



## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN TEACHER EVALUATION: WHY IT'S BENEFICIAL TO TEACHER GROWTH

The following guide from the New Jersey Department of Education provides insights into why districts have chosen to incorporate opportunities for intentional reflective practice within their teacher evaluation systems.

### INTRODUCTION

Imagine two teachers:



#### TEACHER 1: MARIA

- Five years of experience
- Consistently received effective and highly effective ratings on last three evaluations
- National Board certified



#### TEACHER 2: FRANK

- Four months of experience
- Not yet evaluated
- Struggles with classroom management

*Under the TEACH NJ Act of 2012, which established a new system of educator evaluations, both of these teachers will be evaluated using similar processes.*

The primary goal of AchieveNJ, which details how the law will be carried out, is to support and grow teacher practice in order to positively impact student achievement. By utilizing systems that provide clearer definitions of high-quality teaching and learning, districts are able to better understand teacher practice, which allows them to differentiate feedback and support to educators.

But if districts are going to be successful in differentiating support to grow teacher practice, they must be afforded the flexibility to meet the needs of teachers at different levels of practice. Maria can and should receive different feedback and coaching than Frank.

Including reflective practice in the evaluation process offers highly effective teachers the opportunity to think more deeply about assumptions and beliefs related to their practice. This, in turn, gives teachers the opportunity to become more effective educators.<sup>1</sup>

### HOW REFLECTIVE PRACTICE APPLIES TO TEACHER GROWTH

Reflection is a process of continually examining and reflecting upon one's behaviors and practices and making adjustments to improve performance. For teachers, reflective practice involves regularly investigating one's behaviors in the classroom through various lenses. For example, educators can reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching practices by videotaping and watching their instruction or educators can reflect on the effectiveness of their instructional strategies by analyzing student assessment data. Utilizing various lenses should allow teachers to reflect on personal areas of strength and weakness and should challenge teachers to adjust their practices to benefit student learning, as well as one's own growth.<sup>2,3</sup>

Engagement in *reflective practice*, as first coined by author Donald Schön, is particularly critical to teachers' growth and development as professionals.<sup>4,5,6</sup> According to a 2004 Braun and Crumpler study, "to be unreflective...results in a teacher who is merely a skilled technician, i.e. one who has limited ability to make good decisions; to consider the consequences of their actions; and, to alter their actions."<sup>7</sup>

Established by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2016, the [Reflective Practice Investigation \(RPI\)](#) pilot explored the process of providing Highly Effective teachers with a more in-depth opportunity to reflect on their instructional practices as part of their evaluation process. The pilot found that the majority of participants felt that the studied method of evaluation was valid and accurate with 96% of participants agreeing that the process was fair. Participants felt that the video and reflective conversation provided a fuller picture of their instructional practices. Both teachers and supervisors agreed that the pilot processes drove teachers to think more deeply about how they could grow and improve their instruction. This is compared to over 60% of teachers and principals who say that traditional feedback and evaluation methods do not help teachers grow according to the SmartBrief white paper, *A Game Changer: Using Video to Achieve High Performance in the Classroom*.

## BENEFITS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

### OWNERSHIP

#### Self-Driven Professional Growth and Development

According to the publication *The Irreplaceables*, teachers who experience retention strategies that address their need for quality feedback and development, as well as increased ownership and responsibility, plan to remain in their schools for six years longer than those who do not.<sup>8</sup> Reflection can help empower teachers to guide and shape their own growth and improvement process.<sup>9,10</sup>



#### A New, Holistic Approach to Feedback

The reflection process as an embedded part of teacher evaluation can offer educators new perspectives from which to examine and reflect upon their teaching compared to the traditional evaluation process, particularly through the use of **video** and **student feedback**.<sup>11</sup> A review of the literature shows that using video as an observation and reflection tool for teachers results in:

- higher teacher satisfaction with the experience;
- better perception of their supervisors' fairness;
- more engagement in self-critique; and,
- higher-quality, actionable next steps that arise from post-observation conferences.

### BUY-IN

### RESULTS

#### Classroom & Student-Level Impact

Reflective practice helps teachers to not only improve the teaching and learning that goes on in their classrooms, but also the climate in which those processes take place.<sup>13</sup> When educators take the time to step back from the daily whirlwind of teaching and reflect upon their students' needs, they gain clarity and can set goals that address those needs.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, this improves both teacher and student motivation.<sup>15</sup>



If you are interested in making reflective practice a part of your evaluation system, access this [Reflective Practice Protocol](#) to assist you.

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