Assessing the Best Ways to Evaluate Elementary School Teachers

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Across the nation, the importance of education in our country is a highly discussed topic. Our children are the future leaders of the world, and most people in the U.S. believe that they deserve the best education possible. Much of our formative years are spent in classrooms, learning from our teachers. If our teachers are not held to high standards or if they are burnt out, then our students are not receiving the best education possible. Our children deserve the best teachers and curriculum so that they can do their best learning. In order for this to occur, teachers must be monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are teaching at the highest level possible.

Currently, in Michigan, teacher evaluation is a topic of much debate. "A broad array of groups—including advocates for parents, students, teachers, administrators, and school boards, as well as business and civic organizations—agree: Michigan needs a more systematic way to support improvement of teaching and learning." (Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, 2013). In the past, teachers that were burnt out or that were ineffective kept their jobs because of the systems for teacher evaluation that were in place in schools. These systems of evaluation might have simply been based on the years worked. Today, people are demanding that teachers are held accountable for each child's growth. Naturally, people want the best teachers to spend eight hours a day with their children in order for them to learn and grow. Schools today must evaluate their teachers, even if they have been teaching many years, so that the best teachers keep their jobs and the worst either improve or stop teaching. "The overarching goal [of teacher evaluation] is to support administrators and teachers, improve instruction, and increase the number of career-and college-ready students." (Michigan Department of Education, 2012).

**The Importance of Teacher Evaluation**

Assessing teachers should be a priority in school districts. When teachers are assessed, the administration can determine which teachers are effective at their jobs and which are not. Those that are ineffective should be given support to improve or eliminated from the system, so that our children are getting their education from those that are best in their field. Every teacher should be given the chance to improve. When a teacher is determined ineffective, the administration can give that teacher more support, such as professional development, to help him or her reach his or her goals. "The new educator evaluation system is grounded in improvement-focused feedback for all educators, including new and veteran teachers." (Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, 2013). In this way, teachers that are not reaching goals in student growth can be made better so that they can reach their goals. In the worst case scenario, ineffective teachers will be removed and replaced by a teacher more capable.

Assessment and evaluation does more than just determine the effective from ineffective. Even highly esteemed teachers have room to improve. "Educators at all levels of the system have room to improve, as do professionals in all lines of work." (Keesler & Howe, 2012). Assessment can give every teacher feedback about their performance, from which they can learn. If every teacher in Michigan was given feedback about their performance, then every teacher could improve one thing about their teaching style, which will increase the quality of our education system. Additionally, if this type of system occurred every year, teachers will continue to learn and grow. For teachers, assessment does not necessarily mean the difference between keeping a job and losing it. Assessment for teachers can instead mean the opportunity to learn and better one's teaching.

Teachers must also be evaluated on the classroom environment that they create. Every child should feel comfortable and safe in their classroom community. For many students, school

can be an escape if they have problems at home. For others, school is a fun place to learn and have fun. Education professionals strive to have school be a positive place for students. Every classroom should be an enjoyable place where the best teaching and learning occurs. Of course, if the classroom is not an effective learning environment, some changes need to take place to ensure that every student feels comfortable and safe. When a teacher and his or her classroom are evaluated, another professional will be able to judge whether or not the environment is effective. If for some reason children do not feel comfortable or safe, then changes can be made. In this way, every classroom will be monitored by professionals and teachers can be given feedback regarding their classroom environment. An effective environment plays a key role in a student's learning. Haim G. Ginott states, "To reach a child's mind a teacher must capture his heart. Only if a child feels right can he think right." (Ginott, 1972). A classroom that makes students feel comfortable and safe will in turn make them enjoy school and learning more.

### What are the qualities of a good teacher?

When discussing teacher assessment, the words "ineffective" and "effective" are common. It is important to note what qualities an effective teacher possesses. The most important quality that delineates an effective teacher is student growth. An effective teacher can take a classroom of twenty to thirty students and help them to grow. In one year's time, every student should learn and grow in every subject. For example, students should increase their reading level by one grade level. Additionally, their writing and math skills must show one year's growth, as well as their learning in social studies and science. By the end of the year, each student should be functioning one grade level higher in each subject to justify one year's growth. Their reading level must increase by one grade level, which can be measured by any type of reading assessment that teachers typically give. Students should also be more advanced in

problem solving, mathematics, and writing. These types of growth can be measured by comparing student work from the beginning of the school year to student work at the end of the school year. Writing pieces should be graded on the same scale in the fall and in the spring. Their scores should be much higher in the spring than in the fall. Some schools might have students take a test in the fall, and then the same test in the spring to demonstrate what they have learned throughout the school year. The most effective teachers are those that are able to create an environment where students are truly learning. In order for them to truly learn, they should enjoy themselves and feel comfortable and safe. Student growth is largely determined by assessments given to the students. At the beginning of the year, students demonstrate their skills and knowledge, and then they do the same at the end of the year. By these assessments, teachers and administrators can determine how much the student has learned during the course of one school year. Some assessments might be simply a cumulative math test. Others might be more standardized, such as the MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) or the NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association). Vanessa Keesler and Carla Howe examine the types of assessments used to determine student growth in all grades. State assessments, local common assessments, and end-of-the-course assessments were the most frequently used in early elementary, as well as in grades 2-8 and in high school. The NWEA test was also frequently used. (Keesler & Howe, 2012). These types of assessment are effective and helpful when determining student growth, however, teachers and administrators must also be able to look at specific skills that students have learned during the year. This might require looking at examples of student work, instead of looking simply at test scores.

