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Teacher Evaluation in Statute, Regulation, and Litigation: A View of the Mid-Atlantic Region With a Focus on Pennsylvania

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This article presents information derived from an analysis of the legislation and regulation of teacher evaluation policy in the five Mid-Atlantic states with a focus on Pennsylvania. This article includes highlights of their commonalities and differences. It also includes a summary of litigation initiated by teachers in the region and potential problems that can accompany these evaluation systems.

Teacher evaluation has been central in the national agenda to improve teacher quality since 2009. It was first mentioned in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) as a consideration for policy: “Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated” (p. 26). Since then, it has been on the agenda of governors (Goldrick, 2002) and federal policymakers (U.S. Department of Education, 2010); contingent for federal funding through *Race to the Top* (U.S. Department of Education, 2012); and part of flexibility waivers from the requirements of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2002), through which states were required to use student test scores as part of teacher evaluations to judge teacher quality.

In 2014 U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan offered states a reprieve from using student scores on the new Common Core assessments to evaluate schools and teachers, allowing states to push the accountability “pause button” (Klein, 2015a). Although the *Every Student Succeeds Act*—the bill to reauthorize NCLB which President Barack Obama signed into law in December 2015 (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2015)—is silent on teacher evaluation (Klein, 2015b), states will likely stay the course due to their investment in instruments, training, and expertise. States might, however, respond to educator concerns by tweaking the instruments and policies that they have developed. At this important crossroad of implementation, state departments of education need to take stock of the challenges facing teacher evaluation systems and seek educator input.

This article presents information about the legislation and regulation of teacher evaluation in the Mid-Atlantic states with a focus on Pennsylvania. It includes the results of the analysis of data obtained from the five states, a summary of litigation initiated by teachers in the region, and speculation on potential problems that can accompany these evaluation systems. It provides educators with a perspective about policy in the region at this important crossroad.

Teacher Evaluation Policy in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Pennsylvania is one of five states in the Mid-Atlantic region. As seen in Table 1, these states have collective bargaining with active teacher unions. Most (four of five) states control teacher evaluation at the state level. State control of local teacher evaluation ranges from mandating a system, approving it or an alternative, and monitoring what is done to setting guidelines for improvement plans and annually evaluating implementation to make changes (Hazi & Arredondo Rucinski, 2009).

Table 1
Factors Related to Change in Teacher Evaluation in Mid-Atlantic States

State	Collective Bargaining	Level of State Control	Early R2T Adopter	Student Gains Criteria	Tenure Status Change	State on Pause
Delaware	Yes	3	X	X	2010	X
Maryland	Yes	1	X		2010	X
New York	Yes	3	X			
New Jersey	Yes	3			2012	
Pennsylvania	Yes	4				

Delaware, Maryland, and New York got a head start with Race to the Top funds, which required teacher evaluations to be tied to student test scores. Delaware is on its second version of its observation instrument. Only Delaware changed its statute to incorporate student achievement as a criterion for teacher evaluation. Three states (Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey) made changes to limit teacher tenure status. Only Delaware and Maryland requested a pause from the use of test scores to evaluate schools; thus, most, including Pennsylvania, are proceeding with their plans to evaluate teachers. Compared with its Mid-Atlantic neighbors, Pennsylvania has made substantive changes as a result of Race to the Top but has limited them to its teacher evaluation statute and regulations.

Table 2 shows that teacher evaluation is done on an annual basis in most Mid-Atlantic states. While there can be quite a bit of variation among the states (and within states among different types of teachers), this analysis reports the highlights of their policy commonalities and differences.

Four states (Delaware, Maryland, New York, and New Jersey) give more weight to teacher observation. Pennsylvania gives equal weight to observation and other types of data. In these four states student achievement growth scores represent 15-40% of a teacher's score, with two states (New Jersey and New York) hoping to increase that percentage over time. Only Delaware and New York make adjustments in student growth calculations. Delaware uses disabilities and English language learner status in some of its growth modeling. New York adjusts for the effects of poverty, English language fluency, and learning disability.

Table 2
Features of Teacher Evaluation Policy in Mid-Atlantic States

State	Frequency	% Student Test Scores	SLO/SGO	Evaluation Influence	Instrument
Delaware	Annual once in 2 years	20% Component V Student growth targets	% of Component V Growth Goals in content areas	Danielson	Delaware Performance Appraisal System II
Maryland	Annual OR once every 2 years for highly effective and effective	20% student growth	15-30% 3 types	Danielson	State Model 4 domains, each worth 12.5%
New York	Annual	40% to increase to 50% Growth adjusted + locally selected measure	SLO based on subject area and where no data	Various	10 approved to include Danielson
New Jersey	Annual	20 to increase to 30% Student Growth Objective OR Student Growth Percentile (less than 20% teachers)	20% SGO	Various	26 approved to include Danielson
Pennsylvania	Annual	50% data with 3 types: Building level (15%) Teacher Specific (15%) and Elective (20%)	20% and “elective” data	Danielson	Danielson or Locally developed alternative

All Mid-Atlantic states use the Student Learning (or Growth) Objective (SLO/SGO) in different ways. Maryland uses three types of SLOs: subject-specific at the high-school level and in non-tested subjects, at the district/school level, and at the classroom level. New York tends to use this measure with teachers in subjects with limited data. Pennsylvania uses the SLO for teachers without state test scores (e.g., counselors and teachers of art, music, physical education, etc.) and as teacher-specific data that is found within 15% of the teacher’s score.

All five states use the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson Group, 2013) as an observation instrument, perhaps because Danielson is based in New Jersey and accessible to those in the Mid-Atlantic. New Jersey and New York list other state-approved instruments Only New Jersey and Pennsylvania weight an instrument’s domains. New Jersey allows local discretion on the weighting of the four Framework domains of planning, environment, instruction, and professionalism. Pennsylvania weights the two domains of classroom environment and instruction more heavily since they tend to include items more related to student test scores (Lazarev & Newman, 2015).

In Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, the Public School Code was amended with the passage of Act 82 in 2012. Act 82 requires teachers to be evaluated according to a new rating tool that includes student data. The state published a rating tool for its school districts in June 2013. While a teacher receives an overall rating of either satisfactory or unsatisfactory, that rating is derived from component ratings of failing, needs improvement, proficient, or distinguished. Component ratings are weighted and calculated, then converted to numeric values. These calculations and conversions, as well as the weighting within the Danielson Framework, make Pennsylvania's scoring approach unique.

For educators classified as classroom teachers, an observation instrument accounts for 50% of their rating. Districts may elect the Danielson Framework (i.e., "Pennsylvania Rubric Assessment," 2012) or another instrument approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). All instruments must contain four domains that mirror the Framework. In the Framework, the 10 items in domains 2 and 3, the on-stage domains, are weighted more than the 12 items in domains 1 and 4, the off-stage domains. Items in the on-stage domains of classroom environment and instruction are more observable when in the classroom, while items in the off-stage domains are less observable and require other evidence such as lesson plans, student records, and interactions with parents. The classroom teacher receives an observation and practice rating of "Failing, Needs, Improvement, Proficient or Distinguished. The rating form sets numeric values for these four rating levels on a zero to three point scale" ("Rules and Regulations: Title 22," 2013, p. 3337).

Multiple measures of student achievement or growth represent the other 50% of classroom teachers' ratings. Multiple measures of student achievement or growth include three categories: building-level data that include exam results, graduation, and attendance data (15%); teacher-specific data that include student performance on state assessments, value-added calculations, locally developed district rubrics, and IEPs (15%); and elective data that include district designed measures, national standardized tests, industry certification exams, and student projects and portfolios (20%) ("Rules and Regulations: Title 22," 2013).

A classroom teacher receives a performance rating of distinguished, proficient, needs improvement, or failing, which then equates to an overall rating of either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A needs improvement or failing rating results in an improvement plan. The first needs improvement rating is a satisfactory rating, but two needs improvement ratings within 10 years with the same employer results in an unsatisfactory rating and an additional improvement plan. Two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings are grounds for dismissal. Pennsylvania's 10-year time period is unique.

In 2013-14 educators classified as classroom teachers were evaluated based on the observation instrument (85%) and building-level data (15%). In 2015-16 the state is adding the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) to teacher evaluations since it will have collected three years of value-added data. Thus, all data types for teacher rating will be in use.

Differentiated supervision is a PDE-recommended practice that districts can elect to use. It is also unique to Pennsylvania. Teachers who receive a satisfactory rating for two consecutive years may qualify for a three- or four-year cycle of supervision. The differentiated supervision includes a goal-setting/action plan reported to a professional learning community (e.g., faculty meeting, in-service, PTA/PTO); is aligned to the Danielson Framework; is aligned to the district's initiative to improve instructional practices; and may omit formal observations and the collection of evidence, but should include informal walkthroughs throughout the school year. The teacher can be moved back to the formal observation model if the principal deems it necessary (PDE, 2013).

Danielson's Framework for Teaching is integrated with Teachscape (Danielson Group, 2013) and EduLink (2012) in Pennsylvania. A web-based platform provides ways to collect, manage, store, and report data (i.e., video, instrument-based and lesson artifact); to communicate information and feedback; and to provide professional development on the instrument for teachers and principals. These systems provide ubiquitous data, communications, and professional development. PDE does not endorse any digital product.

Approximately 2,000 districts in 47 states, including Pennsylvania, use Teachscape to incorporate the current version of the Danielson Framework and examples of applications regarding the Common Core (Herold, 2013). EduLink (2012) offers the 2007 version of the Danielson Framework and is used by many Pennsylvania districts at less cost.

Litigation and Grievances

As states began to implement systems to evaluate teachers, starting in 2009, teachers and their unions began to anticipate and challenge their results. Teachers in Florida filed a complaint in federal district court (*Cook v. Stewart*, 2014). Seven teachers claimed that the use of standardized tests to evaluate them in non-tested subjects violated their 14th Amendment rights.

At issue is the use of a school-wide, value-added score, because these seven teachers do not teach reading and math, nor do they teach the students whose scores are being used to evaluate them. A state-approved, mathematical formula estimates individual expected learning growth of students in a particular year and calculates the value teachers add to student learning. It is adjusted for factors outside of the teacher's control, such as student disability status, attendance, or status as an English-language learner, but not for socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or gender. (Hazi, 2014, p. 137)

At least 50% of the teachers' scores were based on student test results. These seven teachers were certified, experienced, and award-winning teachers. In the ruling, the judge found that such an evaluation was legal because it followed the state statute, even though it appeared to be implemented poorly and was unfair. The judge said: "This case, however, is not about the fairness of the evaluation system. The standard of review is not whether the evaluation policies are good or bad, wise or unwise; but whether the evaluation policies are rational within the meaning of the law" (*Cook v. Stewart*, 2014, p. 17). When appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals of the 11th Circuit, the court affirmed the lower court's ruling. It concluded that Florida school districts had

a legitimate governmental purpose to carry out evaluation, and the burden was on the plaintiffs to refute the justification of the statute. The teachers could not.

Since then, teachers have filed suits in eight states and the District of Columbia. Most are at the complaint stage, working their way through the system. Complaints are typically 14th Amendment challenges to the U.S. Constitution, state statutes that limit or eliminate tenure, evaluation provisions that are unconstitutionally vague, or administrator actions that are arbitrary and capricious. Teachers claim their scores give them ratings that deny them bonuses, have the potential to damage their reputation, or risk putting them in line for dismissal. Many attack some aspect of the value-added measure including validity and reliability, access and transparency, variables in its formula, errors in data, errors in calculation, and test alignment.

