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Guidance on *Needs Improvement* Rating in Teacher Evaluation Systems in Illinois

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Guidance on *Needs Improvement* Rating in Teacher Evaluation Systems in Illinois

The 2010 Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA; 105 ILCS 5/24A et seq.) requires that districts adopt an educator evaluation system that recognizes excellent and proficient teachers as well as identifies those teachers who are not currently meeting expectations for educator quality (i.e., *needs improvement* and *unsatisfactory*). PERA specifies that teachers should receive a summative rating for their performance that reflects teacher practice as well as student growth. A teacher's summative rating is assigned to one of four performance categories: *excellent*, *proficient*, *needs improvement*, or *unsatisfactory*. This guidance document is intended to support understanding of PERA related to a *needs improvement* rating. For many teachers and districts, the assignment of a *needs improvement* rating can be a springboard for promoting teacher growth and improvement. To that end, this guidance document provides a brief overview of PERA related to a *needs improvement* rating, identifies those areas of the law where joint committees have the flexibility to shape their own local response, and provides selected research and local examples related to supporting the growth and development of teachers.

Note: PERA does not require any joint committee (see definition of joint committee at § 24A-4 and 23 Ill. Admin. Code § 50.30) to act specifically on the guidance provided in this document. This document addresses the *needs improvement* rating. For PERA language related to the rating of *unsatisfactory*, see the Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 24A-5(i-k).

Background: PERA Language Related to a *Needs Improvement* Rating

The Illinois School Code states in relevant part:

> Within 30 school days after assigning a tenured teacher a "Needs Improvement" rating, a school district, in consultation with the teacher and taking into account the teacher's on-going professional responsibilities (including his or her regular teacher assignments) must develop for that teacher a "professional development plan" directed to the areas that need improvement and that includes any supports the district will provide to address the areas that need improvement.[1]

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[1] Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 24A-5(h)

> **1. PERA Language Pertinent to a *Needs Improvement* Rating**
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> **Immediate Required Action**
> - A professional development plan (PDP) must be created by the evaluator in consultation with the teacher within 30 school days.
> - The PDP must be directed to the areas that need improvement and include any supports the district will provide to address the areas that need improvement.
> - Any professional development provided as part of a PDP must align to Standards for Professional Learning (2011) published by Learning Forward**.**
>
> **Required Follow-Up**
> - An educator who receives a *needs improvement* rating must be evaluated at least once during the school year following the receipt of such rating.
> - Educators with a *needs improvement* rating who are subsequently assigned a rating of *proficient* or *excellent* are reinstated to the regular evaluation cycle for tenured educators.
>
> *Sources:* Illinois School Code, 105 ILCS 24A-5; 23 Ill. Admin. Code § 50.100.

Professional Development Plan

As specified in PERA, districts must ensure that a PDP is created within 30 school days for all teachers receiving a *needs improvement* rating. Unlike a formal remediation plan that is put into place when a teacher receives an *unsatisfactory* rating, the PDP is more informal and is designed to support teacher growth in the specific areas identified as needing improvement (see Table 2). Although the district has final decision-making authority, the development of a PDP is intended to be a collaborative process that reflects a shared commitment to helping the educator improve. The PDP must be developed by the evaluator in consultation with the teacher; must take into consideration the teacher's ongoing professional responsibilities; and must outline the areas to be improved as well as the ways in which the district will provide support to facilitate this improvement. Any professional development provided as part of the plan must align with the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) (see Text Box 5). Beyond these rules, joint committees have considerable latitude in determining all remaining aspects of the PDP, including goals, duration, professional development activities, and supports; how and when teacher progress will be assessed; and what will happen at the conclusion of PDP—including reassessment and the follow-up steps taken when teachers do not show improvement over time.

