

Minnesota State Teacher Development, Evaluation, and Peer Support Model

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CAREI staff interviewed 14 summative evaluators and 40 teachers representing eight of the 17 districts participating in the pilot. Selected quotes from these 54 individuals are presented here. The quotes show a wide range of perspectives and provide insight into the complexity of implementing an ambitious teacher assessment model.

QUOTES FROM SUMMATIVE EVALUATORS

Change is challenging

When you are dealing with teachers who have been through one cycle of new initiatives after another that go away, they get a little standoffish.

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Plans provide guidance

I think it forces the staff to not only self-reflect, but a lot of them started to look at data. And it forced them to look at skills and I think that part has been great. We would do it to some degree [already] but the level of intensity was heightened with this process.

It was a great help because they gave us a good guide to follow.

Often plans weren't specific enough

The amount of time that I had to put into these growth plans is horrendous...out of the ten I have reviewed so far, one met a standard that I accepted. The other nine, I made notes and sent them back to them for corrections...which means I'll get them back again. It's going to take 100 hours to do all these.

POINTS OF CONTACT

Promoted professional conversations

Sitting down with teachers more often than you normally do, to sit and talk with them and they understand what you're expecting; that's been good. It's kind of forced the issue in a way. You did some of it, but not to this point of following a certain thing exactly.

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Concern about feasibility

I'm averaging twelve meetings a week for observation purposes, and they are each about half an hour. I feel there are things that are really good that I did when I was a principal before that I'm not able to do because of this. So it represents twelve meetings a week, but it doesn't represent the time required to even prepare for those meetings.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

Increased teacher conversations

What I have been enjoying about it is we've been having very good conversations around things like assessment, standards, and student learning goals.

Teacher buy-in was a challenge

The battle we are fighting in this building is that so much of what has been done, has been done because someone told you that you had to do it. There was no buy-in. I've got to do this, so I'll just write something down. There is not a belief that this can help us improve achievement.

My gut feeling is that most of the teachers are doing what they have to do as part of the process, not to actually see the growth.

Considerations regarding specialists

I think with the growth plan [Individual Growth and Development Plan] made sense to everyone across the board, whether they were new, or a specialist, or a special educator. They could all find something they were interested in improving on, documenting, and keeping track throughout the year.

The Student Learning Goals got tricky for specialists and the assessments that they needed to create for themselves and prove. Special Educators have really struggled because they didn't have a class goal necessarily because they have such a small group of students. At first it was kind of difficult for them to wrap their head around. At first they were saying, "This doesn't pertain to us." No, it does, we're going to get creative and think about how you can accomplish this in your setting, smaller groups.

With special education, the class goal can be hard because a class might be just two students. The implications might be that if one person doesn't meet a goal, then 50% of your class has failed to achieve mastery.

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TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

Instant feedback

To have everything online has been very beneficial. I've loved that. You really don't ever have to have paper...Typically, I would have a pre-conference and they would come ready to answer some questions, but I couldn't read the answers to the questions before I got there because I didn't demand that they put them in. But now they almost have to input them and then they come in and we talk about them; same with the post-conference. In my mind, that's made that all much, much easier. The pre- and the post- flows a little easier for me because of the [online] system. I can just look at the list of a person's name and see what color they're at and which ones they've completed and how many they haven't completed.

SUSTAINABILITY

Too time intensive to be sustainable

The Manual is overwhelming...it is an 86-page document. I don't know how many staff members have read it, I haven't read it cover to cover...the time part is the part that really scares me.

I spend 20 minutes probably per teacher's goal sheet going through it and double-checking the data, times 40. So 800 minutes just for the goals. As for the PLC time, and meeting with Tyler, I'd say an additional 8-10 hours in that.

QUOTES FROM TEACHERS

TRAINING

Needs to be more streamlined

I'd like to pare it down, make it less gobbledygook and more direct...give me the cliff notes version, tell me what I need to do and I will do it. Quite often you walk away going, what are we supposed to do?

Applying new details to existing work was overwhelming

It's a lot. Even though it's stuff we're doing all the time – looking at test data, adjusting our instruction – it's a lot to then put it all in this neat package and have it make sense.

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INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Keeps you on track

I think every year you have ideas...but through this process, we're committed to doing it.

I refer back to [my Individual Growth and Development Plan] and I'm trying to work on those things. I think it's good to have that constant reminder of what you're working on because we do so easily get side tracked and so it's nice to have a focus. Not that you still don't get side tracked, but it kind of keeps bringing you back.

Peer review is beneficial

If you're going to evaluate teachers, this is how you should be doing it. Not just one principal walking through your classroom on one day. The peer review documents your professionalism.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

Promotes reflection

It gave me permission to spend the time with a lot of data...Look at your students. Look at the data. See where they excel. There were some really nice surprises and some areas of concern that were much more evident by taking that time. The Student Learning Goals allowed me to focus, not just for my target group, but all of my classes to ask: "Where are they really, where do they need to be and, what can I do?"

Confusion about multiple sets of goals

One of the things that was confusing to people is writing more goals. I just finished my Individual Growth and Development Plan and now you're telling me I've got to do more goals?

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Increased communication and collaboration among teachers

In my 20 years, these last two to three years here, between what we're doing now with this teacher pilot and the instituting of PLCs, has had a huge impact on collaboration and teacher communication between us.

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TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

Instant feedback

As soon as they hit submit, you're seeing it. And, as soon as you hit submit, they're seeing it. And then the whole tracking of information is all right there, rather than needing to have a folder with papers and more papers and they don't get into the right folder....It's just very clean in this regard.

INITIAL REACTION TO THE MODEL

Clarity comes from doing it

Once you start getting into the forms and you start filling everything out [for] your actual individual plan and student learning goals...then the terminology and all the background information seems to make a lot more sense.

Effective professional development

It's the process of thinking about teaching in a professional way that's important, and hopefully, it's an ongoing process, rather than "we're doing this this year because it's the Model." Maybe we can come out of this with our own Model that will maybe feel more natural to us.

I think there's just a general benefit to spending time with colleagues that we don't get a lot of time to do, thinking about practice and our pedagogy.

It's going to make us better and it's going to be great for the kids because we are going to perform better. We have a respect for ourselves, and our colleagues because we're doing the right thing. I envision that it's going to greatly enhance our teaching and that the kids are going to benefit from it a great amount. This should have been done years ago.

I like that it's teacher-driven in a way, as opposed to what's just being handed down "from above."

SUSTAINABILITY

Concerns about the cost of full and ongoing implementation

How do we maintain it without the funding?... Getting help the first year has been crucial for us. I don't know how schools are going to do it, without the resources, especially small schools like ours.

I believe we're a district that's been struggling with staff development and resources for materials...I worry that we won't have the resources once we don't have the pilot.