



# 2015-16

# Educator Evaluation

# Implementation Report

*September 2017*



STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Executive Summary

**TEACHNJ**, the tenure law unanimously passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Chris Christie in 2012, revamped the teacher evaluation system in New Jersey. Prior to TEACHNJ, evaluation systems were inconsistent and, in many cases, provided little in the way of educator support. The stated goal of TEACHNJ is to “raise student achievement by improving instruction through the adoption of evaluations that provide specific feedback to educators, inform the provision of aligned professional development, and inform personnel decisions.” With three years of certified evaluation data available at this point, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is optimistic that New Jersey’s educators are improving their level of instruction.

Summative evaluation results for teachers show that from year one to year three of the new evaluation system (AchieveNJ), **there are more highly effective teachers** – an increase from 23 percent to 38 percent – and **fewer less-than-effective teachers** – a decrease from 2.7 percent to 1.1 percent (Figure 1). This is primarily due to improvements in individual teacher evaluation ratings from year to year. For example, of the teachers who were rated Partially Effective in 2013-14 and remained in the classroom, 90 percent improved their rating to Effective or Highly Effective in the next two years.

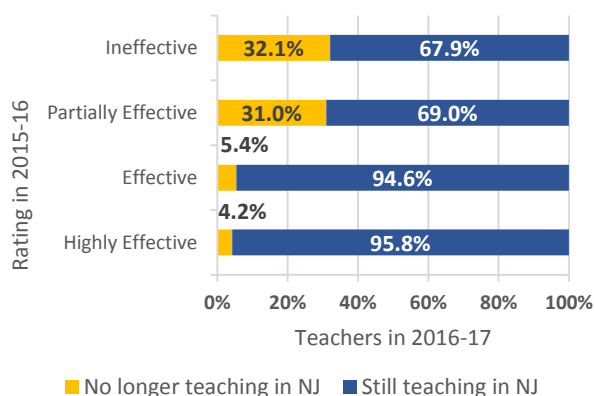


Figure 1. Annual retention of teachers from 2016-17

goes to New Jersey’s educators who have worked diligently to implement this new system, particularly to the administrators who have grown in their evolving roles as instructional leaders. The NJDOE worked closely with thousands of these educators over the past five years to **provide support and gather feedback to guide its efforts to make improvements to the system**. The NJDOE’s work with educators points to areas of continued collaboration on improvements, including: simplifying and reframing principal evaluation; helping districts parse evaluation as a professional growth system and not a punitive one; and encouraging Highly Effective teachers to seek ways to maximize their impact beyond their own classrooms.

The Department reaffirms its commitment to working collaboratively with educators and stakeholders across the state to build on the success of AchieveNJ. Teacher and leader quality is at the root of student success, and students deserve the best educator evaluation system that can be provided.

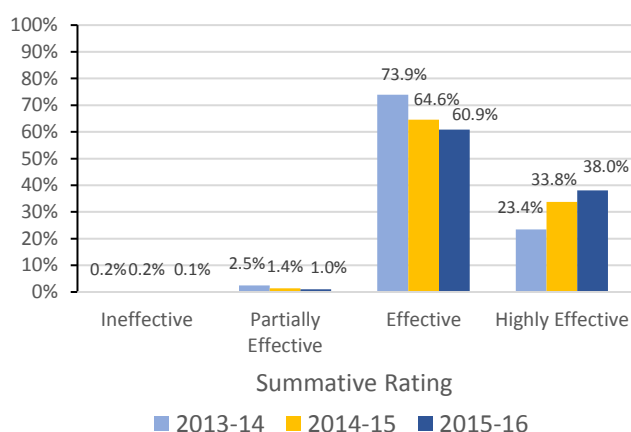


Figure 2. NJ Teacher Summative Ratings 2013-16

Differentiated staff turnover also contributes to improved teacher performance in New Jersey’s classrooms. Over the past three years, **almost one-third of teachers evaluated as Ineffective or Partially Effective in one year no longer teach the following year, whereas 95% of teachers with an Effective or Highly Effective evaluation continue teaching in New Jersey schools** (Figure 2).

Credit for these improvements in teacher quality goes to New Jersey’s educators who have worked diligently to implement this new system, particularly to the administrators who have grown in their evolving roles as instructional leaders. The NJDOE worked closely with thousands of these educators over the past five years to **provide support and gather feedback to guide its efforts to make improvements to the system**. The NJDOE’s work with educators points to areas of continued collaboration on improvements, including: simplifying and reframing principal evaluation; helping districts parse evaluation as a professional growth system and not a punitive one; and encouraging Highly Effective teachers to seek ways to maximize their impact beyond their own classrooms.

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## Part 1: Background and Goals of the Educator Evaluation in New Jersey

### Background

Effective educator evaluation is one of the pillars of New Jersey's reform efforts aimed at improving academic outcomes for the state's school children. High-quality educator evaluation is predicated on the principle that **identifying and improving teacher and principal quality is a cornerstone in improving student outcomes**. Excellent teachers promote above-average student growth. Similarly, principal quality also impacts student learning, and this impact tends to be greatest in schools where the learning needs of students are most acute.

New Jersey's educator evaluation and tenure system was revamped in 2012 by the TEACHNJ Act, marking the first significant change to the teacher tenure law in over 100 years. TEACHNJ strengthens the evaluation system by requiring multiple observations of educators, consideration of student growth measures, and using evaluations to inform professional development plans. In addition, teaching staff must now consistently demonstrate effectiveness to earn or maintain tenure. TEACHNJ and the AchieveNJ rules adopted to implement the act, highlight the importance of effective teachers and school leaders and provide tools that **help school districts maximize their educators' effectiveness for the benefit of their students**. The Department developed AchieveNJ and educator evaluation policy by listening to and learning from educators, and continuously adapting and improving as needed.

#### *A) Design Lessons from Pilots*

The Department used pilots to develop the contours of AchieveNJ for both teachers and principals, including 30 districts and thousands of educators as described in the "[Evaluation Pilot Advisory Committee Report](#)" and the "Rutgers Graduate School of Education Report." More recently, the Department completed a pilot of a differentiated observation process for Highly Effective teachers and has made this option available to educators based on the success of the pilot. In spring 2017, 10 school districts are conducting a first-phase pilot of the Department's streamlined principal practice instrument. This will be followed by a second pilot phase in 2017-18.