> **2. What Is Not Included in PERA Related to a *Needs Improvement* Rating?**
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> **Goals, professional learning activities, and supports:** PERA does not stipulate the content, format, or structure for PDPs, nor does PERA specify how many goals or which professional learning activities and supports must be provided.
>
> **Duration:** PERA does not specify the duration of a PDP. A PDP may cross school years.
>
> **Monitoring of progress and metrics:** PERA does not specify how or how often a teacher needs to be assessed during the PDP. PERA does not indicate what will happen at the end of the PDP, such as reassessment or the follow-up steps taken when teachers do not show improvement across time.
>
> **Reassessment and follow-up steps:** PERA offers joint committees flexibility in how teachers are reassessed and does not specify what needs to happen at the conclusion of a PDP or what next steps should be taken for teachers who receive repeated *needs improvement* ratings.

PDP Components

A strong PDP will help establish the structure, supports, and skill-building opportunities needed to promote professional growth on the part of teachers—with the aim of effectively moving teachers out of a *needs improvement* status. In developing the PDP, stakeholders may want to consider the following PDP components:

- Improvement goals
- Professional learning activities and supports
- Duration
- Progress monitoring and metrics
- Reassessment and follow-up steps

When a teacher has received a *needs improvement* rating, the reasons for this rating may not be immediately apparent or straightforward. A range of individual, district, and external factors can affect a teacher's measured performance. Individual factors may be attributed to the teacher or the evaluator, including, but not limited to, the need for more training regarding the district's framework for proficient teaching, the need to understand the district's assessment/evaluation process, or an inconsistency in the application of the district's framework for proficient teaching. The district is responsible to provide sufficient initial and recurrent training so that teachers and evaluators can be rated *proficient* in the application of the district's framework for proficient teaching. The scope of this guidance document is the Professional Development Plan; thus, it is limited to those factors belonging to the teacher as an individual. Guidance related to the performance of an evaluator, inconsistent or ineffective evaluation, or the fairness of the district performance evaluation plan is beyond the scope of this document. Guidance related to these aspects of PERA can be found in these PEAC documents:

1. Guidance on District Decision Making: http://www.isbe.net/peac/pdf/guidance/13-3-dist-dec-making.pdf

2. PEAC Guidance to Schools and Districts Regarding Evaluating Teacher Practice and Understanding Summative Ratings: http://www.isbe.net/peac/pdf/guidance/15-4-summative-ratings.pdf

3. Guidance on Building Teacher Evaluation Systems for Teachers of Students With Disabilities, English Learners, and Early Childhood Students: http://www.isbe.net/peac/pdf/guidance/14-3-teacher-eval-sped-ell-preschool.pdf

4. Guidance on Peer Evaluation in Teacher Evaluation Systems in Illinois: http://www.isbe.net/peac/pdf/guidance/13-17-pe-teacher-eval.pdf

5. Model Teacher Evaluation System Creating a Summative Rating: http://www.isbe.net/peac/pdf/guidance/13-9-te-model-summ-rating.pdf

All of these factors may interact in ways that inhibit a teacher's enacted or measured performance. Before developing a PDP, evaluators and teachers are strongly encouraged to uncover the likely underlying cause(s) for the *needs improvement* rating. Districts must provide a safe and comfortable environment in which these discussions can occur. The information should be used to design a PDP that aligns with each teacher's individual needs and circumstances (see Text Box 3 and Table 1).

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3. Considering Potential Root Causes for a *Needs Improvement* Rating

The underlying causes for the *needs improvement* rating should be taken into account in developing the plan for teacher support or decision rules for teachers who do not show progress. Root causes may include individual-level, organizational, systemic, or external factors. These factors may interact in ways that inhibit a teacher's enacted or measured performance. Table 1 lists some of the potential root causes for first-time and repeated *needs improvement* ratings. It is important to remember that there may be multiple reasons why a teacher has received a *needs improvement* rating.