New York has three complaints (Hazi, 2015). The latest is a Great Neck teacher who was rated ineffective in the 2013-14 school year and is challenging the statistical model used in the rating because she claims that it punishes excellence and that it is not transparent nor understood by rational educators (Lederman v. King, 2015). With two consecutive ratings of ineffective, she could be dismissed. She claims, however, that her rating is arbitrary and capricious, and her reputation has already been ruined by publishing the rating on the state's website, ENGAGE NY.

New York teacher unions filed two earlier complaints. The Rochester Teachers Association first filed suit, claiming that the Board of Regents failed to account for poverty and unfairly penalized teachers in their ratings. With 90% of its students living in poverty, the union claimed that it violated teachers' 14th Amendment rights to a fair evaluation and made it difficult for teachers to be rated effective (New York State United Teachers, 2014).

The Syracuse Teachers Association, supported by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), sued the New York State Education Department for unfairly penalizing teachers of disadvantaged students and violating their 14th Amendment rights. Syracuse is one of the poorest districts in New York, with 80% of its students classified as low socioeconomic status. Thirty-five percent of Syracuse's teachers received the two lowest ratings (Riede, 2014).

Though there is no litigation yet in Pennsylvania, a grievance and a teacher dismissal action involving test scores have occurred. There could be many reasons for this limited legal action in an active labor state. First, the weighting of student test scores under 50% does not pose a threat of dismissal to most Pennsylvania teachers. Second, if a teacher is dismissed, he or she may just quietly leave rather than challenge a dismissal. Third, teachers may initiate action first through grievances and then through board hearings, which would be confidential and fall under the radar of public reporting.

A few grievances are working their way through schools (personal communication, Dr. Carla Claycomb, Director of Education Services, Pennsylvania State Education Association, April 20, 2015). Pennsylvania's system has yet to be fully implemented, but grievances are addressing vague

statutory language about the timeline for evaluation. Teachers argue that all data used for a single evaluation need to be derived from within the evaluation time period, not from a year different from the observation data and judgment.

A Pennsylvania teacher has also been dismissed due to unsatisfactory performance ratings. Joseph Giansante, a tenured mathematics teacher with a six-year history of satisfactory evaluations employed by the Pittsburgh Public Schools, was dismissed at a meeting of the Board of Education on November 25, 2015, because of two consecutive unsatisfactory performance ratings during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. According to observers, he failed to use learning objectives and plan lessons using district-mandated pedagogy; failed to use a three-phase lesson to teach math problems that required students to explain why an answer was correct; failed to correct student off-task behavior, language, and tardiness; failed to use data to group students which resulted in segregation; and did not improve when given feedback (Weiss, n.d.).

To challenge his dismissal, Giansante attempted to introduce witnesses and two types of evidence of his satisfactory teaching performance. Although he introduced a fellow teacher and former students as witnesses, they were not persuasive, since “they are not qualified to evaluate teachers in accordance with the School Code” (Weiss, n.d., p. 21). The first data that Giansante provided were three years of his student growth scores as evidence of student learning. Giansante’s value-added score was a high 90 out of 100 points for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years (Mellon, 2015). The second data were student surveys of his teaching. He claimed that observations were anecdotal, while his data were “the only objective evidence with respect to the impact of [his] teaching on the learning done by his students” (Weiss, n.d., p.19). He was denied, since these data were not used in his evaluation during these years (Mellon, 2015). The state did not approve district use of these data until the 2013-14 school year.

This dismissal will likely be upheld if Giansante challenges it, since courts tend to rule in favor of school boards as long as administrators follow the law and district evaluation procedures and give the teacher the opportunity to improve. In such dismissals, the burden is on the teacher to show that administrator action was arbitrary and capricious. The Giansante case is the first known instance in which a teacher attempted to use value-added scores and student survey data in his defense.

Conclusions, Speculations, and Recommendations

Pennsylvania is both similar to and different from its Mid-Atlantic neighbors. Like other states in this region, Pennsylvania annually evaluates teachers and uses Danielson’s Framework for Teaching in this process. Pennsylvania uses multiple measures, including student test scores and SLO/SGO, in calculations of teachers’ scores. While these Mid-Atlantic, collective bargaining states include student achievement growth scores, their influence is minimized relative to the other measures.

Unlike its neighbors, Pennsylvania uses weighting in observation scores and complex calculations and conversions in the final rating. Ironically, the teacher is still judged to be either

satisfactory or unsatisfactory, a result that the new evaluation systems were supposed to correct by differentiating among degrees of teacher effectiveness (Sawchuk, 2013). While no litigation is currently underway, grievances began, prior to 2015-16 and the full roll out of its system.

Teacher evaluation systems were initiated based on the belief that the “right” system would identify ineffective teachers, who would then be dismissed, leaving only effective teachers who would then continue to increase student achievement as measured on standardized tests. States are tinkering to find the right system.

The overinflated rating of teachers has been a major criticism of teacher evaluation systems, where, for example, 96% of teachers were given satisfactory ratings (e.g., Butrymowicz, 2014). Policymakers believe these annual ratings are inaccurate, when they look at schools where students score poorly on tests but the majority of teachers are rated highly. They believe that teacher ratings must mirror student achievement (e.g., Sawchuk, 2013). Policymakers want to see more teachers rated as unsatisfactory and eventually more dismissals in low-performing schools (Gee, 2013; Sawchuk, 2013). This dominant narrative could result in further changes to teacher evaluation statutes and regulations, especially if new systems still result in a high percent of teachers receiving satisfactory ratings.

While PVAAS scores are not being rolled out until the 2015-16 school year, their consequences will not be known until well after. Litigation in other states tends to focus on the unfair use of test scores. Will teachers who receive a low rating because of low student test scores claim that the value-added scores are not valid and reliable (e.g. Harris & Herrington, 2015), especially if a state has not done validity and reliability studies? Will a teacher’s reputation be injured if a newspaper publishes teacher scores under a state’s Right to Know law (e.g., Felch, Song, & Smith, 2010)?

Could an instrument be designed so that teachers receive low ratings? For example, in Rochester, 600 of its 900 teachers are appealing their poor ratings. Some even suspect that in poor urban districts in New York more teachers will be rated ineffective or developing, but in more wealthy districts where students do well on state tests, teacher ratings will be high (Riede, 2014).

The appearance of grievances may vary greatly among Pennsylvania school districts based on a number of factors. One may be administrator-teacher relations. Where there are positive relationships, implementation may go smoothly. Where there have been tensions, especially during collective bargaining, implementation may be rocky.

Another factor may be weighting of multiple measures. Observations may continue to dominate the score for those instructionally certified teachers who are labeled “nonteaching professionals,” including a high number of special educators. Since teachers have been told in training sessions that “distinguished is a place you visit and not live,” teachers can expect administrators to be discouraged from rating teachers as “distinguished.”

As the full evaluation system is rolled out, some measures may emerge as influential. The remaining 50% of a teacher’s score includes three types of data: school-building data, teacher-specific data (three years of PVAAS), and elective data (SLOs, IEPs, etc). The current weighting of

the PVAAS data at 15% minimizes its potential influence on the score. However, if the percent to PVAAS increases with an act of the legislature, it could become a problem for teachers. Also, the remaining measures of elective data (at 20%) and building data (at 15%) are potential influencers that can tip the 50% of the overall rating. If a district experiences financial hardships on top of a low-performing status or loss of students, one could imagine such crises might overshadow ratings if there is cause to eliminate teachers.

SLOs are being viewed as a way to measure student growth in an array of subjects and grades without the cost of new statewide assessments, and as a way to ensure teachers' buy-in to their evaluation. However, SLOs can be difficult to develop and assess. Can their validity be challenged when their quality and rigor vary greatly? Can a principal determine whether teacher-created assessments are aligned to the curriculum and designed to be technically sound (Popham, 2013)?

These are a few speculations about problems that might result in grievances, which can be precursors to litigation in this high-stakes accountability climate. As we add new measures to how we judge teachers, in the hopes of improving evaluation, we may complicate the process and add new vulnerabilities to the practice of evaluating teaching. These times will be challenging for teacher evaluation, as states search for the right system with the right mix and weight of multiple measures, and as teachers attempt to protect themselves from actions that put them at risk for dismissal. One can hope that we will use more than student growth scores and the percent of teachers judged satisfactory as indicators of policy success.

At this point in the implementation of Pennsylvania's evaluation system, educators would be wise to minimize damages. First, the state Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development could establish a task force to identify strengths and challenges that practitioners are experiencing with teacher evaluation. Solutions and promising practices could be identified and shared.

Second, VAM gains should continue to be weighted under 50%, since they have become the focus of litigation. It would be best to exercise caution with VAMs until the courts resolve their use. The American Education Research Association has articulated its position against the use of value-added models in high stakes personnel and program decisions, due to their scientific and technical limitations, and offered recommendations for technical requirements that must be met prior to their use (AERA Council, 2015). This position should be distributed, and trainings should be held to better inform practitioners about the limitations of value-added measures, so that they can explain them to their boards of education and staff.

Pennsylvania educators should also focus on how to improve instruction, which is a more difficult challenge. Improvement is hard work and requires teachers and principals to carefully study teaching, in depth and over time. The evaluation instrument can help establish common ground, but only where teachers and administrators have positive relationships within a climate of trust. Teachers need sustained conversations about desired student behavior and classroom routines that no longer work to begin the inquiry to understanding and change. Pennsylvania's differentiated supervision could be a safe harbor where teachers can have these important conversations in learning communities.

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Not Just the ArtiFacts: Pottsville Area School District's Approach to Using Evidence to Support Reflection, Dialogue, Collaboration, and Goal Setting for Professional Growth

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Recognizing the power of effective supervision for professional growth, a school district's leadership team worked to fulfill a vision beyond the shortcomings of Pennsylvania's Educator Effectiveness legislation. The team viewed it as an opportunity to connect evaluation to supervision, and more importantly place their emphasis on supervision. This article illustrates a district's process in creating and implementing a model that differentiates and individualizes supports for each professional staff member. Specifically, it illuminates the use of evidence portfolios and individualized supervision meetings to assist as a guide for teachers in a process to become reflective practitioners with a high degree of self-efficacy. Integral to the success of this paradigm shift was providing a process to ensure each participant was able to understand the process of supervision and remain committed to self-reflection for professional growth. Ultimately the intended product of this shift is to ensure our children are provided the educational experience they deserve.

Recognizing the power of effective supervision for professional growth, the Pottsville Area School District leadership team worked to fulfill a vision beyond the shortcomings of the Educator Effectiveness legislation. The team viewed the requirements as an opportunity to connect evaluation to supervision, and more importantly place their emphasis on supervision. This article illustrates the district's process in creating and implementing a model that differentiates and individualizes supports for each professional staff member. Specifically, it illuminates the use of evidence portfolios and individualized supervision meetings as guides for teachers in a process to become reflective practitioners with a high degree of self-efficacy. In this process, leaders do not discount the importance of clinical supervision, nor do they reject the usefulness of student performance data; they view each of these components as essential to the process of professional growth, connected through supervision rather than evaluation.

The Evidence Portfolio

To support an environment that motivates educator improvement, the use of the evidence portfolio is more about process and professional dialogue than evaluation, thus providing a

consistent and collaborative method of supervision for professional growth to support educators in becoming reflective practitioners. Every professional staff member is required to gather, collate, and analyze artifacts connected to each component of the four domains of Danielson's (2011) Framework for Teaching. While developing guidelines and expectations for the portfolio, the team felt it was crucial to provide a reference guide with example artifacts consistent with each component of the framework. (Table 1 provides examples of the portfolio reference guide later.) Additionally, the leadership team collaborated with professional staff members to create portfolio reference guides for each educational specialist, including but not limited to guidance counselors, deans of students, instructional advisors, speech pathologists, reading specialists, and occupational therapists.

