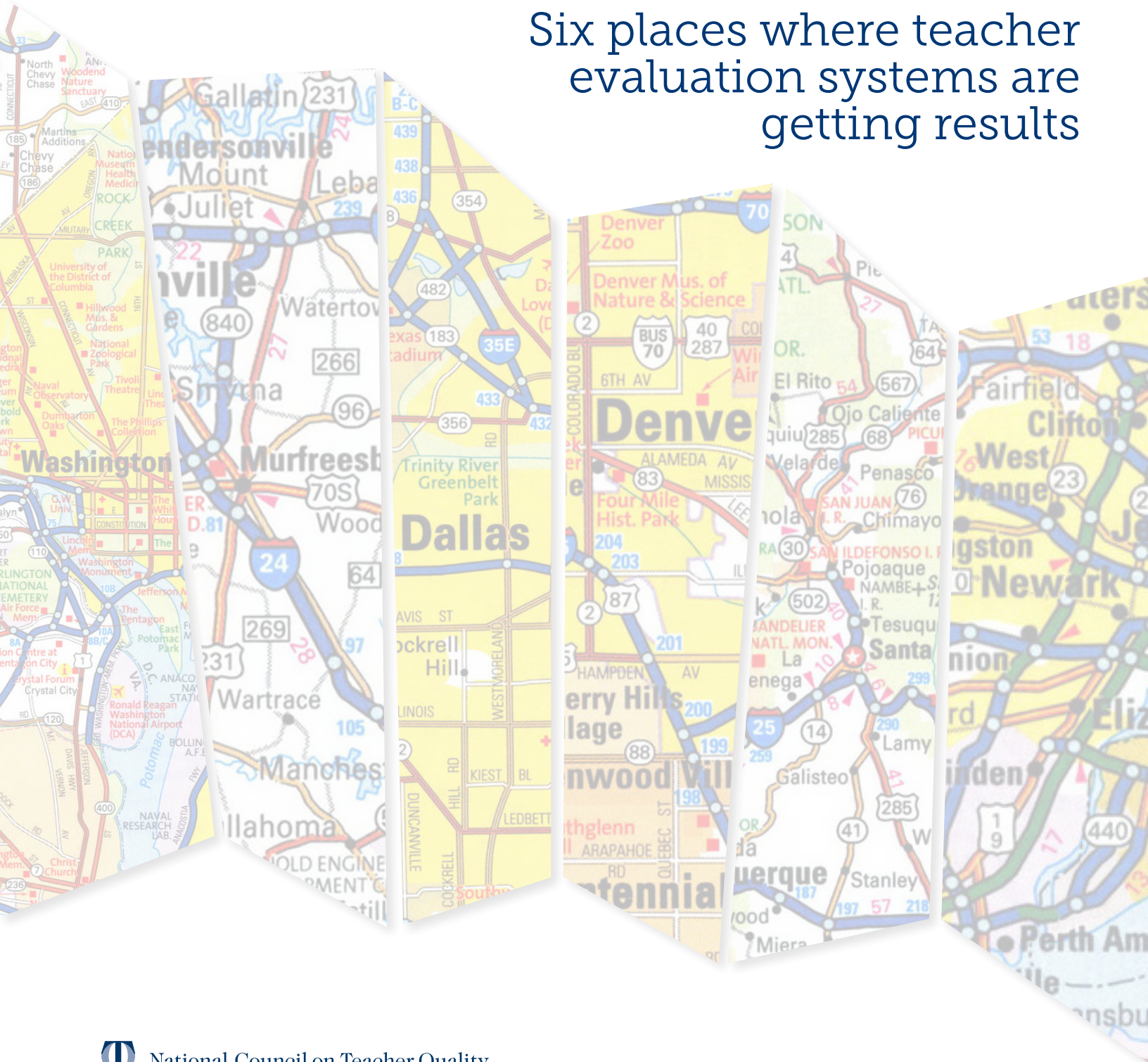
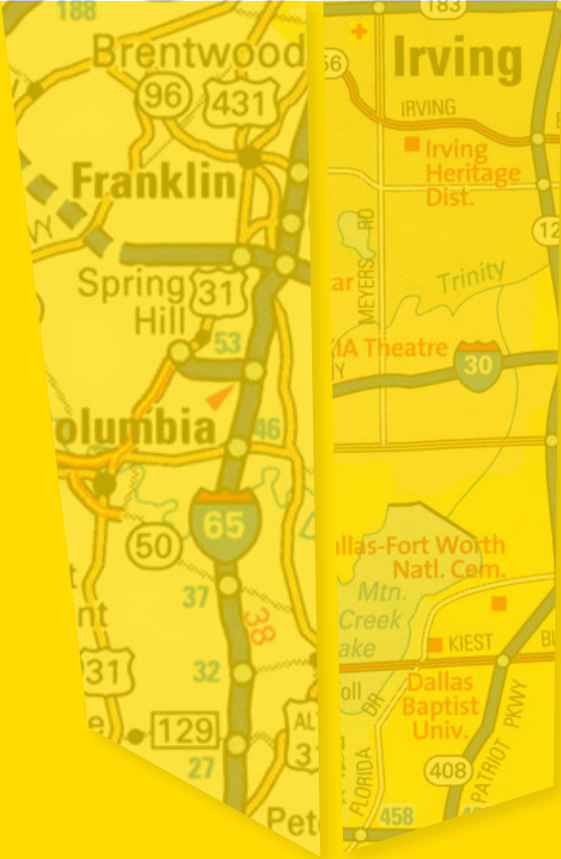