As Dr. Ginott says, "Good teachers can really light the way for their students." (Ginott, 1972). In order for teachers to "light the way" and to achieve student growth in all subject areas,

a teacher must be engaging and enjoyable during his or her interactions with students. The teacher must be organized, prepared, and flexible. The effective teacher promotes student growth by getting his or her students to truly think and engage in topics. These qualities and skills are reflected in the teacher's actual teaching. The teacher must also establish an environment and maintain control of it through classroom management.

Finally, a teacher is a professional, not unlike any professional in any workplace. The teacher as a professional extends far beyond the walls of a classroom. Teachers should be effective communicators, with their superiors in administration, their teaching colleagues, and especially with families in the community. Promoting the exchange of ideas is important for effective communication. They must be a positive contribution on the entire school community. This includes being involved in not just the classroom during school hours, but also in extracurricular activities both outside and inside of school. The teacher as a professional is punctual and hard-working, and is also reflective to continue to improve and grow professionally. The professional teacher is required to seek out professional development. In most school districts, professional development opportunities are provided for them. In others, teachers continue their education by taking courses and furthering their education. Teachers are typically taught best practices by other professionals with more experience, or by their administrators at staff meetings and seminars. Teachers must be constantly learning and growing in order to improve their teaching practices.

**Current Laws Regarding Teacher Evaluation in Michigan**

Clearly, teacher evaluation is an important task for school districts to consider. Every district wants to have the best teachers in their classrooms. The topic of teacher evaluation

expands farther than individual school districts, however. The Michigan Department of Education is also extremely concerned with educator evaluations. In fact, in the last couple of years, new laws have been established concerning this topic. Statewide, every school district is required to evaluate their teachers throughout the year and give each teacher an effectiveness rating at the end of the school year. The Michigan Department of Education (hereafter referred to as MDE) states that under these new laws, "there are four different effectiveness ratings: highly effective, effective, minimally effective, ineffective." (Michigan Department of Education, 2012). These ratings are given to teachers annually and are locally determined, which means the rating is given to the teacher by their own district. However, because each district can have their own systems of evaluation, "there is not currently a standard, statewide definition of each rating." (Michigan Department of Education, 2012). Therefore, an effective teacher in one district might be considered highly effective in another district. Despite the lack of a standard definition, the effectiveness ratings will be used similarly in each district. "The effectiveness ratings will provide important feedback to improve school systems and instruction, set goals, select professional learning opportunities tailored to the teacher/administrator for continued growth and improvement, and to reward progress." (Michigan Department of Education, 2012). Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and everyone involved in the school community will be able to learn and benefit from these four effectiveness ratings of teachers.

Currently in Michigan, each district is required to evaluate each teacher and give him or her one of the four effectiveness ratings. However, the district has the freedom to choose their own method for evaluating teachers and administrators. In June 2011, the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (hereafter referred to as MCEE) was created as part of the teacher tenure reform efforts. The MCEE has been working on producing educator evaluation recommendations

to help the school districts implement these new laws. In July 2013, the MCEE recommended four teacher evaluation tool vendors that they believe are qualified to serve Michigan. They are: Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, The Thoughtful Classroom, The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, and Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. (Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, 2013). These four methods will be discussed further in depth.

Of course, as with any new endeavor, there will be costs for implementing an educator evaluation system. The four approved tools will cost each district to bring in to be used because they are sold by vendors. However, "the state will select and pay for one of the four approved tools that will be used to observe classroom teaching." (Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, 2013). So if the district chooses to use the state recommended evaluation tool, the state will provide the funds necessary. In addition, "the state will also provide technical support and training for one of the four observational systems… The technical support includes gathering and managing the observational data for districts that use the state's preferred system." (Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, 2013). Basically, this means that the state of Michigan will choose one of the four approved teacher evaluation tools and will pay for the expenses involved in using this tool in the school districts. School districts must also consider, though, that "any district that chooses to use one of the other three piloted observation tools must pay for any expenses above the base cost supplied by the state, including the cost of technical support, training, and data management. Additionally, schools may develop or purchase their own observation tool, but they will have to provide significant evidence that it is as rigorous as the state-approved tools." (Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, 2013). Individual school districts have the freedom to decide which method would be best suited, but the district will have to cover the costs of implementing their chosen system.

**Defining an Effective Teacher Evaluation Method**

The new laws regarding teacher evaluation give districts room to choose which method best suits their needs. The MCEE piloted four methods and suggested their use in Michigan. However, many districts might still want to use their own method or look into other options. The state law does include evaluation criteria that the school district must meet when implementing a teacher evaluation method.