#### *B) Evolving through Continual Feedback*

The Department has convened groups of hundreds of educators since the launch of AchieveNJ to better understand how the new evaluation systems are working and how they can be improved. These advisory committees, in conjunction with current pilots mentioned previously, have played a large role in helping AchieveNJ evolve in a variety of ways, including, regulation changes that emphasize quality of observations over quantity, simplification of the principal evaluation rubric, flexibility for observing Highly Effective teachers, and a plethora of tools and resources covering all aspects of AchieveNJ, as requested by educators.

#### *C) Building Capacity with Responsive Support*

The Department has prioritized resources to support district understanding and implementation of AchieveNJ since its rollout. The Office of Evaluation's support and improvement efforts have extended to **nearly every one of New Jersey's school districts** between 2013 and 2016. These efforts range from large-scale presentations and workshops for superintendents to individualized support for teachers via in-person or phone/email contact. The direct outreach by Department evaluation specialists has helped build ownership of AchieveNJ concepts for educators. Matthew Hellfant, superintendent of Hasbrouck Heights School District, reports that in-district support from the Department has been useful in helping his administrators understand how evaluations can provide "detailed data on instruction and how we can **use that data to improve teacher and student performance**." In conjunction with pilots and advisory committees, this detailed and frequent feedback from districts has allowed the Department to responsively update regulations, guidance and resources on the AchieveNJ [website](#).

## Goals for AchieveNJ

The goal of educator evaluation in New Jersey is to improve academic outcomes for students by helping their teachers and principals become the best they can be. More specifically, as informed by the recommendations of the Educator Effectiveness Task Force, an evaluation should:

1. **Accurately assess the effectiveness of educators, and differentiate** between those who are excelling and those who are struggling; and
2. **Improve the effectiveness of educators** through a system that clarifies expectations for educator practices, provides meaningful feedback to identify strengths and weaknesses that will result in a relevant growth plan, and promotes the use of student and teacher data to improve educator practice and student learning.

Parts 2 and 3 of this report provide evidence of progress toward meeting these goals and show that teachers are improving through a better evaluation system. Though, significant work needs to be done by some districts to ensure that each component of AchieveNJ provides an accurate assessment of a teacher's work. Additionally, the focus on teacher evaluation has provided administrators with an opportunity to develop as instructional leaders. However, districts must similarly focus on the overall quality and implementation of their principal evaluation systems.

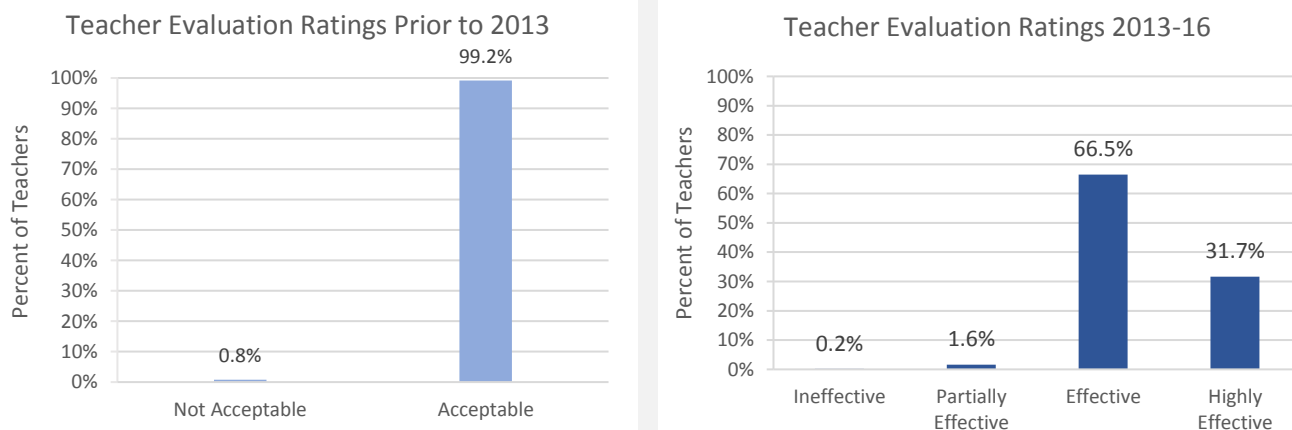
## Part 2: Teacher Evaluation

Many districts have devoted significant time and effort to making teacher evaluation successful by providing teachers with fair and accurate evaluations that have led to improvements in teacher effectiveness. Most teachers are satisfied with AchieveNJ, as surveys conducted in the fall of 2015 and 2016 showed that nearly three quarters agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I am satisfied with the educator evaluation and support system in my school district."

### AchieveNJ Produces Better Differentiation in Evaluations

One early indicator of success of the teacher evaluation system is that **better differentiation among teacher effectiveness levels** is giving districts information to help them improve the quality of their teaching staff. Prior to TEACHNJ and AchieveNJ, evaluation of teachers usually produced a binary outcome of satisfactory or unsatisfactory. In some cases, formal evaluations did not occur at all and, for many, evaluations provided no useful information to help teachers improve. With new evaluations, all teachers are assigned one of four ratings based on multiple observations using a quality practice instrument and multiple measures of student growth. Figure 3 depicts how

Figure 3. Differentiation of Teacher Evaluation Ratings Before and Since AchieveNJ

