

An Analysis of Principals' Perceptions of the Primary Teaching Evaluation System Used in Eight U.S. States

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Abstract This research examines how public school principals in eight U.S. states perceive their teacher evaluation systems, which are based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FfT). States were selected to represent high, middle, and low scorers in the annual *Education Week* "Quality Counts" report (Education Week, 2016). A total of 1,142 out of over 8,100 working principals in the eight states responded to an online survey, yielding a response rate of over 14 percent. Most principals were somewhat satisfied with FfT but found implementing the system too cumbersome. Responses suggested an average of two changes to FfT desired by each principal; few wanted to keep their FfT as is. Targets for improvement included overhauling software used to enter teacher evaluations; eliminating student growth goals and student test scores (VAMs) as part of evaluations; reducing the time and paperwork required; and wanting more training for administrators and teachers on the use of FfT. Some states' principals wanted to return control over teacher evaluation systems to local school districts. Most respondents agreed that their version of FfT has improved their school's instructional program, and they prefer the new instrument over their previous evaluation instrument.

Keywords Principal Preparation Program (PPP); Framework for Teaching (FfT); Student Learning Objectives (SLOs); Value Added Measures (VAMs)

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Introduction

Teacher quality and criteria used to determine teacher effectiveness are hot topics for nations worldwide. Teacher evaluation systems in most nations are essentially a “work in progress,” says Andreas Schleicher of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Walker, 2013), and were the focus at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) held in March 2013 in Amsterdam.

Especially since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, U.S. education has been impacted by many change initiatives (Goodwin & Webb, 2014). One involves how schools evaluate teachers. Since 2009, over thirty states have overhauled their teacher evaluation instruments, many doing so to meet federal guidelines in an attempt to acquire some of President Obama’s \$5 billion Race to the Top money (Ruffini, Makkonen, Tejwani, & Diaz, 2014). Of these states, over twenty have adopted Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (FfT) as their teacher evaluation system, created a modified version of it, or use it as one of several approved evaluation systems (The Danielson Group, 2013). By 2012, fourteen states required measures of student growth and learning when evaluating teachers (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2012), although the types and specific regulations regarding the use of student growth in teacher evaluation vary widely across states.

Why has there been such a drastic change in teacher evaluation systems? According to Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009), too often teacher evaluations are “too lenient [or] fail to adequately differentiate between teachers at different levels” (p. 3). In addition, recent teacher evaluation changes result from “dissatisfaction with evaluation systems that have largely failed to distinguish between effective and ineffective teaching” (p. 3). In short, previously-used instruments just have not worked well. In this context, Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (FfT) has become a resource for school districts and states searching for a more effective evaluation tool. States that use Danielson’s FfT include Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Kentucky, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.¹ FfT is also the default teacher evaluation framework for Illinois school districts that have not developed their own alternatives (Teachscape, 2011). In Rhode Island, FfT is the foundation for the evaluation system used throughout the state and is called the Rhode Island Model. While FfT provides an alternative teacher evaluation system for those dissatisfied with other options, and many school districts have adopted FfT, whether its implementation has improved teacher evaluation remains an open question. Do administrators who have adopted FfT consider it an improvement? If not, what would they change about it? These to date unanswered questions are the focus of this research.

State education quality rankings

For the past 20 years, *Education Week* has ranked all U.S. states and the District of Columbia in education using six categories: K–12 Achievement; Standards, Assessments, and Accountability; Teaching Profession; School Finance; Transitions and Alignment; and Chance for Success (an index combining information from 13 indicators covering residents’ lives from “cradle to career”). U.S. states and the District of Columbia also receive overall scores and letter grades based on an average score

over the six categories (Education Week, 2016). This research uses the *Education Week* rankings to create a cross section of states for in-depth study. This study's qualitative nature makes examining every state's evaluation system impractical, but it also would be inadvisable to study only states of equal ranking. Consequently, this research uses a cross section of eight states chosen first at random from the high, middle, and low-ranking segments of the *Education Week* "Quality Counts" report during the last eight years. The states are Arkansas and Wisconsin (higher range), Delaware, Rhode Island, Kentucky, and Illinois (middle range), and Idaho and South Dakota (lower range).

Table 1. Education Week State Rankings

State	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	8-year average
Wisconsin	15	16	18	18	13	11	11	11	14.1
Arkansas	10	10	6	5	5	6	36	41	14.9
Delaware	18	22	22	25	19	18	15	16	19.4
Rhode Island	23	33	31	20	17	16	13	13	20.8
Kentucky	41	37	34	14	10	9	29	28	25.3
Illinois	41	41	40	29	28	24	15	17	29.4
Idaho	49	44	44	47	49	42	46	47	46.0
South Dakota	46	48	49	51*	51	51	40	39	46.9

Table 1 shows individual yearly rankings of the selected states over an eight-year period (2009–2016) in *Education Week*'s "Quality Counts" reports. The table also shows each state's mean ranking over the period. As indicated in the table, Wisconsin has ranked in the top 20 states during the eight-year period. Arkansas was in the top ten from 2009 through 2014; it averages 14th during the past eight years. Rhode Island has gradually improved its ranking for the past seven years. Kentucky steadily rose in rank for the first six years of the period but has fallen in the last two. Illinois had progressively risen in rank before dropping to 17th in 2016. Idaho and South Dakota consistently have ranked low, although South Dakota improved to 40th in 2015 and 39th in 2016.²

Significance of this study

At the 2013 Amsterdam summit, education ministers and teacher leaders from high-performing education systems across the world addressed three key issues: how teacher quality is defined, what standards are set and by whom; what systems are in place for teacher evaluation and how evaluations are conducted; and how teacher evaluation contributes to school improvement and teacher self-efficacy (Education International, 2013). In his keynote speech at the conference, Education International (EI) General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen said, "Now more than ever, we need a

shared vision for quality education. There is a risk that cutbacks and austerity measures will impact professional standards and developments.” He added, “Defining these standards needs to be achieved in cooperation between education ministries and teacher unions. Only then will we be able to face the challenges that lie ahead.”

