



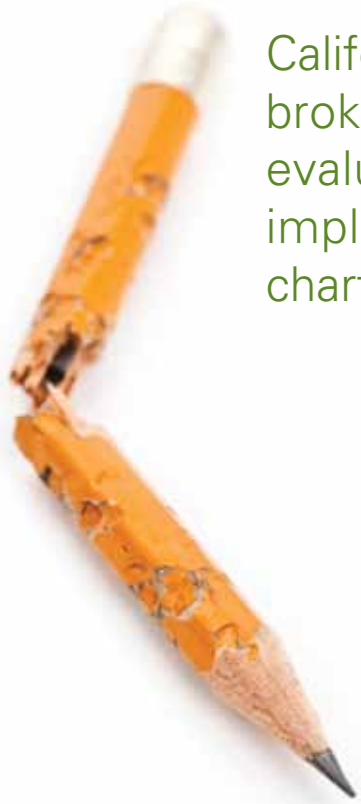
# Improving Teacher Evaluation in California



The Education Trust—West

**TEACH  
+PLUS**

Los Angeles



California's current teacher evaluation system is broken. Fortunately, new, more useful teacher evaluation processes are being developed and implemented in forward-thinking districts and charter schools across the state.

When asked why they teach, most teachers say they do it because they love their students, and because they love helping their students to learn. In fact, research has proven what teachers and parents have long known to be true: great teachers have a significant long-term impact on student learning. The single most important school-based factor in improving student academic performance is the quality of the teacher in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Students who have a series of strong teachers soar academically, while those who have weak teachers fall further and further behind.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, one might assume that our school systems would prioritize identifying and recognizing effective teaching—while helping those who need support to grow in their craft. Yet, too often, teachers report that their principals offer very little meaningful feedback on their performance.<sup>3</sup> When provided with formal evaluations, 99 percent of teachers in five school districts studied by The New Teacher Project received “satisfactory” ratings. This type of vague and inconclusive evaluation fails to provide meaningful, actionable feedback specific to each teacher’s strengths and



weaknesses—rendering the rating system virtually useless. And in a broader set of 12 districts, three-quarters of teachers failed to receive feedback on development areas as part of their most recent evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

This system is not fair to teachers, and is certainly not fair to their students. In a state plagued by wide opportunity and achievement gaps,<sup>5</sup> it is clear that we must take much more seriously the role of the teacher. To do that, we must work toward defining and designing a

comprehensive solution to recognize great teaching and address chronically ineffective teaching—while helping teachers at all levels to continuously improve.

Fortunately, powerful new evaluation systems are being designed and implemented in forward-thinking districts and charter schools across our state. These systems are designed by district and school leaders, working in collaboration with teachers and unions, to help all teachers grow and thrive in their jobs.

High-quality teacher evaluation systems are necessary to address the following questions:

- How can we help all teachers reach their full potential in the classroom?
- How can we ensure that teachers thrive, so that the best teachers want to keep teaching?
- How can we identify and address consistently ineffective teaching fairly but decisively?

*Adapted from [Teacher Evaluation 2.0, The New Teacher Project](#)*

## What's wrong with current teacher evaluation systems?

California's current evaluation systems are shaped by an array of state laws, district policies, union contracts, and local practices that, when combined together, prevent teachers from receiving high-quality evaluations.

California law on teacher evaluations, commonly known as the Stull Act, sets a low bar for evaluations. Annual evaluations are only required of untenured teachers, as well as tenured teachers who received an unsatisfactory rating but have not yet shown improvement. Districts are only required to evaluate tenured teachers once every other year, and they are permitted to reduce this to once every five years for teachers with more than 10 years of experience. There are very few criteria in state law about the elements that must be included in a teacher's evaluation, such as regular observations or student

growth data. While some districts choose to supplement the minimum expectation with more frequent observations or formal check-points, many do not.<sup>6</sup> As a result, school leaders often regard the formal evaluation as a compliance requirement instead of an opportunity to provide meaningful feedback to improve teaching and learning.<sup>7</sup>

Further, very few districts look at student achievement data when evaluating teachers, even though the Stull Act requires them to consider how a teacher's students are progressing toward content standards, as measured by state assessments. And instead of assessing effective instruction, most teacher evaluations consist of simple

“Teacher evaluations are often approached as little more than the tedious act of filling out a form when they should in fact be seen as an opportunity for teacher mentoring and development.”

Karina DiGirolamo, Dance and Literacy Teacher  
Equitas Academy Charter School  
Los Angeles, CA

checklists of easily observable practices ranging from the cleanliness of the classroom to the quality of the work on the walls, or—as one study of teacher evaluations found—whether a teacher is presentably dressed.<sup>8</sup>

Most troubling is that few districts adopt evaluation systems that are aimed at improving the quality of instruction. Usually, there are no pre- or post-observation discussions, few opportunities for teachers and administrators to review and discuss student performance data, and minimal professional development offerings targeted at specific areas of improvement. Evaluations, when they happen, are too often characterized by cursory observations, thoughtless checklists, and the absence of reflective discussion about teachers' impact on student performance.<sup>9</sup>

In cases where teachers excel, evaluations *could* serve as the grounds upon which to base rewards, recognition, or additional leadership opportunities. But they hardly ever do. In cases where teaching is simply ineffective, evaluations *should* trigger meaningful interventions and supports for improvement, and—when necessary—dismissal. But they rarely do.