"The evaluation criteria are outlined in state law (MCL 380.1249). The criteria include:

(1) Not later than September 1, 2011, and subject to subsection (9), with the involvement of teachers and school administrators, the board of a school district or intermediate school district or board of directors of a public school academy shall adopt and implement for all teachers and school administrators a rigorous, transparent, and fair performance evaluation system that does all of the following:

(a) Evaluates the teacher's or school administrator's job performance at least annually while providing timely and constructive feedback.

(b) Establishes clear approaches to measuring student growth and provides teachers and school administrators with relevant data on student growth.

(c) Evaluates a teacher's or school administrator's job performance, using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth as a significant factor. For these purposes, student growth shall be measured by national, state, or local assessments and other objective criteria. If the performance evaluation system implemented by a school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy under this section does not already include the rating of teachers as highly effective,

effective, minimally effective, and ineffective, then the school district, intermediate

school district, or public school academy shall revise the performance evaluation system

within 60 days after the effective date of the amendatory act that added this sentence to

ensure that it rates teachers as highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or

ineffective.

(d) Uses the evaluations, at a minimum, to inform decisions regarding all of the

following:

(i) The effectiveness of teachers and school administrators, ensuring that they are given

ample opportunities for improvement.

(ii) Promotion, retention, and development of teachers and school administrators,

including providing relevant coaching, instruction support, or professional development.

(iii) Whether to grant tenure or full certification, or both, to teachers and school

administrators using rigorous standards and streamlined, transparent, and fair procedures.

(iv) Removing ineffective tenured and untenured teachers and school administrators after

they have had ample opportunities to improve, and ensuring that these decisions are made

using rigorous standards and streamlined, transparent, and fair procedures." (Michigan

Department of Education, 2012)

Any method that a school district chooses to use must follow these criteria established by state

law. For teachers, their principals "hold the primary responsibility for assigning an overall

effectiveness rating for teachers; however, a principal may have assistance from many

individuals in conducting any portion of the evaluation." (Michigan Department of Education,

2012).

An effective teacher evaluation system must also take into consideration the means in which student growth is determined. "The law requires that student growth will be 25% of each evaluation beginning in 2013-2014." (Keesler & Howe, 2012). Students must be assessed at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year to establish how much they have grown from their teacher. Many times, students are also assessed in the middle of the school year as well. This is helpful mostly for teachers so that they know which areas they must focus on before the end of the school year. When it comes to types of assessments used to determine student growth, there are many patterns that most school districts follow. When it comes to elementary schools, especially in the lower grades, "there are more types of assessments available for measuring growth" and "the most popular choices are local common assessments, followed by DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and work sampling." (Keesler & Howe, 2012). The type of assessment is a choice that the district must make when considering teacher evaluation, and as long as the student assessment has the ability to show student growth, then it will be satisfactory to use in a teacher evaluation system. The evaluation system that the district does decide to use, however, must clearly show whether the children in a teacher's class have grown or not to determine the teacher's impact on the student.

Finally, an effective method of teacher evaluation must be easy to use and to understand by everyone involved. Administrators need to use this method every single year to evaluate every single teacher. Therefore, the system that is in place should be easy for them to understand and they should be able to utilize it. If a system is too complicated or time consuming, then the principal or administrator will not use it to its full potential; instead, they may try to find shortcuts as they have many other responsibilities in addition to teacher evaluation. The teachers in the school must also understand the system so they know which areas to focus on in their

classroom. They must also be clear about which teacher actions are positive and which are negative. Additionally, everyone involved in the school community should be aware of what the effectiveness ratings mean. Teachers must understand why they earned the effectiveness rating that they did. A complicated, confusing, or time-consuming teacher evaluation system is an ineffective one, and school districts must take this into consideration when choosing their own evaluation system.

## Examining Methods of Teacher Evaluation

Ten or so years ago, there was little to no teacher evaluation. In most districts in Michigan, teachers that had been working a long time had seniority over the newer teachers. This meant that it was more commonly the newer teachers that lost their jobs when there were cuts being made. Older teachers were safe in their jobs because they had earned tenure. The problem with this method is that older teachers could sometimes burn out and become ineffective, but they were not able to be fired. Older teachers could do the bare minimum to get by and meet requirements, while younger teachers with a stronger work ethic were more likely to lose their jobs. Clearly, not all older teachers proved this to be true; however, a tenure system in which this type of situation is a possibility is not an effective one.

