A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom
Creating a Teacher Evaluation System that Works for California

> We worry that the future of our young colleagues in teaching may not fulfill the promise we have dreamed of for our profession, where the highest consideration is given to teachers' important questions: "How am I doing?" and "What can I do better?" We want evaluation that offers answers to those questions, that paints a detailed picture of good teaching, that serves to guide professional development, and that lays out a clear, coherent path through a teacher's career where the expectation is for continual improvement.
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> — Excerpted from the full report, *A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom*

The dire state of education funding in California and across the nation means we must be smarter than ever about how we use our resources. Since teacher quality has emerged as one of the most powerful variables in student success, the focus of policy reform must be on building the capacity of our teachers to meet the challenges our schools face. The urgency of the task of improving teacher quality makes it more important than ever for us to attend to the knowledge and experience of teachers themselves and not to succumb to quick-fix reforms accompanied by one-time infusions of money.

In 2008, expert teachers deeply invested in the success of their students formed Accomplished California Teachers (ACT) to bring their knowledge to bear on the pressing policy issues of their field. ACT's mission is to present practitioner perspectives and expertise on a wide range of issues concerning teaching quality. ACT is an organization of California teachers who have achieved distinction in a multitude of ways: as teachers of the year, national Milken award-winning educators, leaders in curriculum development and professional learning, teacher mentors and coaches, and as those who have gone through the rigorous certification process of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

This is an executive summary of a report by ACT that examines teacher evaluation. The recommendations in this report are drawn from research, analysis of existing policies, input from academic experts, and our own experiences as promoters of quality teaching. This report offers our recommendations on making teacher evaluation a more useful tool to advance the quality of teaching across California.

Overview: The state of teacher evaluation in California

While evaluation processes across the state vary widely, many of them look very much the same as they did in 1971 when the California Legislature enacted the Stull Act, governing teacher evaluation. In sharing their own experiences with evaluation, ACT members revealed some common challenges: a system that teachers do not trust, that rarely offers clear directions for improving practice, and that often charges school leaders to implement without preparation or resources.

Jane Fung, National Board Certified Teacher and Milken award winner in the Los Angeles Unified School District, shared her experiences with evaluation as she has experienced them during her 20-year career:

> I have had administrators who never came into my classroom for formal observations or asked me for anything more than the initial planning/goal sheet. I have had administrators observe a formal lesson and put the feedback sheet in my box without ever having spoken to me about the lesson, and I have had years where I am just asked to sign the end-of-the-year evaluation sheet [without being observed].

San Diego middle school teacher Ellen Berg describes an experience—more intrusive but no more productive:

> Because there is not a common language about what quality teaching is, in some cases we use a checklist of random things. In San Diego Unified they had us go visit classrooms with a list of all these things that were supposed to be going on—group-work, cooperative learning, etc.—and it was impossible to do all these things in a 15- (or even 50-) minute period, and teachers were being ripped up for not doing everything on the list.

While there are environments where evaluation helps teachers improve their practice, they are rare in California, and the costs of the existing systems, both to the fiscal bottom line and to the quality of the teaching profession, are large. Fiscal costs entail much more than those of removing poor teachers after the tenure deadline passes. The financial impact accrues to school districts that must replace teachers who leave due to dissatisfaction with the profession caused by lack of guidance about improving their work and to loss of leadership that is overwhelmed by the task of providing that guidance. In cases where teachers leave because of lack of guidance and support, the costs related to hiring each new faculty member can amount to upwards of $20,000. The impact of this loss goes well beyond finances, resulting in the loss of promising young teachers, a lack of opportunities for teachers to master the craft of teaching and advance their effectiveness with students, and an absence of the growth in mastery that comes from collaboration with expert evaluators.

What's wrong with the current system?

From our discussions, conversations with teaching and administrative colleagues, and examination of the research, we have identified the most problematic elements of the current evaluation system:

- The standards that aim to guide teaching practice (the California Department of Education's California Standards for the Teaching Profession) list elements of effective teaching but fail to elaborate on evidence of these elements. Teachers and their evaluators do not share a truly well-defined and detailed pictures of what constitutes good professional practice at each level of teacher development.

- In most cases, evaluations are conducted for compliance, and therefore do not improve the quality of teaching. There is rarely substantive discussion that occurs either before or after an observation that is focused on ways to improve instruction.

- The time available for principals to conduct effective evaluations is seriously limited, particularly in large schools and high-need schools where administrative demands are large. Furthermore, the preparation principals receive in conducting evaluations is inadequate. One evaluator in a school is rarely sufficient to judge the skill of teachers across a range of content and developmental levels, no matter how well-resourced a school might be.

- Most evaluations pay little or no attention to the performance of a teacher's students, even though California's Stull Act requires student outcomes to be considered. Evaluations too often focus on easy-to-observe practices like classroom management, rather than looking for evidence that students are actually mastering the learning goals set for them.

- Current evaluation procedures occur on schedules mandated by local agreements that are not considerate of actual needs of teachers and have no sense of urgency about which teachers' work needs more careful support or scrutiny.

- Most evaluations are not used to target needs of individual teachers and help them select professional development to address areas in which they need additional knowledge or skills. This further contributes to teachers' views that evaluation is not about developing mastery of professional standards, but rather a routine designed to ensure that an administrator is performing his job.

