

EMPOWERED EDUCATORS

HOW HIGH-PERFORMING SYSTEMS SHAPE
TEACHING QUALITY AROUND THE WORLD

TEACHER APPRAISAL AND FEEDBACK

POLICY BRIEF



This paper is part of a series of policy and country briefs produced as part of *Empowered Educators* – a landmark, international comparative study of teacher and teaching quality in the world’s top-performing education systems, commissioned by the Center on International Education Benchmarking® of the National Center on Education and the Economy®. For a complete listing of the materials produced by the *Empowered Educators* project, including a searchable database of recorded interviews and authentic tools, please visit www.ncee.org/empowered-educators

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Teacher Appraisal and Feedback

While high-performing countries are known for recruiting capable individuals into teaching, preparing them well, and providing them with opportunities for professional learning and growth, a key element of their systems is the continual appraisal of their performance as teachers and the feedback educators provide to teachers to help them improve their performance. The goal of these teacher appraisal systems tends to be to provide information to help teachers improve their performance, rather than to identify and sanction low-performers. With careful selection and preparation, along with the closely mentored work teachers do in their probationary period, these systems, by and large, do not expect to fire teachers later.

For the most part, teacher appraisal in high-performing systems is based on clearly articulated standards of professional practice. Teachers know the standards they are expected to meet, and the appraisals use a variety of measures—including multiple observations—to determine whether teachers can demonstrate that they have met the standards. Moreover, the standards address a range of teacher competencies, including teachers' contributions toward school and network goals, as well as individual contributions.

In some cases, such as in Shanghai and Singapore, the appraisals are tied directly to opportunities for teachers to advance in their careers as well as in salaries. But the main purpose of the systems is to support professional learning and growth. The feedback teachers receive helps them understand where they are successful and where they need additional support, and teachers have incentives to pursue learning opportunities to address their improvement needs.

This brief will examine the appraisal and feedback processes in five high-performing countries: Australia (particularly New South Wales and Victoria), Canada (Alberta and Ontario), Finland, Shanghai, and Singapore. It will highlight some of the common features of the systems, and show where each system is unique. And it will provide some lessons for other countries to consider.

Approaches to Appraisal

In some jurisdictions, such as Finland and Canada, formal appraisal is not a major element of the teacher development system, unless a teacher is having difficulty. In others it is an annual event for all teachers, with varying degrees of organizational investment in the process. In all, however, there is some form of yearly attention to teacher development, in the form of an

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annual learning plan or goal-setting tied to teachers' plans for improvement. These plans, like the evaluation processes themselves, are tied to professional teaching standards.

Canada

The Ontario Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) is designed to foster teacher development and identify opportunities for additional support where required. Once they have successfully completed their induction process, teachers are evaluated by the principal or his / her designee once every five years (unless there is a performance concern) in a traditional format: a pre-observation meeting, classroom observation, a post-observation meeting, and a summative report. The appraisals are based on 16 competencies that reflect the standards of practice set out by the Ontario College of Teachers, the agency that accredits teacher-education institutions and certifies teachers. New teachers are evaluated on eight of the 16 competencies; experienced teachers are appraised on all 16.

In addition to the TPA, each year, experienced teachers must also complete an Annual Learning Plan (ALP), which outlines their plan for professional growth. In collaboration with their principals, teachers set growth goals, along with a rationale, a set of strategies, and an action plan for achieving them. In doing this they reflect on their previous performance appraisal, the prior year's professional learning, and input from parents and students.

In Alberta, formal teacher evaluation in Alberta is rare (occurring only when teachers apply for certification or a leadership position, and when they request one from their principal). However, as in Ontario, teachers in Alberta prepare an annual professional growth plan. The plan (a) reflects goals and objectives based on an assessment of learning needs by the individual teacher; (b) shows a demonstrable relationship to the teaching quality standards; and (c) takes into consideration the education plans of the school, the school authority, and the government. This is reviewed and approved either by the principal or by a group of teachers delegated by the principal.

