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 Evaluation

Educator evaluations could play a significant role in building a strong education system in our country. The most significant purpose of educator evaluation is to properly assess the performance of teachers and administrators so that schools can ensure they employ and support 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.

Purpose for this Paper

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. However, 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 to 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 differentiating educator practice or 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 (RTT) initiative

The Race to the Top (RTT) initiative 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 points earned in six major criteria:

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 category, subcategories defined the ways states could qualify for each set of points.

> "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 "Great Teachers and Leaders" sector —the most heavily weighted sector— included several subcategories, the most valuable of which 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 at the same time removing ineffective teachers.

RTT did not mandate a specific type of teacher evaluation system; however it provided incentive that prompted many states to evaluate their own systems and make changes so that they could effectively compete for RTT funding. 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 adopted an average of 2.2 teacher evaluation policies. Ultimately, the RTT program was able to raise awareness about this form of educational policy, thus influencing change in many states, including Michigan, regarding 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 MCEE 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 and educators' 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 13 selected districts. Based on the findings from this pilot study, the MCEE offered policy recommendations to Michigan 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 MCEE recommended four evaluation tools for teachers and two evaluation tools for administrators[1], as well as provisions for how these evaluation tools should be used. The recommended evaluation models 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 teacher and administrator evaluation systems. 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 (read more about MCEE policy recommendations at www.mcede.org).

Student Growth and Educator Evaluations

One key idea raised in RTT, as well as in 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,

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Evaluation Models Recommended by the Michigan Council for Educator Evaluation (MCEE)

For Teachers

- Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model
- The Thoughtful Classroom
- The Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning
- Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching

For Administrators

- School Advance Administrator Evaluation System (1.0)
- Leadership Performance Matrix (Doug Reeves)
- Marzano School/District Leader Evaluation System *

* not originally recommended by MCEE, but specified later by Michigan legislators

Source: Building an Improvement-Focused System of Educator Evaluation in Michigan: Final Recommendations – Michigan Council for Educator

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[1] Michigan legislators later added a third approved administrator system: the Marzano School/District Leader Evaluation System

students must show adequate growth for teachers to receive a high rating in their evaluation. This growth can be measured in a number of ways, but quite often it is measured based on student assessment data.

In Michigan, Public Act 102 of 2011 included a provision to measure student growth using state assessments. It 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, when the legislature passed Public Act 173 of 2015, the student growth share was reduced to 25percent from 2015-2018, and to 40percent beginning in 2018-19.

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.
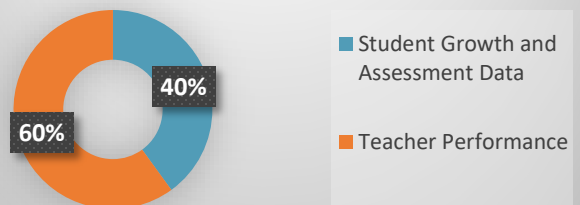
How do Educator Evaluations Work in Michigan Today?

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 starting in 2018-19, for educators in tested grades and subjects 50 percent of student growth must be measured using state assessments. (For teachers in non-core subjects or grades not tested with state assessments, the entire student growth rating can come from local growth measures.)