If we do not support and develop our teachers, if we refuse to have honest conversations about how teaching affects student learning, if we avoid using evaluations to inform continuous improvement, and if we overlook high-performing teachers as a critical resource to all, then teachers will never reach their full potential as professionals. This shortchanges both teachers and their students.



## Better models of teacher evaluation are being developed right here in California

Some school districts, charter management organizations, and non-profits are determined to do better. Los Angeles Unified School District, the College-Ready Promise, and Lucia Mar Unified School District have each identified improved teacher evaluations as a critical way to improve both the quality of teaching and student outcomes. Despite their differences in geography, size, and governance, these districts have developed evaluation systems with a number of similarities. They all depend on multiple measures including observations, student data, and feedback from stakeholders beyond the principal. And, they all emphasize the importance of using the evaluation process to address ineffective teaching, inform teacher development and support, and recognize the most effective teachers.

### LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (LAUSD)

<http://sae.lausd.net>

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California's largest school district has developed a proactive agenda to reform its educator evaluation, support, and development processes. The Initial Implementation Phase of the Educator Growth and Development Cycle will be used to inform teacher development and support, career pathways, and leadership opportunities. More than 500 teachers and approximately 130 school leaders in more than 100 schools have volunteered to pilot the review system in 2011-12 and provide critical feedback on the process before it is scaled across the district. In addition, more than 150 local

and central office instructional leaders have volunteered to provide support as classroom observers. The multiple-measure performance review system will consider:

- Classroom observations conducted by trained administrators and school leaders;
- Feedback from students and parents/guardians/caregivers;
- Teacher contributions to student learning through the use of student outcome data, using a model called Academic Growth over Time; and
- Teacher contributions to the school community.

“Teachers know the importance of giving our students meaningful feedback on their work—not as judgment, but as opportunity for improvement. Similarly, this same attitude of ‘learning’ should be what drives teacher evaluations.”

Kyle Hunsberger, Math Teacher  
Cochran Middle School  
Los Angeles Unified School District



## THE COLLEGE-READY PROMISE

[www.thecollegereadypromise.org](http://www.thecollegereadypromise.org)

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In 2009, a coalition of charter school management organizations in California received a seven-year grant to advance effective teaching, retain the best teachers to work with the highest-need students, and dramatically increase the number of college-ready graduates. In partnership with hundreds of teachers who have helped with the design and implementation of this program, the College-Ready Promise is piloting a pioneering evaluation system that will be used to develop teachers through targeted supports and professional development, while providing recognition and rewards to highly effective teachers. The annual evaluations will include:

- Observations of teacher practice and behavior;

- Teacher impact on student achievement outcomes over time, using a model called Student Growth Percentiles; and
- Feedback from students, families, and peers.

## LUCIA MAR UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND TAP™: THE SYSTEM FOR TEACHER AND STUDENT ADVANCEMENT

[www.lmusd.org](http://www.lmusd.org), [www.tapsystem.org](http://www.tapsystem.org)

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The small, coastal district of Lucia Mar is the first California school district to implement TAP. TAP includes teacher evaluation as a key element of a comprehensive approach to improving teacher effectiveness. Already impacting more than 10,000 teachers and 100,000 students nationwide, the TAP system uses evaluation results to provide teachers with powerful and sustained opportunities for career advancement, professional growth,

accountability, and competitive compensation. Seven Lucia Mar schools recently voted to bring TAP to their sites. Their teachers will soon be evaluated using a model that includes:

- Four observations each year, two announced and two unannounced, conducted by multiple trained evaluators including master teachers; and
- Contributions to student learning growth, using both individual and school-wide value-added scores.

We are not yet able to measure the effectiveness of the new programs in Los Angeles Unified, the College-Ready Promise schools, or Lucia Mar Unified. However, TAP and similar programs have proven to positively impact student achievement in other districts and states. We should watch closely as these three pioneering efforts unfold in order to glean lessons learned for the rest of California.



## Teachers as advocates for change

As schools, districts, and the state move to adopt new evaluation systems, teachers like you should be central to that process. You can take action at your own school sites, in your school districts, and at the state level to begin the tough work of improving California's broken teacher evaluation system.

**AT THE SCHOOL SITE:** If a culture of meaningful evaluation, continuous feedback, and differentiated support does not already exist, speak to your principal about the improvements you'd like to see and suggest visits to schools where reforms are being implemented. Ask your principal for professional development in your individual growth areas and work with other teachers to establish and support school-wide efforts to improve evaluation practices.