Finland

Formal appraisal is rare in Finland as well. According to the TALIS surveys, almost 28 percent of lower secondary teachers in Finland teach in a school where the principal reports that teachers are not formally appraised.¹ Rather, appraisal and feedback take place in an ongoing way as part of teachers' daily work. In general, evaluation involves a one-on-one private conversation between the teacher and principal that may focus upon issues like individual growth, participation in professional development, contributions to the school, and personal professional goals. The focus is more on "steering" than on "accounting" for teacher's work.

Teachers begin to reflect on their work and receive feedback on it during initial teacher education. In their preparation programs, teachers are introduced to a cycle of

planning, action, and reflection, and are expected to engage in similar kinds of research and inquiry throughout their careers. This process underscores the notion that learning in practice does not happen on its own without opportunities for teachers to analyze their experiences, relate experiences to research, and engage in metacognitive reflection. In some ways, it models what the entire system is intended to undergo: a process of continual reflection, evaluation, and problem solving, at the level of the classroom, school, municipality, and nation.

In some municipalities in Finland, the appraisal and feedback process is more formalized. In the city of Helsinki, for example, principals use a common form to guide the conversation with teachers about how they have fulfilled the objectives the teacher set for the year. This form focuses upon some key features of teaching that are considered important: “personal performance”; “versatility”; “initiative”; and “ability to cooperate.” In addition to the teacher’s general classroom practice, the “versatility” of the teacher refers to whether she or he uses or has mastered “good pedagogical skills”; can “acknowledge and meet diverse students in different circumstances”; and can “acknowledge diverse learning needs.” The form asks teachers and principals to consider the degree to which the teacher demonstrates “initiative” (which includes, for instance, “using new and meaningful working methods and practices”; and “active participation in in-service training, [within-school] work groups, development initiatives, district workgroups”).

Thus appraisal in Finland, even when formalized, relies heavily on personal, qualitative information about a teacher’s practice, growth, and professionalism. The goal is continual improvement; following the conversation between the teacher and principal, the teacher sets goals for the following year and, sometimes, identifies learning opportunities within or outside the school.

Appraisal is more frequent and formal in Australia, Singapore, and Shanghai, where teacher evaluation is an annual event, closely tied to the professional teaching standards and individual teacher performance goals that are annually established in relation to growth needs.

Australia

Teacher appraisal in Australia has traditionally been the province of states, since states employ teachers in government schools, and evaluation processes are developed often with input from state branches of teachers’ unions. In both New South Wales and Victoria, the appraisal processes—known as Teacher Performance and Development—are seen as key tools for school improvement and improvement in student learning.

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In New South Wales, the annual Performance and Development Plan is guided by the state’s reform blueprint, known as Great Teachers, Inspired Learning. It documents a concise set of three to five professional goals that are explicitly linked to teachers’ performance and development needs and the professional standards. There is an expectation that the goals should align to the school plan and systemic strategic directions. There is also an expectation that the goals establish a personalized pathway for each teacher through the alignment to standards by recognizing existing expertise while also identifying areas for professional growth.

Teachers collect evidence of their professional learning and progress against the standards-aligned goals; this is the same evidence they may use to maintain their teacher certification. They conduct a self-assessment, and principals or their designees are responsible for conferencing with the teacher and observing and documenting performance.

In Victoria, Teacher Performance and Development is intended to connect teachers’ performance against specified standards and goals with their development through professional learning opportunities and feedback on their work, to be underpinned by principles of collective efficacy, peer collaboration, and professional accountability.² The Department of Education and Training has sought to build collective capacity by fostering a visible culture of instructional practice, and of schools as professional learning communities.³

Teacher performance is linked to school improvement and student learning in several ways. First, teachers’ individual performance and development plans are closely aligned to school goals, and the three broad categories: student learning,

