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# Getting It Right:

## A Blueprint for Effective Implementation of the New York City Teacher Evaluation System

Teacher Policy Team on Teacher Evaluation Implementation  
June 2013



**Educators 4 Excellence**

New York

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# Preface

“We joined the Educators 4 Excellence Teacher Evaluation Policy Team because we wanted a teacher-driven, fair and useful evaluation system to support us as teachers and help our students achieve at higher levels.”

from “Beyond Satisfactory: A New Teacher Evaluation System for New York” (2011)

Two years ago, an Educators 4 Excellence Policy Team proposed a framework for a new teacher evaluation system that they believed would result in meaningful feedback and support for New York City’s teachers. Finally, after years of debate and acrimony, New York City teachers may finally receive the improved system that they deserve. On June 1, 2013, New York State Education Commissioner John King outlined the details of New York City’s new system (see page 7), which will be enacted districtwide starting in September 2013. Although the new evaluation system is a positive step toward helping teachers grow and improve, the system’s ultimate success will be defined by the quality of its implementation. Anticipating the challenges of rolling out a new evaluation system in the largest school district in the country, we joined this Policy Team with the goal of informing the implementation process to ensure the system accomplishes its goal of supporting our professional growth.

Fair, meaningful and multi-measure evaluations can create a collaborative community in our schools by opening our classroom doors and creating opportunities for vital conversations about what is working and what could be improved. However, any new policy can be challenging, especially in a system as large, diverse and complex as New York City’s 1,700 schools.

Further, the new evaluation system requires a fundamental shift in the culture of our schools. This sea change will require immense and thoughtful support to meaningfully transform the way teachers teach, principals lead and students learn.

We came together to create a set of recommendations for implementing teacher evaluation by reviewing the research and studying the implementation of evaluation systems in other districts and states. We spoke to stakeholders and experts from around the country with firsthand experience implementing evaluation. We surveyed hundreds of our colleagues to learn what was most important to NYC teachers and to infuse our recommendations with their voices and ideas.

We developed these policy suggestions to help New York City learn from the best practices and mistakes of others and to ensure the smoothest and most effective implementation possible. To be successful, teacher evaluation must foster effective communication and trust between all parties. It is imperative that the system be implemented with fidelity by including thoughtful training, transparency, accountability and reflection. If New York City gets this right, together we can transform teaching and learning for generations of students and teachers to come.

“Teacher evaluation needs to be implemented well to help ensure its core purpose: to make all teachers better at what we do, and therefore, all students better off for having us as part of their lives.”

Matthew Schatz, Kindergarten teacher, P.S. 145 The Bloomingdale School

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# Introduction

Early in the research process, we recognized the need to balance building an effective learning community with consideration of the administrative and logistical challenges associated with a school system as large and diverse as New York City's. This recognition forced us to tackle numerous important questions, including: How do we ensure...

- evaluators provide consistent, regular observations using the Danielson Framework for Teaching (the rubric selected for NYC's new system)?
- observations fairly and accurately measure teacher performance across the district?
- teachers receive meaningful and constructive feedback tied to professional development?
- the evaluation system continues to improve as we identify challenges and areas for growth?
- 1,700 schools and 75,000 teachers understand the new system in three months when it launches districtwide?

Answering these questions is not easy, and there will certainly be bumps along the road, but the stakes are too high not to be successful. We believe this evaluation system has the potential to fundamentally improve teaching and learning in New York City. The following recommendations can help us successfully implement this critical tool, and create a culture of professional learning for our colleagues and improve outcomes for our students.

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## Recommendations

The following strategies are designed to ensure that New York City's new teacher evaluation system is implemented in a fair and meaningful manner that strengthens the teaching profession and improves student outcomes.

### Effective Training

Evaluators and teachers should receive comprehensive training, phased in over time, on how to use the Danielson Framework.

Evaluators and teachers should also be trained on how to give and receive feedback and have constructive conversations about strengths and areas for growth.

### Thoughtful Observation Schedules

Teachers' observation schedules should be organized to prioritize support and development.

Principals should have manageable portfolios, particularly principals in large schools or who lead teachers who teach specialty areas they are unfamiliar with.

Highly effective teachers should be leveraged as trained observers.

### Timely Feedback and Targeted Professional Development

Feedback should be delivered in a timely fashion.

Feedback should be tied to meaningful and targeted professional development opportunities.

An emphasis should be placed on building a community of professional learning in schools.

### Systemwide Review and Reflection

An extensive reflection process using systemwide surveys should be used to gather feedback on the evaluation system and its implementation.

