

A Recent History of Educator Evaluation Policy in Michigan

How have teacher evaluations evolved as a strategy to provide students with equitable access to high-quality teaching?

“Teachers are the single most important school-related factor in a child’s education.”

– Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness

Introduction to Educator Evaluations

Educator evaluations could play a significant role in building a strong education system in our country. Most significantly, the purpose of educator evaluations is to be able to properly assess the performance of teachers and administrators so that schools can be sure that they are employing and supporting the most effective education practice possible. In doing this, school districts level their focus on one important component of their system to assure the public that students are receiving the best education available, through the most effective, research-supported teaching and leadership behaviors. Moreover, high-quality evaluation can be used as an improvement tool, informing the individual growth plans of all educators. Finally, education leaders and policy-makers aim to use educator evaluation to protect the employment of the most effective teachers, while simultaneously filtering out educators who might not be performing effectively. The positive presupposition that supports reforms to educator evaluation is that public schools nationwide will create, develop, recognize and retain quality educators, who promote effective learning strategies and environments for students and contribute to student growth and success.

The Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) supports in principle the need for fair, balanced, and efficient systems for identifying effective practice among the teachers and leaders who are working in Michigan’s schools. We acknowledge that over time, researchers have developed some high-quality evidence-based models for observing teaching and leadership practices. Our available tools are somewhat less capable of measuring the impact of professional practices on student achievement and growth—a required feature in modern-day educator evaluation systems.

We support ongoing research and capacity building by all stakeholders in the evaluation process so that Michigan can continually improve our collective ability to:

- observe and report effective practice
- accurately measure and accurately attribute student growth; and
- support teachers and administrators in their roles as effective educators

To that end, we submit this paper as a means of developing a shared understanding of where we have been, where we find ourselves at present, and how we might further contribute the body of knowledge and effective practice within Michigan’s educator evaluation system.

Beginnings of Modern Educator Evaluations: Race to the Top

Prior to 2009, educator evaluation had limited utility in contributing to employment decisions. Then in 2009, an eye-opening report from The New Teachers Project (TNTP) turned the nation’s attention to an alarming reality: teacher evaluation systems in America were failing to provide accurate and credible information about individual teachers’ instructional performance. This failure led to a phenomenon that the report’s authors called “the Widget Effect,” which describes the tendency of school districts to assume classroom effectiveness is the same from teacher to teacher. According to the report, [*The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*](#), this decades-old fallacy fostered an environment in which teachers cease to be understood as individual professionals, but rather as interchangeable parts. According to the report this fallacy denied individual strengths and weaknesses and was “deeply disrespectful to teachers; in its indifference to instructional effectiveness, it gambles with the lives of students.”

The authors of *The Widget Effect* sought to reverse this reality through four specific recommendations:

1. Adopt a comprehensive performance evaluation system that credibly differentiates teachers based on effectiveness in promoting student achievement
2. Train and hold accountable administrators and other evaluators in the evaluation system
3. Integrate the performance evaluation system into critical human capital policies
4. Adopt dismissal policies that provide lower-stakes options for ineffective teachers and fair but efficient due process systems

The U.S. Department of Education under Barack Obama embraced the call-to-action in *The Widget Effect*, and incorporated it into its 2009 Race to the Top (RTTP) initiative

The Race to the Top (RTT) initiative of 2009 sought to expand the presence and influence of educator evaluation on a national level. This program was funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 and served as a state incentive program in which states could receive grant money for implementing policies in several areas of education, including teacher evaluations. The ARRA allocated \$4.35 billion to RTT, which was primarily to be used to reward states who implemented effective education reform programs. States were awarded this competitive grant based on a point system. There were six major criteria sections where points could be awarded:

1. State Success Factors (125 points)
2. Standards and Assessments (70 points)
3. Data Systems to Support Instruction (47 points)
4. Great Teachers and Leaders (138 points)
5. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (10 Points)
6. General Selection Criteria (55 points).