Thorough and accurate teacher evaluations also undergird student learning. A school’s fundamental mission is to educate, and both its daily practice and attempts to improve that practice depend on having high-quality teachers in place. As Stronge and Tucker (2003) note, “Without high quality evaluation systems, we cannot know if we have high quality teachers” (p. 3). What makes an effective evaluation system? First, teacher evaluation systems must be well understood by teachers. Second, they should identify authentic differences in performance (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Milanowski, Prince, & Koppich, 2007). When evaluation systems fail to meet these expectations, some may blame principals, but this would be misguided. As Goe (2013) notes, principals “have not received the mandate, the training, and the tools that will enable them to promote teachers’ professional growth as a result of evaluation” (p. 1). Principals must be equipped to use information acquired through evaluations to support teachers. Who does the evaluation also matters: implementing an effective evaluation system requires evaluators with significant, recent experience in the classroom. Besides being experienced educators, everyone involved in the evaluation process needs training to use assessment instruments, whether they be classroom observations, portfolio reviews, or other methods (Mathers, Oliva, & Laine, 2008).

Reforms such as new teacher evaluation systems ostensibly aim to improve educational quality, yet experienced teachers—and administrators—often find them troubling for several reasons. Despite the recent drive for better instructional techniques, implementing new teacher evaluation instruments and including high stakes testing as part of evaluations may be driving many out of the profession. In Baltimore County, Maryland, over 700 teachers retired or resigned in 2014, about 100 more compared with two years earlier (Bowie, 2014). In New Haven, Connecticut, 28 teachers were fired in just their second year of teaching, largely because of low student test scores (Bailey, 2012). Such outcomes appear contrary to the ideal of using evaluations to support teachers’ professional growth. Conflicting goals or interests may impede successful implementation of teacher evaluations. For example, while administrators themselves are not evaluated based on student test scores, they appear ineffective and may be held accountable when test scores are low. As a result, teachers whose students score lower than others may be perceived more as a problem than as an opportunity for growth; perceptions of such teachers and their principals are intertwined. In 2012, in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, 15 public school principals were fired because of low student test scores (Waller, 2012).

If new teacher evaluation systems are to succeed in meaningfully measuring performance and in providing a basis for improvement, we must understand how those implementing such systems view and understand them. Toward that end, this study examined principals’ perceptions of their teacher evaluation systems, specifically Danielson’s FfT. It also studied their perceptions of how well their state education department and their principal preparation program (PPP) prepared them to implement FfT.

Implementation of FfT in eight states and VAMs

National teachers' unions have recently called for states to adopt new teaching evaluation systems. The National Education Association (NEA) (2015) asserted that "current systems for assessing, evaluating, and supporting teachers too often fail to improve teacher practice and enhance student growth and learning" (p. 2). The NEA advocated developing "new systems of teaching and learning that align student and teacher assessment with the ultimate goal of improving both" (p. 2). The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (Darling-Hammond, 2014) noted that among several criteria for an effective teacher evaluation system, "Evaluators should be knowledgeable about instruction and well trained in the evaluation system, including the process of how to give productive feedback and how to support ongoing learning for teachers" (p. 1). "As often as possible, and always at critical decision-making junctures (e.g., tenure or renewal)," the union remarked, "the evaluation team should include experts in the specific teaching field" (p. 1). While the need for knowledgeable evaluators is widely accepted, an area of controversy in teacher evaluation systems is the inclusion of value-added measures (VAMs). Most notably, VAMs include student test scores. Some researchers oppose using VAMs. Darling-Hammond (Strauss, 2012) argues that VAMs are "highly unstable," since teacher ratings based on them "differ substantially from class to class and from year to year" (p. 1). Darling-Hammond (Strauss, 2012) further notes that VAMs "are significantly affected by differences in students—even when value-added formulas attempt to control for various factors such as prior achievement and student demographic variables" (p. 1). Lack of faith in VAMs' utility or accuracy in measuring teacher efficacy extends beyond researchers.

Some of the states studied in this research include VAMs in teacher evaluation, while others have removed them or do not include them. Kentucky's FfT system, known as the Teachers Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (TPGES), includes four teaching domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. A fifth domain—Student Growth—was considered for inclusion by Kentucky, but in 2014 it was eliminated as one of the domains for evaluating Kentucky teachers. Nevertheless, parts of it, particularly student test scores, remain an integral part of the teacher evaluation system in the form of student growth goals and student growth percentiles (Kentucky Department of Education, 2014).