Figure 1: Key Phases of the Annual Performance and Development Process

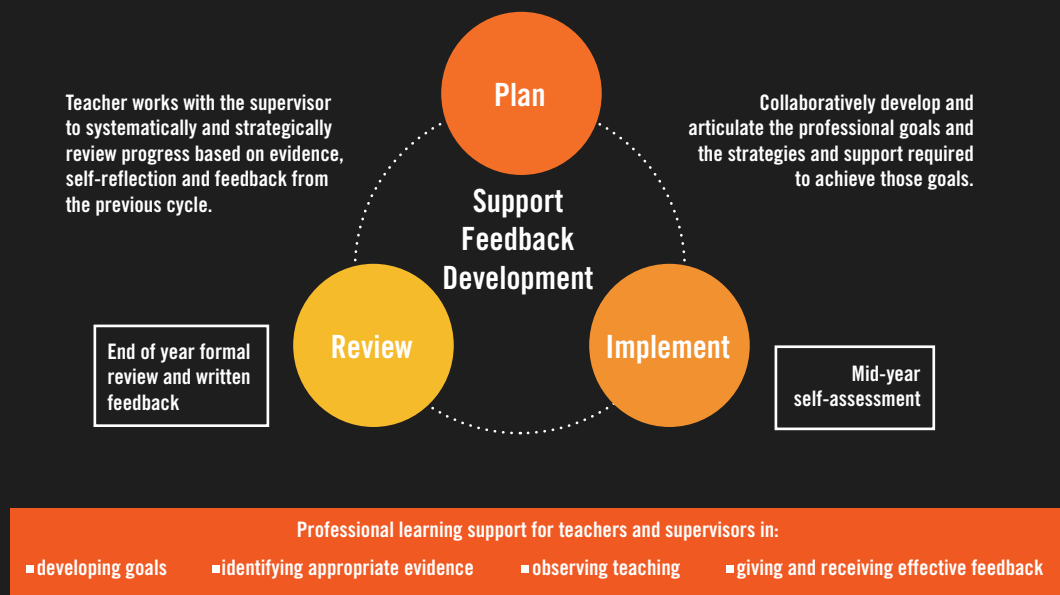
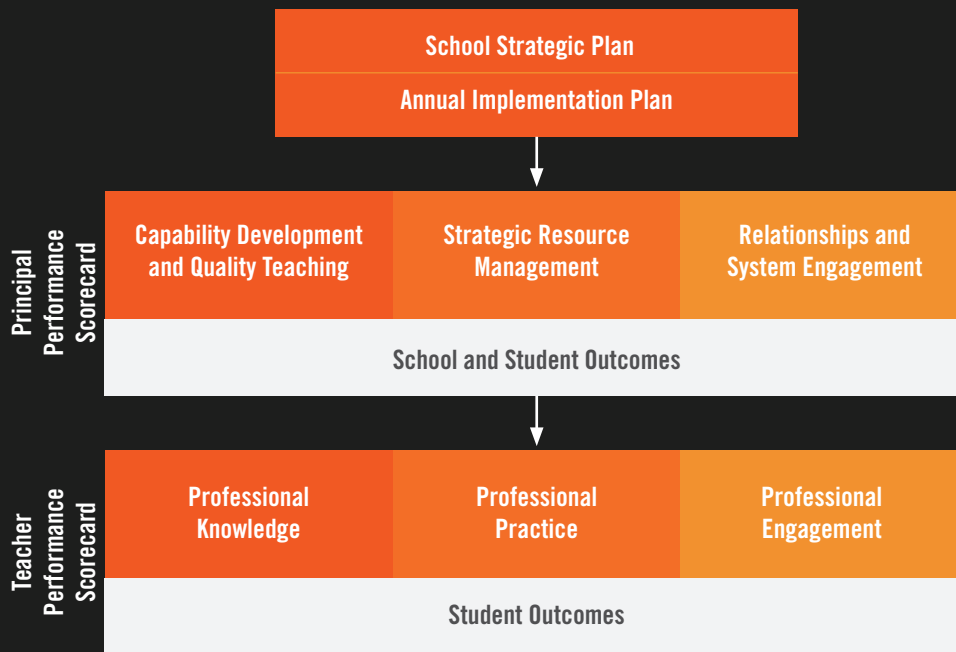