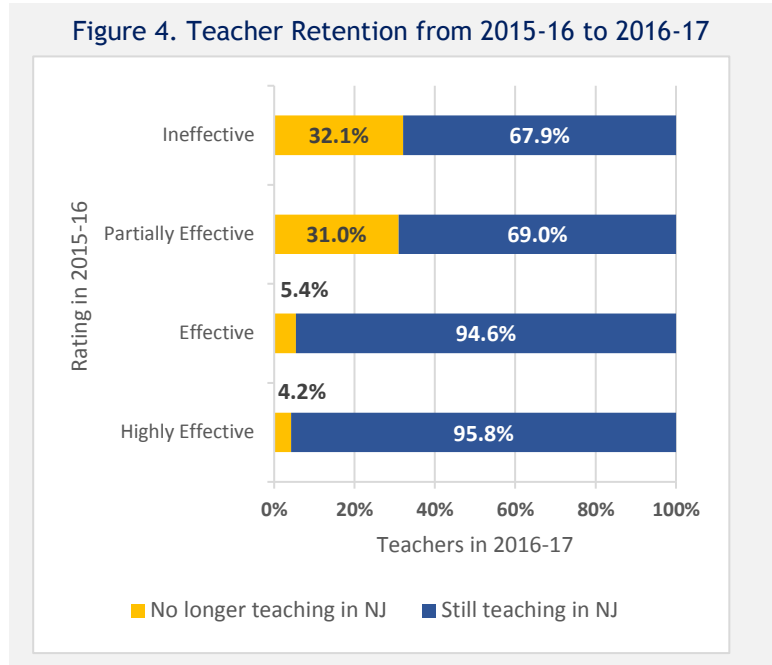


AchieveNJ has provided a more differentiated picture of teacher performance over the past three years compared to the previous system.

A more nuanced picture of teacher effectiveness allows us to see some important patterns related to teacher retention and recognition of highly effective teachers discussed in (A), (B), and (C) below.

### A) Districts are Retaining Effective Teachers at High Rates

**The state's best teachers are choosing to stay in the profession**, while a much higher proportion of those who are performing at lower levels are voluntarily leaving the profession. Figure 4 shows, of all teachers rated Partially Effective or Ineffective in 2015-16, about a third were no longer teaching in New Jersey the following school year. The remaining two-thirds were provided with targeted support and growth opportunities to help them improve. **The retention rate of Partially Effective or Ineffective teachers contrasts sharply with that of Effective or Highly Effective teachers**, where 95 percent continued to teach the next year. This differentiated pattern of retention holds true each year that AchieveNJ has been in effect, and it has had a positive effect on the overall quality of the teaching workforce in New Jersey schools.



### B) Tenure Charge Process is Used Effectively as a Last Resort

The *TEACHNJ Act* requires teaching staff to demonstrate consistent effectiveness to retain tenure. If a teacher is rated below effective one year, extra support must be provided to help the teacher improve. A second year of low rating can trigger tenure charges. In general, districts have rarely had to resort to the tenure charge process to remove teachers who are not performing well. **The vast majority of teachers who are not meeting an acceptable level of proficiency have left the profession prior to charges being filed.** Of the 22 tenure cases that have been heard by New Jersey's arbitrators since 2015, when inefficiency charges could be brought after two years of low evaluation ratings, the large majority of these – or seventeen – resulted in teachers having tenure revoked. The majority of these cases come from a few large urban districts that have brought tenure charges as a last resort to ensure their vulnerable students are served by the best teachers possible.

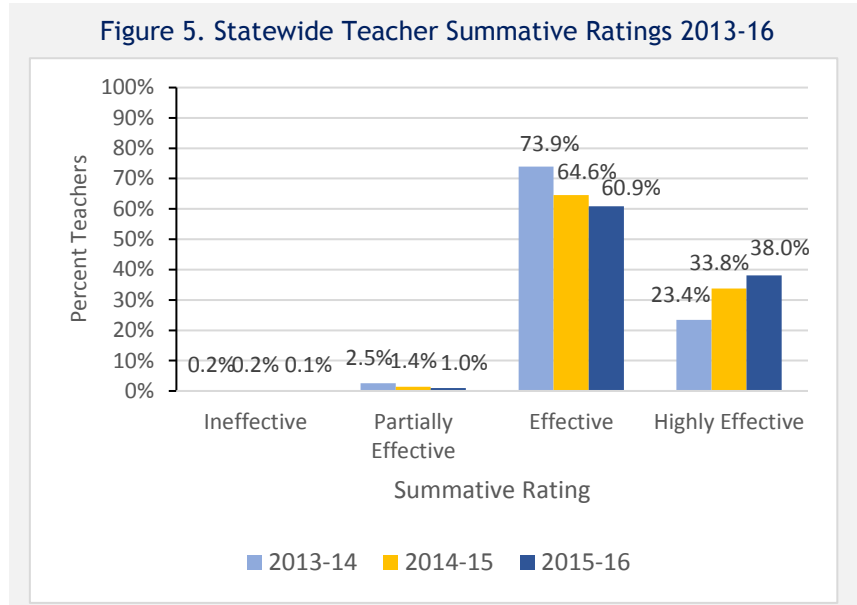
### C) New Jersey Schools are Recognizing Great Teachers

AchieveNJ not only helps schools identify teachers who would benefit from extra supervision and support, but evaluations also spotlight the best teachers in a new way. For example, **New Jersey currently has approximately 200 Achievement Coaches, who are Highly Effective teachers providing high-quality professional development to colleagues in their own school districts and others around the state** in areas of practice identified by AchieveNJ as those needing most improvement. In its second year, the [Achievement Coach Program](#) has provided coaching to 15,000 teachers in about 120 school districts. This program has allowed Achievement Coaches to flourish as leaders, and it is having a transforming effect in school districts. For example, Morris County Vocational Schools Achievement Coach and 2014 Morris County Teacher of the Year, Lisa Adams, notes, "Teachers are now largely responsible for providing professional development opportunities throughout the district and serving on committees related to the five-year strategic plan." Debbie Gulick, assistant

superintendent in East Brunswick Public Schools and coordinator of her district's Achievement Coach Program, says that the program not only helps her teachers improve their teaching practice in critical areas, but also provides a robust pipeline for administrative roles.

