

Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee: Teacher Evaluations

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March 2012

“We believe that a fair, transparent, and data-driven evaluation system, coupled with a transformed way of linking professional development to specific teacher needs, will result in fewer than 10% of Tennessee teachers being defined as “ineffective” and unable to move students’ growth by at least one academic year—leading to higher student achievement overall by 2014.”

Excerpt from Tennessee’s Race to the Top Application

Introduction

The Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010 created a new teacher evaluation system in Tennessee.¹ Some components of the new evaluation system (the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model or TEAM) are still under development (e.g., measures of student growth for teachers of non-tested subjects are being developed), but TEAM has been implemented as part of Tennessee’s agreement for receipt of federal grant funds. This report analyzes and describes the former teacher evaluation model (Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth) and TEAM and compares the two models. See Exhibit 1.

Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth (FEPG)

The Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth (FEPG) was developed by the Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) and was approved by the Tennessee State Board of Education (SBOE) in 1997.² (According to state law, the SBOE has the

power to adopt policies concerning evaluation of teachers.³) FEPG was piloted from 1997 to 1999 in 10 schools across the state, and was implemented statewide in July 2000.⁴ FEPG contained 44 criteria within six domains:⁵

1. Planning
2. Teaching Strategies
3. Assessment and Evaluation
4. Learning Environment
5. Professional Growth
6. Communication

SBOE rules provided guidelines for the teacher evaluations including a detailed description of the evaluation process, what data sources could be used, and what procedures LEAs had to follow in order to develop their own evaluations.⁶ Teachers were evaluated through a series of observations conducted by trained evaluators (training for evaluators lasted two days).⁷ Evaluators included school administrators, school district staff, and peer evaluators (e.g., teachers, such as department heads, who served in leadership positions). School principals were “responsible for the final evaluation decision.”⁸

State law required apprentice teachers^A to be formally evaluated at least once per year.⁹ Prior to 2007, teachers with a professional license^B were required by law to be evaluated only twice over a ten year period; however, in 2007, the state statute was revised to require these teachers to receive one formal evaluation

^A Teachers who hold apprentice licenses have graduated from an approved teacher preparation program. Teachers who hold an Apprentice Teacher License must teach for three years in an approved Tennessee school and must receive a positive rating on their evaluation in order to qualify for a Professional License. Apprentice teachers can be in Year 1, Year 2, or Year 3 which indicates the number of years that they have held an Apprentice license and have been teaching in an approved Tennessee school.

^B Teachers who possess a Professional License have taught at least three years.

(FEPG) and two informal evaluations (Performance Assessments) every five years.¹⁰ According to guidelines adopted by the DOE and approved by the SBOE for FEPG, Year one and two apprentice teachers had to be observed at least three times per year, Year three apprentice teachers had to be observed at least twice per year, and professionally licensed teachers had to be observed at least twice during the year that they were evaluated.

Apprentice teachers were evaluated using the Comprehensive Assessment. FEPG recommended that teachers with Professional Licensure also use this evaluation; however, professionally licensed teachers could also have been evaluated using the Focused Assessment.^c Approximately 98 percent of LEAs used the Comprehensive Assessment to evaluate teachers.¹¹ The Comprehensive Assessment required teachers to complete the following documentation:¹²

- **Self-Assessment:** Teachers used student performance data and Performance Standards for each of the 44 FEPG criteria to identify areas of strength and areas that they needed to strengthen.
- **Reflecting Information Record:** Teachers reflected on their lesson and teaching practices after their observation.
- **Educator Information Record:** Teachers could include more information on student growth, their collaboration with other educators, and their professional growth.
- **Future Growth Plan:** Teachers worked with evaluators to create a Future Growth Plan at the conclusion of the evaluation process. This plan included a list of the areas teachers needed to strengthen, their growth goals for these areas, and a plan of action for achieving those goals including a description of planned professional development training.