Table 1. Some Potential Root Causes for a *Needs Improvement* Rating

First-Time *Needs Improvement* Rating	Repeated *Needs Improvement* Rating
▪ The teacher is new to the profession and lacks experience (The New Teacher Project, 2010; TNTP, 2015).	▪ The teacher cannot successfully perform duties assigned.
▪ The teacher's practice is inconsistent with the district's framework for proficient teaching.	▪ The teacher's practice is inconsistent with the district's framework for proficient teaching.
▪ The teacher needs additional training in one or more components of the district's framework for proficient teaching.	▪ The teacher exhibits continued inconsistencies relative to the district's framework for proficient teaching.
▪ The teacher needs additional training on the district's evaluation plan or rating rubric.	▪ The teacher's established practice is not aligned with the school or district's evaluation plan or rating rubric (Wood et al., 2014).
▪ The evaluator needs additional training on the district's framework for teaching and/or the district's evaluation plan or rating rubric (Bell et al., 2014).	▪ The teacher is assuming a new role or responsibilities (e.g., changing grades, subjects, or specialty areas) or has been recently reassigned.
▪ The district failed to provide sufficient training on framework for teaching and/or the evaluation plan or rating rubric.	▪ The teacher has recently experienced (or continues to experience) a significant life event (e.g., divorce, death in family, or major illness).
▪ The teacher is assuming a new role or responsibilities (e.g., changing grades, subjects, or specialty areas) or has been recently reassigned.	▪ The district has not provided effective feedback and/or support from coaches and school leaders (The New Teacher Project, 2010).
▪ The teacher has recently experienced a significant life event (e.g., divorce, death in family, or major illness).	▪ The district has not fulfilled its responsibilities for providing support as
▪ The teacher has been assigned high	

proportion of students with more intensive needs (e.g., English language learners, special education, or academic challenges) (Chaplin, Gill, Thompkins, & Miller, 2014; Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2014). • There are issues with rater bias, distortion, and reliability of ratings by educator evaluators (e.g., subjective opinions by evaluator result in rubric not being interpreted and applied accurately, objectively or reliably) (Bell et al., 2014).	outlined in the PDP. • The teacher has been assigned high proportion of students with more intensive needs (e.g., English language learners, special education, or academic challenges) (Chaplin et al., 2014; Whitehurst et al., 2014). • The rating system measurement design flaws or shortcomings occur that affect validity (i.e., actual progress and improvement in teacher practice are not adequately captured by rating system or reflected in assigned ratings) (Mihaly & McCaffrey, 2014). • There are issues with rater bias, distortion, and reliability of ratings by educator evaluators (e.g., subjective opinions by evaluator result in rubric not being interpreted and applied accurately, objectively or reliably) (Bell et al., 2014).

Improvement Goals

PERA specifies that a teacher's PDP must be developed in consultation with the teacher and, minimally, include the areas in need of improvement identified through the teacher's performance evaluation. However, PERA does not specify how many goals need to be set or how goals should be developed and defined. One approach recommended by Learning Forward (Killion, 2013), the Illinois State Board of Education, and other state departments of education and being used by some Illinois districts as part of their educator evaluation systems (Bremen High School District 228 District Evaluation Committee, 2013; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012; Oak Lawn-Hometown School District 123, n.d.) is the use of SMART goals, which are specific, measurable, attainable/actionable, results focused, and time bound.

A popular approach, SMART goals aim to help teachers define goals that focus improvement efforts on concrete outcomes and to provide the parameters teachers need to gauge their progress. Writing SMART goals is an acquired skill. Teachers and evaluators using this approach are strongly encouraged to participate in training to learn how to write effective goals that meet the SMART criteria. Learning Forward supports the SMART goal approach, recommending that improvement goals be developed with performance data that identify teachers' needs, be standards based, and align with SMART goal criteria (Learning Forward, 2011). In addition to the SMART goal approach, some Illinois districts use other goal-setting approaches (see Text Box 4).

