

Chairman Rokita, Members of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, distinguished guests ...

My name is Jim McIntyre, and I have the privilege of serving as the Superintendent of the Knox County Schools in the great state of Tennessee. As the public school system for Knoxville and its surrounding area, the Knox County Schools is approximately the 75th largest school system in America, serving more than 55,000 students from urban, suburban and rural environments in 88 schools. I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning to discuss the important topic of teacher performance evaluation.

Over the past five years, Tennessee has embarked on a remarkable journey of education reform and improvement. Radically higher academic standards, support for performance-based pay, fundamentally restructured teacher tenure, and the introduction of an interest-based labor dialogue called “collaborative conferencing” are but a few of the significant policy initiatives that have been put in place to enhance schooling for our children. But perhaps no other recent change has greater potential to improve the quality of education in our state than the adoption of a new teacher performance evaluation system.

Tennessee law now requires a performance evaluation of every teacher, every year; and at least fifty percent of that evaluation must be based on student academic outcomes. While district-specific plans that meet these parameters can be approved in Tennessee, the standard evaluation system is called the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model or TEAM. The TEAM evaluation system is based on multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, incorporating elements of student academic results, multiple observations of classroom practice, and indicators of teacher professionalism. This year we will even pilot using some student feedback on a limited basis.

The TEAM evaluation system features an excellent classroom observation instrument (or “rubric” as it is called), which begins with a detailed and research-based definition of good teaching, and allows educators to understand how their instruction measures up against a very rigorous standard. The rubric incorporates specific instructional practices that have been demonstrated to increase student achievement. The classroom observation protocol requires an objective assessment based solely on the evidence that an evaluator observes in the classroom or during lesson-planning activities.

Our new teacher evaluation system, now in its second year, has several important strengths:

First, requiring every teacher to be evaluated every year connects the performance evaluation to the day-to-day work of teaching students. In the past, teacher evaluations took place only twice every ten years in Tennessee, and teachers felt this process was oddly separate from their daily efforts in the classroom. Because it occurred so infrequently, the previous evaluation system had, at best, a marginal impact on instructional practice. With evaluation happening for every teacher each year, it is now part of the daily work of the school. Evaluation visits are routine and frequent, professional conversations center around the instructional strategies in the rubric, and the evaluation process can actually have a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching in our schools.

Second, Tennessee’s teacher performance evaluation system incorporates both student achievement and academic growth outcome measures. We are all familiar with student achievement data, which gauges where a student measures against a particular standard at a point in time, and is typically expressed as to whether the student is deemed “proficient” in the subject matter for a particular grade level.

But Tennessee also includes “value-added” growth measures as a significant proportion of its evaluation system. Value-added growth, as the name implies, measures student learning over time, and whether the student exceeds or falls below the expected level of academic progress over a specified period of time, usually a school year. It therefore measures the amount of “value” added by the teacher (or the “effect” of the teacher) over and above the expected academic growth. The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) is a well-regarded statistical model, refined over the past 20 years, that calculates the growth measures used in the TEAM evaluation system.

Value -added growth is a useful measure to include in a teacher evaluation model, as it quantifies each student’s learning over the period that the educator has taught them, but does not disadvantage the teacher if a student came to him or her behind academically. Value-added growth, therefore, provides useful information regarding the effectiveness of the teacher. As quantitative measures of student academic success are increasingly integrated into teacher evaluation systems across the country, academic growth models will be critical in helping to ensure a fair, appropriate measurement of teacher effectiveness.

Third, I appreciate that a significant proportion of the teacher’s evaluation is now based on student outcomes. Our new performance evaluation system puts a premium not only on good teaching, but also on student learning. No longer is it acceptable for a teacher to say, “Well, I taught a great lesson, but my students just didn’t learn it.” The new evaluation system reinforces the urgency we all must feel in ensuring that our students meet the much more rigorous academic standards that we have put in place in Tennessee... and higher expectations for our teachers will help us get there.

Fourth, the approach we have taken in Knoxville, and generally across the state of Tennessee has been to ensure that our evaluation system is a developmental process. That is, it is focused on helping our teachers to improve their instructional practice.

I believe we must view teacher performance evaluation primarily as a professional growth tool, rather than purely as an accountability mechanism. Don't get me wrong, there will be teachers who will fail to secure tenure or who will be terminated because of issues surfaced through their performance evaluation. But for the overwhelming majority of our teachers, those who are solid performers to truly extraordinary educators, our evaluation system will be about continually improving and enhancing their instruction.

Finally, I believe that our evaluation system is well aligned to the new Common Core academic standards that Tennessee and 44 other states have adopted. As a state-led initiative, Common Core will require our teachers to explore curricular topics in greater depth, and to facilitate important 21st century skills such as critical thinking, applying knowledge, and identifying creative solutions. Accordingly, the instructional rubric includes indicators that evaluate in-depth questioning, teaching different modes of thinking, and problem-solving – exactly the types of skills that will prepare our students for success in today's rapidly changing world.

The TEAM evaluation system, like any system, is not without challenges. Because our state assessments only cover grades 3-8 and certain subjects in high school, close to half of the teachers in Tennessee are without individual value-added growth data. Our state has committed to increasing the number of grades and subjects with such assessments, but this remains an important concern. For the most part, non-tested teachers share in the growth data for their whole school or particular discipline. I think this is a very appropriate short-term solution, as music and art teachers do influence the learning of all students in their elementary school, and certainly a great physics teacher will bolster the academic growth of her students in mathematics.