Teachers could also submit a lesson or unit plan prior to each observation. Evaluators provided feedback to teachers throughout the evaluation process. LEAs could also use an alternative teacher evaluation model,

but it had to be approved by the Commissioner of Education; few LEAs used alternative teacher evaluations. See Exhibit 2 for more information on FEPG.

Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM)

In 2010, the “Tennessee First to the Top Act” (FTTT) changed the way teachers are evaluated in Tennessee. FTTT was passed in part to bolster Tennessee’s 2010 Race to the Top (RTTT) Application. One of the main goals listed in Tennessee’s RTTT Application was the development and implementation of a new teacher (and principal) evaluation system that included student achievement as one of the components.¹³ FTTT created the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee (TEAC) and charged the Committee with the development of and recommendation to the SBOE of “guidelines and criteria for the annual evaluation of teachers and principals employed by LEAs.”¹⁴ The statute requires teacher evaluations to “be a factor in employment decisions” including dismissal, tenure, compensation, promotion, and retention.¹⁵ According to the statute, the new teacher evaluation system was to be implemented by the 2011-2012 school year.

TEAC began meeting in March 2010 to develop the new teacher evaluation system.¹⁶ In September 2010, TEAC voted to approve its initial policy recommendations for the SBOE. Field testing of four different models for the observation component began in October 2010 in 230 schools in 84 districts across the state; in March 2011 the TAP Observation Rubric was recommended by the DOE and subsequently approved by the SBOE.¹⁷ In January 2011, TEAC created a list of alternative measures of student achievement that could be used for the 15 percent student achievement portion of the new teacher evaluations. In April 2011, TEAC presented its final policy recommendations to the SBOE, which the SBOE subsequently approved. The SBOE approved the state teacher evaluation model in June 2011. The new Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) was implemented statewide in July 2011.

^c The Focused Assessment was more of an action-based project that teachers (mostly high performing teachers) completed.

SBOE Rules allow local districts to develop and implement their own evaluation models if approved by the SBOE. In April 2011, the DOE reviewed alternative model applications from three groups: Memphis City Schools, Hamilton County Schools, and the Association of Independent and Municipal Schools (AIMS). DOE recommended these models for approval and the SBOE approved them in June 2011.¹⁸

SBOE Rules require all educators to be evaluated annually.¹⁹ Evaluations must follow the new guidelines adopted by the SBOE:

1. The primary purpose of annual teacher and principal evaluations is to identify and support instruction that will lead to high levels of student achievement.

2. Evaluations will be used to inform human capital decisions, including, but not limited to individual and group professional development plans, hiring, assignment and promotion, tenure and dismissal, and compensation.
3. Annual evaluations will differentiate teacher and principal performance into five effectiveness groups according to the individual educator's evaluation results. The five effectiveness groups are: significantly above expectations, above expectations, at expectations, below expectations, significantly below expectations.²¹

FTTT states that student achievement data must comprise 50 percent of the teacher evaluation criteria: 35 percent of which shall be based on student growth

Exhibit 1: Timeline of Recent Policy Changes Affecting Teacher Evaluations in Tennessee²⁰

Date	Event
1997	State Board of Education (SBOE) approved Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth (FEPG).
1997-1999	FEPG was piloted.
2000	FEPG was implemented statewide.
June 2004	SBOE approved revisions to FEPG to comply with No Child Left Behind.
2007	The state statute was revised to require teachers with a professional license to receive one formal evaluation and two informal evaluations every five years.
January 2010	First to the Top Act signed into law - created new teacher evaluation system.
March 2010	The Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee (TEAC) began meeting to develop new teacher evaluations.
September 2010	TEAC voted to approve its initial policy recommendations for the new teacher evaluation system for the SBOE.
January 2011	TEAC voted on options for the alternative student achievement measures that will comprise 15 percent of teacher's evaluations.
March 2011	TAP rubric was chosen as the observation rubric for teacher evaluations.
April 2011	TEAC presented its final policy recommendations for the new teacher evaluations to the SBOE; the SBOE approved all recommendations and revised the "Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policy" 5.201.
June 2011	SBOE approved the state teacher evaluation model and three alternative teacher evaluation models.
July 2011	The SBOE revised the rules relative to teacher evaluations, Chapter 0520-02-01; the new teacher evaluation system (TEAM) was implemented statewide.
November 2011	The SBOE revised the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policy 5.201, allowing two observations (for teacher evaluations) to be conducted during one visit with only one pre-conference and one post-conference meeting per visit.
2012	All teachers will receive their evaluation scores for the 2011-2012 school year.