One Teacher at a Time

The evidence portfolio is not an end. Rather, it is a means and process to engage professional staff members in collaborative reflective practices with supervisors. The evidence portfolio is intended to create a cycle of reflection. At the conclusion of the evaluation period, professional staff members complete self-assessments and use the portfolio artifacts to determine their level of performance for each component of the Danielson (2011) framework. Next, professionals meet with supervisors to engage in collaborative discussion focused on growth. Though the teacher final rating is derived from this process, it is supervisory in nature. The supervisor and professional staff members meet to discuss evidence and come to a consensus as to the level of performance demonstrated on each component. This process also creates discourse relative to student performance data. Consequently, through this connected process, each professional staff member is able to create measurable goals for the following year. The goals are clear derivatives of artifacts included in the evidence binder, observation evidence, and student performance data. This process links to the development of Student Learning Objectives (SLO), discussed later in the article.

Focus on Learning

The leadership team is committed and will continue to lead professional staff members to ensure they implement evidence-based best practices to reach each student. As a result, there has been a paradigm shift among professional staff members, from a mindset such as "I taught the curriculum" to "My students have learned the curriculum." Their vision aligns with the message that it is no longer appropriate just to look at what was taught. Instead, we must focus on what was learned. The evidence portfolio creates an excellent guide for reflective practice needed for this process of continually professional growth.

Examples of Evidence

The process of building the evidence portfolio is crucial for reflective practice. However, teachers sought clarification as to exactly what constitutes evidence. Via individual supervisory meetings, the curriculum coordinator collaborated with each staff member and began to develop

guides that illustrate examples of evidence that demonstrate proficiency in each of the components in the four domains (Danielson, 2011).

The processes developed and instituted by the Pottsville Area School District were derived from regulations within the Educator Effectiveness System in Pennsylvania. It is important to the leadership team that the process is viewed as something done “with” professional staff, rather than something done “to” the staff. Resulting from this mindset was a collaborative effort among professional staff and leadership team members to create sample evidence guides designed to aid the manner in which the portfolios were produced. Tables were developed to align with the components of the Danielson (2011) Framework for Teaching in each of the four domains.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

Table 1 displays examples for component 1a for multiple district teaching and non-teaching professionals. Note that component 1a is only one of 22 components in the Danielson (2011) Framework for Teaching, demonstrating the complexity of individualizing the portfolios.

Table 1
Domain 1 Samples

Classroom Teacher	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson plan with standards and essential questions • List of essential questions for a unit • Specific lesson that addresses a student misconception as an opener then the teaches as a concept • Review lesson with rationale • Prompts, tasks, or activities designed to draw out misconceptions (and correct them) • Differentiation example for different levels of prior knowledge
Coach	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development resources • Classroom visitation notes • Examples of strategies based on teacher-specific goals • Research for Professional Development session
Dean of Students	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Adolescent Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of intervention strategies • PBIS resources • Discussions with social worker • Discussions with special education teacher/supervisor • Letter recognizing participation as a SAP team member • Mentor program • IEP meetings
Nurse	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Nursing Process and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Assessment procedures • Agendas for trainings provided to staff • Letter recognizing participation as a SAP team member
Reading Specialist	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DIBELS Next • Progress Monitoring Plan • Lesson Plans • Scope and Sequence of Reading Program • Diagnostic assessment examples

Table 1 Continued

School Counselor	<i>1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Counseling Theory, Best Practice and Techniques</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of test score results to parents, students (PSAT, SAT, ASVAB) • Explanation of Common Application use for the application process for post-secondary educational facilities • Explanation of SAP team and mental health resources • Contact with outside resources with students at risk: Children & Youth, ChildLine, etc. • ASCA (academic, career, social domains) documents • Grade level appropriate timelines and meetings • Narrative listing of the counseling theory utilized most • Support with special education process
Social Worker	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Social Work Principles, Theories, and Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificates from trainings attended • Correspondences regarding students • Minutes from county wide SW meeting • Emails to staff regarding students • IEP demonstrating related services such as group and individual • Social Work training agenda provided to aides • Letter recognizing participation as a SAP team member • Examples demonstrating use of social work framework
Speech Therapist	1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and analyze evidence based research articles relative to language acquisition and articulation. • Presentation agendas and supports for classroom teachers

As illustrated in Table 1, each professional staff member has elements specific to his or her role. The one-size-fits-all model no longer works, and the examples of evidence provided to each professional staff member allows for clarity in expectations. To further illustrate the complexity and need for the portfolio reference guides, some examples are provided below for domains two through four.

Domain 2: Environment

Component 2b requires professional staff members to demonstrate how they establish a culture of learning in a classroom or workplace. For this component, the dean of students may submit positive behavior support and student discipline data. An instructional coach may focus on feedback from professional development sessions that he or she provided during in-service trainings. Finally, a school counselor or social worker might include student surveys, behavior intervention plan data, and mentoring program data.

Domain 3: Instruction

Component 3d focuses on assessment and data-based decisions. For the classroom teacher, coach, or reading specialist, the evidence provided focuses on formative assessments, rubrics, feedback forms, progress monitoring, and reading charts. Evidence for the dean of students might include student discipline reports, while the school nurse may include procedures collating and reporting health data. All these forms of evidence can be connected to individual action plans and SLOs.

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

Component 4e, growing and developing professionally, focuses on each staff member's responsibility to develop measurable goals with actions to achieve said goals and data analysis to determine his or her level of success. In general, examples might include demonstrated actions that were implemented after attending conferences or trainings or participating in organizations, District Summer Learning Academy sessions, team and committee meetings, and in-service trainings.

Items submitted as a part of the portfolio may differ significantly depending on the professional employee's assignment. By allowing professional staff members the opportunity to determine and create their portfolios, the leadership team is empowering them to demonstrate effectiveness rather than simply rely on a single snapshot observation for evaluation.

Individualized Supervision Meetings

To ensure consistent understanding of expectations and processes for growth, the leadership team devoted an unparalleled amount of time to each professional staff member. Individualized supervision meetings alleviated concerns and ensured clear understanding of the calculation for each staff member's final evaluation. To maintain consistency and dissemination of the same message, the director of curriculum and instruction and building principals met with each professional staff member. Topics addressed were the educator effectiveness procedure evaluation percentages, self-assessments, rubrics, SLOs, the differentiated supervision plan, and evidence portfolio requirements. Pie charts were used to depict how each employee would be evaluated as determined by their position.

Creating SLO Linkages in Act 82

The leadership team linked the SLO process to supervision in lieu of evaluation. Teachers were guided in developing performance measures and indicators to determine mastery and/or growth for areas in which students were not performing well academically. They then combined their SLO with their Individual Goal Plan (IGP) to implement action research. As a component of the supervision plan, teachers are required to create an IGP to develop goals. As stated earlier, these goals are derivatives of the supervision meetings where student performance data and the evidence portfolio are discussed. The SLO process, as required by Act 82, does not naturally allow for this type of supervision. It only requires goals, performance measures and indicators. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have great latitude in their method of implementation. Fortunately, the Pottsville leadership team provided clear connections to require actions for improvement. The final supervision meeting at the end of the required yearly evaluation cycle allows for the development of measurable goals with actions to improve student achievement.

Anecdotally, through discussions during professional development activities and in-service trainings, co-author Stephanie Ziegmont (personal communications, 2015) learned that teachers began to recognize how their SLO, the differentiated supervision plan, and the evidence portfolios are connected pieces to assist with increasing their effectiveness as teachers.

Program Evaluation

Clearly, anecdotes do not adequately measure teacher perceptions or program effectiveness. Therefore, the questions still remain: Do teachers recognize the connections among their SLO, the differentiated supervision plan, and the evidence portfolios? Will student achievement and growth be realized resulting from this work?

To ascertain the effectiveness of the evidence portfolio process, the leadership team will conduct an internally driven program evaluation. Using Brun's (2014) guide to frame data collection and analysis, exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory questions will be used to gather data from stakeholders through an anonymous survey. The questions are framed to determine perceptions of the effectiveness of the differentiated supervision plan and their evidence portfolios. Additionally, SLO data and other local and state assessment data will be analyzed to gauge the impact on student achievement and growth. The survey responses and data analysis will provide necessary feedback for leaders and teachers to continually update and improve their plan and process.

Conclusion

Although some may argue that Act 82 has been a hindrance, the Pottsville Area leadership team used it as a catalyst for teachers and nonteaching professionals to showcase capacity and engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers and supervisors. This article illuminates a small fraction of what has been done to support professional growth through meaningful supervision. The leadership team is committed to a mission that ensures that each child is provided with diverse and challenging learning opportunities and a vision that focuses on the belief that all students will succeed. To this end, their process has begun—a process that calls upon each teaching and nonteaching professional to improve. The belief exists that if teachers improve their craft and capacity to facilitate learning, then each child will demonstrate significant growth socially, emotionally, and academically.

The future is exciting. Plans are in place to update the teacher induction plan, to include the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) to implement common formative and summative assessments, and to use of curriculum-based common assessments that are clearly linked to standards at varying levels of Webb's Depth of Knowledge (Hess, Carlock, Jones, & Walkup, 2009). These links will allow teachers and leaders to connect, collaborate, and analyze data to adjust curriculum and instruction regularly. Additionally, the PLC process to implement common formative assessments will connect to the entire supervision process and use curriculum-based student performance data to achieve the overarching goal of the Educator Effectiveness Project.

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Know Your Students and Their Dreams: A School District-University Collaboration in Sustained Professional Development in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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This article describes the efforts of members of a school district and university collaborative in providing professional development in culturally relevant pedagogy. The motivation for the work was partially related to changing teacher evaluation policies throughout Pennsylvania. Different contextual factors for the sustained professional development effort presented opportunities and constraints. Through a retrospective narrative, the authors analyze both successes and challenges presented by such collaboration and offer recommendations for effective professional development in culturally relevant instruction.

Many students in urban districts are taught by teachers who do not look like them, in schools led by principals who do not look like them. In fact, of the new teachers in the field in 2012-13, 79% were White, 12% Latino, 7% Black, 1% Asian, and 1% identified as multiracial (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). If the majority of educators are White, and the majority of students are Black, Latino, or Asian, there is the potential for teachers to ignore or devalue home cultures of students, a phenomenon known as cultural incongruence (Gay, 2010). Most White teachers admit that they do not feel prepared to teach students of color (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Ladson-Billings' (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) holds much promise for the improvement of K-12 instruction, especially as practitioners strengthen its relationship to subject matter instruction. Although more and more teacher preparation programs include courses on culturally relevant pedagogy and how best to support English language learners, there is a profound need for professional development in CRP for practicing educators (Young, 2010). In this article, we present a descriptive narrative of such an effort in culturally relevant pedagogy for teachers in a diverse high school in a mid-size city school district in western Pennsylvania. This narrative shows that when school leadership provides supports for sustained teacher learning of CRP, improvement of instructional practice is possible. As participant observers in the project,

we have included comments from teacher surveys and also from observations of the professional development sessions.

The professional development described in this article began as a collaborative effort between the district and one of its university partners when the director of the partnership, Alexandra Anderson,¹ invited a faculty member, Sylvie West, to participate in a session on CRP for student teachers at the beginning of the school year. Soon after that, the director asked her university partner to collaborate in ongoing professional development (PD) on CRP at a diverse high school in the district, Hilltop High. We begin this article with a profile of the school, followed by an introduction to the recently adopted teacher observation rubric that served as motivation for the principal to seek assistance with PD and the actual design of the PD. We then present a brief review of the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and teacher learning, followed by an examination of the professional development goals and sessions. We end with discussion of the challenges and strengths of the PD and recommendations for meaningful teacher learning of CRP.

