

Leading Change in Hillsborough County Public Schools

In August 2010, Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), in Tampa, Florida, began implementing one of the most ambitious and comprehensive teacher evaluation systems in the United States. Covering all of the district's 12,000 K-12 teachers, the new system included three components: peer and mentor evaluations, principal evaluation, and student learning gains using value-added measures. These multiple measures of teacher effectiveness represented a significant break from the former evaluation system, which relied solely on principal input. The new system also required that all teachers be observed at least three times per year, a marked contrast from the time when tenured teachers required observation once every three years.

The new teacher evaluation system was not the only change in the district in the 2010-2011 school year. Superintendent MaryEllen Elia and her leadership team also completely revamped how the district's 235 principals were evaluated. Principal evaluation criteria consisted of gains in student achievement, a 360-degree survey component completed by teachers and area directors, and other factors such as attendance and discipline, retention of effective teachers, and evaluation of teachers.

Implementing new teacher and principal evaluations in the eighth-largest school district in the country in the same school year with fidelity could be considered an overly ambitious or even impossible undertaking. With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the project depended on the effective execution of a number of interlocked components, with the failure of any individual component potentially imperiling the success of the whole reform. First, the Hillsborough County School Board and Superintendent Elia set a clear and compelling vision best articulated in the initiative's title: Empowering Effective Teachers (EET). The defined vision of supporting and sustaining excellent teaching allowed all stakeholders – teachers, principals, district and union leaders, and community members – to develop a detailed and workable plan for implementation. At the same time, while HCPS was well-positioned to affect this change, the logistics of institutional reform were daunting.

Throughout 2009 and early 2010 focus groups and committees came together to develop a new teacher observation rubric. With the formula for evaluation settled, the district had to recruit, hire, and train 75 peer evaluators and 46 mentor evaluators. Principals also had to be trained in how to conduct reliable and valid observations and evaluations. For the value-added component, HCPS needed to ensure that robust pre-measures and end-of-year assessments existed for every course offered and that student results and demographics could be linked to individual teachers. Even if the district was able to accomplish all of these tasks, it still needed to get buy-in from teachers and principals for real change to occur.

Fast-forward to 2011, with a month left in the school year, the results of implementation have been impressive. By August 2010, HCPS had hired all peer and mentor evaluators and trained them on the new observation rubric and the three parts of the observation cycle: pre-observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference. Within ten weeks of the first day of school, all principals were certified to conduct observations with the revised rubric. By the spring, district teachers had experienced over 35,000 observation cycles, and peers, mentors and principals were on track to observe all teachers the required number of times for the school year. In addition, assessment data used in the value-added measures were being collected, linked to students and

teachers, and transmitted for analysis to the University of Wisconsin's Value Added Research Center. Perhaps most importantly, the district had seemingly strong support from its teachers for the new evaluation; 96 percent of teachers who voted approved a new contract that included the multiple measures evaluation.

Anecdotal evidence, together with formative assessment results, also suggested HCPS was on the right track with student achievement, though the impact of the new evaluations awaited analysis. According to Superintendent Elia, "What we said we were going to do was support teachers to get better. I am overwhelmingly hearing that teachers are more focused this year, in their classrooms, as they're teaching, and that we're putting the supports in place to help them."

Setting the Context

HCPS was a large, urban-suburban school district serving 191,000 students in the Tampa metro and surrounding areas. Governed by a seven-member school board, HCPS was organized geographically into seven areas overseen by area directors. The student population was demographically diverse: 4 percent Asian, 22 percent black, 28 percent Hispanic, and 42 percent white. Additionally, 57 percent of students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch.

The district's teachers were represented by the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association (HCTA). The president of HCTA, Jean Clements, was in her fourth term and beginning her ninth year as the union head. District leadership included Superintendent Elia, Deputy Superintendent Ken Otero, Deputy Superintendent and Chief Human Resources Officer Dan Valdez, Chief Business Officer Gretchen Saunders, Communications Officer Steve Hegarty, Chief Facilities Officer Cathy Valdes, Chief Governmental Relations Officer Connie Milito, Chief Information and Technology Officer David Steele, and Assistant Superintendents Lewis Brinson, Wynne Tye, and Gwen Luney.