Figure 2: Example of a Balanced Scorecard Approach



Source: DEECD, 2013b, p. 15

student engagement and well-being, and student pathways and transitions. Among these, student learning goals are the most tangible, and outcomes on a variety of assessments feed into teachers' plans. Senior teacher Seona Aulich explains:

“ As a staff, we look at whole-school data a lot, and we look at trends. Collectively, we're accountable as a school. We set new goals for our strategic plan and our annual implementation plan from looking at the previous year's data. What realistically can we improve for the following year? That's where our (performance and development plan) goals are coming from. ”

Second, the evaluation process is tied to state, and now national, teaching standards. Beginning in 2014, it has used a “balanced scorecard” approach, in which teachers are assessed against their performance in four domains.⁴ The first three are directly connected to the domains of the national professional teaching standards – professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement – while the fourth is student outcomes. Teachers and principals together discuss and set goals in each of the four domains using the level of the national standards appropriate for their career stage and job classification. Schools have considerable flexibility in the use of school-based professional learning, and of portfolios of evidence of performance, and have discretion in the relative emphases applied to the four domains in assessing individual teacher performance.⁵

Embedded in the process are two mechanisms which direct the focus of evaluation towards teacher professional development and student learning outcomes. Under the Performance and Development Culture framework, teachers' individual performance

plans, which can include team goals – typically a grade-level team – are connected to those of the school. This is intended to promote collective accountability: teachers are accountable to each other by furthering team goals; and teachers are accountable to the community through school strategic plans. Moreover, by situating individual goals in the context of team goals, the process is intended to contribute to fostering collaborative practices within the school.

By tying the process to national teaching standards, teacher evaluation also becomes connected to professional learning and the annual registration process. (The same is true in New South Wales, where the evidence assembled during appraisal is part of the accreditation process teachers need to complete.) Evidence of professional learning in practice may become evidence both for renewal of registration and for evaluation. It connects a school-based process to state policy, to national professional standards, and to a common language for discussing what quality teaching looks like.

Teachers and principals (or other members of the school management team) are expected to undertake professional conversations based around teaching standards and continual improvement – what their students need to progress, what teachers need to learn to engage their students, and evaluating teachers' impact on student learning. In this way, the performance and development process provides another mechanism for teachers to be reflective about the practice of the school, and about their own teaching practice. This may also help further embed the national standards as a common language for articulating teaching quality within the school and profession, given that principals and senior teachers may themselves be less familiar with the standards than more recently-trained teachers.

Performance against individual plans is also intended to be based on multiple forms of feedback. This typically includes feedback on observed classes by peers within the school, including leading teachers or those with a role in school management. Recent international survey data showed that, nationwide, teachers in Australia were more likely to receive feedback on their work from members of the school management team (57 percent) or other teachers (51 percent) than they were from their school principal (27 percent).⁶ Feedback may also include information from student and parent surveys, or structured observations. Plans may incorporate team goals as well as individual goals.

Shanghai

Shanghai's teacher evaluation system also seeks many forms of input and feedback for teachers, including from other teachers and students. While the principal plays a role in the evaluation and makes final ratings determinations, the actual appraisal and feedback process is substantially teacher-to-teacher. As a Shanghai teacher explained:

“Teachers are required to write a summary about their work, and the principal and the other teachers evaluate his or her work according to the summary. In

most schools, teachers are also evaluated according to their teaching. His or her lessons are observed by the jiaoyanzu zhang (leader of teaching and research team) and other teachers, and the students are required to fill in some evaluation forms. The result will be fed back to the teacher and sent to the principal, but not the district office. It does not make a huge difference in the salary, but helps the principal to decide which teachers can shoulder more important responsibility. ”

As this quote suggests, student feedback is a routine part of the evaluation process for teachers. Schools and the district administer surveys to students and parents as part of the school evaluation process and questions about the teacher and classroom operations are reviewed by the principal. As in Australia and Singapore, there is a cycle of goal-setting, mid-year review, and end-of-year review. And evaluation in Shanghai also ultimately fits into a career ladder scheme by which teachers can be promoted in rank.