Profile of Hilltop High

Hilltop High is located in a predominantly White neighborhood, with a student body that was 55% White and 45% African American at the time of this professional development effort. It was a traditional ninth-twelfth grade school with a teaching staff that was 85% White and 15% African American, reflecting national trends (NCES, 2012).

The principal made the request for PD for the teaching staff because of two factors: (1) “red flag data,” as she called it, showed that African American students had lost 21 percentage points on the statewide assessment in reading the previous year and 13 percentage points in mathematics, with only 20% attaining proficiency or advanced status in the former and 18% proficiency or advanced status in the latter; and (2) a new teacher observation tool had been introduced, featuring culturally competent instruction as an element.

Teacher Observation Rubric and the Design of Professional Development

The district’s teacher observation rubric (E-BEST), published in 2012, was modeled on the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007) but included two additional components in Domain 3, Instruction. The first was *assessment results and student learning*, and the second, the focus of this PD, was *implementing lessons equitably*. E-BEST states that in the distinguished category the educator, “Consistently and effectively uses a wide array of culturally responsive instructional strategies to address racial and cultural achievement disparities among individual and groups of students. Students demonstrate a commitment to the culturally responsive learning community.” The principal at Hilltop High recognized the need to provide learning opportunities on “culturally responsive instructional strategies” for teachers if she would be evaluating them based upon this component. Thus, she approached the director of the school district and university collaborative to request assistance with professional development.

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all names, including place names.

The design model for the PD emphasized co-planning with the school's instructional leadership team, consisting of the principal, an assistant principal, four teachers (including the union representative), and the district and university partners. It incorporated regularly scheduled time to debrief after the weekly PD. The content drew from the work of Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2013) on the role of school leadership in developing cultural proficiency. Both the principal and assistant principal at Hilltop High promised to be involved in all aspects of the PD.

The sessions were repeated six times every Tuesday for 13 weeks, with teachers attending during their dedicated professional development periods. On average, there were between 10-15 teachers in each 45-minute session. The school leaders attended most of the sessions unless called away to address immediate concerns. They, along with Dr. West and Dr. Alexander, expected teachers to draw from CRP to support learning and incorporate culturally relevant teaching strategies in their content areas, relating these goals to the teacher observation rubric that highlighted equitable instruction.

Literature Review: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Teacher Learning, and School Leadership

Building upon work by educational anthropologists who explicated the relationship between culture and learning, Ladson-Billings (1995) developed three criteria that undergird culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP): “an ability to develop students academically; a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence of students; and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 483). The teachers in her research believed “in a Freirean notion of ‘teaching as mining’” (p. 479), or drawing out already existing knowledge. This belief aligns with research on students’ *funds of knowledge* that has shown that children bring to school knowledge rooted in their home cultures (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

A growing body of scholarly work connects cultural funds of knowledge to the teaching of subject matter in school. For example, Lee (2007), in analyzing ways to build upon African American vernacular for scaffolding student learning in a secondary English literature class, attempted to align the students’ knowledge with “cultural practices of the subject matter” (p. 97). African American students live within a community that has a rich tradition of language play and “verbal artistry,” including “signifying” (Morgan, 2002; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Signifying requires tacit use of strategies such as double entendre, metaphor, satire, and irony, all of which can serve in negotiating, understanding, and analyzing literary text (Lee, 2007; Morgan, 2002).

In working with a high school English class in a school that served African American students, Lee (2007) taught literary analysis by asking the students to first consider signifying dialogues to determine inferred meaning. Through this process of cultural modeling, “the students make public and explicit knowledge of strategies that they routinely use that have been intuitive and implicit” (Lee, 2007, p. 101). Teachers gradually transition students to analyzing literary texts that reflect the African American experience, and then texts that may be more culturally distant and unfamiliar, such as texts by Shakespeare. Teachers who experimented with cultural modeling activities in their

English classes developed a perspective that their students could meet the intellectual demands of the curriculum (Lee, 2007).

The Algebra Project was developed to improve teaching and learning of middle school mathematics, particularly among students who have been underrepresented in algebra and college preparatory mathematics classes (Silva, Moses, Rivers, & Johnson, 1990). The Project supports the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Standards (NCTM, 1989, 2000), which are grounded in a constructivist approach to learning, and seek “to change the way mathematics teachers construct their learning environments by producing teachers who are able to facilitate a mathematics learning environment grounded in real life experiences and to support students in the social construction of mathematics” (Silva et al., 1990, p. 379). Its Transition Curriculum provides complex scaffolding for students beginning with experiences rooted in their day-to-day lives and using their own language. It draws from physical events occurring within city public transportation systems, and thus familiar to urban students (Silva et al., 1990).

In examining the relationship of hip hop culture to learning, current scholars highlight the culturally relevant aspects of it for meaningfully connecting high school students to creative uses of language, literary devices, storytelling, and social critique (Kelly, 2013). Hill (2009) asserts that hip hop texts are literature and should be presented and analyzed as such in secondary classrooms.

Lee’s (2007) cultural modeling system, Moses’ (Silva et al., 1990) Transition Curriculum, and Hill’s (2009) use of hip hop texts all tie culturally relevant pedagogy to specific subject matter. They contribute to a body of knowledge, grounded in subject matter, for culturally relevant teachers, and consequently, to knowledge that school leaders can draw upon in their work to strengthen teaching and learning. However, as many scholars lament, culturally relevant pedagogy has not yet lived up to its promise and potential to transform teaching and learning.

Sleeter (2012) argues that “culturally responsive pedagogy” has been marginalized for three main reasons: (1) a lack of understanding of it; (2) little research about its relationship to student learning and achievement; and (3) fear of losing power or influence on the part of elites and Whites (p. 568). She faults education reform policies since the 1990s for not considering context as a core element in school improvement, in contrast to reform efforts of the 1970s and 1980s, including Kamehameha School in Hawaii (Au, 1993) and Rough Rock School in Arizona (McCarty, 2002).

Most research on the development of CRP has focused on college courses for pre-service teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997); there are few accounts of sustained professional development in CRP for practicing teachers (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Young, 2010). Several authors have examined teacher learning of culturally responsive practice in specific subject matter areas such as health education (Flory, McCaughtry, Martin, Murphy, Blum, & Wisdom, 2014) or science (Johnson, 2011; Milner, 2011). In many cases, however, the research explores the learning and evolving practice of one individual teacher rather than PD on a larger scale.

While all the criteria of CRP require focused teacher learning and practice, it is the development of a critical consciousness that has proven most elusive. The PD design in western Pennsylvania

attempted to address this challenge throughout the 13-week program by engaging teachers in activities rooted in social justice, with a clear connection to the recently adopted teacher observation rubric and academic learning (Sleeter, 2012).

Initial Goals of the Professional Development in CRP

Dr. Anderson and Dr. West included several key goals for teacher learning in the PD, beginning with identifying characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy and ways to apply it in their classrooms. The characteristics of CRP upon which the PD was co-constructed were communicate high expectations, build relationships and caring communities, convey positive perspectives toward parents and families, practice learner-centered pedagogy with the teacher as facilitator, teach with an awareness of students' home cultures, and reshape and enrich the curriculum to be inclusive (Lindsey et al., 2013).

Teachers responded in various ways to a pre-assessment on cultural awareness in education. In a discussion afterwards, one participant was surprised that so many of her colleagues assessed themselves as culturally competent, asking, "Then why aren't all of our students doing well?" Another added, "We may think we're culturally proficient, but not act it. Maybe we don't see ourselves as we truly are." In discussing one of the items on the assessment, *Cultural misunderstandings are daily occurrences in a diverse society like ours*, a White teacher asked how anyone could agree with this statement. An African American colleague responded, "It is my experience, every day." Through these kinds of honest and thought-provoking exchanges, participants had opportunities to broaden their perspectives and cultivate a critical understanding of concepts such as *culture* and *culturally relevant pedagogy*, along with *race*, *privilege*, and *racism*. Tensions that surfaced tended to dissipate through discussions and activities in the PD sessions.

A Session on Critical Consciousness

Although we cannot describe all the PD sessions here, we have chosen to describe one that focused on that most elusive criterion of culturally relevant pedagogy, critical consciousness. This activity supported discussion of race, stereotypes, and racism, centered on a drawing by a student at the district's performing arts high school (see Figure 1). In the drawing, a younger African American male and an older White woman are depicted in front of a young man of color, in a hoodie, with a knit cap on his head. There are two thought bubbles in the illustration that show the perspectives of the onlookers: One shows the young man standing in a church doorway, and the other shows him robbing the older White woman.

The presenters usually began the session by asking participants to agree upon a name for the young man in the image, followed by asking them to describe what they saw. Many teachers easily identified the images in the thought bubbles as stereotypes. In most sessions, a rich conversation about the sources of these stereotypes followed, which led into discussion of teachers' expectations for their students of color. Some of the guiding questions the facilitators asked were:

1. What dreams and aspirations does Lemont have? Broadly? Academically?
2. What barriers may he encounter in achieving these dreams? Why?

3. As a teacher, what is your role in helping him realize his dreams?
4. How do you convey high academic expectations for Lemont in your classroom?
5. What are the openings for this in your subject matter?
6. Let's assume that Lemont is an African American student. Based on the data, how is Lemont doing?