The leadership team presided over a high-performing school district with a history of success in student achievement. From 2008 to 2010, the district scored three consecutive overall "A" grades based on Florida's comprehensive performance grading system. Across the district's schools, 77 percent earned an "A" or "B" grade in the 2009-2010 school year, and the district's 82.3 percent four-year graduation rate led all large districts in Florida. National recognition has followed this track record: 16 HCPS high schools—almost 60 percent—were listed on Newsweek's 2010 list of America's Best High Schools, with Hillsborough High School ranked 43rd, Henry B. Plant High School ranked 47th, and King High School ranked 67th.

The district has also seen success in the arena of Advanced Placement (AP). The College Board recognized HCPS with the 2011 Innovation Award for its system-wide approach to college readiness. From 2008-2010 HCPS had the largest increase in the number of students earning AP scores of 3 or better of any district in the nation, and the second-largest increase in the number of underrepresented minorities. During the same period, the district increased student participation in AP courses and exams by an annual rate of 19 percent. Even with the increase in participation, the district was able to maintain the percentage of students scoring 3 or better at around 40 percent in 2008 and 2010.

Lessons Learned

An extensive series of interviews with those closest to the project—teachers, principals, union leaders, and district administrators—combined with a review of planning and strategic documents help tell the story of this ambitious reform initiative. Ultimately, six key lessons emerge from HCPS's successful implementation of multiple-measure teacher and principal evaluations. Adapted to local

contexts, these are steps that district leaders and policy makers can follow as they develop teacher and principal evaluation reform initiatives and work to implement them.

1. Build a foundation of board-district-union shared leadership.
2. Create a sense of urgency rooted in student learning.
3. Establish a high-capacity executive team composed of respected district leaders.
4. Include teachers and principals in every phase of the work.
5. Communicate clearly and constantly through multiple channels.
6. Incorporate learnings from implementation quickly.

As much as the lessons here present strategies for implementation, they also suggest an inclusive approach to carrying out educational reform. Critical to the success of the project was a collaborative and supportive set of relationships that consistently sought out and made best use of the input of all stakeholders in the process. When board members, teachers, principals, and union leaders had meaningful roles in the process, the prospect of stakeholder buy-in on the project were greatly increased, streamlining the implementation process. Importantly, the stakeholders also acted as resources whose expertise and commitment molded a more effective outcome.

Lesson 1: Build a Foundation of Board-District-Union Shared Leadership

The School Board's leadership and engagement in improving teaching and learning underpinned the successful rollout of the EET project. Notably, the Board pursued a collaborative approach to crafting district policy that included significant input from Superintendent Elia, HCTA President Clements, teachers, district leaders, business leaders, and community members. As School Board Chair Carol Kurdell and Superintendent Elia noted in the district's 2009 annual report: "The combination of a strong school board-superintendent relationship, supplemented by a collaborative working relationship with the unions, and a staff of highly effective professionals, puts us in a position to succeed." The shared leadership also ensured that district policies and resources would be aligned toward improving how teachers and principals were evaluated.

The working partnership between the Board and Superintendent Elia was only a start. Support and commitment from the teachers' union was essential to the success of the new evaluations. Yet, even in times of ample resources district-union collaboration can be difficult to initiate, let alone sustain. Different cultures, languages, and procedures create barriers to people working together effectively. When funding is constrained, as it was with the recent economic recession, the relationship between school districts and unions can turn adversarial and hostile. Not so in Hillsborough County; HCPS has developed and maintained deep collaboration with its teachers' union that stretches over 40 years. Joint district-union committees touched every level of the organization and made decisions around all core areas of educational work. HCTA President Clements and her staff were involved in nearly all critical strategic and budgetary decisions, from crafting the district's vision, mission, and values to deciding how to allocate resources across the district.

Superintendent Elia explained the importance of having union involvement in the district's direction: "From the very beginning, we had to be working constantly with the union; they had to be part of all the work that was being done." The shared district-union leadership meant that teachers not only endorsed the new teacher evaluation system, but they also helped design and implement its

key components – evidence of what Clements called HCTA’s “drive to continuously scrutinize, reflect on, and improve practice.”