Singapore

Singapore's appraisal system is a key element in its teacher development strategy. To evaluate teachers, the Ministry of Education uses a system known as the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS). The EPMS is designed to be holistic in nature, and customized to the role each teacher plays on the career path she or he has selected. Essentially, EPMS lays out a range of professional competencies as the basis for teacher evaluation, which specifies teachers' performance in three Key Result Areas (KRAs): 1) student outcomes (quality learning of students, character development of students); 2) professional outcomes (professional development of self, professional development of others); and 3) organizational outcomes (contributions to projects/committee work). Within these areas, competency is divided into individual attributes (e.g., professional values and ethics), professional mastery (e.g., student-centric, values driven practice), organizational excellence (e.g., visioning and planning), and effective collaboration (e.g., interpersonal relationships and skills). Teachers are assessed not only on their own teaching but also on how they contribute to the professional learning of the school as a whole. The KRAs are open-ended with no rating scale.

EPMS functions as both a formative and summative assessment. It is used as a self-evaluation tool for teachers. It can help teachers identify areas of strength, assess their own ability to nurture the whole child, track their students' results, review teaching competencies, develop personal training and development plans, and articulate innovations and other contributions to school development. EPMS also forms a basis for coaching and mentoring. The work-review cycle begins with one-on-one target setting

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at the start of the year conducted with the teacher's immediate supervisor, followed by a mid-year work review that is formative in nature, before the end-of-year summative review. The review cycle helps specify areas for improvement, and enables developmental and career pathways to be mapped.

In Singapore, the evaluation process is aimed at helping teachers receive important feedback on their practice from their more senior colleagues. The conversation between teachers and their reporting officers (usually a senior teacher or department head) covers what the teacher has done well, along with areas for development. Azahar Bin Mohamed Noor, a teacher-specialist at Raffles Girls School, explains the nature of the feedback and follow-up:

“ Assessment is both evaluative and developmental. The conversation is done in a very developmental way. We have our own tools such as a classroom observation tool to assess teaching competency. We also use the EPMS, where we have two conversations a year with our reporting officer (RO). The EPMS document is to document what are our plans for the year, what we have done and the impact it has on the school or the students. It also records teachers' training needs. ”

Tan Hwee Pin, the principal of Kranji Secondary School, explained:

“ We want to emphasize to the teachers that this is a developmental process. It is a journey and we want them to have ownership of this journey. Our HODs (Heads of Department) work with the teachers very closely and they provide feedback on a regular basis. This ongoing conversation enables teachers to chart their progress and develop their plans throughout the year. ”

Links to Professional Learning

In high-performing jurisdictions, the links between appraisal, feedback and professional learning are well-developed. The NSW Department of Education and Communities makes these connections explicit.

“ All teachers have a right to be supported in their professional learning as well as a responsibility to be involved in performance and development processes that facilitate their professional growth for the provision of quality teaching and learning. The overarching purpose of the performance and development process is to support the ongoing improvement of student outcomes through continuous development of a skilled and effective teaching workforce.⁷ ”

New South Wales teachers and school leaders are required to work with colleagues and their supervisor to document appropriate strategies and professional learning to support the achievement of their goals. Throughout the implementation of the plan, teachers are required to collect evidence, sourced from their everyday work, that

when considered holistically, will demonstrate their progress towards their goals. The evidence that is required must include data on student learning and outcomes, feedback from peer observations of teaching practice and the results of collaborative practice with colleagues.

According to a survey of 750 highly respected teachers in NSW, all of these are sources of professional learning. The teachers reported that, in addition to collaborative planning and peer observations, the most useful feedback for them came from evidence of assessment from student work and feedback from their students. The second most useful source of feedback was feedback from other teachers and their supervisors. Data from external testing were less highly rated than evidence from student work samples.⁸ The teachers' responses suggested that a key driver of teacher learning is formative assessment based on rich evidence of learning conducted during the teaching process. This assessment is most closely connected to the classroom and creates a cycle of continuous feedback for teachers to monitor the impact of their teaching as well as for students to chart the progress of their learning. These highly accomplished teachers were constantly evaluating the difference they make and how they made it. When asked what types of feedback they sought more often, the teachers identified feedback from other teachers.