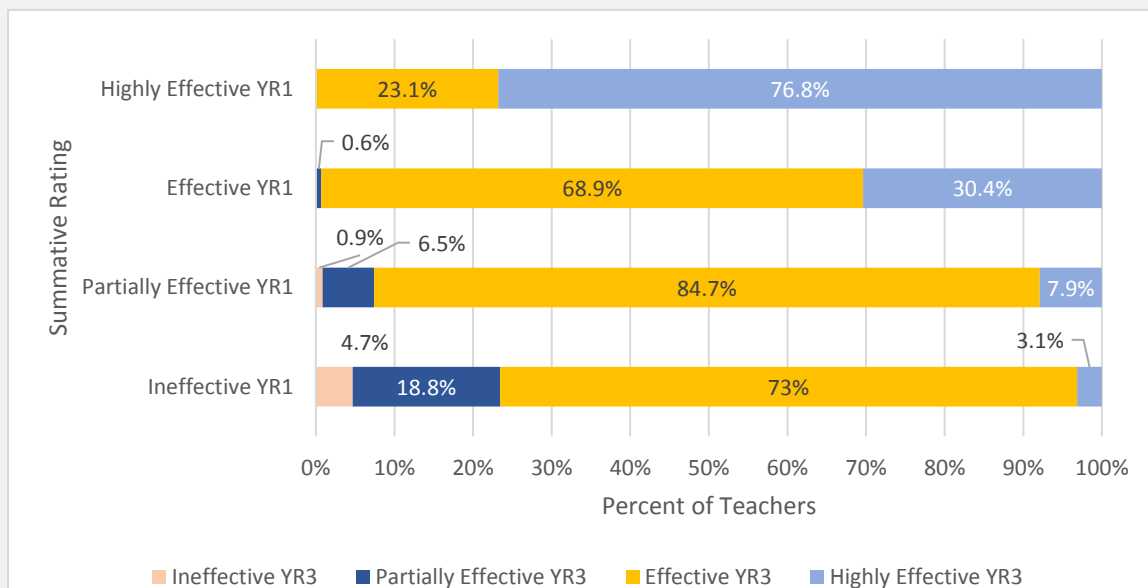
### AchieveNJ is Helping Teachers Improve

Since 2013-14, there has been a decrease in teachers rated less than effective and a rise in those rated Highly Effective (Figure 5). Different retention rates for teachers who are more effective, as previously mentioned, contributes to the improvement in overall teaching quality. However, most of this change is due to individual teachers who have taught in New Jersey over the entire three-year period improving their instructional practice, thereby receiving better



summative ratings. Figure 6 shows how the summative ratings of teachers in year one of AchieveNJ changed over the following two years.

**Figure 6. Individual Teacher Summative Ratings Between 2013-14 (Year 1) and 2015-16 (Year 3)**



For example, of teachers with a rating of Effective in 2013-14, nearly one third improved to Highly Effective over the following two years. As previously mentioned, about 30 percent of teachers rated Partially Effective and Ineffective were no longer teaching the following year. However, of those who have remained in the classroom after a Partially Effective first-year rating, 90 percent were rated Effective or better after two more years.

This observable improvement in the practice of struggling teachers is a testament to the hard work of these professionals, and a commitment by their administrators to help them grow. AchieveNJ requires that teachers receiving poor ratings get extra support through more frequent observations and conferences with their evaluators. They also must set specific goals for improvement in the form of a modified Professional Development Plan known as a Corrective Action Plan (CAP). A School Improvement Panel oversees this process to ensure that the CAP requirements are followed faithfully by teachers and administrators. This system of support is integral to AchieveNJ and encourages districts to make the most of the staff they have spent time and money recruiting.

For its part, the Department heard feedback from administrators around the state when they asked for flexibility in evaluation rules so that they could spend more time supporting and coaching their new or struggling teachers. The Department answered this call by proposing regulations that were adopted by the State Board of Education for the 2016-17 school year reducing the minimum number of observations for tenured teachers to two. It is expected that, as administrators reallocate some of their resources to assisting the growth of novice teachers and those who are on Corrective Action Plans, they will see concurrent improvements in teacher effectiveness in these groups.

In light of the time and effort districts have expended in implementing New Jersey's educator evaluation system and focusing heavily on helping teachers improve, it is no surprise that evaluation ratings are going up. Administrators report that AchieveNJ has had a significant effect on teaching quality in their schools. For example, Pat Haney, Superintendent of Logan School District, says, "An improved evaluation system has been the biggest positive change in education over the past 5-7 years." These are discussed below in items (A), (B) and (C).

#### *A) AchieveNJ has Clarified Expectations for Good Teaching*

Expectations for good teaching have been clarified through the rubrics of the practice instruments leading to widely reported positive shifts in educational communities and the quality of conversations surrounding education. Virginia Grossman, Superintendent of Westampton Schools and 2017 Burlington County Superintendent of the Year, observes, "Teacher evaluation in New Jersey now has a sharper focus on academic knowledge, teaching practice, student engagement and using student data to differentiate instruction." Similarly, Nutley Public Schools Superintendent Julie Glazer says, "The Danielson framework has provided a common language for setting goals, providing feedback, and reflecting on practice."

#### *B) AchieveNJ has Provided a Framework for Improved Conversations and Feedback*

Having a common language has been an important first step in improving teaching but, according to educators, it is the **discussions using this language that have had the biggest impact on teaching**. After working with his staff for the first two years on the new evaluation system, Superintendent Scott Feder reported, "As a result of AchieveNJ, the Millstone Schools had some of the best conversations about teaching and learning over the course of these last two years ever."

During the first three years of AchieveNJ, all teachers were required to have at least three classroom observations annually, though some received more. While observations are important for gathering information, educators report that post-observation conferences are of greatest benefit to teachers. Russell Lazovik, Superintendent of Bridgewater Raritan School District, believes that, "Post-observation conferences are the most important part of the evaluation process."

#### *C) Educators are Using Student and Teacher Data to Improve Teacher Practice*

The *TEACHNJ Act* requires that evaluations not only include evidence of teacher inputs as determined through observations, but also evidence of student learning. All teachers have set goals for student learning in the form of Student Growth Objectives, or SGOs, to comply with the law. SGOs require teachers to determine the starting points of their students in relation to critical standards

they will be taught throughout the academic year. Teachers then set ambitious and achievable learning targets for their students based on this information. Student success in meeting these targets is translated into a score that accounts for 15 percent of a teacher’s summative rating. (Weight of SGOs has varied since 2013: 2013-14 – 15%, 2014-15 – 20% 2015-16 – 20%, 2016-17 – 15%.)