Within each of these categories, there were subcategories that defined the ways states could qualify for each set of points. Based on the

“In a knowledge-based economy that makes education more important than ever, teachers matter more than ever. This report is a call to action—to policymakers, district and school leaders and to teachers and their representatives—to address our national failure to acknowledge and act on differences in teacher effectiveness once and for all. To do this, school districts must begin to distinguish great from good, good from fair, and fair from poor. Effective teaching must be recognized; ineffective teaching must be addressed.” –The Widget Effect, 2009

Effective Teacher: “a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates (e.g., at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth.”
Race to the Top Executive Summary
(US Department of Education)

Highly Effective Teacher: “a teacher whose student achieve high rates (e.g., one and one-half grade levels in an academic year) of student growth”
Race to the Top Executive Summary
(US Department of Education)

allocation of points, the section “Great Teachers and Leaders” was the most heavily weighted sector. This category included several

subcategories, but the most valuable subcategory was “improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance.” Under this subcategory, RTT created goals for states to improve their educator evaluation systems through establishing clear measures of student growth, training educators in evaluation systems, and taking strides to retain quality teachers through proper compensation opportunities, while removing ineffective teachers.

RTT did not mandate any type of teacher evaluation system, however its incentive nature prompted many states to evaluate their own systems and make changes so that they could effectively compete for this grant program. This program did show an increase in teacher evaluation policies for states that were awarded grants. RTT states adopted an average of 3.7 teacher evaluation policies, while non-RTT states had an average of 2.2 teacher evaluation policies. Ultimately, the RTT program was able to raise awareness about this form of educational policy, and thus influenced change in many states regarding their evaluation programs.

Exhibit 1. RTT Application Criteria (in italics), with Aligned Teacher Evaluation Policies Listed Below from State Interview Protocol

Design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers.

1. State required multiple measures of performance to evaluate teachers in tested and nontested grades and subjects.

Differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take student achievement growth into account as a significant factor and are designed with teacher involvement.

2. State required a minimum number of rating levels (two) be used to classify teacher performance.
3. State required districts to use student achievement growth to evaluate some or all teachers and specified the extent to which it must factor into teacher evaluations.

Conduct annual evaluations that include timely and constructive feedback and provide teachers with data on student achievement growth for their students, classes, and schools.

4. State required that evaluations of all teachers (probationary and nonprobationary) take place at least annually.

Use evaluations to inform decisions about staff development, compensation, promotion, tenure, certification, and removal of ineffective teachers.

5. State required that teacher evaluation results be used to guide decisions about professional development.
6. State required that teacher evaluation results be used to guide decisions about dismissal.
7. State required that teacher evaluation results be used to guide decisions about compensation (including annual salary increases or performance-based compensation).
8. State required that teacher evaluation results be used to guide decisions about career advancement.

Creation of the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness

In response to RTT, in June 2011 the Michigan legislature passed Public Act 102, forming the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE). The MCEE functioned as an independent commission that was meant to be active until June 2013. The MCEE was made up of six members, ranging from college deans to high school principals. According to PA 102, the Council was to create recommendations for a future educator evaluation policy. The MCEE articulated three main goals regarding the impact their recommendations might have on state policy. First, the state would create an evaluation system that schools could implement easily and effectively. Second, the state would develop an evaluation system based both on student growth measurements, as well as an educator's professional performance. Finally, the state would enact an evaluation system that can improve both student and teacher performance across the state.


With these goals in mind, the MCEE developed a pilot program to institute and observe a trial evaluation system in thirteen selected districts. Based on the findings from this pilot study, the MCEE offered policy recommendations to Michigan state legislators for each area of their charge: :

1. student growth and assessment
2. evaluation of teacher and administrator practice
3. final evaluation rating system summaries
4. professional teaching certification
5. waiver system for evaluating local evaluation tools

Additionally, the council recommended four evaluation tools for teachers and three evaluation tools for administrators, as well as provisions for how these evaluation tools should be used. These four recommended evaluation tools for teachers (the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, The Thoughtful Classroom, The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, and Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching) have differences in the ways they are implemented, as well as specific performance standards that are considered in an evaluation. However, overall the recommended tools share many basic concepts regarding what to look for in evaluation systems for teachers and for administrators. In these ways, the MCEE gave expansive recommendations to Michigan policy makers regarding evaluations. While not all recommendations were applied to future policies, some significant ideas did find a place in later legislation (to read more about MCEE policy recommendations, go to www.mcede.org).

