The Ohio Teacher Evaluation System

Observations and Recommendations

education first consulting

The Ohio State Board of Education commissioned Education First to review the draft Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES). Our analysis illustrates that OTES is on the right track, emphasizing areas that are directly linked to improving student achievement. However, OTES could be strengthened by simplifying the system, clarifying the goals, and prioritizing the essentials.

Education First offers the following eight observations and accompanying recommendations:

1 OTES includes multiple measures with an emphasis on student outcomes.
Several studies identify teacher effectiveness as the number one in-school influence on student success. OTES focuses on student outcomes by requiring 50 percent of evaluations to be based on student growth (though how growth will be measured is still undetermined).

Other research indicates that some areas of classroom practice are more directly tied to student achievement than others, and OTES emphasizes these essential areas, such as lesson delivery, differentiation, and classroom environment.[1]

2 OTES encourages research-based behaviors that influence student achievement. Recent research indicates that high-quality feedback is correlated with increased student achievement. Additionally, instructional leadership is the second most influential in-school factor on student learning, and successful instructional leaders provide the conditions necessary for teachers to grow through targeted feedback, coaching and additional resources.[2]

OTES incentivizes these behaviors by providing at least six opportunities annually for evaluator/teacher feedback sessions. The system also provides guidelines for teacher/evaluator discussions and examples of effective questioning for evaluators, another sign that the state is focused on providing meaningful feedback to teachers. OTES also emphasizes collaboration, a research-based factor that influences student achievement.[3]

3 Key components of the system are still in development, making it challenging to assess the system as a whole. Significant gaps remain in the still-draft OTES work, including how the student growth components will be determined (particularly for teachers in non-tested subjects and grades), how the various components of the system will be combined to result in a single rating, and what the system for collecting, analyzing and reporting evaluation data will include. Without these key pieces, it is challenging to estimate the impact of the system on teaching and students.

4 OTES is overly complicated. OTES' many forms, tools and pages of narrative make it challenging to summarize what the purpose of OTES is – the so-called elevator speech. Absent a clear vision for the system, stakeholders are left with a complicated and overwhelming process that seems more bureaucratic than useful.

Additionally, OTES suggests ten forms for teachers (one of which asks teachers to answer 29 separate questions before and after observations), as well as nine forms for evaluators. Though several of the forms are not mandatory, are these all really necessary?

OTES does not present a clear set of priorities. The year-long process seems to emphasize each component equally instead of focusing on two or three milestones. A system that doesn't prioritize anything ends up prioritizing everything – and drowning under its own weight.

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[1] Kane and Staiger (2008); Rockoff, Staiger, Kane and Taylor (2009); Rothstein (2009); Kane, Taylor, Tyler, and Wooten (2010).
[1] Taylor and Tyler (2011); Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004); Blase and Blase (1999).
[1] Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) and Jackson, C. Kirabo and Elias Bruegmann (2009).

5 Components of OTES in its current structure may not be feasible for all schools. As noted above, OTES requires far more forms than several comparable systems (ten for teachers, nine for evaluators). For example, Tennessee only requires teachers to fill out one form per observation, and evaluators fill out two (one is the observation rubric, the other is the summative evaluation). These other systems are likely gleaning the same information, but do so in a more streamlined, efficient and manageable way.

6 Some components of OTES are susceptible to being compliance-driven. The abundance of forms may encourage evaluators and teachers alike to simply get them done as opposed to investing meaningful time into them.

Additionally, OTES' observation rubric often emphasizes *whether* teachers are doing certain things, leading to a compliance-driven approach where the evaluator is just checking off that the teacher in fact performed a task. A better focus would be to emphasize *how* teachers are doing those things to get at whether the teacher is performing the task well.

7 OTES allows some teachers to avoid observations. OTES' Option B allows teachers who are not in their evaluation year to substitute observations with a professional project. Ensuring consistent rigor and monitoring of the professional project will likely be a challenge. Additionally, annual observations of all teachers – including highly effective ones – help to reinforce observation skills of the evaluator. The issue for Ohio is to balance thorough evaluations with feasibility, and to

Requiring evaluators to spend significant hours on observations is time well-spent *if* the evaluator is able to provide meaningful feedback to the teacher. It is not time well-spent if the evaluator is simply filling out forms

determine administrators' capacity to complete evaluations efficiently and effectively.

8 OTES does not always reinforce continuous learning and reflection. The current draft OTES suggests that reflection is a sequential step in the system when in fact the system as a whole should focus on incentivizing teachers' continuous self-reflection.

Recommendations

First and foremost, Ohio leaders should avoid letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. OTES is well on its way to becoming a meaningful and effective system, and the state should focus on using the pilot to tweak, refine and enhance the system with the understanding that improvements to the system will continue to occur well after implementation.

The state should focus on simplifying the system and maximizing implementation feasibility, including streamlined approaches to explaining OTES, different evaluation options based on teachers' track records, and simple structures for developing the final rating.

The state should place its time and resources into training on the system. High-quality and ongoing training will likely result in greater clarity and better implementation than additional tools or paper supports.

Several policy enhancements would improve the system, including requiring annual evaluations for all teachers and accountability for evaluators. Aligning OTES to the Ohio Continuum on Teacher Development would also help to clarify the relationship between the two.

No evaluation system can be perfect – in teaching or in any other profession. But we can develop systems that are dramatically better than current ones, and that teachers and school leaders believe are fair and accurate. Once se do, we should use them and improve on them.
The New Teacher Project, Teacher Evaluation 2.0