

Testimony of Thomas Boasberg

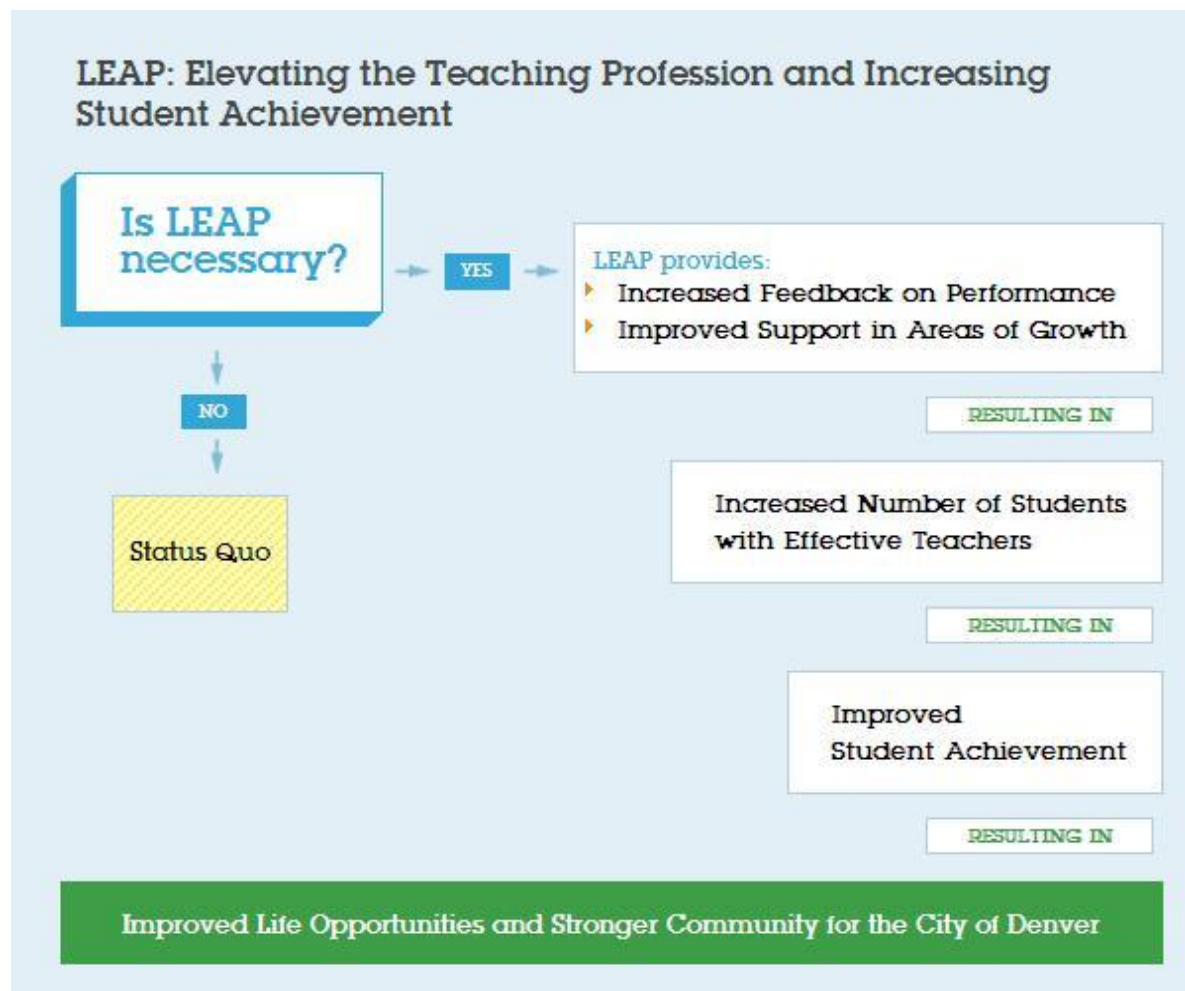
Superintendent, School District No. 1 in the City and County of Denver

Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearing on “Education reforms: Exploring Teacher Quality Initiatives”

July 27, 2011

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding the critical issue of educator effectiveness. I am Tom Boasberg, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools. I have been Superintendent since January, 2009.