However, the partnership did not emerge overnight. There was a long history of district-union collaboration in Hillsborough County, dating back to a statewide teacher walkout in 1968 over budget cuts to education.¹ School-level administrators and teachers’ union members protested against the cuts and pressured the state to restore funding to schools. Over the years, the relationship grew into a partnership and strengthened as teachers and former union members from the 1968 walkout advanced into leadership positions in the district. Many current members of the district’s executive leadership team were former teachers and union members. In fact, the past three superintendents dating back to 1989 were former teachers’ union members.²

HCTA has now been involved in meaningful district decisions for more than 30 years. Early collaborative work focused on curriculum alignment, exam writing, textbook selection, and the development and delivery of quality professional development. Collective bargaining agreements led to HCTA members inclusion on district-level committees that made decisions on the district’s curriculum, school calendar, professional development, and instructional strategies. Then, in the 1990s, at the school level, teachers were required members on School Improvement Process Teams and School Advisory Councils, which played essential roles in developing, implementing, and evaluating each school’s strategic plan around improving teaching and learning, a process that continues to this day.

Also, in the 1990s, HCPS and HCTA worked together developing an innovative teacher peer-assistance-and review program that involved peer mentor teachers assisting new and struggling teachers. Unfortunately, the plan was unfunded due to budget cuts and never implemented. A few years later, the district and union co-designed and implemented one of the state’s first teacher bonus systems based on student achievement gains demonstrated through a portfolio review process.³ In the mid-2000s, HCPS and HCTA teamed up again to put into place a Florida Merit Award Program (MAP), which provided money to pay teachers’ bonuses for student achievement growth.

The collaboration around peer mentoring and performance pay set the foundation for implementing the multiple measures of effectiveness reform. Consequently, when the district and union started looking into changing the way teachers were observed and evaluated, the culture, systems, structures for inclusive decision making were already in place. As Clements explains, “It was just kind of normal to move on into, ‘what if we had money,’ and we could actually consider having the full time mentors who would be master teachers, who could meaningfully insert themselves into a cohort of new teachers’ classrooms.”

At the district level, Elia and her leadership team had monthly formal meetings with Clements and the HCTA leadership team. The content of the meetings was completely open, and focused not only on the details of the plan, but also on communicating a clear message to the district’s 12,000 teachers about the evaluation reforms and solving any problems that surfaced. Valdez explained how the district responded to union concerns brought up in the monthly meetings: “We had a meeting that was a direct result from the union asking us to meet with the [union] building representatives, just to do an overview of how this is going, answer any questions. So, we scheduled three of them...to answer questions, to hear what the issues are, and update people.” The formal district-union leadership team meetings were supplemented by almost daily informal phone calls and email exchanges between Valdez and Clements and the HCTA staff.

The comprehensive system of joint district-union committees was complex and highly differentiated. Importantly, these committees provided recurring opportunities for district and union

members to share decision-making at multiple levels in the organization. As a recent study out of Rutgers University that included HCPS concluded, the union representation on committees had created a “dense network of teacher leadership in critical areas of the planning and decision-making activities of HCPS.”⁴ In terms of the new teacher and principal evaluations, Elia and Clements relied on this dense network of joint district-union leadership to communicate the change, gather feedback, and solve problems that emerged during implementation. This ensured that district and union actions were aligned towards improving teaching and learning through multiple measures of teacher effectiveness.

Lesson 2: Create a Sense of Urgency Rooted in Student Learning

The imperative of student learning framed the debate around reformed teachers’ and principals’ evaluation systems. Teachers and administrators felt the old teacher evaluation system was overly narrow, subjective, and vague. Relying only on a principal’s classroom visit, the one-dimensional evaluation was perceived as a poor tool for assessing, supporting, and rewarding teacher contributions to student learning. According to one principal, “The other evaluation was somewhat vague. And we didn’t always have documentation about what we felt was the right score or the right category to put each teacher in. So, you know, it was somewhat whatever you thought. And I know the new evaluation replaces that and takes out the vagueness.” Clements emphasized: “Most importantly, the old evaluation was acknowledged as nearly worthless in improving instruction and practice. We were far less concerned about rating teachers than we were interested in having a comprehensive, reliable, and valid process that would enable us to meaningfully support the professionals in our schools to adapt and improve instructional practice at all levels of experience and expertise.”

Questions from teachers and district leadership about the efficacy and impact of teacher and principal evaluation led to review of the evaluation model. Superintendent Elia asked outside experts to collect data and analyze the impact of the evaluations. What she found was surprising: Over 99 percent of the district’s teachers were rated satisfactory or outstanding by principals, and 46 percent of high school teachers received perfect evaluation scores. While the district had a reputation for excellent teachers, the scores were misleading. Applied inconsistently across principals, and with weak correlation between teacher ratings and student achievement, the evaluations failed to deliver meaningful data. They had become perfunctory, and they correlated weakly with student achievement. As Clements reflected: “For years, I think, most people just considered [the evaluation] to be this kind of obligatory thing that, at the very least, forced you to sit down with your supervisor or principal towards the end of the year, just kind of going over how things had gone.”