Test scores and standardized testing are efficient methods of proving student growth throughout a school year. "It makes sense to include test scores as a component of teacher evaluations. After all, the federal No Child Left Behind law makes test scores the basis for its rating of schools, so how well teachers do in preparing students for tests is important." (Philadelphia Newspapers, LLC, 2011). Nevertheless, test scores cannot be the only method to determine whether or not a teacher is effective. Firstly, not all students are "test takers". Many

students simply struggle in a testing situation. Tests do not show every aspect of a student. Therefore, tests do not show every aspect of a teacher. Secondly, if testing is the only component in teacher evaluations, then teachers will simply teach to the test and skip all the rest. In the end, this only hurts the students because they are not taught much else aside from passing a test. The third reason against using only test scores in teacher evaluation is that with so much emphasis on standardized testing, teachers will be tempted to cheat on these tests. Around the country there have been many recent cheating scandals as well as allegations about test security breaches. Finally, tests should not be the only factor in teacher evaluation because sometimes students are not distributed evenly across classrooms in schools. "More highly qualified teachers tend to be matched with more advantaged students, both across schools and in many cases within them." (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006). Teacher-student matching means that teachers are getting credited by students that are more advantaged than other students in other classrooms; therefore they have naturally better test scores, despite the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. While test scores are easy to use to determine student growth, they cannot be the only factor in teacher evaluation.

When the laws regarding teacher evaluation changed in Michigan, the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness researched the possible methods for teacher evaluation. In several school districts, the council piloted observation tools and found them all to be effective. The programs are: Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, The Thoughtful Classroom, and 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. These observation tools are recommended by the state; therefore they are a trusted method to use. Additionally, the state will be funding the costs of implementing their chosen system. These

observation tools do not assess student growth. Tests such as the MEAP, ACT, and NWEA will assess student growth.

Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching consists of four domains. Within the four domains are 22 components as well as 76 smaller elements, all of which assess a different aspect of teaching. These components all elements are all displayed as levels of teaching performance, which is basically a rubric for teachers. This rubric is used by principals to assess their teachers in each domain and component. The elements describe each component and provide a sort of map for improving teachers. Yet, the Framework is not only a rubric that is used by principals. "The Framework may be used for many purposes, but its full value is realized as the foundation for professional conversations among practitioners as they seek to enhance their skill in the complex task of teaching. The Framework may be used as the foundation of a school or district's mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation process, thus linking all those activities together and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners." (The Danielson Group, 2011). Teachers can clearly see which elements they have mastered and which they still need to improve. The Framework is a great tool to encourage communication between administration and teachers about expectations. At the end of the year, the principal can have a conversation with the teacher about their scores in all the areas. In this way, teachers can clearly understand their effectiveness ratings because they are given specific comments about their performance in each component. The domains helpfully divide teaching into the following four categories: planning and preparation, classroom environment, professional responsibilities, and instruction. (The Danielson Group, 2011). The components of each domain address specific teaching activities. These components are also labeled by their domain, to make it easier to understand which domain each component falls under in the final comments made by the

principal. In domain one, which is planning and preparations, some components include demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy as well as of students and resources, and designing coherent instruction and student assessments. Domain two, which is classroom environment, includes creating an environment of respect and rapport and managing classroom procedures and behaviors. The third domain of instruction includes communicating with students, using questioning and discussion techniques, and engaging with students. The final domain is professional responsibilities and includes reflecting on teaching, maintaining accurate records, and communicating with families. (The Danielson Group, 2011). All 22 components address a specific teaching skill and provide a roadmap for teachers to follow in order to be effective. The Framework is very extensive and detailed, so it would be very time consuming for administrators to assess every teacher in their building. Principals must also be very attentive to their teachers to give them an assessment rating in every component. Additionally, principals must factor in the test scores to determine student growth when using the Framework. Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching would take a lot of time and energy to use, but it might be worth it because of the quality feedback provided for teachers.

The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning is similar to Charlotte Danielson's Framework for teaching. Both methods have criteria that the principal follows in a rubric form to evaluate the teachers. The Framework has four domains of criteria, whereas, as evidenced by its name, the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning has five dimensions of criteria. The five dimensions are: purpose, student engagement, curriculum and pedagogy, assessment for student learning, and classroom environment and culture. Their Five Dimensions intend to support classroom practice as well as assess teachers. The main difference between this instructional framework and other instructional frameworks, such as Charlotte Danielson's, is that 5D

provides professional development for all teachers. In addition, "5D is accompanied by a sophisticated online assessment that measures a leader's capacity to analyze quality teaching and learning." (University of Washington, 2013). The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning focuses a lot of training on the administrators that are in charge of evaluating the teachers. In this framework, the principals are trained more in depth so that they can guide and support the professional growth of teachers. They are taught how to determine what good teaching is, how to provide effective feedback to teachers, and how to support the professional learning needs of staff. The training for instructional leadership for administrators is broken up into three stages. If implemented in a school, the first two stages would be a professional development day. On these days, staff from the Center for Educational Leadership will give an overview of the teacher evaluation in one day. Stage I training is also available online. Stage II will take five days, all of which will consist of dimension-specific training. Both principals and teachers are expected to take this training, however, principals in charge of evaluations must take the four day rater reliability training in addition to Stages I and II. (University of Washington, 2013). This training is extremely extensive but it does provide a common language for all school staff to use. The five dimensions clearly cover all aspects of teaching, just as Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. In the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, principals are given much more extensive training in order to evaluate their teachers in a similar manner to the Framework. The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning will cost both teachers and administrators a lot of time, but they will be very knowledgeable and they will be experts on the core elements of teaching.

The Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework is another instructional framework similar to both Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching and the Five

Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. In all methods, teachersare observed and evaluated by

their principals using a rubric with specific key elements of teaching. In the Thoughtful

Classroom, the framework is organized in chart with ten dimensions. The ten dimensions are

then organized into three components: the Four Cornerstones of Effective Teaching, the Five

Episodes of Effective Instruction, and Effective Professional Practice: Looking beyond the

Classroom. (Silver Strong and Associates, 2007-2013). These components organize the chart so

that when you read it, you can read each dimension separately but see how they each fit together.

The four cornerstones are the four corners of the chart. "These cornerstones represent the

universal elements of quality instruction, whether in a kindergarten class, AP Physics lab, or

anywhere in between." (Silver Strong and Associates, 2007-2013). The four cornerstones are:

organization, rules, and procedures, positive relationships, engagement and enjoyment, and a

culture of thinking and learning. The five episodes are the remaining cross of the chart. The five

episodes are: preparing students for new learning, presenting new learning, deepening and

reinforcing learning, applying learning, and reflecting on and celebrating learning. "Teachers use

these episodes to design high-quality lessons and units." (Silver Strong and Associates, 2007-

2013). The last dimension stands apart from the rest since it is looking beyond the classroom.

"This dimension addresses important non-instructional responsibilities, including the teacher's

commitment to ongoing learning, professionalism, and the school community." (Silver Strong

and Associates, 2007-2013). Each of the dimensions "outlines a set of observable teaching

indicators and relevant student behaviors associated with effective instruction", "includes a four-

point rubric for conducting summative evaluations", "provides a simple feedback protocol to

help administrators", and is "guided by an 'Essential Question' to help focus classroom

observation." (Silver Strong and Associates, 2007-2013). In The Thoughtful Classroom, all ten

dimensions are organized in a way that both teachers and administrators can clearly understand. In addition, they are also provided with tools in each dimension to help both teachers and administrators. The observations are also guided by an essential question to help focus the observation, which may be especially helpful for principals with many teachers to observe. Like the other frameworks, implementing the Thoughtful Classroom will take a lot of time and effort. Teachers will have to be better prepared and be willing to spend the time required to improve. Administrators must also take time to observe their teachers and analyze their practices using the dimensions. However, The Thoughtful Classroom will certainly help create a common language in a more simple way than other framework options.

The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model consists of four domains, similar to Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. The nonnegotiable goal for instruction in the Marzano Model is student achievement. The four domains are organized in a casual chain in which each domain builds on the previous one. "The four domains of the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model contain 60 elements and build on each other to support teacher growth, development, and performance." (Learning Sciences International, 2013). The first domain is classroom strategies and behaviors. Within this domain, there are routine segments, content segments, and on the spot segments. Together, this domain has 41 elements, which is the majority of all the elements in the Marzano Model. "Unlike other evaluation models, the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model shines the spotlight on Domain 1: Classroom Strategies and Behaviors, which contains not only the largest number of elements but also those that have been shown in casual studies to have the most direct effect on student performance." (Learning Sciences International, 2013). Domain 2 is planning and preparing. This domain contains 8 elements organized into lesson and units, use of materials and technology, and special needs of students. Domain 3 is reflecting on teaching. In

this domain there are three elements in the evaluating personal performance category and two elements in the professional growth plan category. The fourth and final domain is collegiality and professionalism. Promoting a positive environment, promoting exchange of ideas, and promoting district and school development account for six elements all together in the fourth domain. Together, all 60 elements define a knowledge base for teaching. In the Marzano Model, it is recommended to implement a weighting system for the ways to collect data regarding the four domains. This framework provides a calculation system where administrators draw on multiple data sources to construct teachers' final evaluation scores. These data sources include: reflection and collaboration, value-added student data, student surveys, walkthroughs/observations, other data sources, and professional growth plans. (Learning Sciences International, 2013). Whereas other frameworks collect data through observations and assessments for student growth, the Marzano Methods recommends the use of multiple date sources. As with the other frameworks, implementing this model will take time and energy but will provide meaningful data on teacher effectiveness and will promote a language for communicating about teaching.

While school districts in Michigan might choose to use one of the frameworks that were piloted by the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, they are not restricted to these four options. Any school district can choose their own method to use to evaluate teachers, as long as it follows the standards set by the state. A district may choose this option if they have already developed their own system for teacher evaluation. They might also choose this option if they want to evaluate the teachers' current methods of teaching and then work from there. The framework methods might not be the best fit in certain districts, so they may choose a method that might better fit their needs. Some methods also put teachers in charge of their assessment

more than the principals that assess them. Not every district is the same; therefore not every district must use the same evaluation methods.