An independent recommendation committee should make suggestions for improvements to the system.



# Background

## 3012-c: A New Teacher Evaluation for New York State

As part of New York State's approximately \$700 million Race to the Top award, state legislators passed section 3012-c to the state's education law, mandating the implementation of a comprehensive evaluation system. The law requires that all classroom teachers and building principals receive an annual professional performance review (APPR) resulting in (a) a single composite effectiveness score, and (b) a rating of "highly effective," "effective," "developing" or "ineffective." This is in stark contrast to our former evaluation system, which was unstructured, tended to vary greatly between schools, did little to improve a teacher's performance and rated teachers as either "unsatisfactory" or "satisfactory," providing little room for nuance or growth.

The state law also defines the basic structures of the evaluation system, requiring a teacher's yearly rating to be based on:

- **40 percent student achievement:** 20 percent is based on the average amount of growth a teachers' students demonstrate, and 20 percent is based on a locally determined measure of student growth.<sup>3</sup>
- **60 percent measures of teacher practice,** at least half of which should be based on classroom observations. The additional measures may include student surveys, parent surveys and teacher portfolios.

The law left the particulars of the local measure of student growth and the measures of teacher practice to each district and their local union to negotiate, with final approval from the New York State Department of Education.

## New York City's Pilot Program

In January 2010, the New York City Department of Education, consulting with the United Federation of Teachers and TNTP, launched the Teacher Effectiveness Pilot program. In the 2010-11 school year, 20 schools participated in this "no-stakes" pilot. The pilot has grown in subsequent years, expanding to 111 schools in 2011-12 and 215 in 2012-13, with more than 10,000 teachers participating. The program's objective was to test practices for an evaluation and support system aligned to the new state law, primarily using Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Throughout each year of the pilot, teachers were observed six times and assessed on how well they implemented the competencies outlined in the Danielson Framework.

Early results from the pilot have been positive. Teachers who were in the pilot for multiple years, and thus received feedback and had the opportunity to act on the feedback, demonstrated improvement. Even more encouraging, teachers at all levels of effectiveness showed growth. In other words, the percent of teachers who received the lowest rating decreased and a greater percentage of teachers received the highest rating.<sup>4</sup> However, the pilot also revealed challenges and best practices to implementing evaluation, such as the need for parallel training of principals and teachers and other lessons that should inform citywide implementation.

## The Challenge

The pilot program has provided a smart and informed foundation to build upon, but with 75,000 teachers in more than 1,700 schools<sup>5</sup>, only a small fraction of schools participated. This leaves the large majority of

## Highlights of the New Teacher Evaluation Plan

As announced by New York State Education Commissioner John King (June 1, 2013)

### Flexible observations



Teachers can choose between two observation models: either one formal and at least three informal observations, or at least six informal observations. Teachers will be observed using all components of the Danielson Framework, which has been piloted in more than 300 schools in New York City.

### Video



Teachers have the option to use video to improve the quality of both the observation and the feedback.

### Student surveys



Student surveys have been proven to be one of the best measures of teacher performance. In 2013-14, the city will pilot student surveys for grades 3-12, using the well-tested Tripod Survey. The following year student surveys will count toward 5 percent of the evaluation.

### School-based control over local measures



A school-based committee – half chosen by the union and half by the principal – will make a recommendation from a state-defined menu of local student growth measures. The principal can accept their recommendation or use schoolwide growth as the default measure.

principals and teachers untrained on using the Danielson Framework and unaccustomed to giving and receiving feedback.

Furthermore, results from live polling data collected by Educators 4 Excellence during a November 27, 2012 event with NYC Department of Education Chancellor Dennis Walcott indicate that a large proportion of teachers are concerned about the feasibility of implementing this complex evaluation system at full scale in such a short time, naming “administrator training” and “lack of collaborative school culture” as the biggest obstacles to effectively implementing a meaningful teacher evaluation system in New York City.