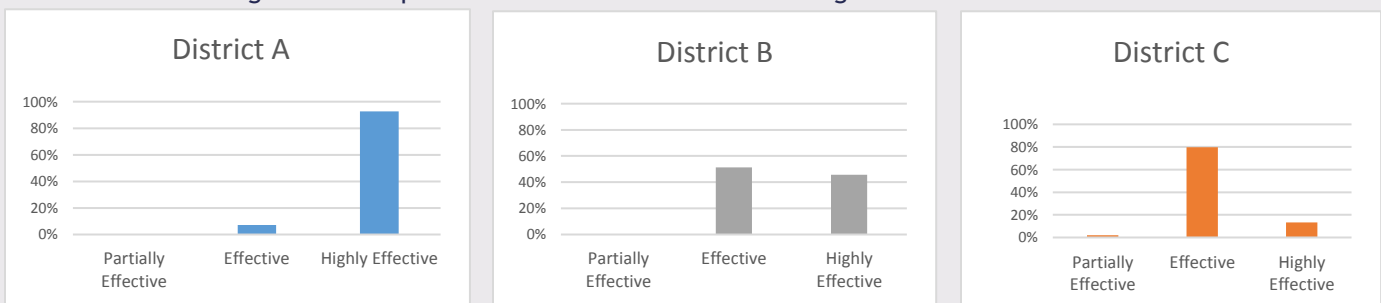
The SGO requirement has played a large role in altering the teacher’s relationship with data as a way to target and adjust instruction to help students improve. Denise Cleary, assistant superintendent in Linden Public Schools says, “Discussions between teachers and administrators are now focused on data analysis, instructional strategies, targeted instruction, and student growth.” Having concrete goals for students helps teachers pay closer attention to overall, as well as individual student, achievement. Lisa Adams, teacher at Morris County Vocational Schools says that because of the structure of SGOs, teachers are constantly monitoring student achievement, and that as students complete their [interim] assessments, teachers monitor their achievement and adjust instruction accordingly.

### Summative Rating Distributions Vary Widely in Similar Districts

By and large, committed educators have leveraged AchieveNJ to add value to teaching and learning as documented above. However, in the first three years of AchieveNJ, some districts have faced a variety of implementation challenges in providing accurate evaluations.

For example, snapshots from three similar school districts in Figure 7 show a wide range of summative score distributions. These districts are similar in size and student population, including subgroups. Each district uses the same teacher observation instrument. However, they differ significantly in terms of student growth as measured by the district’s median growth percentile (mSGP) and the reported effectiveness of their teachers. District C, in which teachers are distributed more normally across the range of effectiveness, has a significantly higher mSGP than districts A and B, which have determined that many or nearly all of their teachers are Highly Effective. Districts A and B are two of 165 of New Jersey’s public school districts that serve 143,000 children whose evaluation results have yielded no teachers in the past three years who would require extra support and specific goals to help them improve their practice. The Department encourages districts to look closely at their own evaluation and scoring systems to determine whether they are fully utilizing AchieveNJ to provide assistance to teachers who need extra support.

Figure 7. Comparison of Teacher Summative Ratings in Three Similar Districts



### Component Ratings Should be Examined

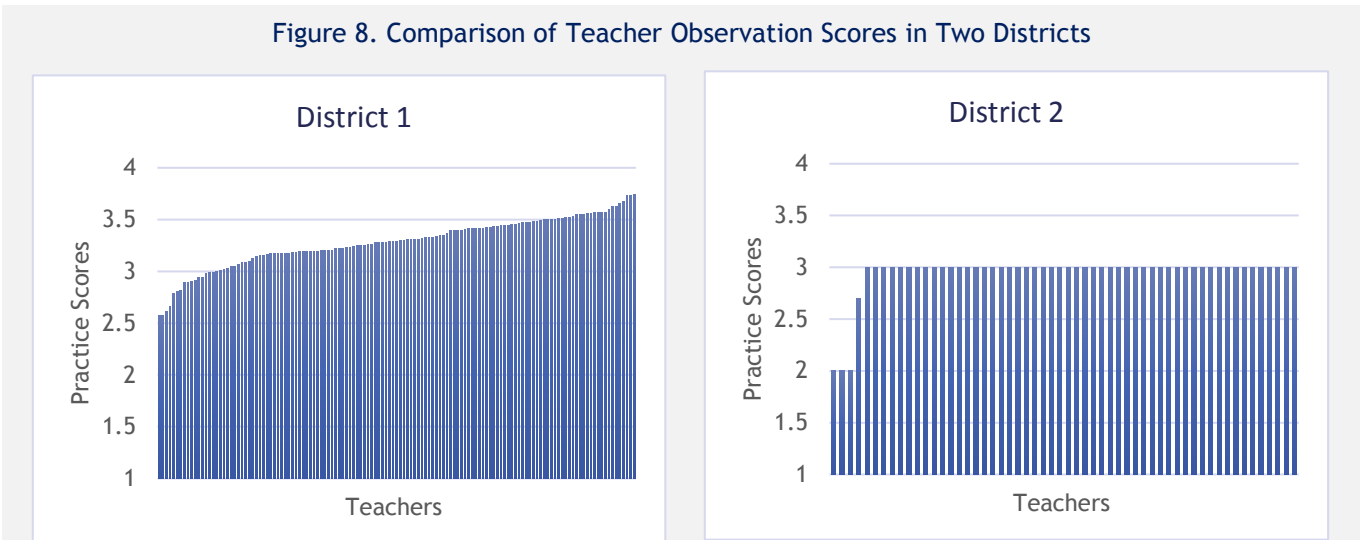
Summative rating distributions may provide a starting point for districts to inspect the accuracy of their teacher evaluation systems, but a deeper look at specific components may yield more actionable information.