A revised evaluation rubric was the first key step in more accurately capturing what went on in the classroom. Previously, principals used what was essentially a checklist of teacher behaviors in their evaluations for items such as asking multiple questions, wait time, or behavior management. According to one district leader, “Our former evaluation system was not very descriptive and specific...we knew that we had the desire to move in the direction of a rubric that would help teachers identify effective behaviors as well as help principals in evaluating teacher behaviors.”

The new observation rubric, based on Charlotte Danielson’s work, offered a fuller view of teachers’ effects on student learning, with four performance ratings across four domains detailed in 22 individual components. In the eyes of one district leader, the new rubric “changed the focus from sole teacher behavior to the interaction that goes on and, you know...do the kids know what they’re supposed to be learning?” And according to one peer evaluator, “We’ve changed our focus so much. We used to be very focused on the teacher, and now we’re very focused on the student.”

Teachers also wanted an evaluation system that could offer actionable feedback to improve student learning. Previous evaluation refinements had led to a more sophisticated instrument, but they lacked the detail provided by the Danielson-based rubric that offered specific feedback and guidance on opportunities for professional development. As Clements explained, “We recognized that we didn’t have something in place that really helped every teacher, at every stage of their career, at every level of excellence, have concrete feedback.” The new rubric and observation cycle encouraged teacher reflection, made peer and mentors available for advice and consult, and provided links to professional development opportunities. Thus, the multiple measures evaluation system embedded a theory of change centered on student learning and teacher growth. If teachers received actionable feedback on their performance from multiple sources, then they could take explicit steps to improving their practice and student learning would improve.

Lesson 3: Establish a High-Capacity Executive Team Composed of Respected District Leaders

A critical decision Superintendent Elia made in planning stages of the teacher and principal evaluation systems was to hand the project over to a respected internal leader, Chief Information and Technology Officer David Steele. Moving forward with implementing the evaluations, Elia and her leadership team’s initial plan had been to hire someone externally to lead the change process. But, Elia and Steele felt uneasy about bringing in someone new to implement such a complicated plan in such a short period of time. Finally, Steele approached Elia and volunteered to direct the project. Steel explained: “We always had in the plan that there was going be a project director. Once we were more or less certain that we were going [forward with the plan], I just kind of personally started worrying about it. And I think Mary Ellen – independently, started worrying about the same thing, too. I said, ‘How is someone who has never been at a meeting going to walk in and run the project?’ And she actually said, ‘You know, I was thinking exactly the same thing.’ And so, that was how I wound up getting it.

Steele’s 33-year long tenure with the district as a math teacher, assistant principal, principal, and district administrator meant he knew its community, leaders, culture, and strengths. Steele also had a good idea about the potential pitfalls that could doom such an ambitious project. One of Steele’s first steps was to assemble a leadership team that could manage and lead the day-to-day operations of the project. In February 2010, the district hired four directors to manage various aspects of the EET project, all with long teaching and administrative experience in HCPS.

Anna Brown, Director of Assessment and Performance Management, oversaw the design and implementation value-added measures component of the teachers evaluation. A former HCPS principal at a high-poverty elementary school, Brown worked closely with the University of Wisconsin’s Value Added Research Center to design and implement the value-added formula used to calculate teachers’ and schools’ contributions to student achievement. She coordinated the Data Warehouse Team, Assessment Team, and Performance Management Team to ensure there was a strong student-teacher data link and that the information transmitted was secure, reliable, and valid. As a critical task in carrying out these duties, Brown also worked to ensure the district had appropriate and aligned assessments at every grade level and for all subjects.

Director of Communications and Project Management Tracye Brown was a former HCPS elementary school principal hired to develop and execute a change management plan for rolling out the new evaluation systems. With experience as a leader of a high-poverty school, Brown was closely connected to both the internal stakeholders – teachers, principals, and support staff – and external stakeholders – parents, community members, and business leaders. She used this knowledge to

build a coherent multiple channel communication strategy that included school-site forums, community presentations, teacher toolkits, emails, newsletters, and a website.