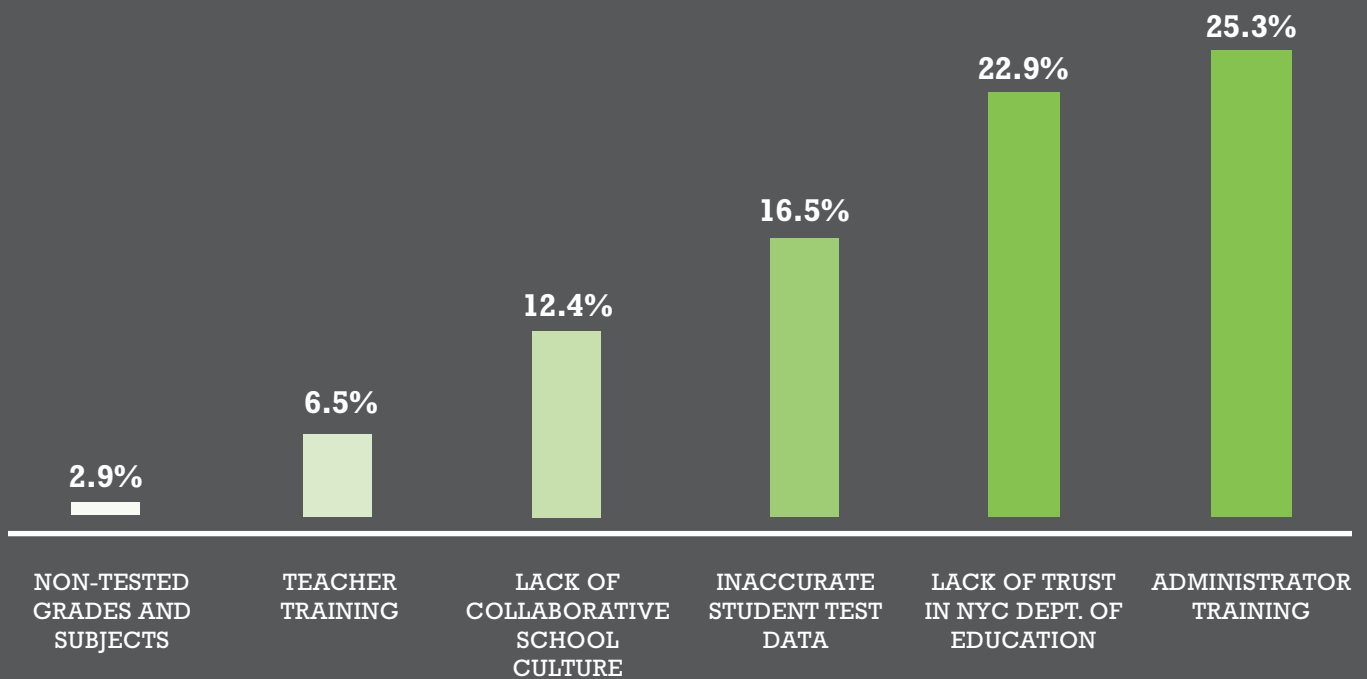
Finally, the timeline itself is a challenge. Although 3012-c required the New York City Department of Education and the United Federation of Teachers to nego-

tiate the details of evaluation, they failed to reach an agreement by the deadline of January 17, 2013. Consequently, the state amended the process to ensure there was a system in place by September 2013 and imposed a state-mandated teacher evaluation for New York City through an arbitration process. The details of the final plan were released on June 1, 2013.

The final plan provides teachers with a say about evaluations by allowing them to choose from a robust menu of options for their observations, including the type, frequency and schedule. These are excellent provisions that clearly value the voices of teachers, but they also add to the complexity of the system. This leaves the Department of Education, the United Federation of Teachers, administrators and teachers with little more than three months to implement a complex system and manage a significant cultural shift.

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**Which of the following is the biggest challenge to implementing a meaningful teacher evaluation in New York City?\***



\* 13.5 percent of respondents chose "Other."  
Teacher survey (n=170).  
Educators 4 Excellence-New York, March 2013.



# Effective Training

Evaluators and teachers should receive comprehensive training that is phased in over time on how to use the evaluation rubric and how to have constructive, sometimes difficult, conversations.

**“If we want teachers to feel comfortable and competent with the new evaluation system, we need to provide them with intense, focused training on how the system works and what is expected of them.”**

Annie Gallagher, Fourth and Fifth Grade Special Education, P.S. 164 Caesar Rodney

## The Challenge

New York City schools employ staff with a variety of educational and managerial styles. Many administrators have had little to no experience observing and providing constructive and, sometimes difficult, feedback. Similarly, many novice and veteran teachers have no experience hearing and acting on constructive criticism of their teaching. As such, teachers and evaluators need to be trained to ensure the quality and consistency of evaluations between classrooms and across the city, as well as on how to have the professional conversations necessary to provide and receive both positive and critical feedback.

