of “skilled” indicates that a teacher consistently meets expectations for performance and fully demonstrates most or all competencies. This rating is the expected performance level for most experienced teachers.
4. **Accomplished**: A rating of “accomplished” indicates that a teacher is a leader and model in the classroom, school, and district, exceeding expectations for performance. The teacher consistently strives to improve his or her instructional and professional practice and contributes to the school or district through the development and mentoring of colleagues.

EVALUATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

As a result of the evaluation process, teachers should be able to pinpoint both strengths and areas ripe for improvement through professional development.³⁸ Specifically, evaluators recommend professional development opportunities focused to the needs of teachers through one of two types of plans.³⁹ Teachers who receive student growth measure ratings of “most effective,” “above average,” or “average” develop professional growth plans in collaboration with their evaluators as a means of identifying resources and opportunities to improve. On the other hand, teachers who demonstrate below-average student growth, receive “ineffective” ratings in any areas of performance, or receive an overall ineffective rating are provided with an improvement plan that is developed uniquely for them by the evaluator.

SAFE HARBOR

Due to the growing pains associated with newer, more difficult assessments, Ohio’s lawmakers have instituted a safe harbor for teacher evaluation results.⁴⁰ The 2016–17 budget signed into law in June 2015 prohibits districts and schools from using the value-added ratings based on assessment results for teacher evaluations during the safe harbor years—unless the district or school enters into a memorandum of understanding collectively with its teachers that provides otherwise. While a district or school could have provided this safe harbor for the 2014–15 school year by entering into a memorandum of understanding, the new budget made the safe harbor a default for all districts and schools, as well as extending it to cover assessments given in the 2015–16 school year. In place of value added, districts and schools must use the teacher performance rating.

The budget also stipulates that the department of education must apply for a federal waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act to permit the exclusion of value-added scores from teacher evaluations in the 2015–16 and 2016–17 school years (which are based on the results of assessments administered during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years).

EFFECTS

A change in law during summer 2014⁴¹ permits less frequent observations for teachers who receive ratings of either accomplished or skilled. As long as the teacher’s student academic growth measure for the most recent school year is average or higher, teachers with an accomplished rating can be evaluated once every three years; teachers with a skilled rating can be evaluated once every two years. In both cases, teachers still must receive at least one observation and conference each year.

Ohio currently has no statewide law that permits the firing of teachers based solely on teacher evaluation ratings. (Due to the legislature-approved Cleveland Plan, however, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District retains the right to use evaluations in hiring, firing, and layoff decisions.)⁴² The Ohio Revised Code states that local boards must include in their evaluation policies the procedures both for retaining/promoting and removing poorly performing teachers.⁴³ In addition, seniority cannot be the basis of a retention decision unless the decision is between two teachers with comparable

evaluations. Boards must also require at least three formal observations of teachers who are under consideration for contract non-renewal.⁴⁴

Beginning in the 2015–16 school year, every core subject teacher who has received a rating of ineffective for two of the three most recent school years will be required by her district to complete all content knowledge exams selected by the department of education as a means of determining content expertise.⁴⁵ School districts may use the results of these exams to help determine whether or not to continue employing the teacher, but the decision to terminate or not renew a teacher’s contract cannot be based solely on this factor—*unless* a teacher fails to earn a passing score after three consecutive administrations of the same exam. If the teacher takes and passes the exam, he or she cannot be forced to take the exam again for at least three years regardless of evaluation ratings. Even after the teacher earns a passing score, though, she will be required by her district to complete professional development that focuses on the areas for growth determined by the most recent evaluations. If, following completion of the professional development requirement, the teacher’s next evaluation rating is ineffective (or if the teacher fails to complete professional development), the school district has grounds for termination.

END NOTES

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- ⁶ Ohio Department of Education, Teacher Performance, accessed June 9, 2015 (see OTES Model Packet), <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Evaluation-System/Ohio-s-Teacher-Evaluation-System/Teacher-Performance-Ratings>.
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