Implementation of the New Teacher Evaluation System

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The goal of the new state teacher evaluation system is to improve teaching and student learning. Over the past two years, Arlington administrators and teachers have been in the process of implementing the new teacher evaluation system. School districts across the state must fully implement the new evaluation system by the 2015-16 school year. This year, two-thirds of Arlington’s certificated teaching staff transitioned to the new system, with 100% of the Arlington teachers transitioning to the new system in the 2015-16 year.

If you are not familiar with the new teacher evaluation system, it began with Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill (E2SSB) 6696 from the 2010 legislative session. Prior to this bill, there had not been a change to the teacher evaluation system for over 25 years. E2SSB 6696 resulted in a change from a two-tiered rating system of satisfactory and unsatisfactory to a four-tiered evaluation system with ratings of unsatisfactory, basic, proficient and distinguished. The four-tiered rubric allows the evaluator to provide feedback along a continuum, rather than just a simple satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

This bill identified eight new performance criteria by which teachers would be measured. These eight criterion include (1) Centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement, (2) Demonstrating effective teaching practices, (3) Recognizing individual student learning needs and developing strategies to address those needs, (4) Providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum, (5) Fostering and managing a safe, positive learning environment, (6) Using multiple student data elements to modify instruction and improve student learning, (7) Communicating and collaborating with parents and the school community, and (8) Exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practice and student learning.

Two years ago, districts were required by the state to adopt an evaluation system from among three research-based instructional frameworks. Charlotte Danielson’s Instructional Framework, selected by our district, creates a common language for principals and teachers to use when discussing instructional practices. Elements of the evaluation training include Danielson’s Instructional Framework, use of the new rubric associated with the framework, observation techniques, avoiding potential bias, and a major focus on calibration of performance observation and criterion scoring.

The evaluation system also includes a comprehensive and a focused evaluation option. When evaluated with the comprehensive evaluation, the teacher is scored on all eight state criteria; whereas, the focused evaluation has the teacher focus their effort on one or two of the state criteria. Both the focused and the comprehensive evaluation include a student growth element. Teachers must receive a comprehensive evaluation once every four years with some exceptions, such as new or provisional teachers remaining on the comprehensive evaluation for multiple years.
The instructional framework provides a clear set of criteria with a rubric that allows teachers and principals to identify more clearly the learning successes in the classroom. Teachers and principals have participated in additional training and have benefited from the time spent learning about the new instructional framework and developing a common language used to describe effective instruction.

In the beginning, teachers had some concerns and apprehension about the new system, but as teachers moved through the process they became more comfortable with the changes. The new evaluation system is being well received by both school administrators and teaching staff.

The implementation of the new evaluation has resulted in numerous great conversations between the teacher and the evaluator regarding effective instruction. The evaluation system also focuses on self-reflection and this becomes a critical element that helps teacher improve their instruction. Another aspect of the system is the effective use of data in the process. This has resulted in some of the most significant changes in the conversations taking place regarding instruction and student learning. Teachers are focused in on what students are actually learning not just what the teacher is teaching.

The success of the implementation of our new evaluation system is a tribute to our dedicated teachers and administrators who have worked collaboratively to effectively implement it. Overall, through collaboration, the implementation of the new evaluation system in Arlington Public Schools has been a success and will result in improved teaching and learning.