In previously discussed methods for teacher assessment, teachers did not have a say in their own effectiveness rating. If districts used a method that involved more authentic assessments, then teachers would be in charge of presenting information to be assessed. Authentic assessment might include portfolios, cases, or exhibitions of performance. Teachers are therefore in charge of gathering information and presenting it to be evaluated. By using authentic assessment, "staff thus become part of the evaluation process and focus their attention on how their work has changed." (Perkins & Gelfer, 1993). When teachers are involved in their own evaluations, they can see how they have grown and changed throughout the year, which will help them to learn and grow in the future. Additionally, authentic assessment displays teaching as it really is from day to day. "Teaching that responds to human diversity and aims for cognitive flexibility requires a wide range of teaching strategies that are activated by sophisticated judgments grounded in disciplined experimentation, insightful interpretation of (often ambiguous) events, and continuous reflection. This kind of teaching aims to diagnose and make use of variability, rather than implement uniform techniques or routines." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Teaching cannot be summed up in a series of techniques. Teachers must adapt to their ever changing classroom. Authentic assessment can better account for these adaptations that teachers make. "In the case of cases and portfolios that require teachers to examine student learning in relation to their teaching, for example, teachers claim that the process of engaging in such analysis ultimately enriches their ability to understand the effects of their actions and helps them better meet the needs of diverse students." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). By examining their own teaching, teachers can pinpoint the actions that help meet the changing

needs of their students. Authentic assessments sample the actual knowledge and skills that teachers need in context.

A popular method of authentic teacher assessments is teacher portfolios. Teachers create their own portfolios and select artifacts to provide evidence of their thinking, learning, and performance. This process forces teachers to take a deeper look at their performance and reflect upon the things that are working and the things that are not working in their classroom. "The teacher portfolio can be an expandable file that includes samples of an individual faculty member's work, documenting his or her performance and professional growth over a period of time." (Perkins & Gelfer, 1993). A teacher portfolio is a type of evaluation that is a constant, ongoing process. The teacher should not simply save a few of their favorite lessons and put them together at the end of the year. "Each staff member should select samples of daily work experiences to put in the portfolio. The contents may include observations made by principal and faculty, written lesson plans, written progress reports, and slides and samples of bulletin boards and innovative projects. There might be samples of written communications distributed to parents, records of parent-teacher conferences, letters of appreciation from parents, or teacher performance checklists filled out by the principal. The portfolio might even include tape recordings and videos of lessons or special events during the school day." (Perkins & Gelfer, 1993). Additionally, "they can also include documents that require additional analysis on the part of the teacher, such as teacher logs or journals, detailed descriptions or analyses of lessons or student work, and reflection on the outcomes of teaching activities." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). By the end of the year, the portfolio should be a representation of all aspects of teaching. During the school year, administration and staff should discuss what elements should be included in the portfolio. In that way, teachers can accomplish a checklist of these

competencies. "Using portfolios to help measure teacher growth and development may build confidence, commitment, and enthusiasm among the faculty." (Perkins & Gelfer, 1993). Plus, "as an assessment tool, they can provide a comprehensive look at how the various aspects of a teacher's practice – planning, instruction, assessment, curriculum design, and communications with peers and parents – come together." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Portfolios serve as both an assessment tool for administrators and as a learning tool for teachers. Administration has the ability to evaluate teachers at any time during the year by taking a look at their portfolio. Teachers also have the ability to reflect on their teaching and their students' learning by looking at their portfolio at any time during the year. Like most evaluation tools, portfolios take a lot of time and effort to implement into a school. Teachers must be invested and committed to this project so that they will do their best work. However, teachers must recreate their portfolio every year, so the process might quickly become tedious. A portfolio created by the teacher is a reflection of the best things that are happening in a classroom. Therefore, this type of assessment might not necessarily be a reflection of the daily classroom. A portfolio assessment might not be enough to evaluate teachers all on its own, but it is an effective tool for teachers to learn and grow.

Another type of authentic assessment would be the creation and evaluation of cases. Cases can be developed from any number of perspectives. Some examples would be a case analysis of curriculum or a case study of a child. "Cases add context to theory." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Creating cases and analyzing them develop and assess teachers' abilities as decision makers in the real world. When doing a case, teachers must conduct and write them on their own. "The writing of the case helps the writer learn to move between levels of abstraction: to understand the relationship between concrete details and larger principles or

issues." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Writing out a case helps teachers make the connection between what they are doing in the real world and what they have learned to do in theory. Teachers could write a case analysis of curriculum. In this situation, teachers would "write a case about a teaching event in which they have encountered difficulty achieving one of their curricular goals with their students." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). This case could be reviewed by teaching colleagues or by the principal. The reviewers could then pose questions, raise issues and make suggestions that may shed light on the teaching situation under study. In this way, the teacher will think more deeply about the experience and find solutions for the dilemma in question. Another approach is the development of a case in which the teacher is not the main subject. Teachers could write a case about a particular student or even an entire classroom. "Collecting and analyzing data for the case study – from observations, interviews, records, and analyses of student work – helps teacher develop their skills of observation and documentation and their ability to analyze how children learn and how specific children can be supported in the process of development." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Writing case studies would be extremely beneficial for teachers because it would help them to reflect and find solutions to problems they may have. A principal might read these case studies to evaluate a teacher's ability to apply theoretical knowledge to concrete examples in real life. Cases would be an excellent tool for evaluating teachers and helping them to grow, but they do not assess every aspect of teaching as an effective assessment method should.