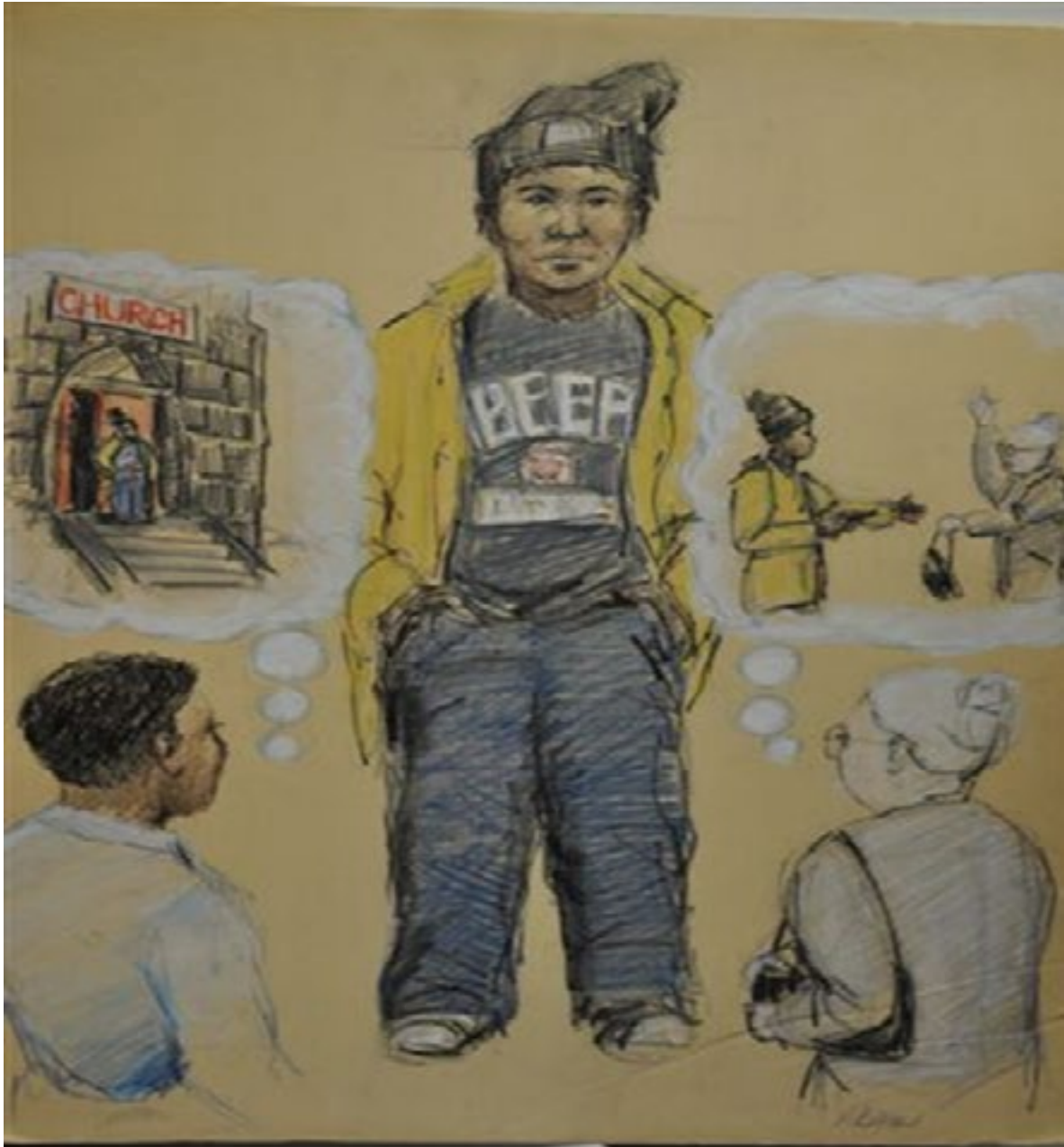


Figure 1. Developing critical consciousness.

By providing a safe space for teachers to articulate their understandings of stereotypes, the impact of media on one's perceptions of Black and Brown teenagers, and their relationship to teacher expectations, the facilitators encouraged the development of a critical consciousness connected to classroom practice and student learning. One participant commented that this session helped her recognize bias in herself. Another wrote, "Teachers must be open to different cultures and be willing to make modifications while keeping expectations high for all learners."

Teacher Assessment of Their Own Learning

At the end of the 13 weeks of sustained professional development, the teachers at Hilltop High identified several strategies to incorporate into their classroom practice:

- Get to know your students and their dreams and goals.
- Use more pair-share in class and allow for more wait time.
- Encourage more student input in their activities and use their experiences to illustrate new ideas whenever possible.
- Smile and welcome students at the door.
- Offer opportunities for every student to be successful during each class.
- Use higher level questions.
- Call parents with good news.

One teacher wrote that she had gained a better understanding of district expectations and of the teacher observation rubric component, equitable practice. Another stated that he would "work more reflectively and evaluate my performance."

Limitations and Strengths

Different contextual factors for this sustained PD effort presented limitations and constraints (see Table 1). For example, the leadership team could not assign outside readings for the teachers due to union policies. The fact that the principal at Hilltop High invited Dr. Anderson and her team to co-construct professional development with close connections to student learning and the new teacher observation rubric may have been key factors in its degree of success. There were immediate gains on the state wide assessments in spring 2011, with African American student achievement increasing 26 percentage points in reading and eight percentage points in mathematics.

However, the PD was not explicitly connected to subject matter instruction, and providers were not given the opportunity to work side by side in classrooms with teachers to implement CRP as they learned about it, key features of PD for instructional improvement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Nor were the central office representative and university partners invited to observe classroom practice of participating teachers. Although Hilltop High's leaders provided some key supports for teacher learning of CRP, they did not leverage all supports available to them, thus limiting changes in practice.

Table 1
Contextual Factors Impacting Professional Development

Limitations	Strengths
Not connected to subject matter or embedded in classroom practice	Organic in origin: proposed by leadership
Did not include observations of classroom practice and provide real-time feedback	Co-planned with leadership team
45 minutes per session; no time for outside readings	Attended by school leadership
External demands on facilitators' time	Required attendance for all teachers
	Linked to "red flag" data
	Linked to teacher evaluation
	Sustained over 13 weeks

Recommendations for Meaningful Teacher Learning of CRP

In the case of Hilltop High, the newly adopted teacher observation rubric, emphasizing equitable practice and culturally competent instruction, served as an important policy mechanism, motivating school leadership to support a focus on CRP. More tools are needed to support teacher and leader learning of CRP.

This PD would be enriched by adding classroom-based activities, such as observations and facilitator modeling alongside teachers to implement pedagogy that is truly culturally relevant and grounded in critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, time and budgetary resources may not be available for this practice in many districts. Although the presence of university partners brought scholarly resources and expertise to these PD efforts, different incentive systems may conspire to discourage their long-term involvement in public schools (Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008).

As Young (2010) writes about culturally relevant pedagogy, scholars and practitioners need to develop "a more sustainable, more collaborative methodology ... to support the teachers' implementation of a theory into practice" (p. 258). One reason that the PD at Hilltop High could be sustained over 13 weeks was the involvement of a variety of educators on the design team, including teachers from different disciplines, a union representative, school leaders, and Dr. Anderson from the district's central office. Collaborative planning that valued teacher input was essential to its success. There was a consistent schedule for weekly sessions, followed by planning and time for debriefing, along with a consistent message from leadership that teacher learning about CRP was expected and relevant to instructional improvement.

Yet this design model did not allow for outside reading, longer sessions for extended discourse, or classroom-based collaboration and feedback. Nevertheless, it met with some success. Both English language arts and mathematics test scores of African American students at Hilltop High School significantly improved the following spring. As one participant concluded, "I'm starting to realize that the way we teach students of today has changed. We have to be knowledgeable about

our content but also our students ... and identify their unique backgrounds. I will start to adjust my lesson planning to meet the culturally relevant needs of my students and hopefully improve their academic performance.”

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Assessing Students' Response to Intervention When Evaluating Specific Learning Disabilities

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Identification of students with specific learning disabilities using response to intervention (RTI) requires students to demonstrate a lack of progress in response to scientifically based instruction. Local education agencies that use an RTI framework for making special education eligibility decisions are faced with determining which students demonstrate a lack of progress. Despite guidelines released by state departments of education, limited guidance regarding student responsiveness is provided beyond the federal language. This article examines current best practices to help school teams use technically adequate assessment practices to document students' progress when making a special education eligibility decision. Recommendations are then provided for collecting and using progress monitoring data during special education evaluations to document a student's lack of progress.

With the authorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, the term specific learning disability (SLD) was codified into special education law. The 1977 Education for All Handicapped Children Act regulations operationalized SLD as follows:

A team may determine that a child has a specific learning disability if: (1) The child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more of the areas listed in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels; and (2) The team finds the child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability in one or more of the following areas: (1) Oral expression; (ii) Listening comprehension; (iii) Written expression; (iv) Basic reading skill; (v) Reading comprehension; (vi) Mathematics calculation; (vii) Mathematics reasoning. (U.S. Department of Education, 1977, p. 65083)

With the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, local education agencies were left with the responsibility of identifying SLD using a discrepancy between a student's ability level (i.e., IQ) and demonstrated achievement (e.g., through performance on a norm-referenced achievement measure). How to determine this discrepancy was largely left up to the states and thus the local education agencies within them. Limited guidance and limited consistency across eligibility decisions resulted in variability and confusion about which students truly had an SLD (Dowdy, Mays, Kamphaus, & Reynolds, 2009). Furthermore, simply demonstrating an ability-achievement discrepancy yields little in terms of instructional relevance (Forness, Keogh, MacMillan, Kavale, & Gresham, 1998).

Responsiveness to Intervention as an Indicator of Specific Learning Disability

With the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, previously the Education for All Handicapped Children Act), and the update to the IDEA regulations that followed in 2006, assessing a student's response to scientifically based intervention could be used for SLD eligibility determinations. The 2006 IDEA regulations included additional procedures for identifying an SLD. State departments of education

Must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, as defined in 34 CFR 300.8(c) (10); Must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and May permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, as defined in 34 CFR 300.8(c) (10). (Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities, 2006, p. 46786)

Since the 2006 reauthorization, all 50 states have included response to intervention (RTI) in their regulations, and 45 states have developed RTI guidance documents (Boynton-Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). State guidance documents have, however, had limited impact on accurately defining and identifying SLD within an RTI framework. Additionally, much variability remains across state requirements not only for determining eligibility using RTI data but for identifying SLD in general. This variability within and across states may have led to continued reliance on using norm-referenced achievement tests to support SLD eligibility decisions. Determining whether a child meets eligibility criteria for SLD becomes even more unclear given the lack of consensus regarding how to quantify inadequate responsiveness to instruction and intervention. Pennsylvania is one such state with a guidance document for RTI (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008), but limited guidance regarding student responsiveness is provided beyond federal language.

Pennsylvania's Response to Intervention Guidelines

The Pennsylvania Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008) provides schools with guidance regarding RTI implementation in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's code, Criteria for the Determination of Specific Learning Disabilities (2008), stipulates that SLD eligibility may be determined using RTI, which is:

a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention, which includes documentation that: the student received high quality instruction in the general education setting; research-based interventions were provided to the student; and the student progress was regularly monitored. (§14.125[2][i])

Additionally, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE, 2008) outlined four criteria for SLD identification: (1) adequate achievement; (2) RTI: lack of progress in response to scientifically-based instruction; (3) ruling out other conditions or cultural or environmental factors; and (4) ruling out lack of instruction. When considering Criteria 1 and 2, a student must demonstrate a dual discrepancy, which refers to a discrepancy between a student's level (Criterion 1) and growth (rate

of improvement; Criterion 2) compared to his or her peers (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Speece, 2002; Speece & Case, 2001). Although both Criteria 1 and 2 must be met to demonstrate a dual discrepancy, this manuscript focuses on Criterion 2, lack of progress. Additional information regarding Criteria 1, 3, and 4 may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network's website.¹

To meet Criterion 2, a student must “display an inadequate rate of improvement when presented with scientifically based interventions” (PDE, 2008, p. 9). This determination assumes regular progress monitoring done with fidelity has occurred throughout the period in which the student had received intervention. PDE (2008) recommends that schools use progress monitoring measures that have acceptable psychometric properties, have alternate forms, are sensitive to student growth, inform instruction, and are administered efficiently. It is left to individual schools to determine whether their progress monitoring measures meet those criteria. The National Center on Intensive Intervention (n.d.) provides guidance about whether specific measures meet those criteria. The frequency of progress monitoring increases as more intense interventions are provided, with the recommendation of at least twice per month for students receiving supplemental (Tier 2) interventions and at least weekly for students receiving intensive (Tier 3) interventions (PDE, 2008).

Regular progress monitoring allows school teams to graph student growth and visually depict progress using aim lines and trend lines, as well as to quantify a student's growth by calculating a slope based on the data collected throughout intervention. PDE (2008) indicated that quantifying a student's growth is especially important when determining the extent of the discrepancy in comparison to peers' progress and recommended a student's rate of improvement be two-times discrepant from that of peers to indicate a significant discrepancy. Although a quantified rate of improvement allows for comparison of a student's growth to that of typical students (Batsche, Castillo, Dixon, & Forde, 2008), “neither the federal or state regulations currently or have ever specifically indicated how inadequate a student must be in terms of rate of improvement to qualify for special education under the SLD designation” (PDE, 2008, p. 10). Furthermore, the discrepancy of two-times discrepant has never been empirically validated. Therefore, it is ultimately the responsibility of each school to determine whether Criterion 2 is met. In the absence of empirical validation for any one method of determining lack of progress, as well as limited state level guidance on engaging in technically adequate progress monitoring practices, an examination of current progress monitoring research is warranted.