Below we detail the purpose of our Leading Effective Academic Practice system (LEAP), the collaborative process used to develop LEAP, the Framework for Excellent Teaching, and the set of professional development supports for our teachers that are aligned with LEAP.



PURPOSE OF LEADING EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC PRACTICE SYSTEM (LEAP)

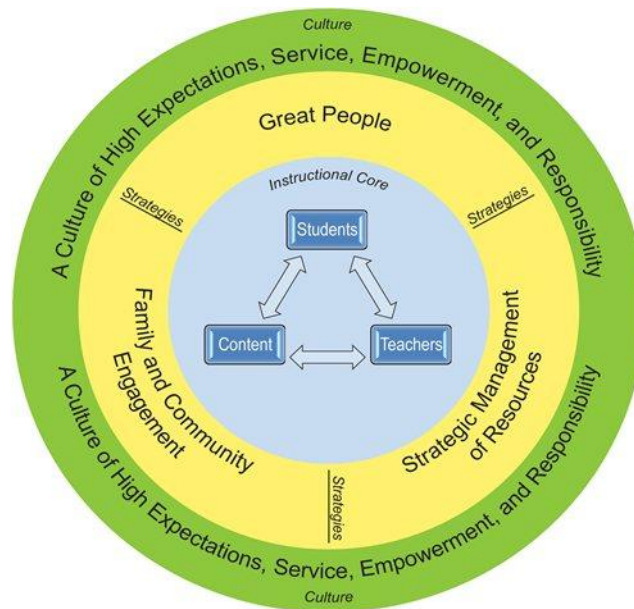
Overview:

The Denver Plan

The 2010 Denver Plan lays out the *DPS* vision and the course we are embarking on to achieve our goals. It states the district's committed to having a highly effective teacher in every classroom and building strategies to support this commitment.

The Empowering Excellent Educators work, including LEAP, focuses on two strategies within the Denver Plan:

1. **GREAT PEOPLE TO DRIVE BETTER OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:** Development of a multiple-measure teacher evaluation and feedback system that meaningfully differentiates the performance of teachers.
2. **FOCUS ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE:** Create conditions to ensure educator effectiveness. This will require us to develop a shared definition of effective teaching (DPS Framework for Effective Teaching); do more to support teachers in becoming effective teachers; and continue to develop principals to be effective leaders.



The Need for Reform:

Despite the progress that we have made as a district, we must face the sobering reality:

- Too few DPS students are proficient on the state's reading, mathematics and writing measures.
- Not enough of our students are graduating from high school.
- In a district where a majority of our students are of color - 58% Latino and 14% African American - and 73% of all students are FRL, an unacceptable achievement gap persists between our African-American and Latino students and their Anglo and Asian-American counterparts.

While our growth confirms that we are on the right track, we acknowledge that we must significantly accelerate our rate of improvement and put far more of our students on the path to graduation and success in college and careers.

Study after study has made clear that the most important factor in closing the achievement gap is the quality of teaching. Our students deserve our best and we need to ensure that all students have great teachers.

Ready for Reform:

It is time to accelerate our reforms, to sharpen the focus on student achievement and classroom excellence.

A report released in August 2010 by the [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#) recognized Denver as the *4th best city in the country* for cultivating a healthy environment for school reform to flourish.

The [Council of the Great City Schools](#), a national organization of 67 of the nation's largest urban school districts, stressed in its 2009 evaluation of DPS that our district's vision for reform is "one of the most promising and comprehensive in the nation." The council further noted, "The architecture of these reforms—instructional, financial, and human capital—is among the most seamlessly conceived in all of urban education in the United States."

Denver Public Schools has made steady strides in the past few years. Our momentum is strong and we need to capitalize on it now. Investing in teachers is one of the critical ingredients to school reform in Denver. Essential to our reform strategy is empowering educators with meaningful feedback to enhance their instruction and maximize their impact on student achievement.

Empowering Excellent Educators:

Elevating the Teaching Profession

Empowering Excellent Educators is a comprehensive set of initiatives rooted in a commitment to consistently develop, recognize, reward, recruit and retain great teachers and principals. LEAP is part of DPS's commitment to Empowering Excellent Educators.

