

“A Learning Paper”

# Integrating Educator Evaluation and Professional Development to Support Ongoing Growth:

Addressing State, District, and  
*Race to the Top* Requirements

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***"When effective professional development is a core component of an evaluation system, it strengthens and refines teaching and increases student learning."***

~ Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director,  
Learning Forward

## Introduction

***We know that professional learning should to be tightly aligned and integrated with educator evaluation to form a complete cycle of learning, focused support, and ongoing professional growth for all staff.*** What would it look like if this vision was fully realized?

Well-known studies such as *"The Widget Effect,"* conducted by the New Teacher Project, and *"So Long, Lake Wobegon?"* (Donaldson, 2009) suggest that traditional teacher and principal evaluation procedures have been quite ineffective in accurately assessing high quality instruction and guiding necessary improvements due to a cognitive bias or illusory superiority that results in almost all educators receiving satisfactory or higher ratings. Leaders and teachers agree that many teachers and principals are actually not as effective as the evaluations portray (Varlas, 2009). Typically, the results of the standard appraisal process have had minimal if any impact on improving teaching or learning. For some time, Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education, has been vocal with concerns about traditional evaluation procedures and systems, saying that the systems are "broken."

It's fair to examine the root causes that have led us here. Several contributing factors include ambiguous or inadequate standards, lack of time, collective bargaining restrictions, and weak evaluation tools to manage the process, such as poor methods for data input, personalization, and dissemination. In many districts, these issues are compounded by an organizational culture that does not embrace constructive feedback and provides limited accountability and little motivation to encourage candid and valid evaluations. Given this scenario, it's no wonder that it may seem daunting to figure out how to comply with new requirements while truly realizing a vision of the evaluation process that is rigorous, fair, collaborative, and meaningfully supports teachers, principals, and non-certified personnel in moving their professional practice forward.



There are many reasons why educator evaluation is at the forefront of today's educational landscape. First, federal programs such as *Race to the Top* have clearly established renewed expectations for comprehensive, coherent, and transparent procedures for annual, performance-based evaluation. Second, in an increasingly competitive K-12 environment, public schools are under enhanced pressure to validate that their teachers are successful. Third, education reform models that focus on high quality teaching and increased attention to value-added assessment models have provided a significant push to re-examine the manner in which we appraise our teacher workforce. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, researchers indicate that "a well-designed and implemented evaluation system may be the most effective way to raise student achievement" (Donaldson, 2009).

Another significant reality is that most newly defined evaluation requirements include student achievement data and student growth measures, in addition to multiple observations, as important factors. Many districts are also expected to demonstrate that professional development has a significant role in the evaluation and growth process; therefore, assessing the effectiveness of professional development experiences is becoming increasingly important. To start, a Professional Development Management and Evaluation System (PDMES) such as MyLearningPlan, allows administrators to meet the new requirements around determining the effectiveness of professional learning by collecting and examining a wealth of information about what educators are learning, and the corresponding changes in instruction and student outcomes. This emphasis on looking for evidence about the relationship between teaching and student learning was echoed by *Education Week*: "The money spent on professional development could be better tracked to ensure that it has an impact on student learning."

To strengthen the connections between teacher evaluation and professional development, MyLearningPlan OASYS was designed to be fully integrated with MyLearningPlan. MyLearningPlan OASYS is the only system of its kind that is embedded with a PDMES to form a complete cycle of ongoing learning, reflection, appraisal, support, and growth. Danielson (2009) reinforces the importance of this relationship between professional development and educator evaluation: "An effective teacher evaluation system accomplishes two things: it ensures quality teaching and it promotes professional learning." She advises that we shift focus from "inspection" to "collaborative reflection." To do this well may require instituting cultural, structural, and technical changes.



The diagram below (Figure 1) illustrates this emphasis on the whole teacher or principal as an active professional deeply involved in moving their practice forward. With technology to easily manage and track ongoing, job-embedded professional learning, and to facilitate the flow of information and analysis about teaching effectiveness and student performance, educator evaluation can be a more valued and relevant means of effectively supporting teachers, principals, and even non-certified staff.

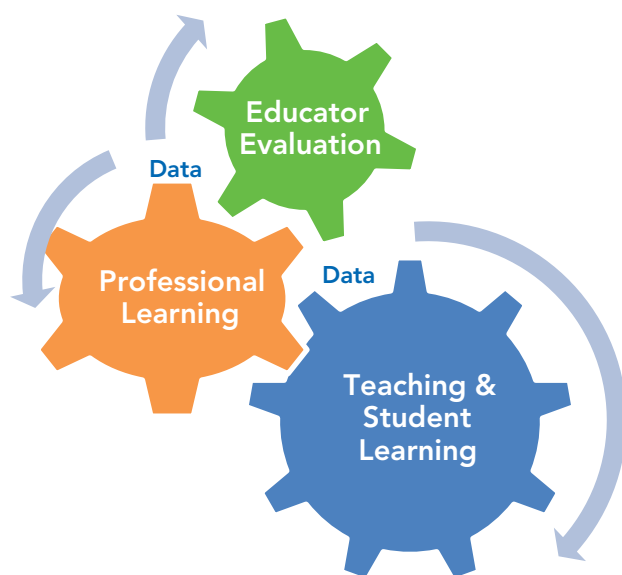


Figure 1: Relationships between Evaluation, Professional Learning and Teaching & Student Learning

Over the past decade, our customers have asked us to complete this loop, which led us to design and develop MyLearningPlan OASYS, a comprehensive online system for streamlining the management of all components and procedures pertaining to educator evaluation. This system was designed specifically to work with MyLearningPlan to support the aim of improving the efficacy of teachers and principals based on documented performance and integrated flow of data between professional development and evaluation systems. This union between MyLearningPlan and MyLearningPlan OASYS fulfills the notion of the complete growth portfolio, and is a natural extension of MyLearningPlan.