Student Growth and Educator Evaluations

One of the key ideas raised in RTT, as well as the MCEE study, was the role of student growth in educator evaluations. According to RTT policy, student growth is categorized as "the change in student achievement... for an individual student between two or more points in time." In many states, students must show adequate growth for teachers to receive a high rating in their evaluation. This growth can be measured in number of ways but is quite often meant to be measured based on assessment data. RTT increased the emphasis on student growth around the nation. For example, following the RTT policy, Public Act 102 of 2011 included a provision to measure student growth using state assessments. It also declared that beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, 40 percent of a teacher's annual evaluation must be based on student growth, and by the 2015-2016 school year, at least 50 percent of the annual evaluation must be based on student growth. However, following the MCEE's recommendation, the



"The evaluation process needs to incorporate multiple measures when evaluating teacher effectiveness and it must incorporate valid observations of professional practice. Enhancing instruction and improving student achievement is the goal of every educator."

- Michigan Education Association

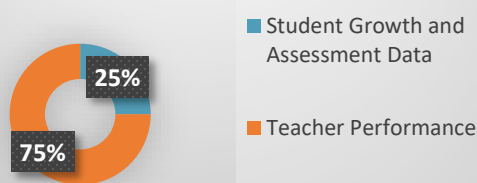
legislature passed Public Act 173 of 2015 which lessened the influence of student growth on educator evaluation. Despite the emphasis placed on student growth, the actual definition of “growth” tends to be fairly vague in several policies. The MCEE defines student growth as simply “the change in students’ knowledge and skills across time.” At the same time, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) uses a student growth percentile (SGP) model to describe student growth, which according to the MDE “describes a student’s learning over time compared to other students with comparable prior test scores.” PA 173 does not explicitly define student growth, though it references the recommendations made by the MCEE many times. Based on this, it can be seen that student growth remains a contested issue, not only in its definition, but in its impact.

How do Educator Evaluations Work in Michigan Today?

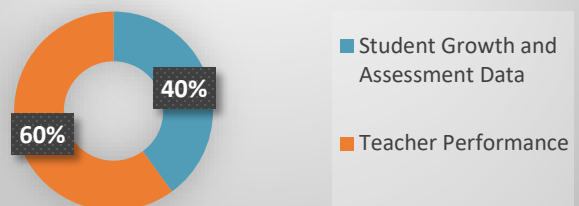
Public Act 173 of 2015 was written based on the recommendations from the MCEE, and it continues to guide educator evaluations in Michigan at present. This act requires each public school in the state to have evaluation systems in place for teachers and administrators. It requires annual evaluation that puts an emphasis on student growth. This student growth can be measured, in part, through state assessments. Moreover, it requires that by the 2018-19 school year, 40 percent of the annual evaluation will be based on student growth, with the remainder based on the educator’s overall performance, as measured using a district-selected observation tool. Furthermore, the act states that in the same school year 50 percent of student growth must be measured using state assessments for educators in tested grades and subjects. (For teachers in non-core subjects or grades not tested with state assessments, the entire student growth rating can come from local growth measures.)

PA 173 also lists recommended evaluation frameworks that school districts can use, including those outlined by the MCEE. However, the act does not limit districts from choosing other options. Additionally, the act implements the use of specific evaluation ratings. These ratings include ineffective, minimally effective, effective, and highly effective. Finally, the policy defines the use of these evaluations to help set goals for teachers, as well as offer a route for the termination of teachers who have received ratings of ineffective on three consecutive yearly evaluations.