What do we need to do?

Use existing high quality models and practices

Two key elements to building a better teacher evaluation system are, first, that it substantiates that the quality of a teacher's work to meet the needs of her students, and, second, that it helps a teacher understand what she needs to do to improve, regardless of the level of her experience.

While the current system does not generally accomplish either of these goals, we see some areas of strength on which the state can build a system that is likely to produce these results and, in so doing, make big strides in improving the quality of its teaching force. Indeed, we were impressed with some of the work already done. We believe that, rather than throwing away the work that was accomplished at considerable cost and commitment of expertise, it makes sense to use it to build a new system that will lead to a comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation that promotes professional learning throughout the teacher development continuum.

Effective models of evaluation already exist. Among them, the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, which, if built upon to develop clear descriptors of standards, could be used to build an aligned evaluation system for teachers. Another is the state-approved Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT)—a good measure of quality in the pre-service phase and a valuable tool for improving teacher preparation. PACT can also provide relevant data to develop a better, more personalized, path for new-teacher induction. The California Department of Education's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program (BTSA) provides a structure to evaluate and support teacher development in the first few years of teaching. For more experienced teachers, the state should renew its commitment to promoting National Board certification, and should develop ways to bridge the gap in professional learning opportunities that occurs between induction and readiness for NBPTS certification.

Design a new evaluation system based on best research on good teaching

We recommend creating a new evaluation system, using effective approaches that already exist, designed around the following principles:

1. *Teacher evaluation should be based on professional standards* and assess quality across the continuum of teacher development. The state should use the California Standards for the Teaching Profession and the National Board standards to create a continuum of expectations from pre-service teaching to accomplished practice. The standards of teaching practice selected as appropriate at each level of teacher development should guide evaluations while accounting for the requirements for successful teaching in the variety of unique contexts in which teaching occurs.

2. *Teacher evaluation should include performance assessments* to guide a continuous, coherent path of professional learning throughout a teacher's career. These should include existing assessments like PACT and the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) in pre-service; a new tool like the PACT that would be more productive than the current assessment to guide induction during BTSA; new, authentic assessments related to classroom practice for developing professionals; and the National Board assessment at the accomplished level.

3. *The design of a new evaluation system should build on successful, innovative practices* in current use, such as evaluations built on teachers' self- and peer-assessments in relation to high standards of performance or evidence-based portfolios that demonstrate ways that a teacher's instructional practice is contributing to student achievement. Teachers must have a significant role in the design of a new framework and in promoting it among teachers in the state.

4. *Evaluations should consider teacher practice and performance, as well as an array of student outcomes for teams of teachers as well as individual teachers.* To support collaboration and the sharing of expertise, teachers should be evaluated both on their success in their own classroom and their contributions to the success of their peers and the school as a whole. They should be evaluated with tools that assess professional standards of practice in the classroom, augmented

with evidence of student outcomes. Beyond standardized test scores, those outcomes should include performance on authentic tasks that demonstrate learning of content; presentation of evidence from formative classroom assessments that show patterns of student improvement; the development of habits that lead to improved academic success (personal responsibility, homework completion, willingness and ability to revise work to meet standards), along with contributing indicators like attendance, enrollment and success in advanced courses, graduation rates, pursuit of higher education, and work place success.

5. *Evaluation should be frequent and conducted by expert evaluators,* including teachers who have demonstrated expertise in working with their peers. Evaluators at each juncture should be trained in the recognition and development of teaching quality, understand how to teach in the content area of the evaluated teacher, and know the specific evaluation tools and procedures they are expected to use. There should be training opportunities available for evaluators and final recommendations about teachers' tenure and employment should be subject to review by a reliable evaluation oversight team.

6. *Evaluation leading to teacher tenure must be more intensive* and must include more extensive evidence of quality teaching. This evidence should be collected and reviewed by both the teacher and trained evaluators and should include documentation that shows that the teacher's practice exhibits the standards that define quality teaching. The process should be an ongoing part of a serious teaching induction process that helps novices grow in their profession, with the help of mentors and coaches, guided by clear standards of practice.

7. *Evaluation should be accompanied by useful feedback, connected to professional development opportunities, and reviewed by evaluation teams* or an oversight body to ensure fairness, consistency, and reliability.

Make expert teachers full partners in the process

As we examined the role that evaluation currently plays in affirming and elevating the quality of teaching in California, and as we looked at the research and read about evaluation practices in other states and countries, we became convinced that California should begin crafting new policies to improve its evaluation system immediately. However, it should not do so without the voices of teachers who can contribute knowledge about good practice, how to identify and improve it, and how to ensure that all teachers in the state meet the standards it sets for them.

It is critical that teachers embrace and trust a new teacher evaluation system, secure in the knowledge that classroom teachers have been full partners in its design and that it truly has the potential to transform practice and dramatically increase student achievement. We believe that teachers can lead California's classrooms to new levels of learning when we build evaluation systems that support and engage them in this process. We offer our vision of continual professional growth, with reflection and collaboration between administrators and teachers, that will lead to greater outcomes for all of our students. Teachers are ready to step up as partners to make our schools places where all of us, from the principal to the kindergartner, learn together.

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This full report and related materials are available at http://nbrc.stanford.edu.

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