**AT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT:** Engage with other teachers in your district to improve teacher evaluations. Recommend visits to schools and districts implementing new multiple-measure evaluation practices across the state. Tell your district and union leaders that you want them to appraise teacher performance seriously and honestly, that you want teachers to be held accountable for improvement, and that you want meaningful action to be connected to performance ratings. Make it clear that evaluation, when done well, is done *with* and *for* teachers, not *to* teachers.

**AT THE STATE LEVEL:** Work to make your voice heard in our state capital. Share your personal story and experience with evaluations with your state representatives. Contrast the current reality with your vision for improvement. Raise your voice for change and reform on behalf of teachers and your students!

“Much of what I do as Master Teacher is new to me, and the job has grown as I've learned more about it. The workload is huge, but oh-so-worthwhile. The results are already noticeable. Teachers are being stretched and supported, and they are reflecting and improving.”

George Griffin, Master Teacher  
Grover Heights and  
Fairgrove Elementary Schools  
Lucia Mar Unified School District

## Resources

Visit these sites for more information on teacher evaluation best practices, research, and policy, both nationally and in California:

**THE EDUCATION TRUST** promotes high academic achievement for all students. This includes advocating for policies and practices that help low-income students and students of color get equitable access to high-quality teachers. For more information: [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

**TEACH PLUS** works to improve outcomes for urban children by ensuring that a greater proportion of students have access to effective, experienced teachers. They work in six cities, including Los Angeles, CA. For more information: [www.teachplus.org](http://www.teachplus.org)

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON TEACHER QUALITY** advocates for reforms in a broad range of teacher policies at the federal, state, and local levels in order to increase the number of effective teachers. For more information: [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)

**COMMUNITIES FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE** works to ensure effective teaching for every student, especially for low-income students and students of color. Their work has begun in four communities, including Los Angeles, CA. For more information: [www.4teachingexcellence.org](http://www.4teachingexcellence.org)

**ACCOMPLISHED CALIFORNIA TEACHERS**, a teacher leadership network made up of accomplished teachers, seeks to amplify the teacher voice in policy conversations and research about teacher quality and evaluation in California. For more information: [www.acteachers.org](http://www.acteachers.org)

**THE NEW TEACHER PROJECT** seeks to ensure that high-need students get outstanding teachers. Its landmark report, *The Widget Effect*, has helped policymakers in states across the country make the case for more rigorous teacher evaluation systems. For more information: [www.tntp.org](http://www.tntp.org)

**MEASURES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING** is a large-scale, multi-state project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to develop fair and reliable measures of effective teaching, in partnership with school districts, principals, teachers, and unions. For more information: [www.metproject.org](http://www.metproject.org)

### STATE POLICY:

- Learn about proposals to reform California laws governing teacher evaluation. Read about all bills at <http://leginfo.ca.gov>, and visit The Education Trust—West at [www.edtrustwest.org](http://www.edtrustwest.org) for more information on pending California teacher evaluation legislation.
- Find out who your state legislators are and contact their offices to share your story and vision for improving teacher quality in California: <http://leginfo.ca.gov>. Contact Governor Jerry Brown to do the same: <http://gov.ca.gov>.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Rivkin, S. G., Hanushek, E. A. and Kain, J. F., "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica*, Vol. 73, No. 2, (2005): 417– 458.
- <sup>2</sup> For evidence from Tennessee, see: Sanders, W. I. and Rivers, J. C., *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996). For evidence from Dallas, Texas, see: Jordan, H. R., Mendro, R., & Weerasinghe, D., "Teacher Effects on Longitudinal Student Achievement: A Preliminary Report on Research on Teacher Effectiveness," (Paper presented at the National Evaluation Institute, Indianapolis, IN, 1997).
- <sup>3</sup> For evidence from Los Angeles Unified School District, see: *Teacher Quality Roadmap: Improving Policies and Practices in LAUSD* (Washington, DC: The National Center on Teacher Quality, 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D., *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project, 2009).
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, California P-16 Council. *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Report of Superintendent Jack O'Connell's California P-16 Council*, 2008.
- <sup>6</sup> Strunk, K., *Collective Bargaining Agreements in California School Districts: Moving Beyond the Stereotype*, (Berkeley, CA: PACE, 2009).
- <sup>7</sup> *Accomplished California Teachers, A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System that Works for California* (Stanford, CA: National Board Resource Center at Stanford University, 2011).
- <sup>8</sup> Toch, T., & Rothman, R., *Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education* (Washington, DC: Education Sector, 2008).
- <sup>9</sup> *Accomplished California Teachers, A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System that Works for California* (Stanford, CA: National Board Resource Center at Stanford University, 2011).





## The Education Trust—West

The Education Trust—West works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-k through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.

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Teach Plus Los Angeles works to improve outcomes for urban children by ensuring that a greater proportion of students have access to effective, experienced teachers. By engaging teachers in Los Angeles charter and district schools, Teach Plus seeks to amplify the voice of teachers through the T+ Network and the Los Angeles Teaching Policy Fellows program.

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