### 1. Training for Evaluators on the Danielson Framework<sup>6</sup>

To prepare for the 2013-2014 school year, evaluators from every school should receive intense training on the use of the Danielson Framework. Training should include, but should not be limited to:

- Online learning modules with post-assessments,
- In person training with post-assessments, and
- Job-embedded training with talent coaches who are experts in the Danielson Framework.

These opportunities may be provided by networks; the union; online through ARIS Learn, the NYC Department of Education’s online portal, or through school collaborations with other professional organizations. Post-assessments should, at a minimum, test an evaluator’s ability to score a sample lesson, aligning their assessment with a fair and tested standard. Evaluators should not be allowed to observe teachers until they have demonstrated a consistent ability to accurately score sample lessons.

### 2. Training for Teachers on the Danielson Framework

Like evaluators, teachers need to receive intense training

on the Danielson Framework to understand the new expectations and provide them with the vocabulary to have meaningful conversations with their evaluators. In order to properly train teachers, one of the mandatory professional development days in September should be dedicated to providing citywide training on the Danielson Framework. To ensure the training is consistent, network or district-trained talent coaches should conduct these professional development sessions. While there should be a common baseline of training, teachers and school leaders should select which subsequent training sessions would be most appropriate for individual staff members to attend.

### 3. Phased Training in the Danielson Framework

Teachers and evaluators will be implementing all 22 components of the Danielson Framework for the first time in the 2013-14 school year. To ensure that all teachers and evaluators develop a true understanding of the Framework, the components should be introduced in steps throughout the year after an initial broad overview of the full Framework. The principal and teachers should work together to determine the appropriate order of focus, based on the needs of the school. This deliberate rollout of the

Danielson Framework should provide adequate time for teachers to become comfortable with each component, while respecting the urgency of the evaluation process. By January 2014, all teachers should have completed training modules for all components and can be held accountable for implementing each one. In earlier observations, evaluators should limit their written feedback to those components for which teachers have completed training modules.

### 4. Training to Have Constructive Conversations

Giving and receiving feedback is a critical skill that takes training, practice and coaching to do well. Evaluators and principals have the opportunity to engage their staff in meaningful conversations that lead to improved teaching but need training to build and deepen their skills and abilities to deliver constructive criticism. This will require:

- Model language for evaluators and teachers,
- Modeled behavior and simulations for evaluators, and
- In-school coaching for evaluators.



# Thoughtful Observation Schedules

Teachers' observation schedules and the delivery of feedback should be organized to prioritize support and development.

Principals in large schools or who lead teachers who teach specialized content areas should have manageable observation portfolios, supported by other trained observers.

**“The timeline is crucial. Teachers’ evaluations and professional development sessions must fall on a timeline which allows time for growth and for administrators to have a fair chance to observe that growth.”**

Laura Siegle, Seventh Grade Humanities, Lower Manhattan Community Middle School

## The Challenge

Some administrators, especially in very large schools, will lack the time, resources and training to conduct the number of observations required in addition to providing meaningful feedback and balancing their other responsibilities. Furthermore, teachers with varying degrees of experience and expertise will require different degrees of support at different times of the year.

## 1. Thoughtful Scheduling

In New York City's teacher evaluation plan, teachers will have two choices: a formal, full period observation and at least three shorter, informal observations, or at least six shorter, informal observations. Individual observations should be scheduled to account for the natural flow of the school year and the level of experience of the teacher and should be spaced to allow time for learning and im-

provement. This will provide teachers the necessary time for growth in specific competencies and provide an opportunity to demonstrate improvement over time.

**Example A:** If Mrs. Smith, a first-year teacher, chose to have one formal and three informal observations, the formal observation should not be scheduled earlier than November. Informal observations should take place as early in the year as possible. This will ensure that new teachers have sufficient time to establish and practice their classroom routines before their formal observation but still receive the valuable feedback from informal observations and develop a constructive dynamic with their principal.

**Example B:** If an observation indicates that a teacher is “ineffective” or “developing” in particular competencies, the observer should direct the teacher to a corresponding

professional development opportunity. The next observation focused on that competency should not occur until at least two weeks after the professional development session is complete or one month after the initial observation.

## 2. Manageable Evaluator Workloads

Ideally, school principals will conduct a majority of the evaluations for all of their staff. However, in large schools where they cannot logistically complete the required observations and provide feedback and support, we recommend that principals prioritize observing new teachers, teachers rated “ineffective” or “developing,” and a selection across grades and subject matter to have an awareness of how things are going throughout their school. In addition, principals should not be the sole evaluator for subject areas that are outside of their expertise. For example, a principal who does not speak French should not be the sole observer for a French teacher. Trained assistant principals, district personnel or Teachers on Special Assignment should conduct the remaining observations in large schools and in subject areas that are outside a principal’s expertise. All observers need to go through the same rigorous training recommended in the previous section. We think leveraging Teachers on Special Assignment shows particular promise for supporting principals in large schools and in observing subjects outside of their expertise; see the next recommendation for more detail.

