

Alternative for Measuring Teacher Effectiveness

Session Law 2019-212 (SB 621) eliminates the use of the North Carolina Final Exam (NCFEs) as part of the statewide testing program to assess teacher performance and professional growth, effective with the 2020-2021 school year. Additionally, the statute requires the State Board of Education (SBE) and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to submit, by March 15, 2020, to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee a plan on how to use other means to accomplish the purposes for which data are collected by the NCFEs.

Currently, North Carolina Final Exams provide information to teachers on their students' academic progress in core subjects (science, history, mathematics, and English) not covered by an end of grade (EOG) or end of course (EOC) exam. Approximately 17,000 (16,892) teachers in the state receive growth data from the NCFEs. Many of these teachers also receive student growth data from an EOG or EOC, but for about 70% (12,061) of these teachers, NCFEs are the only source of student growth. These are the academic courses that are covered by the NCFEs: Social Studies (middle grades), Science (6th and 7th grades), Pre-Calculus, Advanced Functions and Modeling, Discrete Mathematics, Math 2, American History I & II, American History: Founding Principles/Civics, World History, Chemistry, Physical Science, Physics, English Language Arts I, III, and IV.

NCDPI has consulted with faculty members from the state's EPPs, leaders from our local school districts, and nationally recognized education researchers to help formulate the recommendations put forth in this document. Similar to using value-added to measure teachers' effectiveness, there are advantages and limitations to each of the alternatives offered in this document. In forming these recommendations, NCDPI assumed that the legislature would expect these alternatives to reflect the qualities of the state's value-added model: validity, reliability, the ability to differentiate among teachers, and grounded in student learning.

At its February 2020 meeting, the State Board of Education requested NCDPI staff to bring a single recommendation for measuring effectiveness for teachers who currently administer North Carolina Final Exams. Each of the five recommendations put before the State Board of Education has strengths and weaknesses if employed as a single measure of effectiveness. Rather than recommend an approach that has the fewest, or least problematic, weaknesses, NCDPI has chosen to recommend a process that leverages the strengths of all the proposed measures.

The graphic below illustrates a process that can be implemented for the targeted teacher population, as well as all North Carolina teachers. The process focuses on three key components of effective teaching: 1) Professional Practice, 2) Instructional Practice, and 3) Student Growth.

Measuring Teacher Effectiveness

1. Professional Practice

Standard 1
Standard 5

2. Instructional Practice

Classroom Practice

Standard 2
Standard 3
Standard 4

Student Perception

3. Student Growth

EVAAS
Performance-Based
Assessments

1. Professional Practice – Effective teachers are ones who actively work toward upholding the high standards of the profession and strive for continuous improvement. These characteristics of an effective teacher are captured in two of the standards of the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES): Standard I: Teacher demonstrate leadership, and Standard V: Teachers reflect on their own practice.

Standard I is critical for ensuring that today’s classroom teachers are developing the skills they need to increase their impact on student learning for greater numbers of students (e.g., mentor teachers, master teachers, instructional coaches, etc.). Standard V ensures that teachers are consistently using the data and evidence available to them for improving their impact on student learning. NCDPI acknowledges that school administrators are best positioned to evaluate teachers’ performance on these two domains.

2. Instructional Practice – Research indicates that the classroom teacher has the largest impact on student learning. The instructional practices that lead to student learning are captured in three standards of NCEES: Standard II: Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population, Standard III: Teachers know the content they teach, and Standard IV: Teacher facilitate learning for the students.

Student learning is maximized when a teacher has a strong command of the content she/he is teaching and also knows the best way to deliver that content to her/his students (pedagogy). Teachers, especially in the early years of the profession, need expert guidance on both issues. NCDPI recommends that teachers receive expert feedback on their instructional practices from an educator who has demonstrated strong positive results in student learning **in the same content area**. Teachers who have been identified as master teachers in their content areas would be the preferred evaluators of these standards. These master teachers would benefit from their close working relationships with teachers to provide feedback on teachers’ instructional practices. The master teachers would evaluate their colleagues on Standards 2, 3, and 4 in the evaluation process. School administrators would review these evaluations and approve the final summative rating for the teachers. This recommendation does not preclude an administrator from providing this feedback but would require the administrator to be identified as an expert in the content area.

At its heart, learning is a relationship of trust. How students perceive the expertise, practices, and commitment of their teacher has an impact on their learning. Student feedback can help a teacher understand what the needs of the students are and whether they are successful in meeting them. If a student does not feel that he/she can ask a question or ask for an explanation to be repeated, then it is unlikely that student will invest the time and effort required to master the subject. Students are ultimately the clients of our educational system and if we do not seek to understand, from them, what obstacles are standing in the way of their learning, then we cannot provide the best service possible to them.

Student surveys could be developed at the state level and provided to LEAs and charter schools with students matched to the teachers who instruct them in specific subject areas. The results of these surveys could be returned to teachers and schools in a manner that protects student confidentiality. The state would have the ability to disaggregate (where appropriate) the data by student demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity or proficiency level) for teachers and schools. Additionally, teachers and schools would get overall student feedback, as well as subject specific feedback from students. It is not advisable to combine the students' feedback with expert teacher feedback, but a separate measure of instructional practice based on student perceptions is recommended.

3. Student Growth – The state's student growth measure estimates the academic progress a student is making, irrespective of the achievement level (i.e., grade-level proficient, career and college ready, etc.). Teachers receive information on whether their students showed academic progress that was consistent with, above, or below the state average in each grade or subject. This information is critical in helping schools understand how well they are supporting students in their pursuit of mastery of a given subject. While it is true that summative, standardized tests are not the only way to measure whether students are progressing adequately, a valid effectiveness measure for a teacher must contain an objective assessment of how well students are progressing academically over the course of a year. State-wide assessments that are more formative in nature and administered over designated points in the school year could provide better, actionable data for teachers for improvement, as well as a summative rating for their performance over the course of a school year. Performance-based assessments could certainly satisfy this component of the model as well, but they are time-intensive for teachers and administrators, require considerable work and expertise to evaluate with validity and reliability, and often focus, for reasons of practicality, on a narrow subset of the curriculum.