Reward and Retain

- Foster a supporting environment for all DPS teachers to grow professionally
- Recognize and reward our best teachers as an invaluable resource
- Provide opportunities for leadership and advancement for highly effective teachers
- Build sustainable training structures
- Provide coaching to new teachers

Recruitment

- Attract excellent new and experienced teachers
- Recruit diverse teachers who reflect our diverse student population
- Complete early hiring cycles to secure the best available talent
- Provide multiple pathways into teaching including [Denver Teacher Residency](#) (DTR)
- Train our principals on how to successfully identify and onboard new teachers that fit their school culture

Evaluation

- Provide evaluations that are transparent, objective and complete
- Use multiple measures, including peer observation and student achievement data
- Link to differentiated professional development

Professional Development and Support

- Provide meaningful professional development
- Link professional development to identified needs
- Create a structure of feedback and support
- Provide teachers with the online tools and resources they need for success, including online assessment tools and easily accessible curricular resources

Every component of Empowering Excellent Educators is built on the respect for the central role of educators in raising student achievement in the district. Our hope is that Empowering Excellent Educators will elevate the teaching profession within DPS, in our community and shine a national spotlight on the far-reaching and profound impact we know teachers have on their students.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS USED TO DEVELOP LEAP

Collaboration:

From the planning stage and throughout development, DPS and DCTA have worked collaboratively. DPS and DCTA recognize that a successful Framework for Effective Teaching and the supporting evaluation system, LEAP, must be informed by the ideas and experiences of actual practitioners.

DPS and DCTA have worked together to organize various engagement groups:

- **Steering Committee:** An oversight committee for Empowering Excellent Educators responsible for ongoing strategic direction and decision making. Members of the group:
Tom Boasberg - DPS Superintendent
Susana Cordova - DPS Chief Academic Officer
Shayne Spalten - DPS Chief Human Resources Officer
Henry Roman - DCTA President
Carolyn Crowder – DCTA
- **Professional Practices Work Group:** A group comprised of DPS employees, DCTA members, and outside experts that act as an advisory board to the LEAP steering committee, project leadership team, and design teams.
- **Focus Groups:** Conducted by a third party and used throughout the development of LEAP and the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching to incorporate teacher and principal voice.
- **Design Teams:** Groups of teachers and principals within DPS that were formed to incorporate teacher and principal voice into the new DPS Framework for Effective Teaching and LEAP. The five Design Teams include: Principal Effectiveness, Teacher Effectiveness, Peer Observation, Student Assessment and Outcomes, and Professional Development.
- **LEAP Project Leadership Team:** DPS staff dedicated to the development of LEAP and the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching. The team includes a full-time DCTA Liaison who works closely with the LEAP team and brings DCTA perspective on a daily basis.

Focus Group Findings:

Over a three week period in April 2010 approximately 225 principals, teachers, district staff, and students participated and shared their ideas in focus groups facilitated by a neutral third party.

The purpose of the focus groups was two-fold:

1. DPS and DCTA wanted to **gather the best information possible from all stakeholders** about what is working within the current system, what is most in need of repair, and what would be necessary to build a more ideal teacher performance assessment system.

2. The focus groups would serve as an important step in a **continuous improvement cycle** that will seek out input, share that input with Design Teams, and check back to ensure the designs are in alignment with the specifications outlined by focus group participants.

The Focus Groups resulted in a set of Core Values that have been used to guide the development of the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching and LEAP.