Determining Lack of Progress

To improve decisions regarding of lack of progress, it is important for educators to reflect on their own progress-monitoring practices and ensure that the conditions under which data are collected meet acceptable standards for interpretation. Review of the literature reveals varying methods for assessing a student's RTI, including final benchmark (Good, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 2001), slope discrepancy (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004), and dual discrepancy (Fuchs et al.,

¹ See <http://www.pattan.net>.

2002; Speece & Case, 2001). Although alternative methods exist in the literature for determining lack of responsiveness, there is overlap between the dual-discrepancy method and the other two listed above, as a student must be discrepant in both level (i.e., final benchmark, Criterion 1) and growth (i.e., slope, Criterion 2). PDE (2008) indicated a student must be dually discrepant (i.e., meet both Criteria 1 and 2). For the purposes of this article, particular attention is paid to determining inadequate progress (Criterion 2) using curriculum-based measurement in reading (CBM-R) because Pennsylvania currently allows schools to determine eligibility for SLD in reading using RTI.

Technical Adequacy of CBM-R

The technical adequacy of CBM-R and decisions based upon it directly impact accuracy of SLD eligibility decisions. Using guidelines described by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (1999) assessments used for psychoeducational evaluations must be reliable, valid, and sensitive. Assessments should demonstrate stability of student scores over time and across forms and should relate to a meaningful outcome. CBM-R has been shown to meet these criteria (Marston, 1989; Wayman, Wallace, Wiley, Tichá, & Espin, 2007). Ardoin, Christ, Morena, Cormier, and Klingbeil's (2013) review of the literature suggested, however, that CBM-R data are likely adequate for decision making at the group level, and additional research is necessary before individual student data can be used to make accurate decisions regarding growth.

Furthermore, when evaluating student growth at the individual level, the standard error of slope estimates may exceed expected growth (Christ, 2006). In other words, decisions based on slope may be a product of measurement error and not actual student growth (Hintze & Christ, 2004). Additionally, variability in passage set may impact one's ability to reliably estimate growth (Ardoin & Christ, 2008; Christ & Ardoin, 2009). Therefore, practitioners can reduce error in their measurements if optimal testing conditions are maintained by ensuring consistency across test administrator, location, and probe difficulty; testing in a quiet environment; and using standardized administration procedures (Christ, 2006). Collecting data for an extended period of time can also lead to a higher-quality dataset (Christ, Monaghan, Zopluoglu, & Van Norman, 2013; Christ, Zopluoglu, Long, & Monaghan, 2012).

Schedule of Collecting CBM-R Data

By reviewing 78 studies, Ardoin and colleagues (2013) found that a range of 3 to 20 data points (with 7 data points being the most frequent suggestion) were recommended before making a decision about progress. It was suggested that at least 12 weeks of data with multiple data points collected each week are necessary before making a decision about an individual student's progress. Likewise, estimating a student's growth based upon universal screening data alone is not valid (Ardoin & Christ, 2008). Further research by Christ and colleagues (2012) suggested that when progress is monitored weekly (i.e., PDE's recommendation for students receiving intensive support), at least 14 data points are needed when high-quality testing conditions are ensured.

An accurate estimate of a student's rate of improvement may potentially be obtained if a denser progress monitoring schedule is followed (e.g., three times per week), but even if data are collected more frequently, practitioners need to be aware of error that exists in the data when making a determination about growth before 14 weeks of data have been collected. Additionally, it may be likely that the duration of progress monitoring is more influential on obtaining a reliable estimate of growth than the schedule of progress monitoring because the effects of instruction take time to be realized (Christ et al., 2013). These findings were substantiated by Thornblad and Christ (2014), who demonstrated that the quality of slope estimates improved with increased duration of data collection and a larger number of data points. Even with daily progress monitoring, however, Thornblad and Christ found that six weeks of daily data were not enough to make an accurate decision about a student's growth for a low-stakes (i.e., reliability and validity below .70) or high-stakes decision (i.e., reliability greater than .90 and validity greater than .80).

Calculating Rate of Growth

Once enough data points are obtained to accurately estimate rate of improvement, educators are tasked with quantifying growth. A student's growth may be quantified using a variety of methods, but calculating a slope of the line that fits the progress monitoring data points provides the most accurate representation of growth rate over time (Deno, Fuchs, Marston, & Shin, 2001; Good & Shinn, 1990). For more information see Shinn, Good, and Stein (1989).

Comparing Students' Responsiveness to Intervention

Setting a standard for comparison requires schools to consider a variety of factors because there is no empirically validated criterion that signifies inadequate growth. For example, Burns, Scholin, Kosciolk, and Livingston (2010) demonstrated variability in decisions made about a student's progress based on whether comparison to an aim line or dual discrepancy was used. When comparing a student's rate of improvement to that of his or her peers, educators must be mindful of nonlinear yearly growth rates, schedules of progress monitoring data collection, the impact of baseline on growth, and the normative growth rates of the selected comparison group.

Research has demonstrated a seasonal effect on student growth rates when assessing progress using CBM-R (Ardoin & Christ, 2008; Christ, Silberglitt, Yeo, & Cormier, 2010; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). Typical student growth results in greater progress from the fall to winter period compared to the winter to spring period. As such, comparing growth for a semester timeframe is likely more appropriate given differences in growth rates throughout the school year and potential changes in supplemental instruction. Furthermore, Ardoin and Christ (2008) reported that calculating growth rates using universal screening data may not be adequate for estimating growth rates of a comparison group. One recommendation by Ardoin and Christ was that school teams might consider collecting data on non-referred students at the same schedule as targeted students for use when making a high-stakes decision. School teams must consider the feasibility of that recommendation while considering the rigor of their other comparative data.

One benefit of progress monitoring data is that it can be graphically displayed. Graphic depictions of growth allow practitioners to compare progress (i.e., slope of the trend line) to that of an aim line, which is especially useful for making instructional changes. For high-stakes decisions, educators need to consider the appropriateness of using an aim-line comparison against a standard criterion (e.g., two-times discrepant, growth below a particular percentile rank), however, because variability in baseline level across students may result in different decisions being made about adequate progress, even if two students are growing at the same rate (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Barnett, 2005). For example, if considering the response of two students with the same growth rates, the student with a higher beginning level needs less time to close the gap than a student who begins at a lower level. The student with the lower initial level may be judged as inadequately responding despite making gains that could hypothetically be greater than what would be expected from a typical student. Therefore, school teams should consider the impact of using an aim line compared to a standard criterion to indicate a discrepant growth rate.

In addition to comparing student growth to an aim line, school teams might consider comparing the target student's progress to that of a normative sample. Many commercially available CBM-R assessments provide normative growth information to which the target student's growth can be compared. Due to variations in local populations, practitioners need to weigh the benefits of using both national and local norm groups.

Shapiro and Guard (2014) explained that the norm group and target student should have commonalities. Therefore, educators need to be mindful of the sample that was used to develop a particular CBM's norm group as well as variations in the local population. If only local norms are used, schools may run into the problem of identifying a student as eligible for special education based on ZIP code. National norms provide data that are similar to those of well-established norm-referenced tests and serve as a comparison to typically performing students (Shapiro & Guard, 2014). Research-based estimates of typical growth are provided by national norms. If only national growth norms are used, however, over- or under-representation of students identified as eligible for special education may occur. For example, students in an underperforming district may be over-identified when the problem lies not within the individual student but rather with universal supports. For schools that do not have at least 80% of students at proficiency, this over-representation could stress the system and potentially lead to misidentification of students in need of special education. This is not to say that students from an underperforming district cannot be identified as eligible simply because 80% of the students are not meeting expectations, however. There are still students with SLD in these districts, and it is the school's responsibility to identify those students. Comparing growth to local norms may provide school teams with information about students most in need of support in a particular school. Thus, comparing a student's growth rate to both national and local norms may provide school teams with useful information for making determinations about inadequate growth.

Implications for Practice

In lieu of empirical guidance as to what constitutes an inadequate rate of improvement, it is recommended that educators critically examine their progress monitoring practices to ensure they are aligned with current best practices to improve decisions about student progress. It is up to individual schools to scrutinize the psychometric properties of their progress monitoring assessments to determine whether they meet standards for which high-stakes decisions can be made. To evaluate their assessments, schools may access reviews of available progress monitoring measures from the National Center on Intensive Intervention (n.d.).

To improve the quality of their data, educators must also strive for optimal testing conditions by standardizing conditions (e.g., consistent administrator, administration procedures, location, and time of day); using alternate forms with equal probe difficulty; and testing in a quiet environment (Christ, 2006). Additionally, extended periods of data collection (e.g., weekly for at least 14 weeks) are needed to improve the reliability of the slope (Christ et al., 2012, 2013). Even with a high quality dataset, however, educators need to consider error in the data and should report confidence intervals for the slope. For more information regarding error in growth rates practitioners may review Christ (2006).

School teams should also consider comparing student growth to an aim line as well as both national and local growth rates. Some commercially available CBMs provide normative growth rates that practitioners can use for comparisons. A student's progress may be compared to growth within the local district as well, but using universal screening data to calculate local growth rates may not be appropriate when making high-stakes decisions (Ardoin & Christ, 2008). Practitioners may gain additional information about student growth by comparing growth to other students receiving similar supplemental or intensive intervention since progress monitoring schedules and instructional practices for these students should be similar.

Finally, when considering student progress, educators need to consider whether the student is making adequate growth given the current supports (Kovaleski, VanDerHeyden, & Shapiro, 2013). Although a psychoeducational evaluation determines special education eligibility, assessments should also provide information that will allow educators to better meet the student's educational needs. Through the evaluation process, school teams should be reviewing the available data to determine what level of support and types of instruction allow students to make meaningful progress toward their goals. Assessing the impact of instruction and documenting response to increasingly intensive interventions delivered with fidelity allows school teams to determine whether a student needs significant and persistent supports. By considering what instruction and supports a student needs to make or sustain progress, school teams can better understand whether a student requires specially designed instruction and special education supports to make a more informed eligibility decision.

Conclusions

Although PDE (2008) provides guidance regarding the use of progress-monitoring tools for determining inadequate rate of improvement, it is up to school teams to ensure acceptable progress-monitoring assessment practices are used. Schools should also consider engaging in appropriate professional development to ensure staff members are trained in progress monitoring using CBM to improve the quality of their assessment data. Furthermore, it is recommended that policy reflect current recommendations from progress monitoring research. To improve high-stakes decision making, specific guidelines are needed regarding the minimum number of progress-monitoring data points necessary for decision making, practices for quantifying students' growth, and selection of a criterion to signify inadequate growth.

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Practitioner’s Page: Instructional Coaching: A Job-Embedded Approach to Supporting Teachers in the Pennsylvania Teacher Evaluation Process

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Act 82 of 2012 (Public School Code, 2012) was designed to transform teacher evaluation, with the goal of improving student achievement by developing effective teachers (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013). The educator effectiveness model instituted through Act 82 is not designed to “fix” poor teachers. Rather, it promotes the growth and development of all teachers to improve their effectiveness to benefit student learning. This description of the educator effectiveness model’s mission, from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), is strikingly similar to the intent of instructional coaching: to build teacher capacity to increase student engagement and improve student outcomes (Barkley, 2005; Jones & Vreeman, 2008; Killion, Harrison, Bryan, & Clifton, 2012; Knight, 2007; Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010).