4. District Examples of Goal-Setting Approaches

The Bremen Community High School District 228 in Midlothian, Illinois, requires that teachers and evaluators establish SMART goals aligned with Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. All District 228 teachers develop individualized growth plans. Teachers first complete a self-assessment using the Danielson framework and then develop at least two SMART goals to either guide the evaluation process (in an evaluation year) or individually improve professional practice in a nonevaluation year. The District 228 Evaluation Committee provides training, support, and resources to help staff learn the skills associated with effective self-assessment and goal setting. The Kankakee School District has developed its own goal-setting process. In Kankakee, a teacher who has received a *needs improvement* rating works with his or her evaluator to develop a PDP with the following components:

- **Areas of improvement:** List each domain to be addressed
- **Rationale for area of improvement:** Evidence from observations that show the area needing improvement
- **Domain/component:** List the domain and/or component rated *needs improvement*
- Indicators for Effective Teaching: Find examples in the *Sources of Evidence for the Framework for Teaching* packet of domain/component rated *needs improvement* that will show or produce evidence of effective teaching.
- **Improvement strategies:** Strategies the teacher will use to show improvement in each needed domain/component.
- **Tasks to complete:** Specific tasks the teacher will complete that will improve the domain/component.
- **Support and resources:** List of supports and resources the teacher can use to improve,
- (e.g., workshops, observe colleagues, ask a specialist, and books/journals).
- **Indicators of progress:** How the teacher will show progress toward *proficient*/*excellent* in each domain/component (e.g., through informal observation and data).

Note. These highlighted examples do not provide a comprehensive description of these plans or of the training and implementation strategies needed to put these plans into effect. Please visit district and school websites referenced to gain a more complete picture of local approaches to educator evaluation.

Determining the appropriate number of goals to include in a teacher's PDP is another decision that needs to be addressed when devising PDPs. Too few goals may prevent a teacher from improving sufficiently to move out of the *needs improvement* status. Too many goals may cause the teacher's attention and efforts to become less focused and effective. Many educational agencies follow the "less is more" principle. For example, the Ohio Department of Education suggests teachers set three to five goals as part of their individual professional growth plan (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.). Bremen Community High School District 288 in Midlothian, Illinois, suggests that teachers select a minimum of two goals to address as part of their individual growth plans (Bremen High School District 228 District Evaluation Committee, 2013).

Professional Learning Activities and Supports

After the improvement goals have been identified, the PDP must outline how the teacher will receive the learning activities and supports conducive to his or her growth and improvement. PERA specifies that the PDP be directed to the areas identified as needing improvement and that professional development provided as part of a PDP align to [Standards for Professional Learning](Learning Forward, 2011) (Illinois Administrative Code Part 50.100 (d)). The Learning Forward

Standards for Professional Learning include seven areas believed to support professional learning based on research and best practice (Text Box 5).

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5. Learning Forward: Standards for Professional Learning

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students includes the following elements:

- Learning communities
- Leadership
- Resources
- Data
- Learning designs
- Implementation
- Outcomes

Source: Learning Forward, 2011.

Research-Based Strategies for Promoting Teacher Growth and Improvement

A review of research conducted by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011) aligns well with Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards and suggests that high-quality professional development exhibits the following characteristics:

- **Aligned/integrated:** Aligns with school goals, state and district standards and assessments, and other professional learning activities

- **Core instruction:** Focuses on core academic content and the modeling of teaching strategies for the content

- **Opportunities for active learning:** Includes opportunities for teachers to observe seasoned educators model practices and actively practice new teaching strategies

- **Collaborative:** Provides opportunities for collaboration and peer feedback and support among teachers (e.g., professional learning community, learning teams, or peer assistance and review)

- **Embedded follow-up and continuous feedback:** Offers continuous feedback to teachers on what they are learning (e.g., instructional coaching, professional learning communities, and data teams)

Learning Forward (2011) suggests that professional learning plans be designed based on the KASAB (knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors) approach (Killion, 2013). According to Learning Forward, lasting change in teacher practice is more likely to take place when teachers are able to build new understanding and skills, shift beliefs, and have the opportunity to apply these new competencies in their classrooms. The Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards also recommend that professional learning is based on research and theories of human learning. For example, the standards note research that suggests that

educators are more motivated to change when they are given the opportunity for "voice and choice" in the design of their own learning experiences (Killion, 2013; Knight, 2011). When determining the professional learning activities and supports that will be included in a teacher's PDP, stakeholders may want to consider one or more of the research-based strategies outlined in this section.