## 3. Teachers on Special Assignment

We recommend the creation of a new full-time position – Teachers on Special Assignment. These teachers can

relieve administrative observers of a share of their workload, and teachers will benefit from high-quality feedback from professionals with subject-specific credentials and experience. These teachers can also serve as outside observers in the evaluation appeals process (see the box below).

To qualify as a Teacher on Special Assignment, we recommend applicants have a minimum of five years of teaching experience and a rating of “highly effective” when the new evaluation system is in place. Once selected, the teachers should complete rigorous training during the summer prior to their assignment.

Teachers on Special Assignment should be charged with both conducting observations and providing hands-on resources and professional development for teachers. To prevent bias, they should not conduct observations in schools where they have worked. We recommend the position be held for two years, at the end of which teachers should have the option to return to the classroom to continue teaching.

Creating this new position will have the added benefit of providing teachers the opportunity to develop as leaders. As the E4E-New York 2012 Teacher Policy Team on Pay Structure recommended in “A New Way To Pay,” “ambitious and effective teachers should be provided opportunities to build their career and increase responsibility without having to leave the classroom.”<sup>9</sup>

# Supporting the Appeals Process

New York State law requires that any teacher in New York City who is rated ineffective receive a second observer in the following year to a) provide additional feedback and support and b) to provide due process through an independent, unbiased observation. Teachers on Special Assignment will have the training and experience necessary to support the appeals process and should be utilized to guarantee teachers are receiving feedback and support, as well as fair and objective ratings.

# Timely Feedback and Targeted Professional Development

Educators should receive timely feedback and readily available, targeted opportunities for professional development to build a community of professional learning in schools.

**“The teacher evaluation system is an incredible opportunity to strengthen the teaching profession in New York, not just by providing opportunities to develop weaknesses but also to highlight the strengths of every teacher.”**

Matt Greenawalt, Eighth Grade Math, M.S. 206 Clinton School for Writers and Artists

## The Challenge

Just as students require differentiated instruction to grow and improve, teachers need professional development that focuses on the areas of growth they need support in. As the new evaluation system begins to provide more individualized feedback, it must also be matched with more targeted and high-quality professional development opportunities.

### 1. Timely Feedback

The plan requires that administrators conduct a “post-observation conference” with each teacher following a formal observation. However, it does not specify a timeline or a structure for the conference. For informal observations, administrators may provide feedback to the teacher orally or in writing, as well as file an observation report within 90 days of the observation.<sup>10</sup> This may be too long for some teachers, especially in the first years of

implementation and for novice teachers. Immediate feedback is essential to successfully improving instruction. We recommend an evaluator take no more than five school days to provide the teacher with oral and/ or written feedback, which should include not only positive practices and concrete areas for improvement but also professional development opportunities that match the teacher’s needs. These opportunities may be provided by the network, the union, through the Department of Education’s online portal (ARIS), or through schoolwide collaborations with other educational organizations.

### 2. Targeted Support

To provide targeted professional development opportunities to teachers, we believe the NYC Department of Education and school leaders should create different professional development plans for educators in three tracks: novice track (those without tenure), career track (those

**“Students really benefit from real-time feedback. Similarly, teachers need timely feedback to learn and grow as professionals.”**

**Keith Scalia, High School English,  
John Adams High School**

with tenure) and intensive assistance track (those who are struggling). These three professional development tracks are also recommended by the Danielson Group, the organization responsible for updating and disseminating the Danielson Framework.<sup>10</sup> Following the first formal or two informal observations in the fall, principals should place teachers in the appropriate track and collaborate on their professional development goals. School leaders should document and communicate these goals with teachers and talent coaches who should provide support and feedback on the plans. This ensures that the system is used on the front end to help teachers grow and improve during the school year rather than waiting for a summative end-of-year performance rating.