In nearby Illinois, most school districts use one of several evaluation frameworks, including Danielson's Framework for Teaching, Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model, or other research-based frameworks (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015). In order to comply with PERA (Performance Evaluation Reform Act), Illinois districts must develop a teacher evaluation plan that includes student growth measures as a significant factor in teachers' summative performance evaluation (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). They must "identify two assessment types to measure student growth for each category of teachers, as well as one or more measurement models that use multiple data points to determine student growth using the selected assessments" (p. 5). To meet this requirement, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and student test scores are used in teachers' end of the year evaluation (Illinois State Board of Education, 2017). Arkansas calls its version of Danielson's model the Teacher

Excellence and Support System (TESS). The Arkansas Department of Education (2015) states that by “using Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, Arkansas found a more in-depth process for measuring teacher practice performance.” Arkansas public school teachers receive annual overall ratings based on evaluations using TESS and student growth measures (Arkansas Department of Education, 2016).

Delaware’s version of Danielson’s model, known as the Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS-II), added student improvement as one of five components for teacher evaluation (Delaware Department of Education, 2015). DPAS-II is used to assess and support student improvement by evaluating a teacher’s current practice, identifying ways to support that teacher’s professional growth, and measuring student growth for each teacher. According to a report in *Education Week*, Delaware added the student-performance portion to evaluations as part of its successful application for \$119 million in federal Race to the Top money (Superville, 2014). In Delaware’s system, student data has the “governing effect” on the final analysis: a teacher cannot receive an overall score of “effective” or “highly effective” if student growth is deemed unsatisfactory (Delaware Department of Education, 2015).

Idaho’s state department of education announced in 2013 that they were on board to start using Danielson’s FfT (Idaho Department of Education, 2013). Granted in 2012, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act gave Idaho permission to allow school districts to use an accountability evaluation system that differs from the state FfT. However, according to a state department spokesperson, all Idaho districts except one use Danielson’s FfT, and the one district not using the model has done a “crosswalk” to Danielson’s FfT showing how those components are being evaluated (T. Carter, personal communication, December 22, 2015).

Two-thirds of an Idaho teacher’s performance evaluation using the state system is based on professional practice using the four Danielson domains, including Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation) and Domain 4 (Professional Responsibilities). This differs from the rest of the other states studied here, which rely mainly on Domains 2 and 3. The other one-third of an Idaho teacher’s evaluation is based on student achievement; one of these measures must be based on the state administered test, called ISAT, by Smarter Balanced (Idaho Department of Education, 2014).

South Dakota public schools began using FfT during the 2014–2015 school year (South Dakota Department of Education, 2015). Known as the South Dakota Framework for Teaching, FfT is the state’s recommended teacher evaluation tool. During the 2015–2016 school year, all public schools in South Dakota must at least meet the minimum requirements of this “teacher effectiveness model” (p. 3). Data gathered from South Dakota state standardized tests must be one of the quantitative measures used to evaluate performance for teachers who provide instruction in state-tested grades and subjects (South Dakota Department of Education, 2015). As in other states, the South Dakota Board of Education passed rules that would provide school districts flexibility to use their own evaluation systems, as long as they align with South Dakota standards for teaching, are research based, and include a valid student growth measure. However, according to a South Dakota Department of Education administrator, fewer than five school districts there use an evaluation system other than the state-approved FfT (C. Leingang, personal communication, January 7, 2016).

Rhode Island's State Department of Education contracted with Teachscape and Educational Testing Service (ETS) in 2012 to implement Danielson's FfT (ETS, 2012). School districts may submit a district-designed model for approval that "complies with the Educator Evaluation System Standards or [may] adopt the Rhode Island Model Teacher Evaluation and Support System" (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2015). According to a spokesperson for Teachscape, Rhode Island still uses Danielson's FfT (A. Millinor, personal communication, November 24, 2015). This "Rhode Island Model" is based on Danielson's FfT. There are currently four other approved models in the state (p. 2). Regarding use of VAMs, Rhode Island began using the Performance for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) tests in 2014. According to a state department spokesperson, the state will eventually link the tests to student growth (Klein, 2015), but for now, test scores are not used in teacher evaluations.

Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction modified Danielson's FfT in 2011, calling it the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness (WI EE) System (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014). In 2011, Wisconsin's "W Act 166" mandated all public school districts and charter schools to use the WI EE System to evaluate all principals and teachers beginning in 2014–2015 (p. 2). As of 2014, the state prohibited using student test scores as a factor in evaluating teacher performance (Education News, 2014).

Research questions

Recognizing the need for analysis of new teaching evaluation systems, this study examined how principals in eight states perceive their new teaching evaluation system—specifically, Danielson's FfT—and their perceptions of how well their state education department and their principal preparation program (PPP) prepared them to implement FfT.

This research addresses the following questions:

- What perceptions do principals in all eight states have regarding how their state department of education and PPP trained them to perform teacher evaluations based on FfT?
- What changes, if any, can be made to improve FfT in the eight states studied?