The other challenge to highlight is ensuring that there is consistency of implementation of the evaluation system, and that we attain inter-rater reliability within schools, districts, and across the state. Our new evaluation system has significantly raised the bar for expectations of teacher effectiveness. If our evaluators are true to their training and consistently rigorous, then TEAM will provide an excellent assessment of teacher performance and an outstanding professional growth tool. If they are not, TEAM will be an expensive and time-consuming failure.

Allow me to outline some of the ways that TEAM data is used. The power of TEAM, and any strong performance evaluation system, is that it provides consistent and useful information regarding teacher effectiveness that can be utilized in human capital decisions, such as retention, termination, promotion, tenure, appointment to teacher leadership roles, and even compensation. In Knoxville, we use the data from teacher evaluations to support all of those critical decisions.

TEAM data is used to identify teachers who may need additional assistance, or those who could potentially be effective peer evaluators (Lead Teachers). Evaluation information is an important factor in the decision to terminate chronically ineffectual teachers, and it is used to discover potential candidates for consideration in school leadership roles.

As I mentioned earlier, the state of Tennessee has significantly restructured teacher tenure. In the past, teachers were automatically granted tenure if they were on the job for three years and one day. It was a sometimes difficult structure because about two and a half years into a teacher's career, a principal had to decide whether to give a teacher tenure, essentially for the rest of their professional career, or fire them.

Now, new teachers in Tennessee are not eligible for tenure until after five years of service, and only if they perform at one of the two highest levels (on a five point scale) on the evaluation system for two consecutive years. This is obviously a very different perspective on teacher tenure, but a worthy experiment in exploring if a radically different conceptualization of tenure will make a difference in teacher effectiveness.

In the Knox County Schools, we have developed a strategic compensation (performance-based pay) initiative that relies heavily on the data from the teacher evaluation system. APEX (Achieve, Perform, EXcel), provides either \$1,500 or \$2,000 to our teachers based on great instruction, strong student academic results, teacher leadership and/or providing consistent high-quality instruction in our high needs schools. Data from the TEAM evaluation system determines 70% of the eligibility for this \$3.6 million incentive pay program (funded in part through *Race to the Top* funding).

One important but somewhat unique aspect of our implementation of the teacher evaluation system in Knoxville has been the development of a Lead Teacher role. Lead teachers are some of our most outstanding and respected classroom teachers who are paid an additional stipend to be observers and evaluators of their fellow educators.

Our Lead Teachers are able to play an important leadership role while remaining as classroom teachers, and they lend credibility, instructional expertise, and much needed support to the teacher evaluation process. Utilizing peer evaluators can be a tricky business, but when done right - with the right people, training, and structure - it can be an incredibly powerful asset in the effective evaluation and development of teachers.

One more important note on teacher evaluation systems: they are not, by themselves, a panacea. Rigorous, developmental teacher evaluation systems can be an important instructional improvement tool, but must be implemented in the context of a larger education reform and improvement effort.

In the Knox County Schools, we have certainly embraced the TEAM teacher evaluation system, but we have also crafted a detailed five-year strategic plan, invested in professional development and teacher support, embraced research-based instructional practices, focused on school leadership, initiated performance-based compensation, facilitated professional learning communities, and built the capacity to utilize data to support great instruction. These strategies all support and compliment the centerpiece teacher evaluation system, and these strategies are collectively indispensable to our educational success.

Finally, you may be wondering how the new teacher evaluation system in Tennessee is impacting teaching and learning. So, I will leave you with just a few perspectives on outcomes:

In 2011-12, Tennessee saw some of the highest gains in student achievement on state assessments in recent history. Likewise, this past year in the Knox County Schools we have seen strong academic progress by virtually every quantifiable measure of student learning and success. Proficiency for our students increased overall in grades 3-8 in all four tested subject areas: English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Graduation rates, academic growth, and ACT scores also posted strong results.

In our school system, we have experienced substantial gains in teacher value-added scores in the last two years. Our district experienced a significant *decrease* in the number of teachers performing at the two lowest effectiveness levels from 2011 to 2012, declining from 18% to 9%.

Over that same time period, the percentage of our teachers scoring in the highest category of teacher value-added performance, those making the greatest impact on student learning, *increased from 27% to 36%.*

Knox County Schools - TVAAS						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	Count
2012	4%	5%	32%	23%	36%	2,050
2011	9%	9%	38%	16%	27%	2,417
2010	13%	13%	34%	16%	24%	1,738

Table 1: Distribution of Knox County Schools Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) Teacher Effect Scores 2010-2012 (teachers with individual TVAAS scores)

In the Knox County Schools, our student outcomes are not nearly where we want them to be yet - and we are certainly not declaring victory - but I believe that our teacher evaluation system is an important strategy in improving the quality of public education in Knoxville and across our state. Tennessee's teacher evaluation system is not perfect, but it is a vast improvement over our previous evaluation process, and I think it will prove to be a very valuable professional growth and instructional improvement tool.

Respectfully Submitted,

James P. McIntyre, Jr.
Superintendent, Knox County Schools
Knoxville, Tennessee