measures and 15 percent of which shall be based on “other measures of student achievement.”²² Individual TVAAS scores will be used for teachers (of tested subjects) and for teachers who don’t have individual TVAAS scores (teachers of non-tested subjects), LEAs will choose from among a list of options approved by the SBOE or teachers will use school-level TVAAS scores. Evaluators and educators must come to an agreement on which measure to use. If an agreement cannot be reached, the measure shall be chosen by the evaluator. FTTT also amended the state statute relative to the use of TVAAS data by removing the clause that prohibited student academic achievement test data from being “used as a part of formal personnel evaluations until data from three (3) complete academic years are obtained.”²³

TEAC recommended measures for the 15 percent student achievement portion of TEAM. The SBOE approved these measures and a technical advisory group is currently working to scale these measures. Individual TVAAS scores for teachers will be used for the 35 percent of the quantitative portion of the evaluation; however, a large number of teachers do not have individual TVAAS scores; they will use school wide TVAAS scores until alternative tests can be developed. The DOE contracted with a group of six technical advisors to develop measures of student growth for teachers of non-tested subjects and to review the recommendations of the teacher working groups. Twelve working groups comprised of educators from around the state made recommendations for alternative student growth measures.²⁴ Some measures are currently being piloted.

The remaining 50 percent of the teacher evaluations criteria will be comprised of a qualitative measure of educator practice: TEAM Observation Rubric. According to SBOE policy, the observation rubric must address the following domains:

- Planning (e.g., teachers’ instructional plans, plans for student assignments, plans for assessments);
- Environment (e.g., how the classroom is organized, how teachers manage student behavior);

- Professionalism (e.g., teachers’ participation in professional development activities);
- Instruction (e.g., how teachers present instructional content, how teachers motivate students).

SBOE policy states that apprentice teachers must be observed at least six times per year (three times per semester) for at least 90 minutes per school year (includes three 15 minutes observations and three lesson-length observations). All other teachers must be observed at least four times per year (two times per semester) for at least 60 minutes per school year (includes two 15 minutes observations and two lesson-length observations). At least half of the observations must be unannounced. The announced observations must be preceded by a pre-conference in which the evaluator meets with the educator to review the lesson plan and discuss the teacher’s goals for the lesson. Evaluators must provide feedback to educators in writing and must meet with the educator to “debrief” them on their observation within one week of each observation (post-conference). During the post-conference, teachers and evaluators may add their reflections on the observation to the “Observation Form.”²⁵ Teachers must submit a lesson plan for the observation on the “Planning” domain; evaluators may require teachers to submit lesson plans for other observations. At the end of the school year, the evaluator must meet with the teacher in an End-of-Year Conference.²⁶ During this conference, the evaluator will rate the teacher on the “TEAM Professionalism Rating Report” and will collect the student achievement measure data, if available.

In November 2011, the SBOE revised the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policy 5.201, allowing two observations to be conducted during one visit with only one pre-conference and one post-conference meeting per visit: the environment and planning observations can be combined with the instructional observations. This allows evaluators to reduce the number of observation visits, though the number of observations remains the same. The length of observations also remains the same; the difference is that because observations can now be conducted back-to-back, the number of pre- and post-conferences is reduced.

