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Guidance on Teacher Evaluation Systems for Beginning (Novice) Teachers in Illinois

*This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above.
For specific questions, please contact the person(s) identified in the document.*

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Guidance on Teacher Evaluation Systems for Beginning (Novice) Teachers in Illinois

Type of Guidance

This guidance document provides background information on evaluations for beginning teachers and recommendations for ensuring that teacher performance evaluations are appropriate for and support the professional learning of beginning teachers. As a guidance document, the following is intended to support districts and local unions in understanding this topic and to provide a foundation for making decisions about districts' evaluation systems.

The interest in induction and mentoring of new teachers in the state of Illinois started in the 1980s and has evolved into a statewide collaboration. Since 2006, state education leaders and educators have worked to develop world-class induction and mentoring program standards and an induction and mentoring program continuum in Illinois. The Illinois Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs (see page 8 for more details) set forth a clear framework to assist in the development of research-based induction programs that are responsive to local contexts (Goldrick, 2013). During this time, the Illinois New Teacher Collaborative, the New Teacher Center, and stakeholders worked diligently to provide and support induction and mentoring programs, which were funded for a limited time by state grant funds. Many local education agencies (LEAs) created and implemented induction programs as a result of state grant funding. Currently, Illinois LEAs that are receiving Race to the Top (RTTT) funds are required to align their induction programs with the Illinois Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs, and implement induction and mentoring programs linked to performance evaluations for new teachers. Those not receiving RTTT funds are encouraged to use this guidance to inform decision making on how to utilize their evaluation systems to best support and develop beginning teachers.

The Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA, 2010) states the following:

Each school district shall develop, in cooperation with its teachers or, where applicable, the exclusive bargaining representatives of its teachers, an evaluation plan for all teachers (105 ILCS 5/24A-4). Each school district shall establish a teacher evaluation plan that ensures that each teacher not in contractual continued service is evaluated at least once every school year (105 ILCS 5/24A-5).

The Illinois Administrative Code (2012) states the following:

This Part establishes the minimum requirements for the establishment of valid and reliable performance evaluation systems for certified employees, pursuant to Article 24A of the School Code, that assess both professional competence or practice and student growth (23 Ill. Adm. Code 50.10).

Evidence of professional practice shall be collected through the use of multiple observations that include formal and informal observations. For the purpose of this subsection (c), a formal observation shall allow the qualified evaluator to acquire evidence of the teacher's planning, instructional delivery, and classroom management skills and shall involve one of the following activities: an observation of the teacher in his or her classroom for a minimum of 45 minutes at a time; or an observation during a complete lesson; or an observation during an entire class period. ... For each nontenured teacher, a minimum of three observations shall be required each school year, of which two must be formal observations. Each formal observation shall be preceded by a conference between the qualified evaluator and the teacher. (A) In advance of this conference, the teacher shall submit to the qualified evaluator a written lesson or unit plan and/or other evidence of planning. ... (B) The qualified evaluator and the teacher shall discuss the lesson or unit plan or instructional planning and any areas on which the qualified evaluator should focus during the observation, if applicable. (5) Following a formal observation, the qualified evaluator shall meet with the teacher to discuss the evidence collected about the teacher's professional practice. ... Following an informal observation, the qualified evaluator shall provide feedback to the teacher. ... (B) The qualified evaluator shall provide feedback to the teacher about the individual's professional practice, including evidence specific to areas of focus designated during the conference preceding the observation (see subsection (c)(4) of this Section). (23 Ill Adm. Code 50.120).

During the 2003–2004 school year, each public school or 2 or more public schools acting jointly shall develop, in conjunction with its exclusive representative or their exclusive representatives, if any, a new teacher induction and mentoring program that meets the requirements set forth in Section 21A-20 of this Code to assist new teachers in developing the skills and strategies necessary for instructional excellence, provided that funding is made available by the State Board of Education from an appropriation made for this purpose (105 ILCS 5/21A-10).

