

2015 Superstars in Education Awards Program
EastSide Charter School
Teaching Excellence Framework

Summary

EastSide Charter School, in collaboration with Thomas Edison Charter School, Prestige Academy and Kuumba Academy, received a waiver by the Department of Education to implement an innovative alternative to the traditional teacher evaluation system, DPAS II. Over the past two years, these schools have been working collaboratively on a more in-depth, more comprehensive teacher evaluation methodology known as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

The TEF has allowed these four schools to delve deeper into teacher performance and coaching strategies for improvement and professional development. By going above and beyond the reach of the traditional DPAS II, the partnering schools have seen a drastic improvement in teacher performance and satisfaction with the evaluation methodology.

Needs Assessment

Measuring teacher effectiveness and providing feedback are key components that allow schools to provide quality education and improve outcomes. Teachers are the frontline in providing our children the education they need to be successful, but without effective evaluation methods educators cannot monitor, evaluate and improve the overall learning experience students receive.

In 2013, 99% of teachers in the state of Delaware were rated effective or highly effective using the State Department of Education's teacher evaluation method, DPAS II. Concurrently, 97% of school administrators and 86% of teachers statewide believed that the state evaluation system needed to be improved. The 99% effective rating for teachers statewide points to a troubling inefficiency in DPAS II. How can *any* profession claim that 99% of its workforce is efficient? How can educators honestly expect to improve the quality of their teaching staff if 99% are already rated as effective?

Under DPAS II, many teachers are simply not receiving the observation, coaching and professional development time needed in order for them to be effectively evaluated. Under DPAS II new teachers are evaluated three times per year and veteran teachers just twice throughout the year. Of these observations, one is unannounced and one or two observations are announced.

Such infrequent observations give teachers too much time unsupervised without guidance. Knowing when observations occur presents an even more troubling issue allowing teachers to better prepare for their evaluated lesson. Observations then are not a true representation of the teachers' everyday consistency and quality.

Action Plan

Working as a collaborative, EastSide Charter School, Thomas Edison Charter School, Prestige Academy and Kuumba Academy developed an alternative teaching evaluation method. The goals of the evaluation system were to: 1) Dramatically Improve Student Performance, 2) Develop and Retain Effective Teachers, 3) Develop a Network of Like-Minded Colleagues and 4) Inform Policy and Practice. To achieve these goals, the collaborative utilized these key theories of action: 1) Define Effectiveness, 2) Develop Educators and 3) Differentiate Support

The four schools received support from the Rodel Foundation to apply to the Department of Education for a waiver from participating in DPAS II. The model, known as the TEF, was approved by the state and is has been in place since the 2013-2014 school year.

Under the TEF teachers are evaluated every two weeks. Throughout the year, this means a teacher can be evaluated as many as 20 times (with a minimum of 10 times), a far cry from the 2-3 evaluations under DPAS II. All sessions are unannounced, forcing teachers to prepare for

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excellence every day. Similar to theories behind random drug testing in professional sports, by keeping the teachers on their toes throughout the year, they strive for a higher quality lesson each and every day, never knowing when they will be monitored.

All evaluations are videotaped with clips used to help the evaluator and the teacher have a better understanding of the entire lesson. Similar to professional athletes watching game tape, teachers have the ability to watch themselves teach and learn tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses. As one teacher recently reported in a survey, “by conducting random and unannounced evaluations I am forced to be on top of my game every minute of every day.”

Teachers work closer with evaluators throughout the year to make action plans and strategies for improvement. Throughout the evaluation sessions, the instructional coach offers research-based action steps and specific strategies to keep the teacher on track towards the pre-determined goals from previous sessions. This initiative has helped teachers and leadership break the traditional barriers between evaluation and coaching. Collaboratively, leaders from the four participating schools work together and periodically visit the other schools to better understand how implementation is occurring in and share methods and best practices.

Results

Teacher buy-in and satisfaction with the TEF has been positive and widespread. 89% of teachers believed that the TEF clearly sets expectations for teaching effectiveness and 88% believed that the TEF helped teachers identify strengths and weaknesses. The TEF has also helped 93% of teachers feel a common vision for teaching efficiency is established and 96% believe that peers are able to set an example of what highly effective teaching looks like in practice. 90% of teachers feel that the feedback and action steps they receive help to improve their instruction.

From an academic standpoint, student performance is on state proficiency exams has a close correlation with the quality of teaching our students receive and the TEF has had an impact on this performance indicator. Specifically, at EastSide, the number of students testing proficient rose by 30 points in reading and 26 points in math on DCAS exams from 2011-2014. Moreover, the number of students reaching annual growth targets on the MAP test rose by 35 points in each reading and math over this same period.

Educational Impact

Having more effective self-aware and highly skilled teachers will make our schools more productive and proficient academic learning centers. These individuals have the power to transform lives and shape the minds of future generations. If teachers are not properly trained or even aware of their teaching strengths and weaknesses, students suffer.

There are many variables that lead to student academic performance. However, what the TEF does is account for the most important variable in the classroom in evaluating and improving the quality of teaching that students receive. By engaging teachers in the evaluation process, the TEF seeks to promote teacher leadership and develop a culture where students are prioritized and teachers are rewarded for high levels of achievement.

Notably, EastSide’s Dr. Browne has been invited on numerous occasions to speak to state and education leaders on the TEF. He has spoken at: a superintendent’s training course at the University of Delaware, two statewide school Principal’s meetings, to the State Board of Education, and to various politicians and community leaders. These meetings have given both our collaborative and the TEF increased exposure for potential large scale replication statewide.

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Important Project Staff

- Dr. Lamont W. Browne, Head of School, EastSide Charter School
- Sally Maldonado, Head of School, Kuumba Academy
- Dr. Jack Perry, Executive Director, Prestige Academy
- Salome, Thomas-El, Head of School, Thomas A. Edison Charter School
- All teachers at EastSide Charter School, Kuumba Academy, Prestige Academy and Thomas A. Edison Charter School