Focus Group Core Values

- **Rooted in Professional Expertise**
The definition of effective teaching needs to be based on the best research and is co-constructed by teachers themselves. Administrators and other evaluators must have the background and expertise necessary to accurately and fairly assess the quality of the teaching they are charged with observing.
- **Multiple Sources of Data**
The system of assessment should bring together various points of data (including principal observation, peer observation, student growth, self-reflection, and other information) to identify areas of strength and to set clear, specific targets for growth.
- **Continuous Feedback**
The system should provide frequent and ongoing feedback about practice, rather than one-shot data points. Constructive feedback is the lifeblood of improvement, providing information about areas of strength and areas for growth, and it should flow through all aspects of the system to ensure each element—from classroom practice to professional development—is achieving the desired results.
- **Consistency with Flexibility**
The system should set clear standards of effective practice and apply them faithfully and fairly across the district, but allow enough flexibility to set goals for improvement and professional development based on the levels of experience and unique needs of each educator.
- **Accountability**
While the system should aspire to help everyone improve their practice, it must also distinguish between various levels of performance, and hold people accountable for reasonable results. Improvement plans must be followed and have consequences. The measurement system should change from a binary “satisfactory/unsatisfactory” to a continuum of performance with specifically defined levels of proficiency.
- **A Culture of Learning**
The system must support and encourage learning and innovation at all levels—in students, in educators, and in administrators—instead of being punitive or just rewarding compliance. Growth must be the end-game for all members of the system. The district as a whole, as well as individual schools, must be intentional about fostering a culture that supports everyone to learn.

- **Reward Effectiveness**

The system should reward effectiveness, linking financial rewards to the evaluation system as well as non financial rewards such as recognition and unique professional opportunities. It should reward effectiveness regardless of years of experience.

Design Teams:

After the initial focus groups were held, the next step in teacher and principal engagement was to form five Design Teams in the spring of 2010.

1. Teacher Effectiveness
2. Principal Effectiveness
3. Peer Observations
4. Professional Development
5. Student Assessments and Outcomes

The five Design Teams worked many hours during the summer and fall of 2010. They applied the [Core Values](#) from the focus groups in addition to pertinent national research and made recommendations on the specific components of the new LEAP system as well as the development of the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching. The passion and dedication they put into their work was inspiring. As one Design Team member states:

"Teachers and administrators working together to define, describe and expect effective teaching will help ensure that every child has an excellent teacher in their classroom."

La Dawn Baity
Principal, Steck Elementary School

Spring 2011 Pilot:

The next step in teacher and principal involvement....

From the start, this effort has been collaborative and informed by the teachers and principals who will ultimately be supported by the new system. From focus groups to Design Teams to the spring 2011 LEAP pilot...teacher and principal voice has been a key element of the development process.

The spring 2011 LEAP pilot schools experienced various components of LEAP and provided their input to help guide improvements to the system prior to the district-wide pilot in 2011-12.

LEAP Pilot: January - May 2011

[Sixteen schools](#) piloted components of LEAP from January - May 2011. Teachers and principals in these schools were the first to experience the system. In many ways they were the architects of LEAP as their feedback guided improvements to the system in preparation for the district-wide pilot beginning in August 2011.

DPS's approach of teacher and principal involvement is somewhat unique: it ensures that our new evaluation tool will be informed by teachers and principals within the district from inception through rollout.

FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENT TEACHING

Overview:

The foundation...

The DPS Framework for Effective Teaching serves as the foundation for the Empowering Excellent Educators work in DPS. It provides teachers and principals with:

- *A shared understanding of effective teaching in DPS*
- A foundation upon which teachers can reflect and perfect their craft
- Observation tool used in LEAP, the new teacher evaluation system

Effective teaching = success with kids. The DPS Framework for Effective Teaching captures the potential of teaching actions to impact student learning in classrooms across Denver.

The framework currently includes standards for measuring the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom (onstage domains). We are in the process of building out the standards for rating teachers' effectiveness outside of the classroom (offstage domains).

4 Domains in the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching	
Onstage Domains	Offstage Domains
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning Environment• Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning & Preparation• Professionalism

With the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching, performance ratings move from a binary system of "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" to a continuum of performance with four levels of effectiveness and seven rating categories:

- Not Meeting (1-2)
- Approaching (3-4)
- Effective (5-6)
- Distinguished (7)

Multiple ratings provide the opportunity to identify areas of strength as well as growth opportunities. Teachers are able to target their professional development to their growth areas. All teachers, whether new to the profession or veteran teachers, can continue to grow professionally and be even better for their students.