Methodology

Eight states were selected that represent a cross section of high, middle, and low scorers in the *Education Week* "Quality Counts" report over the past eight years. Two states from the high range—Wisconsin (average ranking: 14.1) and Arkansas (average ranking: 14.9)—and two states from the low range—Idaho (46.0) and South Dakota (46.9)—were chosen. Four states with middle range scores were selected. Delaware (19.4) and Rhode Island (20.8) represented higher middle range scores; Kentucky (25.3) represented a "middle" middle range; and Illinois (29.4) represented a lower middle range score. While these states were selected randomly from within each ranking category, they also reflect different geographic regions in the U.S. A link to the survey was sent via email (the survey itself is on Survey Monkey). The survey was first directly emailed to each superintendent of school districts in the

states, requesting that they forward the survey to their principals (assistant principals were not included). Superintendents were not necessarily expected to forward the survey, but contacting them first was considered respectful and possibly conducive to effectively distributing the survey. To ensure that as many principals as possible received the survey, it was then directly emailed to all working principals in the eight states whose email address could be obtained through available databases. (Some schools might not have email; they are beyond this study's reach.) An introduction letter to the principal accompanied the survey link. A different Survey Monkey hyperlink was provided for each state's set of principals.

The survey used a Likert-scale attitude measure and forced choice (yes/no) and open-ended questions. For principals in Kentucky, Delaware, Idaho, Wisconsin, Arkansas, and South Dakota—states that use Danielson's FfT almost exclusively—the survey asked questions that examined perceptions of the teacher evaluation system, as well as the proficiency test each administrator must pass before evaluating teachers (see Appendix for a copy of Arkansas's TESS survey). For principals in Illinois and Rhode Island—states that use Danielson's FfT as one of their approved evaluation systems—a respondent who did not use Danielson's FfT would be able to confirm this and would then be asked to name what teacher evaluation system they use. They would then skip questions pertaining solely to FfT.

Results

Response rates varied by state. Those with the highest response rates were Kentucky (310 out of 1,100, or 29%), Arkansas (242 out of 1,100, or 24%), Idaho (134 out of 700, or 19%), Rhode Island (66 out of 550, or 13%), and South Dakota (70 out of 600, or 12%). Lower rates were obtained from Illinois (234 out of 2,750, or 9%), Wisconsin (79 out of 1,200, or 7%), and Delaware (7 out of 150, or 5%). In sum, 8,150 principals in the eight states could have responded to this survey; 1,142 actually participated, yielding a response rate of over 14 percent. This falls in the high end of the average external online response rate of 10 to 15 percent (SurveyGizmo, 2010; PeoplePulse, 2013).

Participant demographics

Of the 1,142 respondents who completed the survey, more than half (53.4%) were male (see Table 2). The majority of respondents were between ages 41 and 55 years. Nearly 71 percent of respondents had a Master's degree plus 15 hours; about 20 percent had a Master's only; nearly 10 percent had a Doctorate. Most had relatively little experience as a principal; about one third had been a school principal for less than five years. Public school principals accounted for 97 percent of respondents. Less than 3 percent worked in a charter school, and less than 1 percent listed their schools as a magnet or "other." Nearly half of all respondents worked in a rural setting. Slightly more than half were elementary principals, while almost 29 percent were middle/junior high school principals and nearly 27 percent were secondary principals. In sum, the average respondent was male, between the ages of 41 and 55, had a Master's plus 15 hours, and was a fairly inexperienced elementary principal who worked in a public, rural school.

Table 2. Participant demographics

N = 1,142	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Gender		Highest level of education
Male	53.4	Master's degree 19.7
Female	46.6	Master's degree + 15 70.7
		Doctorate degree 9.5
Age in years		Years as a principal
36–40	12.0	0 – 4 32.5
41–45	21.1	5 – 8 23.2
46–50	22.8	9 – 12 19.6
51–55	18.4	13 – 16 12.4
56–60	11.0	17 – 20 06.2
60+	06.2	21 – 25 02.1
		26+ 03.0
School setting/location		Type of school
Rural	49.5	Public 97.4
Town	18.8	Charter 02.6
Suburban	19.6	Magnet 00.1
Urban	12.8	Other 00.6
Instructional level		
(Pre)K–12	06.9	
Elementary	50.5	
Middle/Junior High	28.6	
Secondary	26.5	

FfT evaluation instrument

As noted earlier, in two of the states studied—Illinois and Rhode Island—school districts may use evaluation systems other than Danielson’s FfT. Over 92 percent (215) of the Illinois respondents use Danielson’s FfT. Nearly 8 percent (18) use other teacher evaluation systems. Four respondents said they use the Chicago Public Schools’ system, which they noted was “based on” or “similar” to Danielson’s FfT. Three respondents said that they use customized or adapted versions of FfT; one reported that they use a modified version “with union backing.” Three other respondents said their districts will be changing over to FfT in the next school year.

In Rhode Island, over 89 percent (58 respondents) use FfT, while nearly 11 percent (7 respondents) use another evaluation system. Four respondents said they use the “RI Innovation Consortium Model;” one respondent said that this model is “similar” to FfT. One respondent said they use their own model, while another said they use the “Coventry Teacher Model.”

Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents in each state reporting that the principal preparation program they attended and their state education department prepared them well to implement FfT. It also shows the percentage of respondents who agreed that their state department provided adequate training for their teaching staff. All states except Kentucky were almost evenly split over whether they had received adequate training. Almost 3 out of 4 Kentucky respondents said that their PPP did not train them well to use FfT, and over half said that the state department did not

train them well to use FfT. Totalling the 8 states together, over 54 percent agreed that their PPP prepared them well to implement their FfT system; nearly 65 percent agreed that their state department prepared them well. Only in Kentucky did respondents overwhelmingly disagree that they had been well prepared. Finally, a majority of all respondents (nearly 53%) disagreed that their state department provided adequate training to their teaching staff on how they would be evaluated using FfT.