Basis of Evaluations Between the 2015-2018 School Years

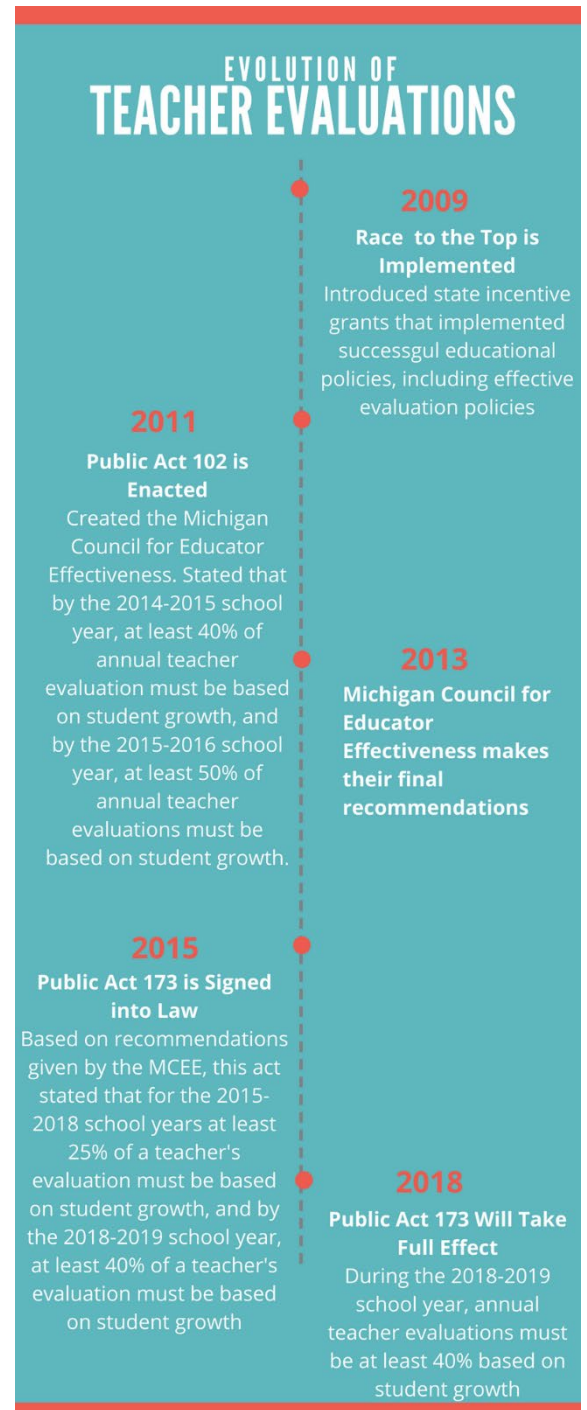


Basis of Evaluations Beginning in the 2018- 2019 School Year



Summary:

- Educator evaluations have been implemented across the nation in an effort to retain effective teachers and administrators and promote effective education strategies.
- The Race to the Top Initiative did not mandate the implementation of evaluation policies. However, it prompted many states to adopt policies that met with the RTT evaluation criteria.
- The influence that student growth has on educator evaluation has fluctuated throughout the years in Michigan and across the country.
- The Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness was created through Public Act 102 of 2011. The MCEE was enacted to provide recommendations for future educator evaluation policies in Michigan, such as Public Act 173 of 2015.
- Public Act 173 guides the current evaluation policies in Michigan today. This act establishes the use of several ratings, including highly effective, effective, minimally effective, and ineffective. It also required that student growth should count as 25 percent of a teacher's evaluation from 2015-18, increasing to 40 percent for the 2018-19 school year.



To Learn More...

- **Building an Improvement-Focused System of Educator Evaluation in Michigan: Final Recommendations – Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness**
<http://www.mcede.org/system/resources/BAhbBlSfHOgZmSSiXmJAxMy8wNy8yMy8yMS80Ny81OS82NjYvRXhIY3V0aXZlU3VtbWFyeS5wZGYGOgZFVA/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>
- **Center for Educational Leadership: Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning**
<https://www.k-12leadership.org/content/service/5-dimensions-of-teaching-and-learning>
- **Marzano Center: Marzano Teacher Evaluation**
<http://www.marzanoevaluation.com>
- **Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness: General FAQ Sheet**
<http://www.mcede.org/system/resources/BAhbBlSfHOgZmSSiXmJAxMy8wNy8yNC8wMy80Ni8xMy81NDAvR2VuZXJhbF9GQVEucGRmBjoGRVQ/General%20FAQ.pdf>
- **Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness site**
<http://www.mcede.org/>
- **Michigan Department of Education Administrator Evaluations**
https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-5683_75438_78527---,00.html
- **Michigan Department of Education: Information on Student Growth in Michigan**
https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-81376_59490-298094--,00.html
- **Michigan Educator Evaluations at a Glance – Michigan Department of Education**
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Educator_Evaluations_At-A-Glance_522133_7.pdf
- **Michigan Public Act 102 – Michigan Legislature**
<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2011-2012/publicact/htm/2011-PA-0102.htm>
- **Michigan Public Act 173 – Michigan Legislature**
<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2015-2016/publicact/pdf/2015-PA-0173.pdf>
- **Race to the Top Program Executive Summary – U.S Department of Education**
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>
- **State Requirements for Teacher Evaluation Policies Promoted by Race to the Top – National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance; Institute of Education Sciences**
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20144016/pdf/20144016.pdf>
- **The Danielson Group: The Framework**
<https://www.danielsongroup.org/framework/>
- **The Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework**
<http://www.thoughtfulclassroom.com/index.php?act=tctef>
- **The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness**
https://tntp.org/assets/documents/TheWidgetEffect_2nd_ed.pdf