Making a difference

Six places where teacher evaluation systems are getting results





Authors: Hannah Putman¹, Elizabeth Ross, and Kate Walsh

Analysts: Kelli Lakis and Kency Nittler

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Overview

Teacher evaluation has undergone rapid reform over the past decade.² School systems set out to help strengthen and improve their existing evaluation systems, which were just not functioning effectively. Under past systems, almost all teachers were being rated as satisfactory and therefore largely viewed as interchangeable.³

Evaluation systems must be able to differentiate among different teachers' effectiveness and apply that information in key personnel decisions in order to build the strongest possible teacher workforce. An examination of many states' and school districts' current approaches to evaluation shows that they have made some real progress in developing improved systems over the past decade. For example, many teacher evaluation systems historically included only two rating levels — satisfactory and unsatisfactory — with almost all teachers earning the former.⁴ Today, most states' and large districts' evaluation systems consist of three or more rating levels. While previous ratings were based primarily on observations of the teacher by a principal, more evaluation systems now factor in objective measures of student growth, as well as other measures such as student input in the form of surveys. Whereas many school systems once routinely evaluated tenured teachers on a two- to five-year cycle, approximately half of the 100 largest districts and half of all states now require annual, summative evaluations for all teachers and have policies to use the results of evaluation systems to inform teacher compensation.^{5,6}

Despite this clear progress, strengthening evaluation systems so that they reflect the genuine distribution of teacher talent in a district or state has proven challenging. One of the setbacks was the implementation of new teacher evaluation measures in tandem with new college- and career-ready standards and assessments for students. These simultaneous transitions meant that teachers were making significant changes in what they taught at the same time they were being more rigorously evaluated, causing some teachers to bristle at these policy changes.

Fortunately, we can identify six pioneers — four districts and two states — which are reporting genuine successes. They are implementing many of the same components commonly found in many state and district systems; however, their results are setting them apart.

These six systems are distinguishing among teachers of varying quality and are delivering the changes initially sought by districts and states across the nation. Some of these systems are already able to boast measurable evidence that the teacher workforce is improving, with higher-performing teachers staying longer and weaker teachers, who previously might never have even known they were weak, choosing to leave.

This analysis focuses on these six systems: Dallas Independent School District, District of Columbia Public Schools, Denver Public Schools, Newark Public Schools, New Mexico, and Tennessee. It depicts how evaluation systems can benefit teachers and, most importantly, students.

The districts and states discussed can each report publicly available evidence of the positive impacts of their evaluation systems. Although the specific successes observable in the districts and states profiled here differ, each offers examples of progress that is possible under well-designed and well-implemented teacher evaluation systems which achieve a more honest distribution of teacher talent and which emphasize continuous improvement. The case studies are drawn from official policies, reviews of the evaluation system that these states and districts have conducted, independent studies, and interviews with district and state staff.

Goals of teacher evaluation

Strong teacher evaluation systems, when paired with supports and incentives, are designed to do the following:

- 1) Provide a more valid measure of teacher quality by distinguishing between teachers at different performance levels;
- 2) Recognize strong teachers and keep them in the classroom;
- 3) Encourage consistently less effective teachers to leave the classroom;
- 4) Help all teachers improve;
- 5) Recruit more effective new teachers; and
- 6) Achieve gains in student learning and other positive student outcomes.

What these six systems have in common

The knowledge base for building a strong evaluation system is still young and is continuously being refined, but some clear principles of strong practice have emerged from a decade of innovation and implementation (see the appendix for more details on these practices and supporting research). As is immediately evident, the districts and states highlighted here have each implemented many of these strong practices.