Table 3. Respondents' satisfaction with FfT training

N = 1,142	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of respondents
	My PPP prepared me well for FfT implementation.	My State Dept. prepared me well for FfT implementation.	My State Dept. provided adequate training to my teachers regarding FfT evaluations.
Wisconsin	49% agreed	62% agreed	42% agreed
Arkansas	52% agreed	83% agreed	66% agreed
Delaware	54% agreed	72% agreed	72% agreed
Rhode Island	51% agreed	85% agreed	66% agreed
Kentucky	28% agreed	44% agreed	28% agreed
Illinois	54% agreed	62% agreed	29% agreed
Idaho	50% agreed	72% agreed	20% agreed
South Dakota	51% agreed	70% agreed	54% agreed

Over 73 percent of respondents said that using their version of FfT had improved their school's instruction program, and over 77 percent said that their version of FfT was better than their old teacher evaluation instrument. While a majority of respondents seemed to see benefit in using FfT, respondents in all but two states also reported that the system had increased the number of teacher evaluations they had to complete. The exceptions were South Dakota, in which 66 percent of principals said their teacher evaluation workload has not increased, and Idaho, in which 55 percent of principals said their number of evaluations has not increased. However, out of the total of all eight states' respondents, 65 percent said that the number of evaluations they have to complete has increased as a result of implementing FfT.

Suggested changes to FfT

While a majority of principals reported general approval of FfT as a teacher evaluation tool, many also saw room for improvement. Principals were asked what changes they would make to their version of FfT. The following section examines the common changes that principals would like to see.

Arkansas: Reduce time for evaluations; fix Bloomboard

In Arkansas, 445 responses reported desired changes to TESS, for an average of al-

most two suggested changes per principal. The two most common responses (20 each) centered on the amount of time it takes to complete teacher evaluations and complaints about BloomBoard, the database evaluators use to enter teacher evaluations. Comments included “TESS is not time efficient. If done properly, it takes away from the other teachers that need my attention,” and “Cut down the time it takes to evaluate teachers.” Comments regarding BloomBoard included “To me, the program we use in Bloomboard is not friendly,” and “Bloomboard is difficult to use. Some days it works, other days it is a nightmare.” One notable comment centered on the whole process of having to implement TESS compared to the old way of evaluating teachers: “It’s still just as hard to get rid of bad teachers as it was before,” one principal remarked. Of the 445 comments regarding TESS, only one said it should remain the same. One principal wrote, “The test is fine. I would not change it because it can strengthen administrators’ abilities to observe teachers. I would not let it dictate whether or not administrators can do their jobs.” There were five recommendations to eliminate TESS. One comment said, “Hit the delete button.” If the system is supposed to increase teacher accountability and provide a route for improvement, these principals’ comments suggest that it is falling short.

Illinois: Reduce time for evaluations; eliminate SLOs from evaluations

In Illinois, 371 responses suggested changes to FfT. The two most common responses revolved around time commitments to complete teacher evaluations (19) and inclusion of student learning objectives (SLOs) in evaluations (18). Concerns about time included “Hire more administrators; it’s overwhelming to get all these done,” and “Even with electronic software, Danielson is time consuming.” Comments regarding SLOs included “The Student Growth component does nothing but set schools back like AYP. Instead of trying to create good teachers, we are focusing on improving tests scores,” and “Drop Student Growth—Danielson hates it and the state is contradicting her beliefs by using it.”

It is important to note that while there were over 350 suggestions for change to Illinois’ version of FfT, there were more positive comments (15) about their FfT than in any of the other states. These comments included “I really don’t have a problem with the process as long as the most recent rubric/text is used as the foundational guide,” and “I think it is a ‘great’ plan to rate and coach the teachers.” Only three responses suggested eliminating Illinois’ FfT. Overall, then, Illinois principals seem satisfied with the state’s implementation of FfT, except for the student growth component and time burden.

Wisconsin: Eliminate WI EE; Reduce time for evaluations

Wisconsin principals offered 163 suggestions for changes to WI EE, their version of FfT. The highest number of respondents (14) called for eliminating WI EE altogether. Comments included: “Dump Danielson” and “Get rid of it . . . It’s essentially the same system we had before, with the added burden of maneuvering through the clunky technology issues.” The second most common theme (13) was the amount of time it takes to complete evaluations. Comments included “Time, time, time,” and “Time to do all the evals.” Eleven Wisconsin principals called for returning control of

teacher evaluations to Wisconsin districts. Comments included “Let districts take care of their own evaluations. What happened to local control? We can handle it;” “Scrap it completely and give back local control;” and “Local control. We know what we are doing.” Only two comments favored the status quo. They were “None at this time,” and “It seems that WI DPI is changing the system for the better now.” In contrast to the other states discussed so far, then, among Wisconsin principals, a key component of discontent appears to be loss of local autonomy.