As Director of Professional Development, former school psychologist and staff developer Jamalya Jackson managed the training of all new teachers in the district and supervised the 45 mentor evaluators. Jackson ensured there was a high-quality fit between mentor and new teacher, coordinated the new teacher induction program, and organized professional development training sessions for the district.

The fourth member of the team, Director of Evaluation and Compensation Stephanie Woodford, oversaw the peer evaluator component of the teacher evaluation. She addressed the issues that arose with managing nearly 80 peer evaluators, who each conducted an average of two observations a day. That meant matching peers with teachers, helping coordinate peers' schedules, talking with 20 to 30 peers a day, and answering 300 emails daily.

Steele and his team met every Wednesday morning to discuss the implementation of the new teachers' and principals' evaluations. Every meeting found the team working on a different problem, but the discussions were focused. With well over 100 years of district experience between the members of the group, little time was wasted explaining important nuances of particular schools or communities. The team could move quickly to solutions, relying on their collective knowledge HCPS and Hillsborough County. The "grow your own" approach also meant that Steele's team members were rooted in the community, which minimized leadership turnover. As Steele noted: "You know, when the grant period is over, you're going to be looking at exactly the same people, or pretty much exactly the same people, as when you started. How many of the other districts are going to be able to say that?"

Lesson 4: Include Teachers and Principals in Every Phase of the Work

Change can be imposing, even threatening. Realizing the importance of initial support from teachers and administrators, district leaders included teachers and principals in every phase of the work in developing the new evaluation. A series of focus and advisory groups composed of anywhere from 10 to 30 teachers laid the groundwork. Eventually, that work led to the formation of a 28-member Teacher Evaluation Committee, which included district and union leadership, but mostly principals and teacher representatives from the HCTA—recognition of both the importance of union member support and the resources that HCTA, with its history of professional development support and collaboration on district initiatives, could bring.

Teacher input helped refine the evaluation concept to include peer and mentor components. The peer acted as an informed and impartial observer, usually someone with experience in the teacher's content area and with an impartial view of the teacher, while the mentor was a trusted supporter to new teachers who provided expertise, insight, and pedagogical resources. Teachers reported positive relationships with their peers and mentors, and appreciation of their expertise and flexibility. One new teacher described the relationship this way: "She's helped me with planning, with pacing. I mean, just about—literally just about everything, even ridiculous questions I might have on a Sunday at 9:00 p.m." Notably, the peers and mentors were hired from within the ranks of HCPS teachers and encouraged to return to the classroom after a few years in the positions. Thus, teachers saw their colleagues engaged in the multiple measures reform. This not only gave the initiative greater legitimacy in the eyes of most experienced teachers, but it also meant teachers were deeply involved in implementing what many saw as the most important component of the evaluation.

Teachers on the Teacher Evaluation Committee also tweaked the initial Charlotte Danielson framework in several areas. Teacher input on the nomenclature for the observation rubric helped refine the naming for those scores. The lowest performance rating, “Unsatisfactory,” was changed to “Requires Action,” reflecting a desire for non-judgmental language that emphasized supporting teachers’ pedagogical growth. Of the four domains, Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities, Instruction received the most weight—40 percent (the other domains were each weighted 20 percent), reflecting an emphasis on teachers’ direct impact on student achievement. And the Instruction component focused not on a set of behaviors by a teacher, but on the whole context of student learning in the classroom

Including teachers and principals in every phase of the evaluation redesign has resulted in an evaluation that honors the realities inside classrooms, while giving teachers the feedback they need to succeed. It also helped reduce fear and skepticism toward significant and controversial change. Moreover, as members of committees that designed the new evaluation and as peers and mentors that helped implement it, more teachers had a sense of ownership for the reform. If successful, it was due to the hard work and commitment of the teachers and principals in HCPS.

Lesson 5: Communicate Clearly and Constantly Through Multiple Channels

Superintendent Elia puts it plainly: “You can never communicate enough, and you can never be over-prepared.” With a diverse group of stakeholders and an evolving project, clear, consistent, and effective communication was essential. Within the schools, the groundwork for communication was in place at the beginning of the project, courtesy of the longstanding collaboration between the district and union. Collaborative focus groups and committees solidified this working relationship and ensured that messaging about the evaluation-reform project stayed aligned. The district integrated this word-of-mouth communication channel into a sophisticated change management strategy that included emails, podcasts, e-zines, anonymous surveys, and onsite presentations.