Development:

Initial Development

Some of the most significant and challenging [Design Team work](#) was that of the Teacher Effectiveness Design Team. When discussing the framework to be used in DPS, the Design Team placed high priority on several aspects:

- ELL-focused, urban lens
- Teacher AND student behaviors
- Meaningfully differentiated performance of teachers
- Comprehensive but manageable

The Design Team looked at various national frameworks and observation tools:

- Charlotte Danielson's Framework of Effective Teaching
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Teacher Advancement Program (TAP)
- Quality Urban Classrooms (QUC)
- The Denver Teacher Residency Framework for Educational Equity

In the end, the Design Team recommended that DPS develop our own framework based on the best components of each tool, aligned to their specific understanding of teacher effectiveness in DPS, and based on the 4 domains of Learning Environment; Instruction; Planning and Preparation; and Professionalism.

The resulting DPS Framework for Effective Teaching is a homegrown, practitioner-designed tool that pulls from research-based tools used locally and nationally.

Framework Refinement

The DPS Framework for Effective Teaching was the foundational tool used in over 1400 classroom observations and feedback conversations during the spring 2011 LEAP pilot. DPS also aligned all professional development offerings to the Framework making it the core of personal reflection as well as professional growth.

Teachers and principals in the 16 pilot schools provided extensive feedback on the Framework which was carefully assessed by the LEAP project team and McREL, a third-party program evaluator.

In May/June 2011, the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching was revised based on pilot feedback, alignment to Common Core State Standards, and alignment to the DPS English Language Acquisition program.

The most noticeable change to the Framework was the addition of three new indicators focused on English Language Acquisition: two of these indicators will be observed in ELA-E and ELA-S classrooms and the third will be observed in ELA-S classrooms.

The new indicators emphasize and support effective practice for English Language Learners across the district, which constitute more than 40% of our student population and apply to over 2600 designated ELA-E and ELA-S teachers.

The revised Framework for Effective Teaching will be used in the 2011-12 LEAP pilot in over 120 DPS schools. Feedback from educators across the district during the pilot year will inform future improvements.

[View the Framework:](#)

DPS Framework Overview for Effective Teaching | 2011-12

DOMAIN	EXPECTATION	INDICATOR	
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	POSITIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE AND CLIMATE	LE-1	Demonstrates knowledge of, interest in, and respect for students' communities and cultures
		LE-2	Fosters a supportive and respectful learning environment among students
		LE-3	Motivates students to learn , take academic risks, and demonstrate classroom leadership
	EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	LE-4	Implements high, clear expectations for student behavior and responds appropriately
		LE-5	Classroom resources and space reflect and promote students and their learning
		LE-6	Manages students, transitions-and resources effectively
INSTRUCTION	STANDARDS-BASED GOALS	I-1	Clearly communicates the learning objective(s) for the lesson, connecting to larger rationale(s)
		I-2	Provides descriptive feedback to students on achievement and next steps
		I-3	Provides rigorous tasks and ensures student success through supports
	HIGH-IMPACT INSTRUCTIONAL MOVES	I-4	Uses questioning effectively
		I-5	Checks for understanding in varied ways throughout lesson
		I-6	Uses technology and digital resources appropriately to enhance student learning
	DIFFERENTIATION	I-7	Is proactive in planning for and addressing all students' needs
		I-8 ELA-E, ELA-S	Differentiates instruction according to students' levels of language proficiency
	MASTERFUL	I-9	Demonstrates deep knowledge of content area and

DOMAIN	EXPECTATION	INDICATOR	
	CONTENT KNOWLEDGE		relevant standards
		I-10 ELA-E, ELA-S	Develops English language proficiency through instruction focused on language functions and forms
		I-11 ELA-S	Uses native language instruction to develop strong content knowledge in L1 (this references lessons taught in Spanish, NOT English)
	ACADEMIC LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT	I-12	Promotes students' active and appropriate use of academic language
		I-13	Ensures content is accessible for ELLs
	21 ST CENTURY SKILLS	I-14	Provides opportunities for creativity/ innovation, critical thinking and problem solving
		I-15	Fosters communication and collaboration among students

Aligning Support:

DPS is working to create a variety of different types of high quality professional development that are aligned to the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching. Teachers are able to access targeted support which enables them to refine their craft and continue to grow professionally.

For example, video exemplars of effective instructional practice aligned to each indicator of the Framework are currently being captured and uploaded in the LEAP section of the [DPS Online Learning Center](#) (Moodle).