Rhode Island: Eliminate SLOs; decrease number of observations

Rhode Island principals provided 111 responses concerning changes they would make to the Rhode Island Model. The most common response (19) addressed the inclusion of SLOs and student growth models in evaluations. In this respect, they echo Illinois principals. Comments included “Reduce or eliminate weighting of SLOs,” “Remove the punitive aspect of SLOs,” and “Get rid of SLO’s.” The second most common theme (13) was the number of observations administrators must conduct. Comments included “Decrease the number of observations per year,” and “Hire more evaluators or assistant principals to complete the observations.” Only two of the 111 comments were for the new evaluation system to remain the same. One was “I appreciate the cyclical model.”

South Dakota: Return control to local districts; eliminate SLOs

Ninety-six responses from South Dakota principals suggested making changes to FfT. As in Wisconsin, South Dakota principals expressed disapproval of the shift from local to state control over teacher evaluation methods. Indeed, for South Dakota principals, the most common suggested change (13) was eliminating the required use of FfT and returning control of teacher evaluations to school districts. Comments included “State should butt out, use district control;” “Let local Boards and schools decide what is best for them and their school system;” and “Local control” (this appeared seven times). The second most common response (12) centered on the inclusion of SLOs, student growth models, and student test scores in teacher evaluations. Here South Dakota principals seem to concur with those from Illinois and Rhode Island. Comments included “Do away with the SLO, teachers can manipulate the result anyway;” “Take out the student growth portion;” and “Not tied to test scores!!!” Only two comments were for FfT to stay the same.

Delaware: Eliminate SLOs; decrease number of observations

Delaware principals offered 14 suggestions to change their version of FfT, known as DPAS-II. The most common response (4) was about the use of student growth data in teachers’ evaluations. Comments included “Scrap Component 5, student growth data. It is highly subjective based on content areas and assessments and have stressed many teachers out of teaching,” and “Revise Component V to make it fair.” The second most common responses (3) centered on having fewer observations. These included “More frequent, shorter observations through the year;” and “Make the whole thing shorter.” Only one comment called for DPAS-II to remain the same.

Idaho: More FFT training; eliminate SLOs and student test scores from evaluations

There were 197 responses from Idaho principals regarding changes they would make to their FFT. The most common response (18) mentioned the need for more training in the use of FFT. Comments included “Provide more training for teachers,” “Better training for administrators,” and “More training and collaboration is needed.” As in Illinois, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Delaware, Idaho principals also wanted to eliminate student test scores and growth goals from evaluations; this was the second most suggested change (12) by Idaho principals. Comments included “Eliminate test scores as part of the evaluation. Too many kids and parents don’t care how they do on the test.” Interestingly, six comments mentioned using evaluations to determine merit pay for teachers. They included “Do not make the evaluation a part of merit pay,” and “Danielson never meant it as an evaluation framework tied to salary.”

Of the nearly 200 responses, only nine advocated no changes to Idaho’s FFT. They included: “Charlotte Danielson is great, but we should read the book. This system is supposed to help teachers become better teachers, and in rare cases, recognize some teacher aren’t working out. Legislators need to stop being set on seeing teachers fired.” Comments like these point to the politics involved in implementing evaluation systems and their possible pitfalls and unintended consequences.

Kentucky: Fix CIITS; eliminate SLOs and student test scores

In Kentucky, 555 responses recommended changes to TPGES. The most common responses (over 100) centered on the database evaluators must use for teacher evaluations, known as CIITS (Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System). Every comment regarding CIITS was negative, wanting it either eliminated or made easier to use. Comments included “Get rid of CIITS;” “CIITS ... ruins TPGES;” and “CIITS is terrible. You can’t fly a plane until it is built.” As with Illinois, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Delaware, and Idaho, Kentucky principals expressed discontent with the inclusion of student growth goals and test scores in teacher evaluations. This theme accounted for the second most common suggested change, with 57 related comments. All of these comments were negative; they included “Look at student growth but do not tie it directly to school or teacher performance;” and “Get rid of student growth goal—data not available for deadlines, should be discussion points only.”

Besides wanting to eliminate student growth goals, several Kentucky principals called for eliminating or revising the “student voice” section of the evaluation system. In this section, a teacher’s students use a survey to rate the teacher’s performance. Comments regarding this evaluation component included “Eliminate Student Voice as accountable data;” and “Some kind of student voice survey, student test score data needs to be added for all levels not just grades 3–12 and all contents.” This may be an area in which the intention driving it is supported, but the implementation seems to diverge from the original vision.

Over 20 Kentucky principals wanted TPGES removed altogether. Many responses also revealed high stress levels spurred by having to implement a new evaluation along with other duties. Comments included “The amount of meetings I had

to have with teachers kept me from doing my complete job;” and “I spend over 5 hours per evaluation. The time spent is extremely taxing on me, my job availability, and my family.” As mentioned earlier, Kentucky principals differ from those in other states in that only among Kentucky principals did a majority agree that they might leave earlier than planned as a result of implementing FfT. Their greater relative emphasis on workload might be a key factor in this difference, although the question requires more study.

Of the more than 555 responses concerning TPGES, only 14 wanted no change. Comments included “Great system! I truly believe it will improve administrator’s evaluators of teachers;” “It is a great opportunity to become more effective teachers;” and “Framework for Teaching is excellent!” One mixed response noted, “No changes [need to be made], we just need more resources. Difficult to be instructional leader and manage the campus, work data, oversee assessments, work ball games.” Again, workload appears to be a challenge.