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6. Peer Assistance and Review: A Promising Strategy for Promoting Teacher Growth

Among the many professional development strategies listed previously, one strategy for promoting teacher growth and improvement is a peer assistance and review (PAR) program. A fully implemented PAR program uses teachers to provide structured mentorship, observation, evaluation, and feedback to other teachers to support their ongoing development and student learning. Peer evaluation is one component of a PAR program. An analysis of seven PAR programs found that districts with fully implemented PAR programs retained more novice teachers and dismissed more underperforming teachers—both tenured and nontenured—than did comparable districts (Papay & Johnson, 2012). In 2013, Race to the Top districts in Illinois piloted peer evaluations. A recent guidance document, *Peer Evaluation in Teacher Evaluation Systems in Illinois* (Illinois State Board of Education, 2013), suggests that teachers participating in PAR can support other teachers by acting as formal peer observers in performance evaluations as well as by serving as consulting teachers and mentors for teachers who are struggling. As noted in this guidance document, teachers who work with peer evaluators perceived the feedback to be fair and effective. These combined findings suggest that PAR may warrant consideration when designing PDPs for teachers with *needs improvement* ratings. However, it is important to note that the use of peer evaluators is a decision that is subject to being locally bargained with the union.

One local example of a PAR program with peer evaluation is being implemented by the Bensenville School District (2014). The district's Peer Evaluation Initiative, part of the PAR program, incorporates a three-step process to use consulting teachers to inform other teachers' instructional practice. The consulting teachers, who take on the role for a two-year period, have already demonstrated that they are effective teachers. This process includes teachers setting professional goals and consulting teachers conducting formal and informal classroom observations and analyzing student data (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). According to the Bensenville School District, the benefits of this program include implementing more effective, research-based professional development; supporting teachers with more useful feedback; and providing principals with partners in the evaluation process.

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PDP Duration

PERA states that any tenured teacher with a *needs improvement* rating must be evaluated at least once in the school year following the assignment of the *needs improvement* rating (Illinois Administrative Code 105 ILCS 5/24A-5). The Illinois State Board of Education Guidance document on PERA (Illinois State Board of Education, 2011) indicates that PDPs may cross from one school year to the next. PERA does not specify the minimum or maximum length for the teacher's PDP.

An analysis of research conducted by the Center for Public Education suggests that the duration of professional development should be significantly long to enable teachers to learn new strategies and overcome challenges in implementation (Gulamhussein, 2013). Findings from several studies (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Wen-Yu Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007) suggest that teachers in need of improvement

should engage in professional learning and support across a sustained period of time. Yet, those stakeholders involved in the creation of PDPs may want to balance a desire for extended professional support with the need to keep PDP timelines flexible enough to best meet each teacher's individual needs. For example, the Kankakee School District leaves the decision regarding the PDP timeline to the evaluator and teacher but restricts the duration to no longer than the following school year.

Progress Monitoring and Metrics

PERA does not specify how or how often a teacher is to be assessed during the teacher's PDP period. At the same time, research suggests that feedback is key to learning and that feedback is most helpful when it is immediate and actionable (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Learning Forward recommends that ongoing assessment be integral to a PDP and that plans be structured to occur in "short cycles of learning and application" that take place during a period of a few weeks. Learning Forward further recommends that teacher learning goals and professional development supports be adjusted at the end of each cycle (Killion, 2013). Based on a National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality review of the research on effective professional development strategies, the Center suggests that teachers have the opportunity for continuous feedback to support their growth and improvement (Archibald et al., 2011). Marzano and other researchers promote teacher reflection, self-assessment (Glickman, 2002), and observation followed by structured self-reflection as key self-monitoring strategies for promoting teacher growth and improvement (Marzano, 2012; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Seidman, Tseng, & Weisner, 2006).