Another way to use authentic assessment in schools would be using exhibitions of performance. Exhibitions of performance are a window into the daily classroom environment. "Exhibitions allow teachers to demonstrate particular abilities in ways that include or closely simulate teaching contexts or events. Exhibitions can draw upon tools such as observations or

videotapes of teaching, artifacts like teaching plans, or even group activities that simulate what teachers do when solving problems of practice with colleagues." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Using exhibitions of performance to assess teachers is like giving teachers an annual performance assessment. One recommendation made by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher education is that "teacher evaluation efforts should incorporate measures of assessment including impact on student learning, classroom observations, peer reviews, and school-wide progress on meeting key indicators of success." (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2011). Using exhibitions of performance to evaluate teachers is an authentic way of measuring key indicators of success. Exhibitions would also cause teachers to reflect on their teaching and be more open to suggestions. However, "as with other strategies, these benefits are not automatic. They depend on choosing tasks that represent important skills and abilities and on integrating such assessments into a well-developed set of learning experiences." (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Teachers must understand the qualities of good teaching and they must be committed to the process of learning and growing through teacher evaluations. As with all authentic assessments, exhibitions will take a lot of time and energy to implement in a district. Additionally, these methods require administration to be experts without any formal training. Exhibitions should have to be used in conjunction with other types of authentic assessment, which would be hard to implement into a school, but very rewarding and beneficial if it could be done.

In some of the frameworks for teacher evaluation that were already described, it is the principal's job to rate the teachers based on a rubric that follows the framework's characteristics. Some scholars suggest that principals should rate teachers on their own system to evaluate them each year. In this type of system, principals would rate their staff based on their own scale.

Principals are in fact very good at assessing teachers and determining their highest and lowest teachers. "Principals in a western school district did a good job of assessing teachers' effectiveness. In fact, principals are quite good at identifying those teachers who product the largest and smallest standardized achievement gains in their schools (the top and bottom 10-20 percent)." (Jacob & Lefgren, 2006). Principals could use their own system to assess their teachers on a scale of one to ten. They could choose specific teacher characteristics that they find important, such as dedication and work ethic, classroom management, parent satisfaction, positive relationship with administrators, and ability to improve math and reading achievement. In this way, the school community is more involved in the teacher evaluation process because a principal can look at a parent's satisfaction with a teacher. The principal can weigh some characteristics more heavily than others when determining an overall effectiveness score. "Ability, collegiality, and student satisfaction all contribute independently to a principal's overall evaluation of a teacher, but principals weigh the set of questions measuring teachers' ability to improve student achievement and to manage a classroom most heavily." (Jacob & Lefgren, 2006). Principals must be familiar with the state evaluation criteria, but from there, they could consider characteristics that are important in his or her school community. Principals "may be able to ensure that teachers increase student achievement through improvements in pedagogy, classroom management, or curriculum rather than teaching to the test. Principals can also evaluate teachers on the basis of a broader spectrum of educational outputs in addition to test scores that parents may value. At the same time, the inability of principals to distinguish between a broad middle range of teacher quality suggests caution in relying on principals for fine-grained performance determinations, as might be required under certain merit-pay policies." (Jacob & Lefgren, 2006). Principal evaluations might be easier to implement in a school district, however,

principals have a hard time distinguishing between the middle range of teacher quality. This system might be best used only to determine the ineffective teachers for remediation.

Another possible method for assessing teachers would  be for them to assess themselves. Self-assessment should be used by teachers almost every day when they are reflecting about their lessons. A more formal type of self-assessment could be used as a way for principals to monitor teachers while also facilitating professional growth. Teachers could self-assess by videotaping themselves and watching it later. In this way, they are observing their own lessons and can see the things that they might want to improve on. This could be done on their own time or even with their principal so that they could watch the lesson and talk about it together. Additionally, "self-assessment, an individual enterprise, can be informed by colleagues. Peer input can influence the first self-assessment process (self-observation) by directing teacher attention to particular dimensions of practice. Peer feedback might influence teacher judgments about the degree of their goal attainment." (Ross & Bruce, 2007). A colleague could provide their own input and feedback about a lesson or activity, and the teacher can use that to assess their own teaching. Self-assessment can facilitate professional growth because "self-assessments contribute to teachers' beliefs about their ability to bring about student learning; i.e., teacher efficacy, a form of professional self-efficacy." (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Assessing and reflecting on one's own lessons can truly show the teacher their self-efficacy. "Teacher efficacy influences goal setting and effort expenditure. Teachers who anticipate that they will be successful set higher goals for themselves and their students." (Ross & Bruce, 2007). A teacher who self-assesses will be more self-aware and will set higher goals for themselves. This method is a great tool that could be used in any evaluation system in the school district. Self-assessing is usually done informally every day. Principals could require teachers to formally self-assess as often as they would like.