Their success is a result of adherence to core principles⁷

Strong Practice	Dallas Independent School District	Denver Public Schools	District of Columbia Public Schools	Newark Public Schools	Tennessee	New Mexico
Multiple measures	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student surveys	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Objective measures of student growth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
At least three rating categories	✓	✓	✓	✓ ⁸	✓	✓
Annual evaluations and observations for all teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Professional development tied to evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Written feedback after each observation ⁹	✓	✓ ¹⁰		✓	✓	✓

Although 89 of the 100 largest districts use multiple measures, only 21 use or allow student surveys.¹⁹

One notable feature common among the six locales highlighted here is the use of multiple measures to comprise the overall evaluation rating. The systems vary in the precise measures used, but each uses at least three measures and includes some measures of student learning, as well as observations and, in many cases, student surveys.



Their success is built on a thoughtful approach to weighting individual evaluation components

Weight of individual components (vary by grade and subject)	Dallas Independent School District	Denver Public Schools	District of Columbia Public Schools	Newark Public Schools ¹¹	Tennessee	New Mexico
Observations ¹²	50-80%	30-35%	30-75%	55-85% ¹³	50% (all qualitative measures, including student surveys)	40%
Student achievement or growth	20-35%	50%	15-50%	15-45%	50%	35%
Student surveys	0-15%	0-10%	0-10%	0%	See "Observations"	5%
Professionalism	0%	10-15%	0%	0%	0%	15%
Commitment to the school community	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Teacher attendance	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%

Evaluation systems can be an essential part of a district's or state's talent management strategy, not only to give teachers feedback and support, but also to inform myriad decisions such as eligibility for leadership roles, raises, or retention in the classroom.

Their success is made possible by linking evaluation to key personnel decisions

Key decisions	Dallas Independent School District	Denver Public Schools	District of Columbia Public Schools	Newark Public Schools	Tennessee	New Mexico
Ties compensation to evaluations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Selects cooperating teachers to host student teachers based on evaluations	✓	✓			✓	
Selects teachers for leadership opportunities based on evaluations	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Tailors professional development based on evaluations	✓	✓	✓ ¹⁴	✓	✓	✓
Makes teacher dismissal decisions based on evaluations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Incentivizes effective teachers to work in high-need schools	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Other	Identifies effective teachers to teach summer school	Earning or losing non-probationary (or tenure) status ¹⁵	Adapts evaluation rubric to assess teacher applicants during hiring process		Informs teacher preparation program accountability; influences licensure advancement and renewal decisions; determines if a new teacher qualifies for tenure; informs layoff decisions	Informs teacher preparation program accountability; influences licensure advancement and renewal decisions; informs selection of the state Teacher of the Year

Conversations with district and state staff in these six sites emphasized that attaching meaningful consequences to evaluation systems encourages teachers and principals to take them seriously. Teachers were more inclined to seek support, and principals were more motivated to have difficult conversations with their staff. While teachers continue to earn bonuses or raises for many reasons, compensation tied to positive ratings on evaluations is increasingly common.

Their success is fueled by making strategic compensation decisions

	Dallas Independent School District	Denver Public Schools	District of Columbia Public Schools	Newark Public Schools	Tennessee	New Mexico
Higher evaluation rating	Raise	Raise	Raise & bonus	Raise & bonus	Raise	Award
Teaching a hard-to-staff subject	Bonus	Bonus ¹⁶	Bonus	–	Raise	Award
Teaching in a high-need school	Bonus	Bonus ¹⁷	Bonus	–	Raise	Award
Cost-of-living adjustment	–	Raise	–	Raise	–	–
Additional year of teaching	– ¹⁸	Raise	Raise	Raise	Raise	–
Earning an advanced degree	–	Raise	Raise	–	Raise	–
Other		Additional professional development; Leadership positions		Teacher leadership positions	Additional roles or responsibilities	

With the exception of Denver Public Schools, whose superintendent has remained in place since its evaluation system was first piloted, every system featured here has survived changes in leadership. While these systems continue to evolve and improve, they have all maintained their core principles.

The evaluation systems featured here include many of the characteristics that research and common sense suggest will yield the greatest benefits for teachers, school systems, and students. However, the staff implementing these systems emphasized that they have only reached this point because of a consistent commitment to assessing and improving their systems. None of these evaluation systems got everything right in the first year of implementation. System leaders gathered feedback from teachers, principals, and other stakeholders; analyzed the data they had gathered; and used this information to identify weak points and refine their systems. This systemic commitment to continuous improvement persevered despite leadership transitions experienced by each of the districts and states profiled here.

Evaluation is not a silver bullet that will automatically improve teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. But as the following six examples illustrate, with careful implementation and a commitment to build upon what works and remedy what does not, an evaluation system can be an essential tool in state and district efforts to ensure that every student has access to effective teachers.