Learning Forward suggests that an assessment of teacher progress include both formative and summative measures (Killion, 2013). Formative measures allow the evaluator and teacher to understand the extent to which the teacher is fully participating in planned activities and allow for more timely adjustments to professional learning activities and supports. Summative assessment measures allow the evaluator and teacher to gauge whether professional learning activities and supports are translating into measurable improvements in teacher practice in targeted areas. It is important to note that the decision to include summative measures as part of a teacher's PDP is determined locally.

Classroom observation is commonly used to monitor teacher progress.[2] In fact, PERA requires that teachers who have received a *needs improvement* rating be observed three times in the year following this rating (Illinois Administrative Code, Section 50.120). Although observations are required, it is important to note that classroom observations can serve both a formative and summative purpose. When classroom observation is used as a method of progress monitoring, PDP developers may want to address in the plan whether observation will include any

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[2] The Illinois Administrative Code states: "Evidence of professional practice shall be collected through the use of multiple observations that include formal and informal observations" (Illinois Administrative Code, Section 50.120). Tenured teachers who received a *proficient* or *excellent* summative rating on the previous evaluation are required to be observed twice, with one of those observations being formal. Tenured teachers who received a *needs improvement* or *unsatisfactory* rating on the previous evaluation are required to be observed three times in the year following that rating, with two of those observations being formal. Nontenured teachers are required to be observed three times, with two of those observations being formal.

"unannounced visits" during the PDP period and how soon following observations teachers will have the opportunity to receive feedback and discuss their progress.

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7. Illinois District Example: Monitoring Progress

Illinois districts use a range of approaches for monitoring teacher progress during a teacher's PDP. For example, the Kankakee PDP requires that the plan include a list of specific, desired "indicators of progress" tied specifically to the Danielson framework. Kankakee is prioritizing that evaluators provide effective feedback and coaching to teachers through engaging in a schedule of "walkthroughs" and "reflective conversations" throughout the PDP to offer feedback and coaching to the teacher as they monitor teacher progress. Kankakee has found that evaluators need to receive training specifically in how to offer effective coaching and feedback. Monitoring of progress includes interim observation ratings by the evaluator in these specific needs improvement areas. Ratings and progress are discussed and documented using the "Classroom Observation Documentation" and "Reflective Conversation" forms.

Note. These highlighted examples do not provide a comprehensive description of these plans or of the training and implementation strategies needed to put these plans into effect. Rather, these examples are included with the intention of helping to illustrate sample approaches to the development of PDPs. Please visit the district and school websites referenced to gain a more complete picture of local approaches to educator evaluation.

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When collaboratively devising a plan for monitoring teacher growth and progress during the PDP, stakeholders may want to consider one or more of the following questions:

- How will we know whether progress is being made toward improvement goals? Should we identify interim benchmarks to help gauge progress?

- Which metrics and methods (e.g., observations and conferences) will best help us measure progress?

- How often should progress be assessed? How often should feedback be provided? What timing or schedule for discussing progress makes the most sense?

PDP Follow-Up Steps

PERA states that teachers who receive a *needs improvement* rating are required to be evaluated at least once in the school year following the receipt of such rating. Joint committees have two key areas in which they have the flexibility to shape local policies to guide follow-up steps for a *needs improvement* rating. These steps include the following:

- Reassessment policies, that is, how summative ratings are determined, including the weight associated with rating components (teacher practice and student growth), as well as the factors and mechanisms for calculating a summative score following a *needs improvement* rating

- Local decision rules for responding when teachers receive repeated *needs improvement* ratings

Reassessment: Determining Summative Ratings Following a *Needs Improvement* Rating