The Illinois RTTT Phase 3 application states the following:

All RTTT3 Participating LEAs, subject to the availability of RTTT3 funds or other State funding of at least \$1,600 per teacher in years one and two and \$1,200 per teacher in years 3 and 4, will be required to:

- Establish induction and mentoring programs for all new teachers that are at least two years in duration, use positive performance evaluations as a factor in the selection of mentors, and meet standards set forth in the School Code and administrative rules; and
- Participate in the State's technical assistance and accountability systems to improve the quality of all new teacher induction and mentoring programs. RTTT3 funds will be provided to assist Participating LEAs in establishing these programs.

The State will provide technical assistance to the induction and mentoring programs developed by the Participating LEAs while also holding these programs accountable to ensure program quality. ... In order to ensure program accountability, the State will

develop and implement a process of ongoing program improvement based upon the Illinois Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs, the Illinois Continuum of Induction Program Development, and implementation and impact data. ... RTTT3 funds will be allocated to the dissemination and replication of best induction/mentoring practices beyond the Participating LEAs (State of Illinois, 2011, pp. 47–48).

Scope of Guidance

This guidance document provides examples of how to address the needs of beginning (novice) teachers in teacher performance evaluations in two main ways:

- **Utilize evaluation components and requirements to provide beginning teachers with regular performance feedback and support.** Components of teacher performance evaluations, such as formative feedback from observations or summative feedback, can provide all teachers with valuable insight about their teaching practice, identify areas for growth, and connect teachers with professional learning or support opportunities. Because these feedback opportunities are especially important for beginning teachers who should still be developing in their teaching practice, performance evaluation systems may be designed and implemented to ensure that beginning teachers receive regular and targeted performance feedback and support. This feedback and support will come as part of their performance evaluation, but it may also come in the form of an induction mentor who can provide feedback on classroom observations that are not included in the performance evaluation.
- **Align induction programs to the performance evaluation program.** Induction and mentoring programs can help beginning teachers reach proficiency sooner, including improving their impact on student learning, and can help improve retention rates for new teachers. As defined within 23 Illinois Administrative Code, Part 65, an induction program aligned with existing PERA requirements could provide the necessary depth and frequency of feedback to beginning teachers to accelerate their professional learning and strengthen their effectiveness in the classroom.

Maximizing Feedback and Support for Beginning Teachers Within Performance Evaluation Systems

Beginning teachers, or novice teachers, are teachers who are in their first two years of teaching. Twenty years ago, the most common American teacher had 15 years of experience. Today, the most common teacher is a first-year teacher (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). This change in teacher demographics is significant because beginning teachers often face greater challenges in the classroom and may be less effective than more veteran teachers (Goldrick, Zabala, & Burn, 2013; Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005).

To address this issue, LEAs can utilize teacher evaluation systems, along with formal, high-quality induction and mentoring programs, to provide beginning teachers with performance feedback and to accelerate improvements in their practice. Regular performance feedback and support can help teachers reach proficiency faster by systematically targeting areas for growth

and identifying specific strategies for improvement. Research on new teacher support indicates that in order to strengthen teaching practice and impact student learning, such feedback needs to be of sufficient duration (two years), of adequate quantity (more than one hour per week), and regular (weekly) (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Glazerman et al., 2010). Beginning teachers should be held to the same teaching standards as all other teachers and, within an evaluation system that prioritizes their growth and learning, should be expected to perform at or close to proficiency. The Danielson (2013) *Framework for Teaching* contains four domains, 22 components, and 76 elements. First- and second-year teachers are working to build their repertoire of strategies, classroom management skills, and other important processes that veteran teachers have already mastered. Although not required, districts and collective bargaining units can collaboratively determine areas of focus and the amounts of evidence to collect to inform the teacher practice rating for first- and second-year teachers. For performance evaluations in Illinois, evaluators usually share performance feedback in postobservation conferences, midyear conferences, or summative end-of-year conferences. Illinois law requires a postobservation conference following each formal observation. LEAs can maximize the feedback and support that beginning teachers receive by utilizing these types of conferences in two main ways:

- Increasing the number of observations and postobservation conferences (for formal or informal observations)
- Using multiple observers, including peer observers¹ for observations that include postobservation conferences (formal or informal)

There are a number of reasons for including more observations as part of teacher evaluations. Having more observers can increase the reliability of observation ratings and better capture the variety of teaching practices across different lessons and contexts (Hill & Grossman, 2013; Ho & Kane, 2013). Beyond these benefits, including more observations of any kind (formal or informal) can help to generate more feedback to guide teacher practice. Such feedback can help teachers better see the connection between their everyday practice and expectations, as well as make midcourse corrections in their approach and target specific student groups or learning objectives. For beginning teachers who may feel overwhelmed by both the expectations and realities of the classroom, more regular feedback may be especially helpful in prioritizing instructional goals and identifying school or district resources for support and guidance.