### A) Observations

Statewide, over the past three years, observation scores have yielded a reasonably well-distributed pattern of effectiveness and indicate that, on the whole, teacher practice in New Jersey is strong. In 2015-16 the average teacher practice score was 3.33 out of 4. However, at a district level, there are

Figure 8. Comparison of Teacher Observation Scores in Two Districts

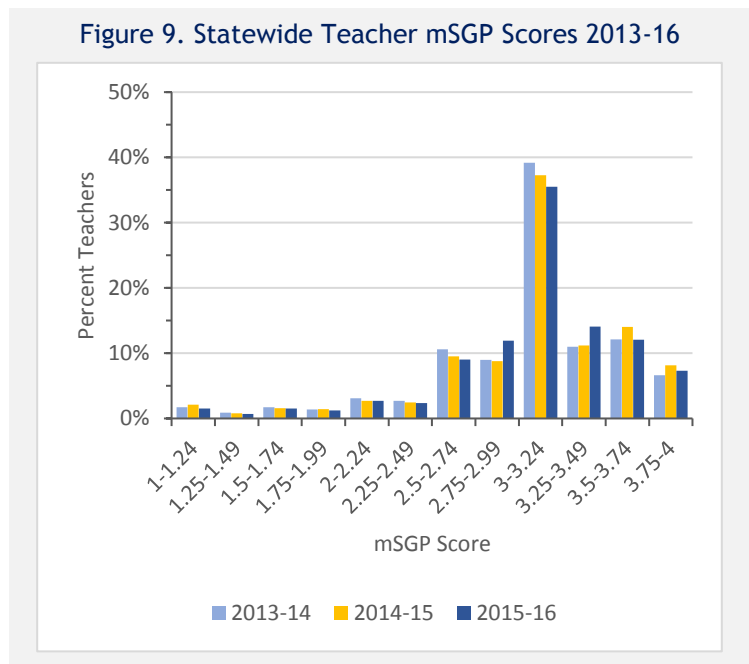


significant differences in how evaluators have been producing observation scores. In Figure 8, District 1’s practice scores indicate the distribution of scores one might find in a well-implemented observation system that reflects expected variation in teacher practice quality. This variation is the essential precursor to providing targeted and appropriate professional development for teachers across the range of practice. District 2’s practice scores show little in the way of variation with the vast majority of teachers scoring 3. The usefulness of District 2’s observation data is limited for professional development purposes, and its accuracy is questionable.

### B) Median Student Growth Percentile (mSGP)

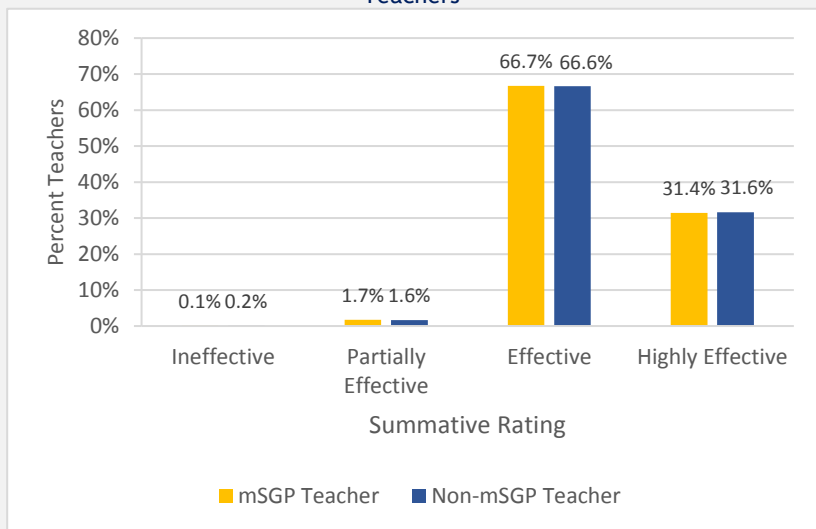
The *TEACHNJ Act* requires student progress on standardized assessments be used when available as a non-predominant component of evaluation. The Department adopted the median student growth percentile (mSGP) to fulfill this requirement. A variety of safeguards have been embedded in this measure to prevent mSGP from unfairly skewing a teacher’s summative rating. These include a scoring crosswalk that assures that the component score earned by teachers whose students show about average growth year to year is squarely in the effective range. Other precautions include requiring that mSGP be calculated only in cases in which a) at least 20 student SGPs are available; b) SGPs are used only from students who have been enrolled for a large proportion of the school year; c) the teacher must have been teaching the course for a large proportion of the year prior to assessment; and d) the higher rating of either the current year mSGP or the median score over the past three years is applied to the evaluation.

Figure 9. Statewide Teacher mSGP Scores 2013-16



In 2015-16, mSGPs comprised 10 percent of the evaluation score for about 18 percent of New Jersey’s teachers. Statewide, mSGP has provided an evaluation component that shows the **vast majority of teachers are promoting good growth in their students** and that about 20 percent are driving exceptional student gains (Figure 9).

Figure 10. Comparison of Summative Ratings of mSGP and Non-mSGP Teachers



Importantly, an indication of the success of the safeguards built into the mSGP system, **summative ratings of teachers with and without mSGPs have been almost identical over the three years since the launch of AchieveNJ** (Figure 10).

Administrators report that mSGPs, as part of a multiple measure system, continue to be useful for calibrating other components of their evaluation systems and for monitoring student growth in critical areas.

## Part 3: School Leader Evaluation

### School Leaders are Growing as Instructional Leaders

There is a growing body of research that describes the instructional leadership of principals as central to the success of teachers and students. AchieveNJ reflects that research by placing significant responsibility and accountability for instructional leadership on principals. School leaders are required to coordinate and participate in all aspects of teacher evaluation and support by: observing their teachers more frequently; providing actionable feedback; helping teachers develop Professional Development Plans (PDPs), leading the School Improvement Panel (SciP) to oversee mentoring programs, CAPs, and school-wide professional development, approving SGOs, and training and being trained in the evaluation rubric. The Department underscored the magnitude and importance of these changes by requiring that districts include the Evaluation Leadership Rubric as 20 percent of an administrator’s evaluation. Some district leaders have acknowledged the results of these changes. “The increased focus on evaluation using a high-quality rubric has encouraged principals and other educational leaders to improve their knowledge of good teaching and become or improve as instructional leaders,” says Barbara Sargent, superintendent of Readington Township Schools.