Summary of most commonly suggested changes to FfT

The following discussion highlights similarities and the most common themes in suggestions for change made by principals across the eight states surveyed.

Elimination or overhaul of VAMs in evaluations

Principals in six states called for eliminating or restructuring the use of student growth goals, otherwise known as SLOs and student test scores, in teacher evaluation. This focus on VAMs was the top suggestion in Rhode Island and Delaware, and the second top suggestion for principals in Illinois, Kentucky, Idaho, and South Dakota. Principals in the two high-ranked states, Arkansas and Wisconsin, did not often suggest eliminating or altering use of SLOs or VAMs.

Reducing time to complete FfT teacher evaluations

One of the most common suggestions of principals in the two high-ranked states, Arkansas and Wisconsin, was to reduce the time it takes to complete teacher evaluations using FfT. It was the top suggestion for Arkansas principals and the second top suggestion for Wisconsin principals; it was also the top priority for principals in middle range Illinois.

Fixing required FfT databases

Principals in two states wanted their state department to fix problems with the database they must use to complete teacher evaluations. It was the top priority for middle-ranked Kentucky principals and the second top priority for high-ranking Arkansas principals. No other state’s principals mentioned database issues.

Eliminating FfT or giving back local control

Importantly, in one of the high-ranked states, Wisconsin, the suggestion that appeared most from principals was to get rid of their version of FfT. Although it was not one of their top two priorities, over 20 Kentucky principals wanted their version of FfT removed altogether. In one of the low-ranked states, South Dakota, the top

priority of principals called for giving control over teacher evaluations to school districts. Respondents in Wisconsin, Idaho, and Arkansas also called for returning control to school districts.

Decreasing number of teacher observations

Decreasing the number of teacher observations needed using FfT was one of the top suggestions for principals in Delaware and Rhode Island. It was the fourth most common suggestion for change by Kentucky principals.

More FfT training for teachers and administrators

The top priority for principals in Idaho was for their state department of education to provide more training for teachers and administrators on how to use FfT. Although it was not one of the top two priorities for principals in the other seven states, respondents in all of them wanted more training for either teachers or administrators. It was the third most common suggestion for Arkansas respondents, fourth for Illinois, and fifth among Kentucky principals.

Conclusions

This study addressed two research questions. First, what perceptions do principals in the eight states have regarding how their state department of education and PPP trained them to perform teacher evaluations based on FfT? Slightly more than half of principals in the eight states felt that their PPP and their state department adequately prepared them to implement FfT. However, a little more than half of respondents in the eight states believed that their state department has not adequately prepared their teachers for FfT.

The second question asked what changes, if any, can be made to improve FfT in each of the eight states studied? This study showed that principals in the eight states are not satisfied using Danielson's FfT. Of the nearly 2,000 total suggestions principals made for changing their state's version of FfT, only 52 comments (slightly more than 2%) wanted their system to stay the same. As discussed, suggestions for improving FfT included overhauling the software used to enter teacher evaluations, eliminating the use of student growth goals and student test scores (VAMs) in teacher evaluation, reducing the time commitment and paperwork required, and wanting more training for administrators and teachers regarding the use of FfT. Some principals even called for eliminating their FfT, while others sought to return control to local school districts, which would decide on their own evaluation instruments and methods.

The study showed that while most principals in these eight states were somewhat satisfied with their FfT model, nearly three out of four principals believe using their version of FfT has improved their school's instruction program and that FfT is a better teacher evaluation tool than their old instrument. Caution must be exercised, however, when using this study to compare a respondent's previous evaluation system to the new FfT system, as lack of satisfaction with the new system does not necessarily reflect a preference for the old system. Many of the principals responding to this survey were relatively new to performing evaluations, and their discontent might

reflect relative inexperience in some combination with direct comparison between a new evaluation system and a previously experienced system.

This research showed that, to some extent, there is a relationship between a state's ranking by *Education Week* and the types of changes each state's principals would like to see made to their FfTs. Responses calling for eliminating or altering the use of student growth goals, SLOs, and student test scores, or VAMs, in teacher evaluation arose mostly in middle- and low-ranked states. VAMs' use did not appear to be a priority for principals from the two high-ranked states. Reducing time to complete FfT teacher evaluations was a priority for the two high-ranked states and for principals in a middle-ranked state. Principals in middle-ranked states also shared a desire for fewer teacher observations. Principals in one high-ranked state and one middle-ranked state believed their PPP did not adequately prepare them to implement FfT. Principals from one low-ranked state had a split opinion on the matter. It is also important to note that the most common response of principals in one of the high-ranked states and in one of the low-ranked states was a shared desire to eliminate their FfT altogether and give back control to school districts over which teacher evaluation system to use.

In conclusion, this research shows that while a few principals who responded to the survey wanted FfT eliminated in their state, most principals instead made clear suggestions about how they would fix FfT. It must be noted, however, that although over one thousand principals responded to the survey, that number accounted for only 14 percent of principals in the eight states. As discussed above, almost half of the principals who responded worked in rural settings. These schools tend to have smaller enrolments; consequently, most have only one administrator who must conduct all teacher observations and evaluations. This may account for much of the stress principals expressed. A limitation of this study might be its rural focus. In addition, perhaps principals who did not respond to this survey felt no need to because they were satisfied with their teacher evaluation systems. Lack of knowledge regarding non-respondents is a common limitation of survey research; extensions of the current study should incorporate additional methods in an attempt to address this issue. Future studies should also focus on the proficiency tests that administrators must take in order to evaluate their teachers.