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MyLearningPlan OASYS takes educator appraisal to the next level by providing the most current technology and best practices to track all evaluation components for different evaluatee groups, including scheduled classroom observations and informal walkthroughs, peer reviews, analysis of student achievement and growth data, and action research projects. The system leverages technologies we have already developed and refined to provide the foundation of customizable forms for a highly adaptable evaluation management system that supports any evaluation component and any form that a district would like to include or customize. Each evaluatee group, such as Tenured Teachers, New Teachers, and Principals can have their own custom forms and rubrics.

Research suggests that evaluation methods should utilize multiple measures for appraising teachers and principals, and MyLearningPlan OASYS simplifies that approach. The system is rubric-agnostic, so any number of rubrics can be incorporated, and rubrics can be updated or changed as district needs and requirements evolve. The Rubric Designer also enables districts to differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories. Best practice content rubrics and forms can be easily incorporated into MyLearningPlan OASYS, and any custom forms may be quickly created using the friendly drag and drop interface. With the flexible Form Designer, district staff can create and update forms, which can include a variety of fields, such as textboxes, checkboxes, tables, mathematical calculations, and file attachments for uploading supporting evidence.

In short order, districts can set up their entire set of components for all evaluatee types to be easily managed in MyLearningPlan OASYS by simply configuring their site and adding the necessary forms. Whether you're using observations and rubrics, deep reflective questions, peer review and observation, self assessments, analysis of student data, portfolio evaluation, or a weighted combination of several components, MyLearningPlan OASYS can streamline your unique procedures.

In addition to managing the evaluation process, the integration of MyLearningPlan OASYS with our PDMES, MyLearningPlan, leverages all of the professional development data that is amassed in online portfolios within the PDMES, in order to initiate informed evaluation conversations about personal learning and professional progress to date. We accomplish this by automatically incorporating accurate, dynamic professional learning histories and professional goals from Individual PD Plans from



MyLearningPlan into any evaluation forms to inform collegial conversations.

Another connection between evaluation and professional development is the Learning Loop, which automatically recommends standards-aligned professional development areas based on an individual's evaluation results. Administrators can review the automatic recommendations and confirm or edit the suggestions for each teacher. Specific learning opportunities provided in the MyLearningPlan District Catalog or associated catalogs of regional providers are automatically displayed on the teacher's Learning Plan for their perusal and easy registration. This ensures that professional development is targeted and plays a significant and meaningful role in the evaluation process.

With an integrated approach to professional development and educator evaluation, as provided through MyLearningPlan OASYS and MyLearningPlan, districts can overcome many of the challenges that have historically hampered teacher and principal appraisal systems. The user-friendly scheduling tool eliminates redundant data entry by syncing calendars and allowing administrators to assign or delegate certain tasks to other team members. Automatic reminders streamline workflow and ensure that communication is clear and all components are completed on time.

Several intuitive features expedite form completion and were designed to help administrators maintain their focus on teaching and learning during an observation or walkthrough. Interactive rubrics enable automatic rubric scoring, the Time Stamp assists with easy lesson scripting, and the Scratchpad allows the observer to capture ad hoc notes that can be transferred to the appropriate form sections at a later time. These tools assist leaders in quickly and accurately collecting and organizing information and evidence, while supporting objectivity and validity.

Robust graphical reports display data collected from rubrics or other form sections to vividly highlight trends and to pinpoint specific areas of need for individuals over time and across groups. Rubric score reports compile data from across multiple rubrics and instances to provide a total score for the observation component of an evaluation. The composite score report combines and weighs several data points, such as observations and student achievement and/or growth scores to automatically calculate a summative score for each individual based on specific state or district guidelines.



Together, MyLearningPlan and MyLearningPlan OASYS empower districts to quickly implement and easily manage a system for handling all of the processes to meet their evaluation requirements. In addition, the integration of these systems facilitates purposeful connections between professional learning and educator evaluation, in order to transparently address many of the *Race to the Top* and other state requirements. Further, with this powerful combination you can truly achieve Learning Forward's definition of professional development: *a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement* (Learning Forward, formerly NSDC, 2009).

Educator appraisal that is well-managed and involves educators, principals, and others in fair, focused, and rigorous analysis of their practice can be a catalyst for creating real learning communities. In this context, teaching and learning are symbiotic and constructive feedback nurtures ongoing growth. When this culture permeates the environment informed decision-making and continuous improvement are not only expected, but realized.

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