### **3. Build a Community of Learning**

The observation and feedback loop included in the evaluation process will be a starting point for dialogue between administration and teachers. As principals provide specific feedback, teachers will become aware of

competencies in which they can improve. However, the dialogue about how to improve teaching and learning should extend beyond the direct principal and teacher relationship. The observation and feedback loop should be complemented by additional opportunities for a school to develop a community of learning. We recommend:

- Videotaped model lessons from master teachers, which can be shared internally within the school or posted more broadly online. Collections of similar resources are currently available, but we think that school-based collections can be particularly valuable, since the model teacher can be accessible to the viewers.
- Peer observations, which are not included as part of the summative assessment but can be incredibly valuable formative check-ins throughout the year. Peer observations can also be completed by reviewing and reflecting on video of a colleague’s instruction.<sup>11</sup>
- Study groups, which include evaluators, teachers, professional development staff and master teachers, to study the Danielson Framework, share their own strategies, review one another’s unit and lesson plans, and review peer observations and video of their own instruction.

Many schools already participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in which teachers work collaboratively to critically analyze best practices.<sup>12</sup> We recommend schools adopt the PLC model, in order to provide a structure for the continued growth of teachers.

**70 percent of teachers reported a positive professional relationship with their principal.**

SOURCE: Teacher survey (n=170).  
Educators 4 Excellence-New York, May 2013.

# Systemwide Review and Reflection

The evaluation system should include an extensive review and reflection process to evaluate outcomes and to propose improvements for future years.

**“The teacher evaluation system should be looked at as a living and breathing document that reflects the evolving nature and responsibilities of the teaching profession.”**

Matthew Schatz, Kindergarten, P.S. 145 The Bloomingdale School

## The Challenge

As every school district that has implemented teacher evaluation has learned, challenges and opportunities present themselves as the system is being rolled out. In New York City, there will be bumps in the road, especially when implementing on such a tight timeline and in such a large district.

We will need to listen to teacher leaders and principals to overcome the inevitable challenges. Further, we need an agile system that enables us to reflect on the best ideas and fix things that are not working.

We need to ensure we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, abandoning an evaluation system that can profoundly benefit teachers and students, because of a

few fixable problems during early implementation. We need everyone who is involved with the implementation process to commit to staying solutions oriented and working to continually improve the system.

## 1. System Feedback Surveys

The NYC Department of Education and union should collaborate on a series of annual surveys conducted by an outside vendor to gather actionable data about what worked and what did not work during implementation. These should include:

- An initial survey of teachers and principals in September 2013 that specifically addresses their training and preparedness on the use of the Danielson Framework.

- A follow-up, year-end survey during the first week in May 2014. This survey will assess the degree to which the implementation of the evaluation system provided teachers with meaningful feedback, resources and support through targeted professional development.
- Reviews of evaluators to ensure their observations are meaningful and consistent.

## 2. Independent Recommendation Committee

An independent arbitrator should oversee a committee composed of representatives of the union and NYC Department of Education, which will review the survey results and make recommendations for revisions to the evaluation plan, to be considered during the next round of collective bargaining.





# Conclusion

Effective implementation will require a patient and systematic approach to train all educators and build collaborative cultures in all schools, enabling administrators and observers to highlight each teacher's strengths, while also giving them feedback on areas for improvement. This will not be easy, but it's hard to imagine a more worthwhile undertaking for the city's educators to fully commit themselves to. An effective implementation of the teacher evaluation system in New York City holds incredible potential to elevate the culture of trust and collaboration in schools, strengthen the teaching profession, and, most importantly, improve student outcomes for the city's 1.1 million students. We owe it to our profession and our students to get this right.

**“The teacher evaluation system is an incredible opportunity to reshape the conversation that is going on in schools.”**

Matt Greenawalt, Eighth Grade Math, M.S. 206 Clinton School for Writers and Artists

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## Our Process and Methodology

### Identifying E4E's Policy Focus

E4E-New York polled E4E members to identify the most important and impactful policy issues.

### Reviewing Research

E4E-New York's Teacher Policy Team met for several months to review research on different evaluation systems as well as local strategies being proposed or piloted. Additionally, we hosted conversations with leaders from the NYC Department of Education, TNTP and other national experts.

### Conducting Local Research

Our Policy Team conducted more than 120 peer and administrator interviews to gather critical stakeholder feedback. We also conducted a survey of 170 E4E members and nonmembers to understand the most critical issues affecting teacher evaluation implementation.

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For far too long, education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table – the voice of classroom teachers.

**Educators 4 Excellence (E4E)**, a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

E4E has a quickly growing national network of educators united by our Declaration of Teachers' Principles and Beliefs. E4E members can learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

Learn more at **[Educators4Excellence.org](https://Educators4Excellence.org)**.