Exhibit 2: A Comparison of the Main Attributes of FEPG and TEAM

Attribute	Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth	Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model
How often are teachers evaluated?	Apprentice teachers – one formal evaluation per year. Professionally licensed teachers - one formal evaluation (FEPG) and two informal evaluations (Performance Assessments) every five years.	All teachers must be evaluated annually.
How many times are teachers observed during each evaluation?	Year one and two apprentice teachers - at least three times per year; Year three apprentice teachers - at least twice per year; and professionally licensed teachers - at least twice during the year that they are evaluated.	Apprentice teachers must be observed at least three times per year for at least 90 minutes per school year and all other teachers must be observed at least two times per year for at least 60 minutes per school year. At least half of the observations must be unannounced.
Who conducts the evaluation?	Trained evaluators including school administrators, school district staff, and peer evaluators (e.g., teachers who served in leadership positions such as department heads). School principals are “responsible for the final evaluation decision.” ²⁷	Trained evaluators who complete the evaluation training and pass the certification test including principals, assistant principals, and other instructional leaders.
What are the qualifications needed to become an evaluator?	Evaluators must attend the FEPG training approved by the DOE and conducted by a trainer certified by the DOE. Training sessions are three days in length; the days are spread over several months. Evaluators can begin evaluating teachers after the first day of training.	Evaluators and anyone conducting observations of teachers for purposes of evaluation must attend a training approved by the DOE and conducted by a trainer certified by the DOE. Training sessions last four days. Evaluators must also pass an evaluation certification test.
What measures comprise the evaluation?	Measures include: observations, teacher self-assessments, review of previous evaluations, teacher self-reflection, indicators of student achievement/ growth, and a review of teacher’s professional growth.	50% - Observation Rubric (Includes Professionalism Rating); 35% - TVAAS (or an alternative measure of student growth for teachers of non-tested subjects); 15% - Other measures of student achievement.
Do teachers receive feedback on the evaluation?	Evaluators are required to provide teachers feedback after each observation cycle and assist teachers with the development of their growth plans.	Following each observation, evaluators must provide feedback to teachers during a post-conference meeting.
What is the evaluation’s score range?	FEPG has a four point scale: Unsatisfactory, Level A – Developing, Level B – Proficient, and Level C – Advanced. The scores for the evaluation are different for Year 1 and 2 apprentice teachers, Year 3 apprentice teachers, and professionally licensed teachers. If a teacher scores below a certain point for any of the indicators, that indicator will be included as one of the teacher’s “required areas to strengthen.”	The five effectiveness groups are: significantly above expectations, above expectations, at expectations, below expectations, significantly below expectations.

Attribute	Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth	Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model
How does the evaluation impact teachers (e.g., salary, professional development, licensure, tenure, dismissal)?	FEPG includes a Future Growth Plan which includes a list of specific areas (as evidenced by the FEPG indicators) that teachers need to strengthen, teachers' growth goals (which must be measureable), and an action plan that states how teachers will accomplish these goals. FEPG guides teachers' professional development plans.	The evaluation "shall be a factor in employment decisions" including dismissal, tenure, compensation, promotion, assignment and retention. ²⁸ The evaluation will also be used to guide individual and group professional development plans.

