Using Teacher Evaluation Reform and Professional Development to Support Common Core Assessments

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Introduction and summary

The Common Core State Standards Initiative, in its aim to align diverse state curricula and improve educational outcomes, calls for K-12 teachers in the United States to engage all students in mathematical problem solving along with reading and writing complex text through the use of rigorous academic content. Until recently, most teacher evaluation systems in this country did not measure or promote the ability of teachers to practice in these ways.

This report discusses efforts to develop and implement Common Core standards and assessments in the 45 states and the District of Columbia that are initiative members, and outlines how past attempts to enact standards-based reform have been impeded by limitations in teacher evaluation. It also draws on the notion of "standard of care," from the field of medicine, to note that advances in our understanding of subject matter, pedagogy, how students learn, and technology call for teachers to continually acquire new knowledge and to refine their instructional practices by participating in comprehensive professional development on a regular basis.

Several new approaches to evaluating teachers hold promise for promoting the type of ongoing teacher learning and changes in instruction that would be associated with a professional standard of care in K-12 teaching. These approaches include classroom observation protocols, student surveys, value-added models, and teacher performance assessments. This report details these approaches and explains their potential to strongly support the enactment of the Common Core standards and assessments. At the same time, it also considers a number of challenges connected with implementing each of these. One challenge common to all four approaches is the need for principals to participate in professional development related to the appropriate use of each approach.

Currently, two multistate consortia are developing rigorous student assessments anchored in the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts, or ELA. In mathematics, the assessments are being designed to measure students' conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and

application and problem-solving skills. In English language arts, the assessments will measure students' ability to read and comprehend complex text across the curriculum, write effectively, and conduct and report on research, in addition to measuring their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Advocates of this approach argue that this move to Common Core standards and assessments across states and school districts is likely to lead to more rigorous, content-rich instruction and improved student achievement. Skeptics, however, question whether the Common Core reforms, and their eventual effects on teaching and learning, are likely to differ much from past efforts to enact standards-based reform and high-stakes testing policies.

In light of less-than-successful past reform efforts the question is: How are current reforms in teacher evaluation likely to affect the implementation of the Common Core standards and assessments? The medical profession and its notion of "standard of care" can be useful in considering this question. In medicine, the standard of care is a treatment guideline, be it general or specific, which defines appropriate medical treatment based on scientific evidence and collaboration between medical professionals involved in the treatment of a given condition. A key aspect of this definition of standard of care is that appropriate medical practice is based on scientific evidence.

When the notion of standard of care is applied to education and K-12 teaching, it points to the need for all teachers to regularly acquire new knowledge of content, pedagogy, learning theory, and technology by participating in comprehensive professional development with the goal of enacting appropriate and effective instructional practices that will promote student learning. In the past, however, standards-based reform and other improvement efforts faltered in part because teacher evaluation systems failed to meaningfully assess instruction or promote teacher knowledge acquisition.[1] Instead, past teacher evaluation systems tended to focus on a narrow range of teaching practices during classroom observations with virtually all teachers receiving satisfactory ratings. The upshot: teachers generally had little incentive to acquire new knowledge or refine their instructional practices.

To address these shortcomings, several new approaches to teacher evaluation focus much more on instruction, subject matter, and/or teachers' effects on student learning than did past teacher evaluation practices. Classroom observation protocols such as the Framework for Teaching and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or CLASS, which was recently explored in the CAP report "Implementing Observations Protocols: Lessons for K-12 Education from the Field of Early Childhood,"[2] represent important advances over previous observa-

tion instruments. In particular, these protocols distinguish among teachers at various levels of proficiency, provide detailed feedback to teachers, have documented reliability, and have demonstrated empirical relationships with student learning. Similarly, the Tripod Student Perception Surveys, which ask students for their views of the instruction offered by their teachers, also differentiate among teachers at various levels of performance, provide detailed feedback, have evidence of reliability, and are empirically related to student learning.