With a strategy for messaging established, technology allowed numerous platforms for communication. The school district’s website hosted a page devoted to the multiple measures of teacher effectiveness initiative, with podcasts from the superintendent, video updates, answers to frequently asked questions, an e-zine, links to press coverage, and posts covering basic information about the changes taking place. The superintendent’s podcasts, titled “The Things You Need to Know” and available in long and short versions, laid out the changes taking place in great detail and in condensed form, respectively. Email pop-ups on the district email system delivered updates and information directly to teachers. Teachers were also able to contact Steele and his team directly with questions through a dedicated email address, greatteachers@sdhc.k12.fl.us.

In February and May 2010, HCPS conducted anonymous surveys, or “pulse checks,” to gauge teachers’ understanding of the evaluation reforms. The surveys checked teachers’ understanding of the initiative and asked their opinions on whether the initiative had been communicated to them, whether they understood it, and whether they received enough communication on the process. More than 3,600 teachers took the May survey, with 800 contributing written responses, and the results indicated a substantial uptick in teachers’ understanding of and support for the initiative. The surveys generated reliable, meaningful, and actionable feedback for district leadership, with a tangential effect of allowing surveyed teachers to engage in forward reflection on what the changes would mean for them.

As teachers returned to schools in fall 2010, communication about the EET initiative was worked into pre-service in the form of a video, narrated by teachers, that explained the new evaluation system. An initial six-hour Danielson Framework training was made available to all district

personnel, in addition to a three-hour follow-up course. Electronic copies of Danielson's "Frameworks for Teaching" were provided to all staff, with hard copies available at individual district sites. In this way, initiative awareness-building was blended into regular professional development. In addition, leadership conducted over 120 on-site, 50 community presentations, and nine teacher town-hall meetings explaining the new evaluation model and addressing questions and concerns.

For peers, mentors, and principals, rigorous training and a clear understanding of the new evaluation proved important as implementation began. Because they served as the "faces" of the EET project, their ability to understand, act upon, and communicate information about the new system was crucial. Extensive training stretched through the summer and fall; they participated in the six-hour Danielson Framework training, as well as two days of face-to-face training, learning how to script and use the rubric to make judgments about teaching and learning. They then took that training to two days of shared observation practice during summer school, and concluded with a three-day certification component during which each observer, accompanied by a trainer, completed two full cycles of pre-observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference.

Communicating through these diverse channels represented an expenditure of time and resources, but the multiple methods of delivery were critical for securing engagement, feedback, and, ultimately, support. They ensured that teachers had plenty of options and opportunities for obtaining information, getting training in the new evaluation process, as well as making their voices heard. This allowed for implementation issues to be shared horizontally through departments and vertically through the leadership system as necessary.

Lesson 6: Incorporate Learnings from Implementation Quickly

Given the size and scope of the evaluation reform project, the change process had been controversial and anxiety-producing for teachers. HCPS leaders knew challenges were going to occur, and they tried to plan accordingly. As Superintendent Elia described: "Understand, you're going to have glitches through this. You're going to have people get nervous. You're going to have all these things that are challenges." District leaders did their best to prepare for potential problems, and throughout implementation they sought to swiftly and effectively address those problems that did come up. Elia explained: "We thought through this process of change, so that we could anticipate where the problems would be, and the hot spots, and we planned for those ahead of time."

Implementing stakeholder feedback quickly demonstrated that the voices of teachers and principals were being heard. For example, teachers initially had to upload responses to pre-observation questions 72 hours before the lesson. But the long lead time sometimes meant that lesson plans changed based on the class activities of the intervening days, so the district changed the system to require pre-conference questions uploaded only within 24 hours.

Peer evaluators also faced an initial challenge using the Lawson Talent Management system to upload observation data. The system exhibited occasional unresponsiveness, sometimes even losing entered data, especially during periods of high system usage. Peers reported having to enter their data late at night to avoid system glitches. Work on the system has since alleviated the glitches, and peers report smoother uploads.