A screen shot showing examples of support offerings available on the DPS Online Learning Center can be seen below.

DPS-Online > Positive Classroom Culture > Books > LE1-LE3 Indicators

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LE1: Care, Interest in and Respect for Students
 LE2: Supportive and Respectful Learning Environment
 LE3: Motivates Students to Learn

LE1: Care, Interest in and Respect for Students

Capturing Excellence: Videos of Practice **Planning Tools and Tips** Professional Learning Networks

Course Offerings (online and hybrid) **Lectures, Webinars, and Podcasts** **Face To Face (f2f) Learning Opportunities**

 **Classroom Online**  

LEAP SYSTEM AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS

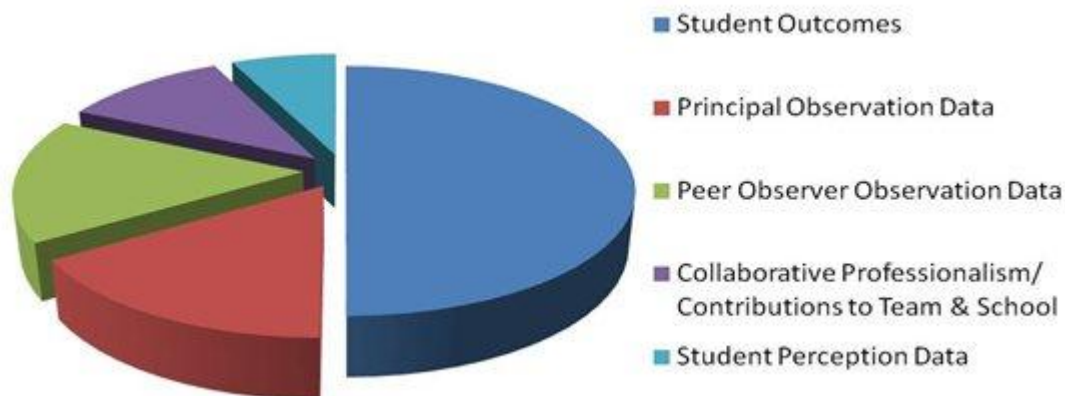
Overview:

The *multiple measures* in LEAP

The district and the DCTA have worked in collaboration with DPS teachers and school leaders to develop a new teacher performance assessment system. Through their work on Design Teams, teachers and principals applied the guiding principles from the focus groups to develop recommendations for a meaningful system of observation, feedback, support and evaluation for teachers. This is what we now call LEAP - Leading Effective Academic Practice.

LEAP provides teachers with additional feedback and support so they can continue to learn and grow professionally. Teachers want to be the best they can be for their students and our students deserve nothing less than GREAT teachers.

Multiple Measures



Student Outcomes:

All Students are Capable of Learning and Growing

This component of LEAP is still in development and will not be part of the LEAP pilot.

When taken into account with other measures of teacher performance, looking at student outcomes is a way to measure the direct impact of a teacher on student achievement. Student outcomes provide a full picture of the learning that results from teacher actions over the course of a year.

When fully developed, Student Outcomes will comprise 50% of a teacher's evaluation. We will be using multiple measures of student performance data rather than a single data source and are committed to using, in as many instances as possible, assessments that are already being used to inform instructional practice.

As we continue to develop the Student Outcomes aspect of LEAP, we are considering the following:

Student Assessment Criteria

1. Multiple sources of data
2. Growth
3. Summative – external and internal
4. Formative – consistent and accurate scoring across district
5. Alignment to standards, scope, and sequence
6. Increased emphasis on objective measures
7. English and Spanish options
8. School / team accountability
9. Transparent formula
10. Timeliness in administration and results

Principal Observation:

Feedback From Your School Leader

The Principal Observation measure in LEAP is fully developed and in-scope for the LEAP pilot.

Historically, principals have played an important role in evaluating and supporting teachers in their schools. This does not change with LEAP. Observation and feedback provided by school principals remain an important aspect of teacher evaluation. With LEAP:

- Principals are receiving extensive training on the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching, consistent rating (inter-rater reliability), and giving meaningful feedback.
- Principals will conduct classroom observations using the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching. Teachers will receive two principal observations during the 2011-12 LEAP pilot.
- Principals will provide teachers with post observation feedback, including insight on areas of strength as well as growth opportunities. Teachers will use this feedback to select from a variety of differentiated professional development offerings, all aligned to the Framework for Effective Teaching.