LEAs can take a number of approaches to structure district-level observation requirements to ensure that beginning teachers receive regular and specific feedback on their performance.

- **Train evaluators to give high-quality, specific feedback on performance.** Although it is important to ensure that there are numerous opportunities for beginning teachers to receive performance feedback, the quality of the feedback given is critical in ensuring that it has a positive impact on teacher practice. Evaluators must be trained on how to provide high-quality, specific feedback that leads to continuous improvement and development.
- **Increase the number of required observations for beginning or nontenured teachers** (see “Spotlight On ... Metro Nashville Schools” on page 7).² Illinois law requires a

¹ The use of peer observers is subject to collective bargaining.

² Determining the number of observations is subject to collective bargaining.

minimum of three observations, two of which must be formal observations. Although informal observations provide a flexible and meaningful opportunity for beginning teachers to receive additional performance feedback and support, these informal observations may not provide beginning teachers with the comprehensive feedback they need to truly improve their practice. Because of the variance in lessons and the common struggles of beginning teachers, it is important that LEA evaluation systems include enough formal and informal observations to accurately assess beginning teacher performance, capture professional growth during the course of the school year, and provide meaningful feedback. Although including additional observations for beginning teachers may take more time, LEAs may take steps to reduce the burden on administrative evaluators (see the [PEAC Guidance Document on peer observers](#) for more information).

- **Implement regular informal observation requirements.**³ Informal observations are an effective way to gather evidence of teacher practice with fewer scheduling barriers. School-based administrative evaluators can conduct informal “drop-in” observations whenever they have time in their schedule without the concern about capturing a full lesson or needing to give advance notice. When conducted regularly, these informal observations provide opportunities for evaluators to gather evidence of teacher practice across a variety of lessons and contexts. Having regular informal observations also may help to build trust between evaluators and teachers, as teachers become more accustomed to having the evaluator in the classroom and receiving constructive performance feedback.
- **Use postobservation conferences or other feedback mechanisms for informal observations.** A postobservation conference with written feedback is required after formal observations. Following informal observations, evaluators also are required to provide oral or written feedback to the teachers, and teachers must have the opportunity to discuss the feedback in person with the evaluator if it is written. By affording practical and meaningful avenues for providing beginning teachers with regular feedback, LEAs can ensure that every evaluation activity also serves as an opportunity for beginning teachers to self-assess, reflect on, and hone their practice.⁴
- **Organize the pacing of feedback throughout the school year.** In order to maximize the positive impact of the feedback and support that beginning teachers receive, LEAs should provide guidance or rules for the pacing of all evaluation components linked to feedback. For example, LEAs may require that all beginning teachers have at least one informal observation and one formal observation, including the postobservation conference or other feedback mechanism, within the first 60 days of the school year. This ensures that beginning teachers receive feedback that is distributed evenly across the school year and during the most challenging times of the school year.
- **Include midyear evaluation conferences to discuss formative student growth data and other evaluation data.** Midyear evaluation conferences provide beginning teachers with an opportunity to discuss the evaluation data collected so far and examine preliminary or formative student growth data. Unlike most postobservation conferences, midyear evaluation conferences allow the evaluator (usually the principal) to discuss the evaluation

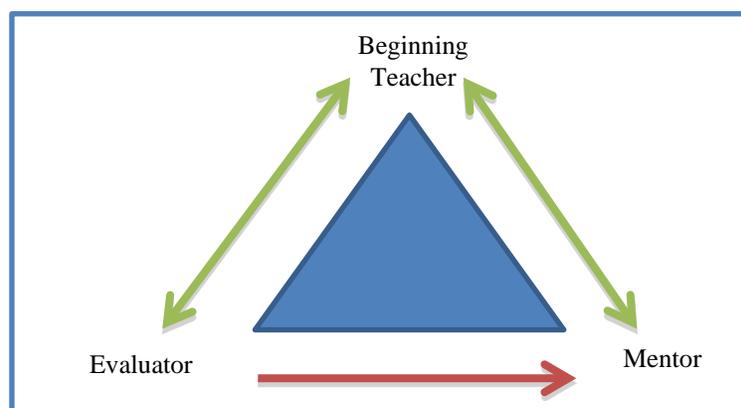
³ Determining the timing and frequency of observations is subject to collective bargaining.