### Districts are Taking Ownership of Principal Evaluation

Superintendents in New Jersey have also used flexibility within AchieveNJ to customize aspects of the process and make it more valuable for their principals. Robert Zega, superintendent of Woodbridge School District, along with his leadership team, utilized the [streamlined RFQ process](#) to modify their principal practice instrument so that it is more reflective of the work and needs of principals in the district. Superintendents such as Cheryl Dyer, in Wall Township School District, reinterpreted the definition of “observation” as it applies to principals. She and her leadership team adopted a shared understanding that observation for principals reflects a window of time rather than a discrete moment, providing a more comprehensive and holistic view of a principal’s practice.

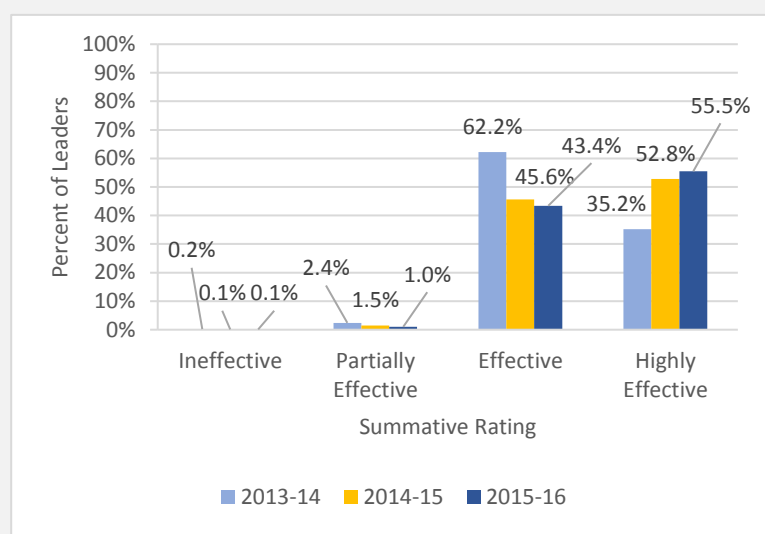
## Principal Evaluation has not been Prioritized in Schools

Despite some notable exceptions, principal evaluation has taken a back seat to other district priorities, including teacher evaluation. This is understandable in light of the higher number of teachers requiring evaluation, the breadth and depth of training requirements, the increased frequency of observation, and the new technical challenges arising as schools seek to implement AchieveNJ for teachers with fidelity.

Evaluating principals is further complicated by the nature of their work and how they demonstrate their effectiveness. Unlike teachers who impact students directly, principals have an indirect effect through the recruitment, development, and retention of teaching talent and the cultivation of an equitable and supportive school climate. These differences have posed challenges to districts as they attempt to accurately evaluate principals and make the evaluation process useful and meaningful for their school leaders.

One of the goals of an improved evaluation system is to accurately assess the effectiveness of educators to differentiate between those who are excelling and those who are struggling. This allows the district to provide appropriate support and make informed personnel decisions. For those school leaders who were evaluated, their evaluation results show less pronounced differentiation than the results for teachers. Across the state, summative scores for school leaders are noticeably skewed, with well over half of all principals rated Highly Effective in 2015-16 (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Statewide School Leader Summative Ratings 2013-16



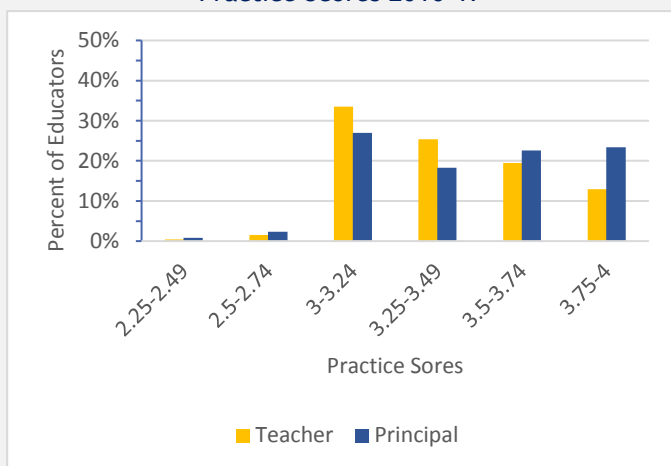
AchieveNJ requires principals who are rated less than effective to receive more support through a Corrective Action Plan. However, very few principals receive this extra support. Across New Jersey's 4,500 principals, assistant principals and vice principals in 2,500 schools, evaluators using AchieveNJ in 2015-16 identified only 38 school leaders in 21 school districts who might benefit from extra support and specific improvement goals.

It is likely that AchieveNJ for school leaders is affected by a confluence of factors that include competing priorities, cumbersome practice instruments, and an overly complicated evaluation rubric. School year 2017-18 provides an opportunity for both the Department and school districts to reframe principal evaluation and highlight the critical role principals play in student success.

### A) Cumbbersome Practice Instruments

School districts choose from a list of Department-approved school leader practice instruments, just as they do for teachers. Practice scores based on these instruments show that in 2015-16 nearly half of school leaders earned scores in the top tier of performance (3.5 and above), significantly more than the one-third of teachers performing at the same level (Figure 12). This difference may be a true indication of the difference in performance levels between principals and teachers across the state, but the design of practice instruments and the fidelity of their use could also be considered as a contributing factor.

Figure 12. Comparison of NJ Teacher and Principal Practice Scores 2016-17



Administrators have expressed concern that principal observation instruments can be complicated to use, and, in some cases, can place artificial restrictions on how principal effectiveness is measured. The Department is working closely with several school districts, as well as the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and the Network for Educator Effectiveness, to design and pilot a streamlined school leader practice instrument that addresses some of the concerns expressed by district administrators.

### *B) Complicated Evaluation Rubric*

School leaders have as many as five components in their evaluation rubric (e.g. Practice, Evaluation Leadership, and SGO Average). The design incorporates multiple measures of student growth and principal practice in order to accurately reflect the range of activities and responsibilities of school leaders. However, the complexity of this design has made the evaluation process unwieldy for some districts. After seeking input from hundreds of administrators in focus groups and presentations, and in keeping with the Department’s commitment to supporting local ownership of evaluation systems, the Department implemented its first corrective measure by making use of the Evaluation Leadership Rubric (ELR) optional. Many administrators consider the ELR to be a valuable measure of some of the most important work a principal does, but others find their principal practice instrument does a good job of capturing many of the aspects found in this rubric. In making this component optional, the Department provided districts with the flexibility to make this decision locally.