That peer evaluators were entering data late at night anyway speaks to the high workload borne by that group. Each peer had as many as 170-180 teachers on his or her caseload, and in one example, a peer had as many as 26 separate schools in which to observe teachers. Between scheduling observations for such a large group of teachers, conducting the full observation cycle—pre-

observation conference, observation, and post-observation conference—and then uploading the observation notes, the endurance of peer evaluators has been tested. Beyond scheduling and the occasional computer problem, the work can be draining, requiring constant fidelity to evaluation principles and meticulous attention to word choice when writing up evaluations and conducting conferences with teachers. It was a workload that could lead to fatigue, damaging the reliability of evaluations and, ultimately, teachers' confidence in the system. Aware of the potential for overtaxing peer evaluators, the district created additional positions in advance of next school year and began the hiring process to ease the peer evaluators' workloads.

Those new peer evaluators will experience a freshly streamlined hiring process. The initial class of peer and mentor evaluators were selected in early 2010 via an elaborate screening and interview process. Facing over 600 applications, a committee composed of a union member, principal, and district leaders screened responses to a series of essay-style application questions. Then, a larger committee interviewed candidates. While rigorous, the committees proved unwieldy, especially given the need to bring new hires on board quickly to reduce the workload of an overtaxed peer and mentor class. This year the number of committees was reduced. In addition, the district assigned permanent members to the screening committee with rotating union representation, allowing the screening and interview process to move forward more efficiently and with greater consistency.

The ability to address and resolve problems quickly was paramount in gaining buy-in from stakeholders. Effective problem-solving—resolving challenges as they arise in such a way that they do not occur again—enhanced the credibility of leadership and the new evaluation system, while giving all participants greater confidence and trust in the process and outcomes. It also ensured that problems did not become systemic and entrenched. As Superintendent Elia explained, “You can't wait until the end of the first year of implementation to respond, because there's insanity that comes up, and you have to respond right then. Because if you're allowing insanity to occur, you're insane.”

Lessons in Leading Change

Six key lessons emerged from HCPS's effort to improve student learning through multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. A strong foundation of shared board-district-union leadership enhanced stakeholder engagement and facilitated communication in the change process. By rooting the need for a new comprehensive evaluation in student learning, Elia and district leaders avoided ideological confrontations and kept discussion focused on the core work of the school district. A high-capacity executive leadership team composed of HCPS veterans put implementation in control of those with the most knowledge of the district's strengths, culture, and weaknesses. Teacher and principal involvement at every step alleviated anxiety inherent in dramatic change, and resulted in smarter decisions about the process and implementation, while also acknowledging the classroom and school context. The district's communication strategy with its multiple channels clarified the evaluation's components and provided opportunities for teachers to ask specific questions about their particular situations. Finally, acting quickly on problems that surfaced showed stakeholders that district leaders were listening and cared.

For school districts looking to follow HCPS's lead in improving teacher evaluation through multiple measures of effectiveness, the magnitude and cost of the reforms may seem unrealistic. Indeed, the start-up costs of hiring and training dedicated staff to implement the initiative were not insignificant. Yet, smaller districts with limited available resources can still learn from HCPS's experiences. Elia, Steele, and Clements recommended starting small with the most impactful components of the multiple measures reform, such as mentor evaluators. As Steele suggested: “If you, every year, for five or six years, get those first year teachers through more successfully, that's

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where you're going to have your impact in the shortest period of time." States can support this incremental approach to real reform by offering special grants and technical expertise necessary to implement a teacher evaluation based on multiple measures of effectiveness.

Ultimately, leading change in HCPS relied on the leadership of Superintendent Elia. As Steele stressed: "She creates the vision and she has the ability to bring people along with her, even on difficult things." For her part, Elia believed it was the capacity of HCPS leadership and teachers that led to success:

I have a really committed team and high-quality people across the board that share this agenda. And without that, it's very difficult. I would say that is probably the greatest strength of the district - we support each other, we support the agenda, and we do what needs to be done to get it done.

Endnotes

¹ Rubenstein, S. & McCarthy, J. (2010). *Collaborating on school reform: Creating union-management partnerships to improve public school systems*. New Jersey: Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations.

² Pat Wingert, "Give Peace a Chance," *Newsweek*, December 6, 2010. Retrieved April 2011 from <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/12/06/when-school-reformers-and-union-leaders-unite.html>

³ Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association and School Board of Hillsborough County Contract, August 4, 2005. Retrieved January 2011 from <http://www.nctq.org/contracts/8-05.pdf>.

⁴ Rubenstein, S. & McCarthy, J. (2010). *Collaborating on school reform: Creating union-management partnerships to improve public school systems*. New Jersey: Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, p. 16.