As noted previously, a teacher with a *needs improvement* rating is required to be evaluated at least once in the school year following the receipt of such rating. PERA offers joint committees the flexibility and option to establish alternative methods by which teachers are reassessed and summative ratings are determined, during the years following an initial *needs improvement* rating. For example, a joint committee might expect to see improved practice ratings after a teacher has received a *needs improvement* rating. This joint committee, therefore, might decide to weight practice ratings more heavily during this subsequent year in an effort to best gauge progress made in this area. Another joint committee might decide that it is best to keep the method for determining summative ratings consistent regardless of a teacher's prior ratings. Although joint committees are given some latitude to adjust the weighting of assessments, they still need to follow PERA guidelines that require that at least 25 percent of a teacher's summative rating be based on student growth in the first and second years and at least 30 percent be based on student growth in Year 3 and beyond (Illinois Administrative Code Section 50.110).

In addition to modifying the weighting of summative ratings in the years following a *needs improvement* rating, joint committees have the option of modifying local assessment policies based on additional factors and considerations. For example, a joint committee might feel that teachers who receive a *needs improvement* rating after recently being reassigned to a new role should be given more time to adjust and improve their practice. This joint committee might establish local policies that take these considerations into account by giving these teachers a greater period of time in which to improve.

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8. Considerations for Potential Adjustments to Summative Ratings During Reassessment

Joint committees are encouraged to consider the following questions when determining whether adjustments should be made to summative rating policies following a *needs improvement* rating:

- To what extent are current approaches to weighting performance and student growth appropriate for a teacher who needs improvement?
- When reassessing a teacher following the teacher's PDP, what are the pros and cons associated with preserving current summative rating formulas versus making adjustments to these formulas for a teacher who needs improvement?
- Are there extenuating circumstances or other factors, such as a recent reassignment, that we would like to consider addressing in our reassessment policies to maximize fairness and promote professional growth for teachers?

(See Table 1 for more detail on revising summative rating policies.)

Local Decision Rules Related to Repeated *Needs Improvement* Ratings

PERA states that tenured teachers with *needs improvement* ratings who are subsequently evaluated and receive a new rating equal to or better than *proficient* must be reinstated to the regular tenured teacher evaluation cycle (Illinois School Code, Article 24A-5). However, PERA does not specify which follow-up steps should be taken for teachers who continue to receive repeated *needs improvement* ratings. To ensure fairness and consistency, many joint committees establish local decision rules to guide their response to teachers who receive repeated *needs improvement* ratings.

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9. Considerations for Decision Rules Related to Repeated *Needs Improvement* Ratings

Joint committees are encouraged to consider one or more of the following questions when devising local decision rules related to repeated *needs improvement* ratings:

- Did the monitoring data that were collected during the initial PDP show any evidence of progress (even if this progress was not enough to move a teacher out of the *needs improvement* status)?
- What are the potential underlying reasons why this teacher received the first or subsequent *needs improvement* ratings*?*
- How many consecutive times has the teacher received a *needs improvement* rating?
- To what extent did the district follow through in providing the necessary resources and supports as outlined in the PDP to help strengthen the teacher's practice?
- To what extent did the teacher fully participate in improvement activities and invest effort in changing his or her practice?

(Refer to Table 1 for other key factors to consider.)

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10. District Examples: Response to Repeated *Needs Improvement* Ratings

Joint committees in Illinois school districts use a range of approaches in responding to teachers with repeated *needs improvement* ratings. For example, Urbana sets up PDP cycles that last only 30 days (Urbana School District 116, 2013). After each cycle, the teacher's performance is assessed to gauge progress. Before and after each observation, the teacher has the opportunity to meet with the evaluator to discuss his or her performance and progress. Throughout the repeated cycles, a teacher engages in reflection of his or her practice through gathering and examining evidence collected through multiple data sources and having ongoing conversations with his or her evaluator regarding progress. A teacher can have up to three of these learning cycles for which the teacher receives a *needs improvement* rating before the teacher receives an *unsatisfactory* rating and is enrolled in a 90-day remediation plan. (Refer to Table 2 for distinctions in PERA law between a rating of *needs improvement* and *unsatisfactory*.)