Instructional coaching is not a new concept. Schools in Pennsylvania and across the nation have been using instructional coaches for decades to support teachers in content area literacy, technology integration, mathematics, data, and overall instructional practice. What is new for many educators, however, is the anxiety that they feel when they consider the accountability of the educator effectiveness model “pie” (Figure 1) by which they are evaluated.

Not only is the educator effectiveness model a challenge for teachers; administrators have added responsibilities under the educator effectiveness model. Many administrators struggle with balancing building management, teacher evaluation, and instructional leadership and turn to instructional coaches to lead adult learning that improves student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009). This article provides examples and practical suggestions as a framework for how instructional coaches can support teachers in the four areas evaluated by the educator effectiveness model: observation/practice, building-level data, teacher-specific data, and elective data.

Observation/Practice

Accounting for 50% of a teacher’s evaluation, observation/practice is measured through the four domains of the Danielson (2007) framework: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Previously in Pennsylvania public schools, a teacher’s entire evaluation was based on this observation tool, so teachers should already be familiar with

Teacher Effectiveness System in Act 82 of 2012

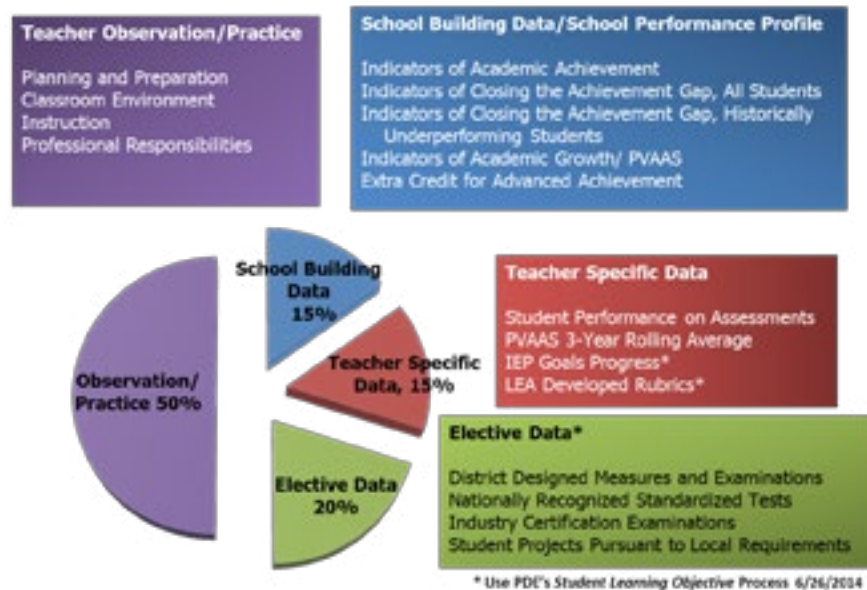


Figure 1. Teacher Effectiveness System in Act 82 of 2012 (PDE, 2013).

the expectations. Since it is half of a teacher’s evaluation in the educator effectiveness model, and because they can directly control their performance during an observation, many teachers strive to continue to improve in this area. Coaches can support teacher growth in each of the framework’s domains.

Planning and Preparation

The planning and preparation domain includes knowledge of students, instructional outcomes, knowledge of resources, lesson design, and assessment design (Danielson, 2007). To support teachers, coaches can, for example, be resource providers, supplying curricular resources and pacing guides for new teachers or providing veteran teachers with updated web sites, articles, and instructional materials for classroom use (Harrison & Killion, 2007). Coaches also incorporate a before-during-after (BDA) cycle as they work one on one with teachers; selecting instructional objectives and designing coherent lessons and assessment of student learning are important parts of the “before” step in the cycle (Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching, 2005). Working one on one and in collaborative groups, coaches can be an integral part of a classroom teacher’s planning and preparation.

Classroom Environment

A teacher’s ability to create an environment of respect and rapport, establish a culture of learning, organize physical space, and manage classroom procedures and student behavior, comprise the classroom environment domain (Danielson, 2007). Adams, Ross, Burns, and Gibbs (2015) explore

data displays as a way coaches can “capture teacher practice around an identified focus” (p. 25) and guide a coaching conversation about the classroom environment. Classroom environment is often a teacher’s choice of focus area, but because classroom environment is essentially classroom management, its affective nature can make teachers feel uncomfortable and judged. However, the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (2005) advocates for non-evaluative coaching practices, and data displays that collect objective data upon which both the teacher and coach agree are a way to provide a non-judgmental snapshot of a teacher’s classroom. Creating the display, Adams et al. (2015) found, helps the coach formulate non-evaluative questions to help the teacher reflect on his or her practices in the “after” conversation. Reflective teacher practice, supported by coaching suggestions, can lead to meaningful change (Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching, 2005).

Instruction

The instruction domain consists of communicating with students, questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, assessment during instruction, and teacher flexibility and responsiveness (Danielson, 2007). Coach support in the instruction domain can come in many forms. Just as a strong teacher differentiates instruction based on learner needs, one of the benefits of an effective coach is his or her ability to tailor individualized support to teachers. Teacher needs in the instruction domain can vary widely, but a few supports that coaches can offer include student data analysis to drive instruction, modeling effective instructional strategies, co-teaching, observation and feedback, and learning walks (Harrison & Killion, 2007). As an example, a teacher may want to deepen the use of formative assessment. In the BDA cycle, the “before” conversation could consist of examining different formative assessment techniques and deciding on a few that would be appropriate for the lesson. The “during” might be a co-taught lesson in which the teacher handles the instruction and the coach collects formative assessment data, and the “after” would be an analysis of the data, a discussion about what instructional changes might be necessary based on the data, and a reflection on the effectiveness of the formative assessments used in the lesson.

Professional Responsibilities

Danielson’s (2007) fourth domain, professional responsibilities, includes professional growth, participation in a professional community, teacher reflection, maintaining accurate records, and communicating with families. Instructional coaches can support teachers in professional growth, participation in a professional community, and teacher reflection. Harrison and Killion (2007) explain that one of the roles of coaches is learning facilitator, and administrators often rely on coaches to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers. These activities can take the form of professional learning communities (PLCs), workshops, mini-professional development sessions (during lunch or throughout the school day that teachers can voluntarily attend during part of their planning time), instructional rounds, or working one on one with a coach. Professional learning with and by their colleagues allows teachers to focus on what most directly impacts student learning (Harrison & Killion, 2007). By its nature, working with a coach is professional growth, as coaching is considered one of the most effective job-embedded professional learning experiences

in education (Killion et al., 2012; Knight, 2007). Additionally, as previously mentioned, the BDA cycle of coaching encourages teacher reflection, an integral part of the professional responsibilities domain.

Building-Level Data

Building-level data are measured by the school performance profile (SPP) score, which includes student achievement on state assessments; academic growth as measured by PVAAS; indicators of closing achievement gaps; attendance, promotion, and graduation rates; advanced student achievement; and other academic achievement indicators. All teachers contribute to the SPP through their interactions with students and contributions to the school's learning environment, as well as their instructional impact on student achievement. Thus, building-level data account for 15% of a teacher's evaluation.

Since the building-level score is very data-heavy, acting as data coaches (Harrison & Killion, 2007; Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching, 2005), instructional coaches can help teachers understand the various data points that comprise the SPP and assist them in adapting their instruction based on student strengths and weaknesses as indicated by the data. Instructional coach as data analyst can help teachers make sense of the school's SPP and turn those data into actionable classroom and school improvement efforts. For example, a coach can lead a grade-level data meeting to examine the achievement gap for historically underperforming students and then guide teachers in developing a plan to adapt their curricular materials and instruction to engage these students. Basing the plan on research-based best practices in closing achievement gaps avoids the common mistake of coach as "know-it-all." Coaches who come across as experts can be off-putting to teachers. Effective coaches learn from research and professional development just as teachers do; in planning for data meetings and other coach-teacher interactions, the coach has the flexibility of schedule and time to conduct the research that guides the plan.

Teacher-Specific Data

Teacher-specific data comprise 15% of a teacher's evaluation. For teachers in tested subjects and tested grades, data include proficient or advanced student achievement on PSSA/Keystone exams and growth attributed to teachers based on a three-year rolling average PVAAS teacher-specific report. For teachers not in tested subjects or grades, this piece of the pie is measured by student progress toward IEP goals and/or locally-developed rubrics. By working with a coach to align their curricula to assessment anchors and eligible content, analyze student data, design and deliver data-driven instruction, and pinpoint strengths and challenges in classroom instruction, teachers in tested subjects and tested grades can increase their capacity to impact student achievement (Zrike & Connolly, 2015). For example, a teacher and coach can focus on the topic of facilitating rigorous student conversation through the types of questions asked by the teacher. Zrike and Connolly (2015) report that teachers "recognized that small changes, such as altering the order of words in a question, could yield big results for deepening student thinking" (p. 22). Such instructional shifts, as required by the Common Core, lead to higher levels of student engagement and deeper

interactions with content, which Zrike and Connolly found yield significant student improvement on state standardized tests. For those teachers without standardized test and PVAAS data, such strategies can also have a positive impact on special needs students' progress toward IEP goals.

Elective Data

Elective data, 20% of a teacher's evaluation, are measured by teachers' student learning objectives (SLO). The intent of the SLO is to formalize and objectively quantify good teaching. With administrator approval, teachers select the instructional focus, goal, performance measures, target students, student performance metric (growth, mastery, or both), performance indicators, and elective rating for the teacher's evaluation.

Coaches can support teachers in the development, implementation, and data examination of their SLOs. By collaboratively examining teacher practice and student data, the coach and teacher can select the instructional focus and target students and set a goal. Then, working through the SLO process template (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014), the coach can help the teacher align the content standards, plan the specific assessment, and identify the methods of evaluating student performance. The coach can guide the teacher through using other planning documents available the Pennsylvania Standards Aligned System (SAS), such as the performance task framework and SLO rubric to ensure that the teacher's SLO is thorough and rigorous before sending it to the administrator for approval. Once the SLO is developed and approved, the coach can also assist the teacher in designing and delivering effective instruction in the SLO's focus area and assist in reflective data analysis that leads to the teacher's assigning himself or herself an elective rating for the SLO.

Conclusion

Empirical research and anecdotal evidence have long supported instructional coaching as a means of building teacher capacity to improve outcomes for students. In addition, coaches can support teacher and student growth in the areas evaluated by the Pennsylvania educator effectiveness model. Working with coaches can help teachers understand the components of the teacher evaluation system, strengthen their practice based on the educator effectiveness model, and create a culture of collaboration that improves student learning.

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Effective Instruction Plus Student Engagement Equals Learning

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Upper Dauphin Area Middle School

I enter my classroom with a sense of excited anticipation and a little bit of nervousness. Today and every day, I will present a lesson for the first time, again. The lesson may be one that I used last year or at some other time in the past 25 years, but it will be the first time for the students sitting in my classroom today. Will my plans work? Will my students be engaged and learn? Will we have fun? Which method of instruction will work best for them? How do I know when a strategy is working? When mastery has been reached?

I am a seventh grade life science teacher. In my classroom, the bottom line is learning. Yes, students will need to show proficiency on standardized tests, but they do not take one in science until the end of eighth grade. In addition, it will be at least two years until they take biology, where they will need knowledge of concepts taught now as scaffolding for learning then. It is more important that they learn the content and processes of science for the long term, so this is my primary goal. Achieving this goal means finding a balance between teaching content (lecture) needed for the test (which drives the content I teach), and teaching inquiry (Allen, 2007), where experiences will help them learn the content for the long term. The bottom line is learning!