⁴ Determining how and when feedback is provided is subject to collaborative decision making between the local union and district.

data collected so far within the context of performance standards or an evaluation rubric, providing a snapshot of what the summative evaluation may look like based on the growth the beginning teacher has made so far. This type of conference allows beginning teachers to see all of their evaluation data in one context prior to any personal consequences and while they still have an opportunity to improve their practice. Beginning teachers can use the midyear evaluation conference to discuss progress made so far, what supports have been helpful, and what midcourse corrections still need to be made.

- **Provide nonevaluative feedback to support the growth and development of beginning teachers.** Providing high-quality training to mentors on conducting observations and delivering feedback aligned with the performance evaluation tool will ensure that beginning teachers understand the expectations. By participating in nonevaluative observations, teachers are more likely to push their practice, try new strategies and techniques, and take risks to improve their practice without worrying about the impact on their performance evaluation. For this reason, it is critical to maintain confidentiality in the mentor and beginning teacher relationship and ensure that nonevaluative observations and feedback conversations are private. The mentoring relationship is built on trust, and that trust can be preserved only if the beginning teacher knows that information about his or her practice will not be shared with an evaluator. Figure 1 highlights the communication structure for a trusting mentoring relationship as developed by the New Teacher Center. The beginning teacher should have back-and-forth communication with both the evaluator and the mentor. This two-way communication empowers teachers to talk about their practice using common language and to highlight changes or improvements. The evaluator can share information about the beginning teacher’s performance with the mentor to help the mentor identify priorities of focus, but the mentor should not share information about the beginning teacher directly with the evaluator.

Figure 1. Communication Structure for Mentoring Relationships



Source: New Teacher Center

There are many ways to ensure that evaluation systems support and develop beginning teachers. Although these approaches would be beneficial for all teachers, they are especially important for beginning teachers. Likewise, implementing these types of evaluation requirements is not likely to add a significant amount of work to the evaluation design if they are required for beginning teachers only.

Spotlight On ... Metro Nashville Public Schools

The Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) evaluation system meets the Tennessee state requirement that beginning teachers have a total of four observations per year, with one announced and one unannounced observation per semester. Struggling veteran teachers have the same observation requirements as beginning teachers, although proficient veteran teachers have only two observations per year. The district also provides guidance on pacing to ensure that feedback is spread out over the academic year. For more information, see the following MNPS information:

- [Observation Pacing](#)
- [Observation Requirements](#)

Aligned Induction Programs

There are numerous examples across the country of induction programs aligned with performance evaluation systems, many of which have been in place for several years. The purpose of induction is to support and develop beginning teachers, with the goal of improving teacher performance and retention within the district. An *aligned induction program* is designed to work with the evaluation system so that evidence on teacher practice may be gathered in a coordinated way and the two systems work together to provide beginning teachers with support and guidance. Typically, induction programs focus on beginning teachers in their first year of teaching, but most comprehensive models extend to second-year teachers or even all nontenured teachers. Induction programs vary in scope with regard to the selectivity of mentor teachers, the amount of foundational training and ongoing support provided to mentors, the participation of beginning teachers in a support network, and the intensity and regularity of mentoring. Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs also are sometimes considered induction programs depending on the design of the PAR program (see the [PEAC Guidance Document on peer observers](#) for more information).

Induction models rely on mentor teachers or coaches who may work in this role full time or part time and usually apply for the role. In high-quality induction models, mentors and coaches are required to have an exemplary teaching record, including consistently demonstrated effectiveness, collaboration, and leadership skills, as well as knowledge about professional development and other supports within the district. Mentors and coaches also are required to go through professional development or training specific to that role to better reflect on and recognize high-quality teaching practices and to give high-quality feedback. It is important to note that induction programs are not mentoring programs alone; induction programs are typically structured, comprehensive programs linked to evaluation and professional development.