However, self-assessment on its own is insufficient in providing enough data to give teachers an effectiveness rating.

## Comparing Effective Teacher Evaluation Methods

There are many different ways to evaluate elementary school teachers. Each method has its own benefits and setbacks. The best method for one district may not work in another district; therefore, each school district must make their own decision. Yet, the method that they choose must follow the evaluation criteria that were set forth in a new law by the state. In addition, whichever method that a district chooses must include a way to determine student growth. Most school districts will decide upon a standardized test and accommodate the scores into the method that they have chosen. The decision must be made by the school districts; however, some methods stand out above the rest as being most effective for evaluating teachers.

The methods that were piloted and recommended by the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness meet the state's evaluation criteria. Each method measures the teacher's job performance annually. Principals can also incorporate student growth into these frameworks. The frameworks can be used by principals to inform decisions regarding ample opportunities for improvement, promotion, retention, support, professional development, tenure, and removing ineffective teachers after they have had ample opportunities to improve. A big factor that promotes the use of these frameworks is that they have been approved for use by the state and that the state is funding their implementation into the school districts. However, not all of the four methods are exactly the same. The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning requires a lot of training, both by principals and teachers, in order to implement. While this might be beneficial in the long run, it is very difficult and time consuming to do in the beginning of the school year.

Plus, each new hire teacher must also be trained before they start teaching. Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching has a long rubric that principals must use for every teacher every year. The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model takes other forms of data collection into account, instead of principal observations alone, but requires a lot of time to implement and calculate scores using a weighting method. The Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework also includes a rubric that must be completed every year, but it is organized in a way that is visually appealing and that makes sense. Observations are also guided for principals to help them focus on what is important. Each of these methods requires principals to measure student growth separately and incorporate the data as a significant factor in the effectiveness ratings. Each method will also require time and energy to implement. While there are pros and cons to every evaluation method, overall, these frameworks seem to be easy to implement into a school while meeting the evaluation criteria set forth by the state.

The frameworks are not the only way to evaluate elementary school teachers. Districts could also implement a system that focuses on authentic assessment, such as portfolios, cases, or exhibitions of performance. Authentic assessment gives principals a bigger window into the daily life in the classroom. Also, teachers have more of a say in their own evaluations. However, authentic assessment is extremely time-consuming on the part of both the teachers and principal. Authentic assessment must also be redone annually, which might make teachers less motivated to do well. School districts might also choose to rely solely on the principal to evaluate each teacher. Using principal evaluations alone would be quick and easy to implement into a school and easy to use annually. This method would be a great way for principals determine ineffective teachers for remediation; however, principals have been proven to have a hard time distinguishing between the broad middle range of teachers. Self-assessment is a great tool that

could be used in any school district as a part of their evaluation method, yet, self-assessment alone is insufficient in providing enough data to give teachers an effectiveness rating. These other types of methods should be used by principals in schools to help teachers improve professionally. Each method has its own benefits for encouraging teacher growth. But on their own, authentic assessment, principal evaluations, and self-assessment are not enough to provide an effectiveness rating for each teacher annually.

In the end, the school districts in Michigan can only choose one method to provide teachers with an effectiveness rating. Each district will choose a method based on how well it meets the evaluation criteria and how easy it is to use and implement in their schools. The best choice for Michigan schools would be one of the frameworks that were piloted and recommended by the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness. From those frameworks, the easiest to use and implement for many would be The Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework. This framework is easy to understand by every person involved. The criteria are displayed and organized in a way that makes sense, without being too overwhelming. While most of the frameworks require principal observations, the Thoughtful Classroom gives the principals an essential question to help focus the observation. The Thoughtful Classroom will take a lot of time and effort to implement, but it will give teachers and principals a way to talk about teaching.

In conclusion, teacher evaluation is a necessary but daunting task for Michigan schools. Evaluating teachers is important in ensuring that our students are learning and growing each year from their teachers, while also being in a safe and effective learning environment. Teachers can learn and grow from evaluations as well. In this way, they can become better every year, which will help students become better as well. Ineffective teachers will be eliminated through

evaluations, making room for more effective teachers. Michigan is implementing a new law that requires that teachers be evaluated. Under Michigan laws, teacher evaluations must take into account data on student growth as a significant factor every single year, while also informing decisions regarding opportunities for teacher improvement, promotion, retention, support, professional development, tenure, and removing ineffective teachers after they have has ample opportunities to improve. School districts must implement a method for evaluating teachers, and there are many from which to choose. The Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness recommended using either: Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, the Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, The Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework, or the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model. Districts are not limited to these frameworks. They could instead choose to use authentic assessment, such as portfolios, cases, or exhibitions of performance, principal evaluations, or teacher self-assessment. In considering all evaluation criteria as well as ease of use, the best method seems to be the Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework. Yet, this framework might not be the best option for all districts. Each district must take all factors into account before choosing a method. In using these methods, school districts will ensure that their teachers are the best they can be. Every parent can rest easier knowing that their children's teachers are the absolute best people to teach their children.

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