Endnotes

- ¹ 106th Tennessee General Assembly, Public Acts, 2010, Chapter No. 2, "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010," p. 6, <http://state.tn.us/sos> (accessed Oct. 24, 2011).
- ² Tennessee State Board of Education, "Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth 5.201," p. 1, <http://www.state.tn.us/sbe> (accessed Feb. 1, 2012).
- ³ *Tennessee Code Annotated* § 49-1-302(a)(5)(A).
- ⁴ Kaneal Alexander, Director of Teacher Evaluations, Tennessee Department of Education, telephone interview, Oct. 27, 2011.
- ⁵ Tennessee Department of Education, "Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth: Comprehensive Assessment," June 2009, pp. 7, 10, <http://www.tn.gov/education> (accessed Oct. 27, 2011).
- ⁶ Rules of the State Board of Education, Chapter 0520-2-1, Evaluations, effective January 2008.
- ⁷ Tennessee Department of Education, "Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth," <http://www.tn.gov/education> (accessed Oct. 26, 2011).
- ⁸ Rules of the State Board of Education, Chapter 0520-2-1-.02(1)(b)(2), Evaluations, Local Evaluations, Local evaluation of teachers, Process, effective January 2008.
- ⁹ *Tennessee Code Annotated* § 49-5-5205(c).
- ¹⁰ *Tennessee Code Annotated* § 49-5-5205(d); Kaneal Alexander, Director of Teacher Evaluations, Tennessee Department of Education, telephone interview, Oct. 27, 2011.
- ¹¹ Kaneal Alexander, Director of Teacher Evaluations, Tennessee Department of Education, telephone interview, Oct. 27, 2011.
- ¹² Tennessee Department of Education, "Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth: Comprehensive Assessment," June 2009, p. 46, <http://www.tn.gov/education> (accessed Oct. 27, 2011).
- ¹³ Tennessee Department of Education, "Great Teachers and Leaders," <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Jul. 20, 2011).
- ¹⁴ 106th Tennessee General Assembly, Public Acts, 2010, Chapter No. 2, "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010," p. 5, <http://state.tn.us/sos> (accessed Oct. 24, 2011).
- ¹⁵ 106th Tennessee General Assembly, Public Acts, 2010, Chapter No. 2, "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010," p. 5, <http://state.tn.us/sos> (accessed Oct. 24, 2011).
- ¹⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: March-June 2010," pp. 1-3, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011).
- ¹⁷ Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: August-September 2010," p. 3, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: March 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011);

- Education, "Developing TEAM: Field Test," p. 1, <http://team-tn.org> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011).
- ¹⁸ Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: May 2011," p. 2, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: June 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011).
- ¹⁹ Rules of the State Board of Education, Chapter 0520-02-01-.01, Evaluations, General Requirements for Evaluations, effective July 2011.
- ²⁰ Kaneal Alexander, Director of Teacher Evaluations, Tennessee Department of Education, telephone interview, Oct. 27, 2011; Tennessee Department of Education, "*Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth: Comprehensive Assessment*," June 2009, p. 10, <http://www.tn.gov/education> (accessed Oct. 27, 2011); 106th Tennessee General Assembly, Public Acts, 2010, Chapter No. 2, "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010," p. 6, <http://state.tn.us/sos> (accessed Oct. 24, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: March-June 2010," pp. 1-3, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: August-September 2010," p. 3, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: January 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: March 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: April 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011); Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: June 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011).
- ²¹ Tennessee State Board of Education, "Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policy 5.201," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/sbe> (accessed Oct. 26, 2011).
- ²² 106th Tennessee General Assembly, Public Acts, 2010, Chapter No. 2, "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010," p. 5, <http://state.tn.us/sos> (accessed Oct. 24, 2011).
- ²³ *Tennessee Code Annotated* § 49-1-606, Amendments Section.
- ²⁴ Tennessee Department of Education, "First to the Top Monthly Update: February 2011," p. 1, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop> (accessed Jul. 20, 2011).
- ²⁵ Tennessee Department of Education, "TEAM Educator Observation Form," p. 2, <http://team-tn.org> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011).
- ²⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, "TEAM Process Guide," <http://team-tn.org> (accessed Oct. 31, 2011).
- ²⁷ Rules of the State Board of Education, Chapter 0520-2-1-.02(1)(b)(2), Evaluations, Local Evaluations, Local evaluation of teachers, Process, effective January 2008.
- ²⁸ 106th Tennessee General Assembly, Public Acts, 2010, Chapter No. 2, "Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010," p. 5, <http://state.tn.us/sos> (accessed Oct. 24, 2011).



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