Comprehensive induction programs provide many benefits, including:

- Greater commitment to the teaching profession
- Increased trust and respect within the professional teaching community
- Improved collaboration among teachers (Duke, Karson, & Wheeler, 2006; Wong, 2003; Wong, 2004; Wong, 2005;)

- Reduced teacher turnover from the school and district (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011)
- Greater teacher effectiveness (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Glazerman et al., 2010)

Illinois has two major resources for LEAs seeking to implement aligned induction programs: *Illinois Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs* (Illinois State Teacher Certification Board, 2008) and the Illinois Induction Program Continuum (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010). These resources provide clear guidelines and standards for LEA (and consortia) induction programs in Illinois, including the roles of administrators and evaluations, program design, and program assessment. These resources emphasize formative assessments and goal setting but do not specifically include alignment with performance evaluations.

In October 2012, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) completed its effort to formalize the application of program standards to the approval and operation of teacher induction programs through the adoption of 23 Illinois Administrative Code, Part 65. These new rules require “sufficient time (at least 40 hours per year) for the mentor and beginning teacher to engage in mentoring activities” (Illinois Administrative Code 23.50, 2012). An LEA that wishes to align its induction program with its evaluation system could voluntarily follow these rules and provide a more substantial amount of feedback and support to new teachers.

LEAs that already have induction programs in place or are considering implementing aligned induction programs also can ensure that their induction programs are aligned to performance evaluation by:

- **Synchronizing the beginning teacher support with the performance evaluation rubric and observation processes and tools** (see Spotlight on... Elgin U-46 below). Whether beginning teachers are working directly with a mentor or coach or are participating in professional development, it is important that the content is aligned to the district performance evaluation rubric. That way, expectations are reinforced and beginning teachers can build their understanding of expectations and make connections to their own practice through conversations with their evaluators.

Spotlight on...School District U-46 Elgin Teacher Mentor Program

Elgin’s existing teacher mentoring program gave rise to its evaluation system. Mentor program leaders provided the catalyst in reforming the district’s evaluation system when they realized the misalignment between it and the teacher mentoring program. “By moving to a teacher appraisal system that was also based on Danielson’s Framework, they were able to leverage the knowledge and skills developed through the mentoring program to bolster their capacity to implement teacher evaluation reform—the performance standards were already accepted by a large proportion of the district’s teachers, and a cadre of capable evaluators had already been established” (White, Cowhy, Stevens & Spote, 2012, p. 10) Elgin phased in its new evaluation system through voluntary participation, beginning in 2008. By fall 2012, the new system was fully implemented districtwide.

For more information, visit [School District U-46/ETA Teacher Mentor Program](#).

Guidance to Districts on Evaluations for Beginning Teachers

The following is a summary of guidance and recommendations to districts for ensuring that teacher performance evaluations are appropriate for and support the professional learning of beginning teachers. ISBE has identified the following recommendations for districts on performance evaluations for beginning teachers:

- Train observers in giving high-quality, specific feedback on instruction and classroom management.
- Require more formal and informal observations for beginning teachers than proficient, veteran teachers.
 - Ensure that formal and informal observations are spaced evenly throughout the year.
 - Ensure that there are meaningful ways for teachers to receive feedback from informal observations, walk-throughs, or peers.
- Align and synchronize the content of induction and mentoring support and programs to performance evaluations, including the evaluation rubric, observation processes, and tools.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does our district have to follow what is outlined in this guidance document?

No. This is just a guidance document. In the development of teacher evaluation systems, a joint committee can choose whether to follow this guidance.

2. What is the difference between a mentor and a peer observer?

A mentor is assigned to support a beginning teacher and will conduct nonevaluative observations to provide formative feedback to beginning teachers. The use of mentor teachers in an LEA is not subject to collective bargaining.

A peer observer, as described in this guidance document, is a teacher who observes another teacher for evaluation purposes. The observation is included as part of the teacher's summative evaluation. The use of peer observers for evaluative purposes is subject to collective bargaining.

3. Where can I find resources on induction and mentoring in Illinois?

The Illinois New Teacher Collaborative houses a significant number of resources for programs that are just beginning or those that are well developed. You can find more information, including the resources mentioned in this document.

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