

June 16, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Barbara McKenna
831.460.9933; 650.725.8600; bmckenna@stanford.edu

ASSESSING TEACHER QUALITY: EXPERT TEACHERS SHARE BLUEPRINT FOR EVALUATIONS THAT WORK

STANFORD, CA—Strengthening teacher quality, which has been consistently identified as one of the most powerful factors in student success, is a top priority for state education leaders in the current policy climate. Whether they are working to qualify for funding from federal education initiatives or not, states across the country are asking questions about the best ways to measure quality teaching: What policies will promote better teaching? How can we ensure that we invest our limited resources to produce the results our students need?

A group of accomplished California teachers has released a report to address these questions, with concrete suggestions on ways to reform evaluation practices and systems, not only to assess but also improve practice throughout a teacher's career, and to identify ineffective teachers.

“Research shows that most teachers *want* to be evaluated,” says Sandra Dean, lead author of the report and a teacher for more than 30 years. “But they want meaningful evaluations that promote better practice. Currently, too many teachers experience evaluation as an erratic, cursory process, in which the assessment that may determine their salary, their promotion, whether they even continue to teach, can sometimes be nothing more than a half-hour classroom visit once a year.” Dean is currently director of the National Board Resource Center (NBRC) at Stanford University, which produced the report

The report, *A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System that Works for California*, has just been released by Accomplished California Teachers (ACT), a group operating under the NBRC. ACT is comprised of master teachers, most of whom have undergone rigorous and effective evaluation processes themselves.

“Elevating the quality of teaching in California and across the country is vital,” says Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, and an advisor on the report. “When policymakers sit down to consider how to raise the quality of teaching in California classrooms it’s important that they include in their conversation those who have met the highest standards in the profession. These educators know what was helpful in getting them ready for their first day of teaching; what helped them become better in their early years of practice; and what it takes to teach students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. They have sought opportunities to improve continually and, in turn, they have invested time and energy in helping their colleagues to do the same.”

Margaret Gaston, founder, President and Executive Director of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, notes, “ACT has it just right: raising the quality of teaching is the essential place to begin in changing the ways our schools work. The straight talk from these highly accomplished teachers on the artful use of evaluation as the critical tool in this enterprise makes good sense. This report damps down the unnecessary noise surrounding the evaluation of teachers and provides a direct path toward a more sensible and professional approach to strengthening practice.”

-more-

The report draws on leading education research and on the experiences of the authors, highlighting challenges in the current system in California and outlining approaches that not only evaluate teachers, but promote their professional growth—helping good teachers continually improve and identifying those who are not well-suited to the profession as soon as possible.

Among the key challenges in the current system in California are the following:

- Teachers and their evaluators do not share a well-defined and detailed concept of what constitutes good professional practice at each level of teacher development.
- Generally, evaluations are conducted for compliance and do not improve the quality of teaching. There is rarely substantive discussion either before or after an observation that is focused on ways to improve instruction.
- The time available for principals to conduct effective evaluations is seriously limited, particularly in large and high-need schools where administrative demands are most pressing. Furthermore, the preparation principals receive to evaluate teachers is inadequate. One evaluator in a school is rarely sufficient to judge the skill of teachers across a range of content and developmental levels, no matter how well-resourced a school might be.
- Most evaluations pay little or no attention to the performance of a teacher's students, even though California's Stull Act requires that student outcomes be considered. Evaluations too often focus on easy-to-observe practices like classroom management, rather than look for evidence that students are actually reaching the learning goals set for them.
- Most evaluations take place according to schedules mandated by local bargaining agreements that aren't designed to consider the practical needs of teachers to improve, nor is there a sense of urgency for discerning which teachers would benefit from more careful scrutiny and support.
- Most evaluations are not used to target the needs of individual teachers or to help them match professional development to areas in which they need additional knowledge or skills.

Among the report's recommendations:

1. Use existing high-quality models and practices: These models assess teachers' work *and* help them understand what is needed for improvement. Among existing models are the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, the state-approved Performance Assessment for California Teachers (for the pre-service phase of teaching), and the California Department of Education's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program (BTSA), which, with some modifications, would be appropriate for the first few years of teaching. For more experienced teachers, the report recommends that California renew its commitment to promoting certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
2. Design a new evaluation system based on best research on good teaching, designed around the following principles:
 - Teacher evaluation should be based on well-understood professional standards that assess quality across the continuum of teacher development.

-more-

- In considering student outcomes, evaluations should go beyond standardized test scores to include performance on tasks that demonstrate learning of content; presentation of evidence from formative classroom assessments; the development of habits that lead to academic success; and contributing indicators like attendance, enrollment, success in advanced courses, graduation rates, and pursuit of higher education.
 - Evaluations should be frequent enough to inform and strengthen practice, and conducted by expert evaluators, including teachers who have demonstrated expertise in working with their peers. Training opportunities must be available for evaluators.
 - Evaluation leading to teacher tenure must be more intensive and must include more extensive evidence of quality teaching. The process should be an ongoing part of a serious teaching induction method that helps novices grow in their profession, with the help of mentors and coaches, guided by clear standards of practice.
 - Evaluation should be accompanied by useful feedback, connected to professional development opportunities, and reviewed by evaluation teams or an oversight body to ensure fairness, consistency, and reliability.
3. Make expert teachers full partners in the process. California should begin crafting new policies to improve its evaluation system immediately. However, it should not do so without the voices of teachers who can contribute knowledge about good practice, how to identify and improve it, and how to ensure that all teachers in the state meet the standards set for them.

This project was supported through a generous grant from the Stuart Foundation.

About Accomplished California Teachers

Accomplished California Teachers (ACT) was formed in 2008 by expert teachers to bring their knowledge to bear on the pressing policy issues of their field. ACT's mission is to present practitioner perspectives and expertise on a wide range of issues concerning teaching quality. ACT's teachers have achieved distinction in a multitude of ways: as teachers of the year, national Milken award-winning educators, leaders in curriculum development and professional learning, teacher mentors and coaches, and as those who have gone through the rigorous certification process of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

The full report and an executive summary can be downloaded from: <http://nbc.stanford.edu/>

#####