The Kankakee School District uses a different approach and time frame. While the PDP is in effect, the district provides support to the teacher as listed in the plan, and walkthroughs and reflective conversations are held. The teacher also meets with the evaluator as outlined in the plan. At the conclusion of the PDP, a teacher who receives a *needs improvement* rating undergoes a formal evaluation cycle in the next school year, per the requirements of PERA and state administrative rule. If the teacher receives a second *needs improvement* rating, then a new PDP is created and the teacher is evaluated the following year. Kankakee reports that because the plan is in early stages of implementation, there is a focus now on collecting data and closely monitoring how PDPs are implemented to ensure that teachers are receiving feedback and coaching as outlined in the plan and are receiving appropriate and sufficient support needed to make progress (Kankakee School District 111, 2014).

Note. These highlighted examples do not provide a comprehensive description of these plans or of the training and implementation strategies needed to put these plans into effect. Rather, these examples are included with the intention of helping to illustrate sample approaches to the development of PDPs. Please visit district and school websites referenced to gain a more complete picture of local approaches to educator evaluation.

Additional Considerations

When a teacher has received a *needs improvement* rating, all stakeholders should share responsibility for supporting the teacher's growth and improvement. In particular, it is important to ensure that:

- Joint committees design fair and supportive local policies and evaluation systems.

- Evaluators accurately and fairly evaluate teachers.

- Tenured teachers actively and fully participate in the PDP.

- Evaluators and districts follow through in providing the resources and supports outlined in the PDP.

It is important that joint committees have established clear local policy for supporting teacher growth to guide appropriate action if measurable progress is not observed after all stakeholders have invested sufficient time, used effective strategies, and fulfilled their responsibilities. Equally importantly, joint committees should pay attention to the prevalence of teachers receiving repeated *needs improvement* ratings within the district and be willing to revisit and revise local policies and practices to ensure their effectiveness. By examining patterns over time related to the underlying reasons for *needs improvement* ratings across multiple teachers, districts can gain a deeper understanding of the individual, organizational, and systemic issues that may be contributing to *needs improvement* ratings and can take steps to address the root causes that may be thwarting greater progress in strengthening teacher practice within the school or district.

Table 2. Highlights of PERA Language Related to *Needs Improvement* and *Unsatisfactory* Ratings

Rating	Required Next Steps	Required Plan Timing and Duration	Required Components	Required Follow-Up for Tenured Teacher With *Needs Improvement* Rating
Needs improvement (Tenured Teacher)	Development of a PDP by the evaluator in consultation with the evaluated teacher	▪ A PDP must be developed within 30 school days. ▪ There is no requirement for PDP duration. ▪ A PDP may cross academic years.	▪ PDP must explicitly address areas of performance that the tenured teacher needs to improve. ▪ PDP must take into account the teacher's ongoing professional responsibilities (including his or her regular teacher assignments). ▪ PDP must be aligned to Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning.	▪ Tenured teachers with *needs improvement* ratings must be evaluated once in the school year following the receipt of a *needs improvement* rating. ▪ Tenured teachers with a *needs improvement* rating who are subsequently evaluated and receive a new rating equal to or better than *satisfactory* or *proficient* must be reinstated to the regular tenured teacher evaluation cycle.
Unsatisfactory	Development of a remediation plan in consultation with the teacher deemed unsatisfactory, a qualified administrator, and a consulting teacher	▪ A remediation plan must be developed within 30 school days. ▪ Remediation plans last 90 school days (unless a shorter duration is provided for in a collective bargaining agreement).	▪ Teachers must be evaluated at the midpoint and end of the 90-school-day remediation period. ▪ The remediation plan must be aligned to Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning.	▪ The tenured teacher with an *unsatisfactory* rating must be evaluated once in the school year following the receipt of the *unsatisfactory* rating. ▪ If a tenured teacher completes a remediation plan and receives a rating of *unsatisfactory* in the 36-month period following completion of the plan, then the district may forego remediation and seek dismissal after the district's PERA implementation date.

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