Another ripe area for research in understanding teacher evaluation and education improvement concerns the politics of devising instruments and deviations between planning vision and actual implementation, as suggested by some Idaho principals' comments. While questions remain, research such as this study is critical to gauge principals' perceptions about teacher evaluation systems: no performance assessment tool is created or used in a vacuum; its success depends as much on the vision, research, and planning behind it as it does on the experiences, training, and attitudes of the people using it. State departments and PPPs should continue to improve their training for the new evaluation system by making it easier for principals to implement, while state departments must provide better training for teachers regarding FfT. Will state decision makers take to heart principals' perceptions and modify their FfT systems? This research offers a vital step in ensuring that the voices of those using FfT are heard. Optimistically, the final result will be higher-quality education

in the eight states studied. Even further, administrator experiences in the eight states should inform decisions in all states. Hopefully, this research will catch the attention of state department officials and institutions of higher learning, who can improve the system to achieve its intended goals of accurately gauging teacher performance and improving education. In this way, the United States could help pave the way for better quality teacher evaluations that contribute to school improvement and teacher self-efficacy.

Notes

1. Other states using FFT in some form: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and West Virginia. Its use has also been approved in New Jersey, Florida, and Washington (Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, 2015).
2. The rankings include the District of Columbia, which increases the total number to be ranked to 51. Education Week did not rank states for 2014, but they assigned each state (and the District of Columbia) scores in each of the six categories and then provided an overall average score. The reader was then able to use these scores to rank states in order, which this researcher did.

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Appendix 1: TESS Survey

Dodson

Principals'
Perceptions of the
Primary Teaching
Evaluation System

Please answer each question based on your personal experience regarding Arkansas' teacher evaluation system or TESS, which is based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT) Proficiency System.

1. At what university or college did you complete your principal preparation program? _____.
2. The principal preparation program I completed prepared me well for the implementation of TESS.
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Somewhat agree
 - C. Somewhat disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
3. Using TESS has improved our school's instructional program.
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Somewhat agree
 - C. Somewhat disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
4. TESS is a better teacher evaluation instrument than our old teacher evaluation instrument.
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Somewhat agree
 - C. Somewhat disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
5. Our state department of education has provided adequate training to our administrators on how to use TESS.
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Somewhat agree
 - C. Somewhat disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
6. Our state department of education has provided adequate training to our teachers on how they will be evaluated.
 - A. Strongly agree
 - B. Somewhat agree
 - C. Somewhat disagree
 - D. Strongly disagree
7. Implementing TESS has increased the number of teacher evaluations I do during the school year.
 - A. ____ Yes
 - B. ____ No

8. I might leave my job earlier than planned because of having to implement the TESS evaluation instrument.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
9. I might leave my job earlier than planned because of the increased emphasis on test scores in teachers' evaluations.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
10. I might leave my job earlier than planned because of the increased number of teacher evaluations I have to perform as part of TESS.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
11. I have heard of administrators who plan to leave their jobs because of the TESS evaluation instrument.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Strongly disagree
12. What changes would you make to the TESS evaluation instrument?
- _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
 - _____.
13. Have you taken the proficiency exam that observers must pass?
- _____ Yes, I have taken the proficiency exam that observers must pass.
 - _____ No, I have not taken the proficiency exam that observers must pass.
14. I have taken the proficiency exam that observers must pass and passed it the first time.
- _____ Yes
 - _____ No
 - _____ I have not taken the proficiency exam that observers must pass.
15. How difficult is the proficiency exam that observers must pass in order to evaluate their staff?
- Very difficult
 - Somewhat difficult
 - Somewhat easy
 - Very easy

16. I believe that the proficiency exam that observers must pass is fair and should be offered the way it is now.

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Somewhat agree
- C. Somewhat disagree
- D. Strongly disagree

17. What changes would you make to improve the proficiency exam that observers must pass?

- a. _____.
- b. _____.
- c. _____.
- d. _____.

Please answer the following concerning your career and school.

What is your current position at your school? _____

In what type of school are you employed?

1. ___Public 2. ___Private 3. ___Charter 4. ___Magnet 5. ___Other _____

**In what instructional level at the school are you employed?
(Check all that apply.)**

1. ___Elementary 2. ___Middle/junior high 3. ___Secondary 4. ___(P)K-12

How many years have you been a principal?

1. ___0-4 years 2. ___5-8 years 3. ___9-12 years 4. ___13-16 years
5. ___17-20 years 6. ___21-25 years 7. ___26+years

What is your gender? ___Female ___Male

What is your highest degree level?

1. ___Undergraduate degree 2. ___Undergraduate degree + 15 hours
3. ___Masters degree 4. ___Masters degree + 15 hours 5. ___Doctoral degree

What is your age?

1. ___21-24 2. ___5-30 3. ___31-35 4. ___36-40
5. ___41-45 6. ___46-50 7. ___51-55 8. ___56-60 9. ___60+

In what setting/location is your school?

1. ___Urban 2. ___Suburban 3. ___Town 4. ___Rural

THANK YOU!!!