## Part 4: Teacher and Leader Quality

As teachers improve through AchieveNJ with the support of their school leaders, students are benefitting. Anecdotally, some school and district leaders report that they are seeing this occur. It makes sense that they would. **Great educators produce greater gains in students than poor educators.** This has been clearly established by research and underpins the development of TEACHNJ and AchieveNJ.

In New Jersey schools, teachers must have a sophisticated grasp of teaching and learning in order to help students develop higher-order thinking skills. Teachers must know not only how to think at the highest levels themselves, but also how to teach this to their students. They must know how to foster intellectual engagement and ask the right questions in the right way at the right time to figure out how to best adjust their instruction. They must plan strategic lessons to maximize the limited time they have with their students, use technology as an instructional lever, and understand the nuances of assessment design so they can better understand what their students know and can do. **New Jersey must make sure teachers can meet the challenge, and if they need support, it is up to school leaders to recognize this and make sure their teachers get what they need.**

New Jersey teachers and administrators have grown a great deal over the past several years, and New Jersey’s children have been the beneficiaries. The Department encourages districts to build on their AchieveNJ successes over the past several years and remember that, in order to provide a great education, it requires great teachers and school leaders.

## Part 5: Moving from a Focus on Compliance to Quality Accountability and Making Improvements Based on Feedback

Over the last several years, the Department has focused on continually improving its accountability systems based on feedback from educators with a clear emphasis on support rather than simple compliance. Such commitment to continually improving all federal and state reporting and accountability systems is based on the theory that the information and tools used to gauge student learning and progress toward our statewide standards must provide educators and broader community members with actionable data about what types of supports are needed for all students.

Similarly, the purpose of a high-quality educator evaluation system is to measure, as accurately as possible, the degree to which an educator performs the most important aspects of his or her work in helping student learning to progress. The evaluation system must also contribute to improvements in the work of the educator in contrast to a system that is a perfunctory, check-the-box activity that is neither accurate nor of value.

**Districts wishing to help their educators grow should concentrate on improving the accuracy and/or value of their evaluation and support systems.** Over the first few years of AchieveNJ, the Department has diligently worked with educators to help districts improve evaluation and support systems, and it has encouraged administrators and teachers to take advantage of the resulting major regulatory changes and resources that are summarized in Figure 13.

Feedback	Department's Response
Administrators need more time to provide support for new and struggling teachers and often have less time to properly evaluate consistently effective senior teachers	Reduced <a href="#">minimum observation requirement</a> from 3 to 2 for tenured teachers in good standing
One-size-fits-all evaluation is limited in value for high-performing teachers	Provided optional observation approach for Highly Effective teachers via <a href="#">Reflective Practice Protocol</a>
Teachers generally score lower on certain critical aspects of good teaching	<a href="#">Achievement Coach Program</a> initiated to provide high-quality PD in specific instructional areas
Simple pre-/post-testing assessment quality and scoring design are inhibiting value of SGO process	Produced <a href="#">guidance, tools and workshops</a> for using multiple measures to determine starting points, increase quality of assessments, and use tiered approach for grouping students
Data management for SGOs is challenging	Produced <a href="#">SGO tracking tool</a>
Many components of the Evaluation Leadership Rubric are captured in principal practice instruments used by districts	The <a href="#">Evaluation Leadership Rubric</a> is an optional component in principal evaluation starting in school year 2016-17
Flexibility in setting administrator goals will allow goals to be more reflective of principal activities	Guidance allows for multiyear and process or programmatic-type <a href="#">administrator goals</a> .
Cumbersome principal practice instruments inhibit value and accuracy of observation process	Revised <a href="#">process</a> streamlines modifications to existing practice instruments. Streamlined NJ Principal Practice Instrument is in phase 1 pilot spring 2017.

The Department encourages districts to review the guidance provided above for specific recommendations to improve the quality of teacher evaluation. These recommendations were developed over the past three years through productive partnerships with NJ districts and educators.

### **Increase Accuracy in Teacher Evaluation**

Accurate evaluations can be used to identify schoolwide and individual educator trends in effectiveness. These trends can then be used to make appropriate personnel decisions and provide support to shore up weaknesses and maximize strengths. There are several ways by which districts have enhanced the accuracy of their evaluation systems that include the following: adjusting observation weights and scoring methods; committing to ongoing observer calibration activities; and using data to improve SGO rigor.

#### ***A) Support, Retain and Leverage Highly Effective Teachers***

Almost all districts have identified a proportion of their teachers as Highly Effective, and statewide, this currently accounts for about a third of all teachers. These teachers are often an untapped resource that can add immense value to schools and their students beyond their daily work within the classroom. Often, great teachers require different challenges and opportunities for growth and will remain motivated if these are provided. In many schools, Highly Effective teachers are given opportunities to mentor aspiring or novice teachers, design curriculum, provide peer support, facilitate collaborative teams, and provide professional development to their peers. When these opportunities are provided, these teacher leaders feel recognized for their expertise, and administrators are able to share some of their responsibilities as instructional leaders with them to the benefit of the staff as a whole.

#### ***B) Add Value to Teacher Evaluation***

High-quality evaluation processes have been used across New Jersey to help teachers improve. However, many districts still struggle to leverage evaluations that can help improve the abilities of teachers to drive academic growth in students. Among the possible causes of this struggle could be the following: the incorrect perception that evaluation is only about providing a score; an overemphasis on paperwork that makes evaluation more of a compliance activity; and/or local policies, processes, and communications that diminish the importance of quality coaching that all professionals need and deserve.

**The Department has seen evidence around New Jersey that thoughtful administrators are making AchieveNJ about growth first.** During the first three years of AchieveNJ in Nutley Public Schools, then Superintendent Russell Lazovick and his leadership team framed evaluation in these terms, “We believe that our evaluation system is about growth, learning, and accountability. In that order.” Lazovick, like many other forward-thinking leaders, has framed evaluation as a professional development tool that can be used to improve individual, school, and district educator quality. Going forward, the **Department encourages districts to renew their focus on AchieveNJ as a key component of effective professional development for both individual teachers and school communities.**