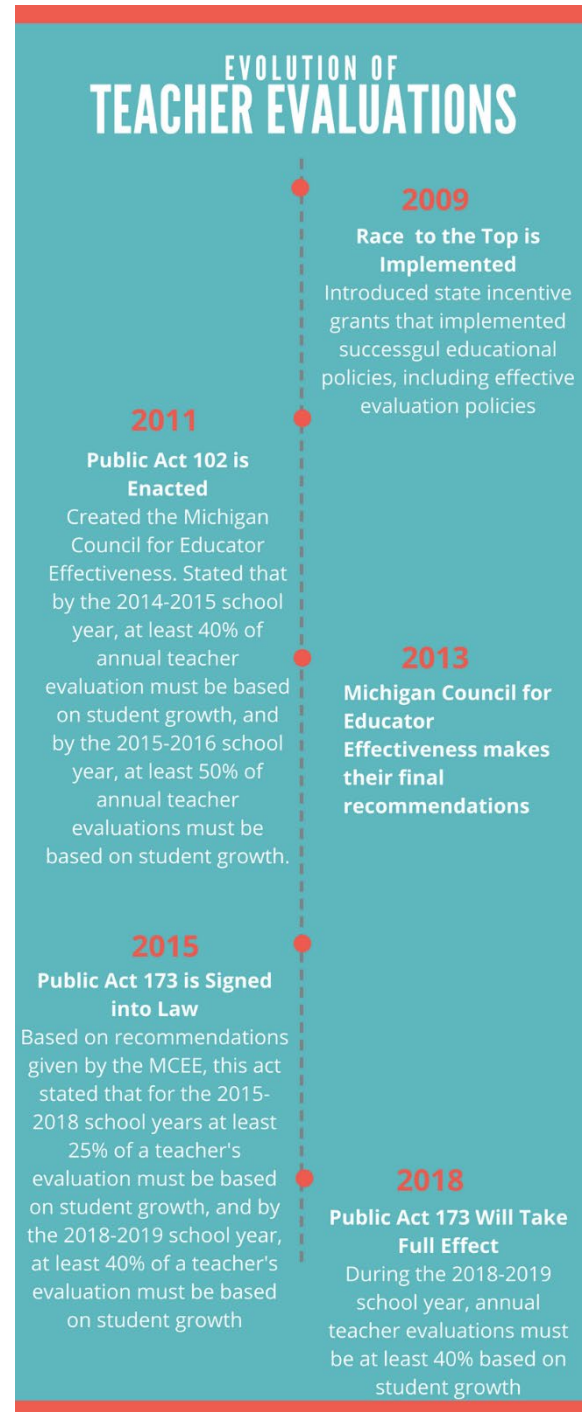**Basis of Evaluations Between the 2015-2018 School Years**

- Student Growth and Assessment Data
- Teacher Performance

25%
75%
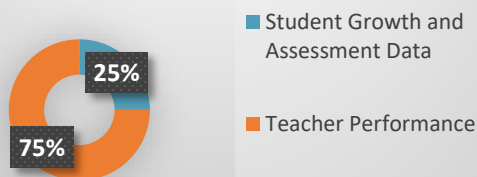
Basis of Evaluations Beginning in the 2018-2019 School Year

- Student Growth and Assessment Data
- Teacher Performance

40%
60%

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, PA 173 implements the use of specific evaluation ratings: 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.

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.
- Student results on state assessments account for at least 50 percent of the student growth component for teachers in state-tested grades and subjects. Local growth measures can account for the remaining 50 percent, and up to 100 percent for teachers in grades and subjects for which there is no state assessment.

EVOLUTION OF
TEACHER EVALUATIONS

2009
Race to the Top is Implemented
Introduced state incentive grants that implemented successgul educational policies, including effective evaluation policies

2011
Public Act 102 is Enacted
Created the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness. Stated that by the 2014-2015 school year, at least 40% of annual teacher evaluation must be based on student growth, and by the 2015-2016 school year, at least 50% of annual teacher evaluations must be based on student growth.

2013
Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness makes their final recommendations

2015
Public Act 173 is Signed into Law
Based on recommendations given by the MCEE, this act stated that for the 2015-2018 school years at least 25% of a teacher's evaluation must be based on student growth, and by the 2018-2019 school year, at least 40% of a teacher's evaluation must be based on student growth

2018
Public Act 173 Will Take Full Effect
During the 2018-2019 school year, annual teacher evaluations must be at least 40% based on student growth

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/BAhbBlsHOgZmSSIxMjAxMy8wNy8yMy8yMS80Ny81OS82NjYvRXhlY3V0aXZlU3VtbWFyeS5wZGYGOgZFVA/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/BAhbBlsHOgZmSSIsMjAxMy8wNy8yNC8wMy80Ni8xMy81NDAvR2VuZXJhbF9GQVEucGRmBjoGRVQ/Generalpercent20FAQ.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