



NEXT STEPS FOR EDUCATION REFORM: PROMOTING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING THROUGH RENEWED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Washington educators and leaders are instituting important reforms passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Gregoire. While the faltering economy continues to pose challenges, progress continues. Educators are creating a meaningful evaluation system to develop distinguished teachers and accomplished learners. Educators, too, are helping more students acquire skills to begin working on their career dreams now, not having students wait until after they leave high school. Washington's commitment to students has never been as urgent or important as it is today.



The following recommendations are based on the premise that student learning and educational attainment are boosted by great teaching. They represent the hard work being done by pilot evaluation districts, and demonstrate our ability to make changes when needed. Through this process, we assure parents, the public, the business community and policy makers that real progress has been made.

In addition to great teaching, thoughtful coordination and better student transitions also contribute positively to student learning. Indeed, the action steps outlined below will position Washington for the competitive world our people and businesses work in by instituting meaningful reforms that promote student learning and achievement.

TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATION

The items below describe current practice and provisions that will be effective in the 2013–14 school year:

Today, teachers and principals receive an overall evaluation of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory.

- » Teachers and principals will receive a rating for each of the eight evaluation performance criteria as well as an overall evaluation summary rating. Four performance ratings are used: Level 1 – Unsatisfactory, Level 2 – Basic, Level 3 – Proficient, Level 4 – Distinguished.

Today, principals-in-training and administrators-in-training are not required to practice conducting and completing a full evaluation process, which will be key on-the-job responsibilities.

- » Principals-in-training and administrators-in-training will be required to practice conducting evaluations using the new evaluation system criteria, ratings and management tools in their preparation programs.

Today, educators are committed to implementing new, research-based, meaningful evaluation systems, but have not been prepared to effectively do so.

- » Principals and school administrators will participate in a robust set of training experiences that will provide them the knowledge and hands-on practice required to effectively evaluate teachers and principals.
- » Professional development work will include group activities and use of web-based information and exercises, as well as access to individual problem-solving support.

Today, no resources are specifically assigned to implement the new evaluation system statewide.

- » Resources will be provided for implementing professional development for the new evaluation system as its success depends upon the caliber of the evaluations conducted.

Today, teachers who earn a Satisfactory evaluation rating may not undergo a full evaluation for many years.

- » Teachers with ratings of Proficient and Distinguished (the top ratings in the new system) will be fully evaluated every three years. Teachers with these ratings in the intervening years will engage in professional development related to one of the eight evaluation criteria.

Today, no specific descriptions of instructional practice or leadership practice define performance.

- » School districts will adopt an instructional framework providing specific practices for each of the four evaluation levels for teachers and principals. These will also be integrated in professional development work.



Today, teachers and principals are placed on probation if they receive an Unsatisfactory evaluation.

- » Teachers and principals will be placed on probation if they: 1) receive an Unsatisfactory overall rating, or 2) receive a Basic rating for two consecutive years, or for two years in a three-year period, and have more than five years of experience.

Today, there is no maximum probationary period for teachers.

- » Teachers and principals must complete a probationary period within the school year of the evaluation.

Today, a procedural error may be used to invalidate the entire probation process and information about the teacher's or principal's performance.

- » A procedural error by a teacher, principal or evaluator, such as missing a deadline, must materially affect the evaluation outcome to stop the clock.

Today, when a teacher is being investigated for allegations of misconduct, he or she is assigned to home until the investigation is complete. This has resulted in employees drawing pay for extended periods while no work is performed.

- » When an investigation is being conducted that requires an education employee to be assigned to home, the initial home assignment will be for 15 days. Periodic investigation updates will be required to extend the home assignment. This will ensure that home assignments are used appropriately and judiciously.

TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL ASSIGNMENT

By July 1, 2012, school districts will be required to adopt updated policies for making staffing decisions. This includes assignments for newly created positions, combined positions, transfers, vacancies, reduction-in-force layoffs and call backs. At a minimum, these policies require consideration of the following variables: certification credentials, evaluation ratings, expertise and seniority. In this manner, we will identify the best candidates for the job. School districts, principals and teachers must work together on this issue.

OFFICE OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

An Office of Student Achievement is created on July 1, 2012, to focus on the goal of increasing the educational attainment of Washingtonians by emphasizing issues affecting the preparation for, and success in, postsecondary training and education. Improved transitions between high school and postsecondary education and training will help more students graduate from high school ready for careers or college. It will also reduce the need for, and expense of, remediation. Better transitions between two- and four-year institutions will help more students complete their college education and graduate on time.

The office will design a strategic plan for achieving the goal as well as provide a central place for research and development of best practices and student financial aid. Its work will be guided by appointed citizens and leaders of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Workforce Education and Training Coordinating Board and the presidents of the four-year institutions of higher education.

PRIORITIZING TIME FOR STUDENT LEARNING

By taking the following actions, we will free up valuable time and resources that can more effectively be spent on student learning:



Eliminate the requirement for individual learning plans for students in the Learning Assistance Program

The Learning Assistance Program delivers additional academic support to students who are achieving below grade level on the state's assessment. As individual schools have a program plan, and instructional delivery involves recurring assessment and instruction cycles throughout the school year, requiring that individual students have one plan a year does not reflect high-quality instructional practice.

Dropping the requirement for a plan for individual students will free up time that can be more effectively used on classroom instruction.

Allow exemptions to the culminating project high school graduation requirement

The completion of a culminating — or senior — project is one of several requirements for graduation from high school. Each school district is charged with setting its own guidelines for the culminating project, which is intended to encourage students to think analytically, logically and creatively, and to integrate experience and knowledge to solve problems.

Allowing students to meet the culminating project requirement through one of these options gives them the experience intended by the culminating project requirement and prepares them for their paths after high school, whether that's a job, career training or college:

- » Running Start, in which students pursue both a high school diploma and an associate of arts degree concurrently;
- » Navigation 101, a life skills and planning program for students in grades 6 through 12 to help them develop a post-graduation plan;
- » AVID, which targets students who need an extra nudge to be successful, can begin as early as 4th grade and continues through the 12th grade;
- » Career and technical education certificate program completion. These courses are offered in the high school or local skills center in such fields as automotive technology, nursing and computer software.
- » College preparatory program completion, including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate.

CHANGE SCHEDULE OF DISTRICT AUDITS

Today, annual comprehensive school district audits require significant time. By shifting to an audit every three years for many educational programs, valuable time and resources would be freed up for those school districts that have had a “clean” audit. A school district with a poor audit outcome would still be required to have an annual audit.

CREATE UNIVERSITY LABORATORY SCHOOLS

Washington's colleges and universities prepare teachers and leaders for our schools. They also house the seeds of innovation and research of best practices. While improvements are occurring in our schools, many educators, students and parents are frustrated that too many students still are not meeting state academic standards and are not ready for career or college. The Governor proposes the following actions to nurture innovation and excellence to help students succeed:

- » Create six, university-led laboratory schools among the schools in the bottom 5 percent of persistently low-achieving schools.
- » Give the laboratory schools the same authority and flexibility to implement innovations as MERIT schools (schools now receiving federal improvement grant funds).

Through these actions, Governor Gregoire — with the support of the education community, families, businesses and the public — will ensure that our students will receive the top-notch teaching they need to become successful adults, and education professionals receive the training and support they need to help them at every step of that fulfilling journey.