In Singapore, professional learning connections are made in the conversation between teachers and their reporting officers, which covers both what the teacher has done well and where there are areas for development. After the conversation with the reporting officer, teachers compose their own evaluation where they write down their thoughts and plans for the future, addressing questions such as: In what ways have you improved? How you are going to improve yourself further? What are the projects you would like to take on? The teacher and the RO identify in- and out-of-school learning opportunities that will help the teacher pursue these goals. The same process occurs in the systems in Canada and Australia, where an annual learning plan is developed around the teachers' goals.

In Singapore, the evaluation may also launch professional learning tied to teachers' career options. For example, Rosmiliah Bte Kasmin of Kranji Secondary School described how her evaluation helped her specifically to refocus her professional development plans when she decided to shift from the leadership track to the teaching track:

“ At the beginning of every year, you discuss with the Head your career options for the next three to five years, taking into consideration the teacher's performance in the previous year. That particular conversation will help you see which direction you would like to go. For example, if you intend to take up the leadership track as the Head

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of Department, probably the school needs to expose you a bit more to different projects and responsibilities in the school. If you choose the teaching track, there are certain projects and things that you need to complete, or certain skills that you need to have before you can get to be promoted to the Senior Teacher position.

When I was on the leadership track, I was doing more of activity organization for the students at the departmental level and was not very involved in mentoring teachers directly. So with the evaluation, I could narrow down the kind of skills that I need to mentor the teachers and exactly how I can improve on my mentoring of the teachers. ”

The Ministry then provides these learning opportunities through NIE, the Academy of Singapore Teachers, or direct coaching coupled with leadership opportunities on-site or in one of the many venues where teacher leaders are working.

Lessons Learned

The policies and practices described here differ from country to country, but they share some common themes. These include:

Teacher appraisal is designed to foster professional learning and growth.

The purpose of teacher appraisal systems is not primarily to reward high performers and identify and eventually get rid of low performers. Rather, it is to create goals for learning and improvement, provide feedback on performance, enable teachers to see how they are meeting their goals for improvement, and suggest what they can do to strengthen their practice. The process is linked to professional learning opportunities so that teachers have help in making progress on their own and their schools' objectives.

Teacher appraisal is linked to professional standards of practice. Teachers understand what they need to know and be able to do, and are evaluated against those benchmarks. In many cases, such as in Australia, the standards are developmental, so that veteran teachers are expected to demonstrate a higher level of competencies than beginners. The standards include a broad range of competencies that include teachers' contributions to school and community goals, as well as their individual performance.

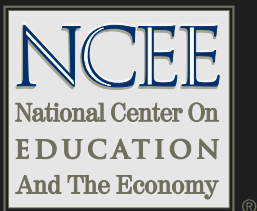
Teacher appraisal can be tied to career opportunities and compensation.

In Shanghai and Singapore, teacher appraisals help determine whether teachers can advance along the career ladder and earn higher salaries. But in these cases, the process complements, but does not replace, the emphasis on professional learning and growth.

The purpose of teacher appraisal systems is not primarily to reward high performers and identify and eventually get rid of low performers. Rather, it is to create goals for learning and improvement.

Notes:

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2. DEECD (2014). Professional Practice and Performance for Improved Learning: Performance and Development. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
3. Elizabeth A. City, Richard F. Elmore, Sarah E. Fiarman, and Lee Teitel (2009). Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
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4. Victoria will transition to a similarly structured 'whole-of-practice' approach built around the professional teaching standards and student outcomes, and focused on teacher goal-setting and reflection, professional practice and learning, and review and feedback for improvement.
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7. NSW Department of Education and Communities (2015). Performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and Teachers in NSW Public Schools. Sydney, Australia: Department of Education and Communities.
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