The purpose of this article is communicate, in a conversational way, how I use various methodologies to promote student engagement and learning and help my students to develop learning strategies that they can use throughout their academic careers.

Laying the Foundation

Middle school is a tumultuous period. Students in this age group want (and need) autonomy in a structured, safe, and predictable environment (Jorgenson, Cleveland, & Vanosdall, 2004). Laying the foundation for an environment that is conducive to learning is how I begin the school year. My students learn that I care about them, that they will be treated with respect, and that I will work to engage them so that they learn.

The first thing I do is get to know my students. I distribute 4x6 index cards and ask them to list their birthday; with whom they reside; and their hobbies, activities, chores, and pets. I ask them to indicate whether they have Internet access at home (to guide me when assigning projects that require use of the Internet). I read their answers and refer to the cards throughout the year. I record their birthdays on my calendar so that I remember to wish them a happy birthday on their special day.

Since one of my goals for my students is that they learn *how* they learn, I ask them to complete an intelligence profile based on Gardner’s (1993) theory of multiple intelligences (MI). Their MI profile is the final addition to the 4x6 card. They keep the questionnaire because by identifying their interests and strengths, they can help themselves to be successful academically (Campbell, Campbell, & Dickinson, 2004) and develop their learning skills.

Since no single methodology works for all students all the time, I use a variety of methods, in tandem or solo, to reach and teach my students. Methodologies include backward design, differentiated instruction, theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), direct instruction, and guided inquiry (Colburn, 2003). Various engagement strategies are used to keep or regain their attention.

Instruction

Once the foundation is set, the learning can begin. I approach instructional planning with the question, “How can my students best learn this content?” rather than, “How can I teach the content?” (Cohen, 2003). Adolescents are “hard-wired” for activity and discovery. Asking for their feedback on a lesson (How did you like this? What would you do to improve it? Is it a keeper?) is another way I actively involve my students.

Successful Instructional Strategies

I use backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) throughout the year. Every unit begins with a pre-test, and I make instructional decisions based on these results. It also gives students a glimpse of what is going to be learned and on which concepts they will be assessed. Pre-tests are never graded—a notion that my students have found hard to believe. I still hear, “Is this for a grade?” I reassure them that the results help me plan the activities for the next unit because I use their scores as a measure of where they are in their knowledge base (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). I keep the essential questions of a unit in mind as I design lesson plans, and they are answered through instruction and activities that incorporate the methodologies mentioned above. I include frequent formative assessments to monitor student progress and record the results in my grade book (not the online grade book) to monitor how each student is progressing through the unit.

I use direct instruction for the delivery of class notes. I involve the students by asking them to read the PowerPoint slides silently while a classmate reads them aloud. While someone is reading out loud, pencils are down; copying does not begin until the reader is finished.

To create a more active note-taking activity, I use a read-aloud strategy that was introduced by sixth-grade reading and language arts teachers. This activity has a dual purpose. Students learn how to read a textbook—identifying the main points of each section—and they record the points in their notebooks. This method is more time-intensive vs. projecting the notes on a screen for copying, so I have keep the timeline for the curriculum in mind as I weigh the pros and cons of each method.

A more student-centered method for the science classroom is inquiry. There are three levels of inquiry: open, guided, and structured. Open inquiry and guided inquiry are difficult for many middle school students; they need more direction than these methods provide. In structured inquiry, students receive the problem to be investigated and the materials and procedure to use for the investigation, but no expected outcomes (Colburn, 2003). Students write their hypothesis and analyze their results to determine whether the data supported that hypothesis. The lab reports are assessed on hypothesis statement format (If ... then ...), the final analysis of the data collected, and how they connect back to the background information included on the handout.

Another student-centered method of instruction that I use is differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999). This method is tried and true for increasing student achievement and the percentage of students who reach proficiency on math and reading assessments (Rock, Gregg, Ellis, & Gable, 2008). As I become more proficient and comfortable with differentiated instruction, my students learn more about themselves as learners, which contributes to their interest in their progress (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Everyone in my class is expected to meet the same standards, so I do not assign easier assignments to the students who need learning support. Instead, I differentiate when assessing their learning product. For example, I will accept bullet points in place of complete sentences on a lab report for the student who has a verbal learning difference. Where students are expected to research a topic and write a five-paragraph essay, the students who struggle with writing and receive learning support for language arts are expected to write one paragraph with at least 5 sentences on the same topic. All are provided with a graphic organizer, which they must complete by hand before creating their essays on the computer. Finally, regardless of a designation for learning support, I check frequently on the progress of all students so that those who need more direction, reminders, or chunking can be successful.

The theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) provides an ideal way to differentiate in the classroom. I have used whole-class activities to target intelligences on a rotating basis and have had small groups working with the same concept, each small group doing an activity targeting a common intelligence of the group. In the first scenario, a unit on minerals was taught with naturalist intelligence in mind. I created a geology museum in the classroom, and students filled their tour books with pictures as they visited each exhibit and identified each specimen. When studying rocks, I used a multiple intelligence activity to assess their learning. Homogenous groups were created based on their intelligences, and each group was expected to create a product, which was evaluated using a rubric. The students had fun! The musical group wrote a song about rocks and taught it to the class like the Pied Piper. The kinesthetic group created a game that involved a scavenger hunt around the room. The visual/spatial group created colorful posters and flow charts, which they presented to their classmates during poster sessions.

These types of activities require an investment of time to plan and execute, but once they are done, they are easy to repeat in successive years. And not all activities require a large investment of time or materials. Flash cards target those with visual/spatial, verbal, intrapersonal, and kinesthetic intelligences. Poster sessions and jigsaw (Kagan, 1994) activities appeal to students with visual/spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and verbal intelligences.

Assessment

After content has been delivered and activities are completed, it is time for the summative assessment. I begin the review process by returning the pre-test to the students, and they review answers, changing what needs correction, so that they can use it as a study guide along with their notes, labs, worksheets, and the textbook. Individual whiteboards are used during a question-and-answer review session, during which I also use as a formative assessment that informs me as to how well I taught the unit. If instruction has not been clear and concise, and most students seem to need more instruction, I can postpone the test for re-teaching. This assessment is important because clear and concise expectations promote success and help students gain confidence in their abilities to be successful (Stiggins, 2007). I communicate with the learning support teacher if it seems one or more of “her kids” needs extra review. Assessments are modified for the students who need it, which is easy to do using a test bank. The number of choices is reduced for multiple choice questions, key words are bolded, and distractors are removed from the word bank in the completion section of the test. Finally, second chance tests are available for those who need it. The second chance test is different from the first, but it is based on the same material.

Assessing Myself

As we work through a unit, how will I know that a strategy works, that my students are engaged in learning? Using entertainment to keep students engaged is not valuable (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). I look for indicators of engagement behaviors, such as fully participating in group activities cooperatively and respectfully; being so focused on their work that I have to call their name more than once to get attention; calling out of turn with pertinent answers or comments; hearing, “Wow! That went fast!” or “This is fun!” or “I LOVE this stuff!” or “Thank you planning this lesson!” (These were the actual comments.) When actively engaged, my students follow directions well and ask for clarification when needed because they want to be successful and care about their work. When a plan works, I make sure to file it so that I can use it again. I also look for indications that students are not engaged in learning. These behaviors include attention-getting behaviors such as acting out, socializing across the room, raising one’s hand to ask questions about totally unrelated or off-topic questions, and nodding off.

Engagement Strategies

If a plan is not working, or not working as planned, I must make on-the-spot adjustments to steer students in the correct direction. I learned this skill the hard way. I had planned a jigsaw (Kagan, 1994) activity and combined it with poster sessions to share the information. I taught a few sections of students who were more academically and socially immature than their peers. More than a few individuals were students with learning differences who were easily frustrated. These students could not handle the independence of moving around to the different posters, and frustration led to off-task socialization and disruptions. I adjusted and returned to direct instruction, with which they seemed more comfortable.

If interest is waning, or if students veer off-topic, I use a few engagement strategies to get their attention. For example, I use “the train signal”: I hold my hands at waist level, palms facing outward, and wave them back and forth, calling, “Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!” This signal means stop, look, and listen. Since it is reserved for times when the students’ attention is needed immediately, it is not ignored. It provides the time to redirect their behaviors, reinforce the directions, correct misconceptions, or report my observations and ask for feedback. It is also useful when they are engaged in a lab activity and I need to say something.

Short, physical activities during note-taking periods serve to reenergize my students. They are told to get up, walk across the room, and say hello to a friend or to thumb wrestle with the person sitting behind them. These activities take no more than a minute, and this investment of time is well worth their redirected attention.

Summary

The bottom line in my classroom is learning. To this end, I work very hard to give my students the best of my efforts and provide sound, interesting, and engaging lessons. Getting to know each of students more personally helps me to design dynamic learning experiences for my students, and I use many methodologies, either by themselves or in tandem, to create these experiences for my students, an energetic group of seventh graders.

There is a pattern to the structure of each unit. A pre-test is used to assess any prior knowledge while giving students foresight into the next topic for learning. Backward design is used when planning for delivery of the content of each unit. I use direct instruction, differentiated instruction, and structured inquiry to deliver the content and frequent formative assessments keep me apprised of their progress through out a unit. I monitor engagement through each lesson and use different strategies to reengage my students when necessary. The desired outcome for all is academic success!

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An Invitation to Write for Pennsylvania Educational Leadership

Erin McHenry-Sorber and Kathleen Provinzano - Co-Editors

Pennsylvania Educational Leadership (PEL) is the professional journal of the Pennsylvania Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (PASCSD).

A peer-reviewed journal, PEL is typically published two times per year. Manuscripts are accepted year round. Topics address the interests and concerns of Pennsylvania educators at all levels. We welcome a wide variety of manuscripts including (but not limited to) single study inquiries, qualitative and quantitative research, theoretical and conceptual pieces, historical analyses, literature reviews, action research, and first-person narratives. Manuscripts may address, among other topics, descriptions of curriculum improvement projects, discussions of trends and issues, views on instructional strategies, statements of theoretical positions, accounts of staff development and supervisory practices, reports of formal research projects and teacher inquiries. In addition, the journal welcomes practitioner's pages—non research manuscripts written by practitioners for practitioners.

Manuscript Submission Guidelines

Pennsylvania Educational Leadership (PEL) is a peer-reviewed journal that accepts manuscripts year round. Topics address the interests and concerns of Pennsylvania educators at all levels. We welcome a wide variety of manuscripts including (but not limited to) single study inquiries, qualitative and quantitative research, theoretical and conceptual pieces, historical analyses, literature reviews, action research, and first-person narratives. Beginning spring 2014, the journal began including a Practitioner's Page highlighting the voices, thoughts, and opinions of educators in the field. Submissions for the Practitioner's Page can take a variety of formats including (but not limited to) book reviews, policy reviews, and critical reflections on current educational issues and trends. Individuals choosing to submit to the Practitioner's Page should follow the same submission guidelines as those submitting manuscripts with the exception of the Abstract. Authors must also indicate that the submission is intended for the Practitioners Page on the cover sheet.

Manuscripts should be emailed to Editor Kathleen Provinzano (Drexel University) at editor@peljournal.org. All submissions are initially reviewed by the editor. Submissions evaluated as appropriate for review are then sent to three readers for blind review. Manuscripts should follow the guidelines set forth by the [American Psychological Association](#).

Before submitting a manuscript to PEL, please consider the following guidelines carefully:

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The deadline for the spring 2016 issue is *Monday, February 22, 2016*. Questions regarding a possible submission, submissions under review, or submissions requiring revision can be directed to the editor via the PEL email address. Authors can also contact Kathleen Provinzano at ktp37@drexel.edu.