Peer Observation:

Third-Party Feedback With First-Hand Knowledge

Peer Observation is part of the LEAP system because there is tremendous value in teachers receiving honest, open feedback from a peer or colleague who has a similar content expertise.

The Peer Observer role is a new position to DPS but one that has been used effectively in school districts across the country for a number of years. Peer Observers are *fellow teachers* who have been hired specifically for this role because they are recognized for their experience and expertise in content, classroom instruction, student achievement, and best practices.

Peer Observers will be matched as closely as possible to the content or grade level of the teacher they are observing so they can provide feedback and support that is *specific and relevant*. Peer Observers will provide a third-party, outside perspective combined with first hand experience with the realities of teaching.

In Relation to Principal Observation

- Principals and Peer Observers will both use the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching when gathering observation data and will also use the same feedback protocol to ensure consistency.
- Both the principal and peer observations will provide targeted feedback about how teachers are performing against the standards in the Framework for Effective Teaching and will help promote teacher growth and development.
- Peer observation is not in isolation from observations done with the principal, but simply adds data points upon which the principal and teacher can review to make decisions about next steps with practice.
- Peer observation allows for more opportunities for teachers to receive feedback.

Collaborative Professionalism:

A Teacher's Contributions to Their Team and School

This component of LEAP was in development during the spring 2011 LEAP pilot. It will be ready for the 2011-12 district-wide LEAP pilot.

Professional Collaboration represents the offstage domains - what a teacher does outside of the classroom that helps determine their effectiveness - of the DPS Framework for Effective Teaching.

Examples include:

- Maintaining student records (student progress)

- Communicating with families
- Self-accountability for student growth
- Reflection
- PLCs
- Teacher leadership
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Collaboration with community
- Pursuing opportunities for professional growth
- Content & pedagogical knowledge
- Knowledge of students
- Identifying key outcomes
- Knowledge of resources/materials
- Integrating materials, resources, tools, technology
- Designing coherent instruction
- Creating student assessments
- Use of data in planning

Student Perception:

Students Know When They Have A Great Teacher...

This component of LEAP was introduced to the spring 2011 LEAP pilot schools in April.

Student Perception Surveys are important because they allow student voice to be part of the evaluation process.

DPS is one of seven districts participating in a national research study called Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project. The research findings from the MET project are informing our approach to this component of LEAP because MET includes a Student Perception Survey. Initial MET findings (released in December, 2010) indicate that:

- The average student knows effective teaching when he/she experiences it.
 - * Student perceptions can help identify effective teachers and point to specific aspects of teacher practice needing improvement.
- Valid teacher feedback need not be limited to test scores alone.
 - * By combining different sources of data, it is possible to provide diagnostic, targeted feedback to teachers who are eager to improve.

DPS will be using research-based student perception surveys developed by Tripod. More on Tripod student-perception surveys:

- Developed by Harvard Professor Ron Ferguson
- The framework emphasizes an instructional "tripod" of content knowledge, pedagogical skill and relationships
- Tripod surveys have been used in hundreds of schools and thousands of classrooms in the U.S. and abroad, as well as in the recent MET study

- Includes measures of teacher effectiveness and student engagement, from the student perspective

Professional Development Alignment:

Balancing Support with Accountability

DPS is dedicated to building a path that helps develop new teachers, ensures that all teachers continue to grow professionally, and rewards and recognizes great teachers throughout their careers.

LEAP helps teachers recognize areas of strength in their teaching practice and also helps identify *growth opportunities*. Once growth opportunities are identified, teachers are able to access differentiated professional development offerings which are aligned to the Framework for Effective Teaching. DPS is creating a variety of different types of high quality professional development to ensure teachers can access the types that are most relevant to their individual needs and interests.

Teachers and principals are able to work together to identify targeted professional development resources and focus a teacher's development on those opportunities that will have the most direct impact on a teacher's practice and student learning.