Another assessment tool, teacher value-added models, or VAMs, differ from observation protocols and student surveys in that they use student achievement data to evaluate teachers' effectiveness, but do not collect or utilize data on instruction. Compared to other innovations in teacher evaluation, value-added models face a host of unique challenges, including issues related to the stability of value-added scores over time, nonrandom assignment of students to teachers, and whether the constructs measured by student assessments are consistent, or "vertically scaled," which means they were intentionally designed around the same constructs or topics across grades.[3] At the same time, advocates maintain that value-added models can be combined with other measures, such as observation protocols and student surveys, to assess and promote effective teaching.

Then there are teacher performance assessments such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or NBPTS, assessments and the edTPA, the newest generation of Teacher Performance Assessment, which differ from the Framework for Teaching and CLASS protocols in that they are content-specific; they focus on multiple lessons from the same unit of instruction; and they feature video clips of instruction, student work samples, and written analyses by teachers of their instruction. Compared to other approaches to teacher evaluation, teacher assessments may have the greatest potential to promote the types of knowledge, including pedagogical content knowledge and instructional practices associated with the Common Core Standards. But these teacher performance assessments are also much more time- and resource-intensive than the other approaches, and districts would confront several challenges in enacting them for use in annual teacher evaluations.

In sum, each of these new approaches to teacher evaluation have the potential to foster the types of rigorous instructional practices called for by the Common Core standards and assessments, but policymakers, district and school administrators, and teachers face a number of challenges in implementing them. In light of these challenges, this report includes several recommendations for how observation protocols, student surveys, value-added models, and teacher performance assess-

ments can be implemented and successfully utilized, along with comprehensive professional development for teachers and principals needed to support the Common Core State Standards Initiative and to measure and promote rigorous instruction. In particular, in enacting these new approaches, districts should consider taking the following steps:

- Utilize school-based instructional coaches in English language and mathematics to provide ongoing professional learning opportunities to teachers related to the Common Core standards and assessments. In addition, districts can support principals' efforts to connect teachers to relevant external professional development based on classroom observation and student survey ratings.

- Ensure the validity and reliability of classroom observation protocols by implementing a standardized approach to training principals and other evaluators, and monitoring their ratings. In addition, districts can train principals to provide timely, meaningful feedback to teachers based on observational data.

- Provide training to principals to ensure that student surveys are administered in a uniform way across schools and classrooms, and work out specific procedures for administering them to young children and students with disabilities. To address teachers' resistance to the use of student surveys, districts can educate them about the value of student survey data. Further, districts can train principals to provide timely, meaningful feedback to teachers based on student survey data.

- Use multiple years of value-added model data in evaluating individual teachers. High-stakes decisions such as dismissal, career ladder promotion, or merit pay should focus only on those teachers who consistently receive bottom-quartile or top-quartile value-added model scores over multiple years.

- Combine aspects—or scaled-down versions—of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and edTPA assessments with one or more of the other approaches discussed in this report.

In order to fully answer the question of how the Common Core assessments can be used to promote rigorous classroom instruction, it is important to have some background information on the Common Core State Standards Initiative—particularly its vision of reform, including potential roles for principal leadership and for teacher professional learning in enacting this vision, which this report provides. In addition to exploring that background, this report discusses current efforts by

two multistate consortia to develop content frameworks and student assessments aligned with the Common Core Standards and considers why past efforts aimed at standards-based reform and high-stakes testing have been limited by the nature of teacher evaluation systems.

This report also introduces the notion of standard of care and explains why advances in our understanding of academic content, teaching, learning theory, and technology require teachers to regularly acquire new knowledge and revise their practices by participating in comprehensive professional development.

The approaches to teacher evaluation presented here, when combined with comprehensive professional development for teachers and school leaders and changes in the organization and capacities of school districts, have the potential to support the types of teacher knowledge acquisition and changes in instructional practices called for by the Common Core standards and assessments.

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