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Teacher Evaluation During the COVID-19 Pandemic October 2020

MSAA Position

While we appreciate that DESE understands the evaluation process “may look and feel different this year,” and we agree that the “Resources for Educator Evaluation Implementation in 2020-21” are a good start, the Education Policies Committee of the Massachusetts School Administrators Association strongly supports that more recommendations and guidance be provided to evaluators in the Commonwealth. This will further the Department’s goal “to help focus and streamline the experience of evaluation in order to ensure that all educators are supported, receiving high-quality feedback, and recognized for their efforts this year.” We recommend:

- Teachers with Non Professional Teacher Status be evaluated using the process determined at the local level that meets the regulations under 603 CMR 35.00.
- Administrators within their first three years of employment be evaluated using the process determined at the local level that meets the regulations.
- Teachers with Professional Status earning a Proficient or Exemplary rating in the Spring of 2019 be released from the regulations for the 2020-2021 school year only. Feedback, support and recognition should continue to be given.
- Administrators with more than three years of experience earning a Proficient or Exemplary rating in the Spring of 2019 be released from the regulations for the 2020-2021 school year only. Feedback, support and recognition should continue to be given.
- Provide guidance to districts on how to streamline evidence collection with a less is more approach. The MA Model System for Educator Evaluation: Overview 2019 states, “In evidence collection, quality supersedes quantity.” In many districts in the Commonwealth, this is not the lived experience for many educators.

History

Massachusetts General Law 603 CMR 35.00 outlines a robust process for teacher and administrator evaluation. As stated by DESE, "The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework, adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2011, is designed to promote student learning, growth, and achievement by providing educators with feedback for improvement, enhanced opportunities for professional growth, and clear structures for accountability."

Rationale

Instructional Time: We would all agree that direct instructional time between educators and students is significantly valuable and important to the overall academic and socioemotional growth of our students. The current pandemic has already caused a significant loss to instructional time. Due to COVID-19 educators are struggling to balance the already rising demands of what used to be their typical day-to-day teaching responsibilities with the addition of safety protocols, supporting the increase in socioemotional distress of students, and the significant added time in the redesigning of curriculum content, instructional design and assessment measures to meet the needs of in person, remote or hybrid instruction. They are doing this while managing their own stressors of living through a pandemic and the impacts that has on their personal lives.

We support the work our educators are doing and strongly believe that their planning time should be devoted to creating high quality learning experiences for the children in the Commonwealth. These high-quality learning experiences will support new learning as well as support reducing the academic gaps caused by the significant loss of instructional time experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning, designing, intervention, and safety are the areas where educators' time should be spent; not fulfilling teacher evaluation responsibilities.

Under these conditions, DESE should ask teachers to dedicate time toward supporting students and families, rather than fulfilling the educator evaluation requirements as we have prior to the pandemic. It is not feasible and it puts the academic, health and safety of students and staff at risk.

Administrator Capacity: Currently, the majority of a Massachusetts administrator's day is spent managing COVID-19 safety and adapting to the numerous barriers that multidimensional learning from in-person, remote, and/or hybrid platforms bring. Under these conditions DESE cannot ask administrators to dedicate the amount of resources towards educator evaluation as we did prior to the pandemic. It is simply not feasible and is unrealistic to have administrators be able to provide the quantity and quality of observations and feedback that support a robust educator evaluation system.

Additional challenges reduce the ability to maintain an effective educator evaluation system such as a schools' method of instructional design due to COVID. Districts, even individual schools within districts vary substantially in how they are able to cope with their instructional practice delivery. While our current evaluation system was based on seeing educators in their classrooms, reviewing their carefully designed instruction practices and monitoring the growth of their students through consistent assessment and practices; COVID has altered what we used to fundamentally consider as education. Educators are now learning multiple virtual platforms and applications, as well as multiple methods of instructional technology to adapt to the needs of the curriculum and to their students. What used to take weeks or even years of professional development training to shift a focus is now being done "on the fly" in a matter of days. We are seeing administrators and

educators redesigning education with limited resources, delays in training, and shortages of technology. Even through these limitations schools continue to reach students to support.

The educator evaluation system was never designed to evaluate in these times of significant educational distress and upheaval. Using the same system to evaluate in these times does not provide for accurate or effective educator growth, but can provide inaccurate and negative implications toward future growth. With the significant added responsibilities and maintaining the current evaluation process, educators and administrators would be more focused on completion of a requirement instead of maximizing the quality of the process.

Administrator Safety: The Governor and the Department have repeatedly stated that their goal is for the health and safety of students, families, and staff. To this end, DESE challenged and required districts to complete feasibility studies based on stringent safety requirements that included spacing and isolation of movement when possible with the goal of all students to return to in person learning when it is safe. DESE must provide guidance to administrators as to how they can perform in class observations while maintaining the safety of their students, their staff, and themselves. DESE's guidance for opening schools recommended several mitigation factors to limit the spread of the virus in schools. Wearing a mask, frequently washing hands, maintaining social distancing we agree are mandatory. Asking evaluators to visit classrooms of their evaluatees several times a school year is not a mitigation measure that keeps in mind the safety of our Administrators or educators.

In many districts, participating in the in-person model, the number of adults who are allowed to be exposed to a class is severely limited to protect the health and safety of students and staff. Additionally, the amount of time "visitors" are allowed to remain in the classroom is also limited. These actions are also being done to limit the number of people who may need to quarantine in the event a class needs to be switched to remote due to COVID exposure.

Resolution

The MSAA Board of Directors resolves that the Department needs to provide more recommendations and guidance to evaluators in the Commonwealth. This will provide much needed relief to the field through further guidance on how the evaluation process can be further modified and streamlined in these unprecedented times. This will provide support to Superintendents as they work with their local collective bargaining units to make changes at the local level.

Unanimously approved by the MSAA Board of Directors on October 22, 2020.