Exploring Effective Teacher Observation & Feedback Practices to Promote Teacher Development

A quality improvement project examining perceptions of high-impact feedback and how school administrators can support teacher growth and development through observation

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Acknowledgements

The late tennis star Arthur Ashe once said, “Success is a journey, not a destination. The doing is often more important than the outcome.” In reflecting over the past few years of this journey, I can think of no more fitting of a quote to describe where I am today at the tail end of this seemingly never-ending process. On second thought, perhaps there are a few other quotes that might encapsulate the thoughts in my head—many of which I dare not include here, while others seem just as appropriate, like an old saying I’ve often heard elders in my community utter: “Thank God I don’t look like what I’ve been through.”

In reflecting on these words and the experiences over the past few years, my heart bursts in absolute amazement at what I have been able to accomplish due to a great many people. As I am reminded of the hardships I faced during this time—the insatiable self-doubt stemming from my own feelings of being an imposter, the unbearable grief from losing one of the most important people in my life, the almost-debilitating emotions from simply trying to exist in a world that does not always seem to value those who look like me—I am also reminded of the unwavering support that so many people provided to me during this journey and every other journey I have undertaken in my life.

To my parents, Donald and Patricia Carrington, who have instilled in me the importance of working hard and pursuing every dream possible; to my siblings for whom I have worked so dutifully to set a good example, to my nephews whom I love more than life itself and who I hope see in me just a glimpse of all that they can become in this world—thank you.

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Executive Summary

As evidenced by different cross-national assessments of students' educational achievement, the United States has consistently lagged behind other developed countries over the past few decades when it comes to educational attainment. As a part of the 2009 American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, the Obama Administration's Department of Education initiated the Race to the Top grant that mandated certain changes to the public education system in hopes of improving educational outcomes for students. Among these changes were mandates around the manner in which teachers were evaluated. As such, once considered an afterthought, teacher evaluation quickly became a widely contested topic within education circles.

In subsequent years, various states participating in Race to the Top began implementing varying changes to their teacher evaluation systems, North Carolina being among those states. Central to these changes was the foundational belief that teacher evaluation system reforms hinged upon clear systems and structures for skilled school administrators to render feedback to teachers throughout the evaluation process in hopes of positively impacting instructional practices. These very ideas serve as the focal point for this capstone study completed in partnership with the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), one of the largest school districts in the United States, who like other large districts is grappling with the challenge of utilizing teacher evaluation processes as a vehicle for consistently improving teaching and learning within classrooms and schools across the district. Consequently, my inquiry and subsequent analysis within this project focused on four centralized research questions:

1. What is the function of teacher evaluation within WCPSS?
2. To what extent do WCPSS administrators' beliefs align with research-based characteristics of high-quality feedback?
3. What barriers prevent school administrators from providing high-quality/impact feedback to teachers?
4. What support do administrators need to provide teachers with high quality feedback to improve instructional practices?

To address these questions, I utilized a mixed-methods approach, which involved surveys of and informal interviews with school administrators along with a review of artifacts made available to school administrators to assist them in implementing their school's teacher evaluation model in accordance with district and state policies and guidance. Despite some potential study limitations, most notably the myriad environmental variables associated with navigating the global COVID-19 pandemic, using these methods, I arrived at the following findings:

1. The stated function of teacher evaluation processes is unclear to administrators and produces differential beliefs around actualized functions of teacher evaluation processes.
2. Administrators generally report understanding what constitutes high-quality feedback; however, they do not feel that current systems and structures allow them to provide it to teachers.

3. The broad scope of the NCEES instrument forces observers/evaluators to consider so many elements/descriptors within observation cycles that they are unable to engage in the levels of meaningful and constructive feedback that teachers may need.
4. Time required to complete elements of current observation requirements along with other managerial responsibilities limit school-based administrators in being able to provide teachers with the level of feedback they feel they deserve and need to grow as practitioners.

Based upon these findings and the extant literature on improvement science and change management, I generated the following recommendations to propose to my partner organization:

1. Develop and implement procedures to solicit additional information about district-wide teacher evaluation practices and processes from teachers and administrators at other grade levels not represented within this study.
2. Develop, formalize, and communicate a district-level vision for high-quality teacher evaluation practices and processes.
3. Develop district-wide supporting documents and resources to assist administrators and teachers engage in vision-aligned teacher evaluation practices.
4. Revise the professional learning model to provide more comprehensive and ongoing training for teacher evaluators.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, educational scholars and practitioners alike have engaged in considerable discourse surrounding ways to improve student achievement. While this particular conversation is not new (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Toch & Rothman, 2008), the focus on teacher evaluation practices as a critical lever in shaping student learning outcomes is. More specifically, a new trend seems to be focusing in on how teacher evaluation processes contribute to the transformation of teaching and learning and how administrative feedback can be a catalyst for improved instructional practices. The latest conversations about how we evaluate teachers is born of the same concerns that led to reform efforts after publication of the damning *A Nation at Risk* that painted a less-than-stellar image of American schools (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Toch & Rothman, 2008). This report, developed as a part of a special commission from then-President Ronald Reagan, highlighted the nation's decline in test scores, alarming rates of illiteracy among American children, along with concerns with teacher preparation programs.

Fast forward nearly two decades and the same issue seemed to be top of mind for American legislators, as well, as they enacted No Child Left Behind (2001) which entailed provisions to measure the quality of teachers via performance measures connected to teacher evaluations. As a result of this legislative mandate, teacher evaluation processes across the United States began to shift significantly at the turn of the 21st century. This coupled with the addition of Race to the Top (RttT), a $4.35 billion grant that incentivized states adopting innovative approaches to K-12 education, led states across the nation to overhaul their evaluation practices to ensure that there were specific systems and structures

in place to monitor teacher performance to ensure that students received high-quality instruction.

In some cases, this involved implementing what has come to be known as value-added measures that calculated teachers' contributions to students' performance on standardized tests that would then be factored into a teacher's evaluation. In other places, it involved edits to the frequency and volume of observations and tools used to rate teaching practices. What these policies often lacked, however, were specific supports to strengthen the feedback that teachers received as a part of these observations and evaluations, seemingly failing to address what all of this was designed to do—to improve teaching practices to improve student learning outcomes.

This issue is particularly prevalent in the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), which like other districts of its size has many of the common challenges that come with operationalizing complex endeavors like standardized evaluation practices given the myriad actors involved in the system. With 196 different schools come 196 different principals with different educational philosophies and consequently ideologies regarding observation and evaluation practices. Extending from this, each principal is generally supported by at least 1-2 assistant principals at the elementary level, 3 or more at the middle school level, and anywhere between 4-7 at the high school level generally speaking. As a result, observations within each of these buildings look different. In fact, in some cases, even the observations and the feedback provided within the buildings look different.

To bridge the gap between what we already know about what has been done to implement varying levels and types of feedback through teacher observation and evaluation

practices to support teacher growth, my capstone project identified and examined ways in which teacher evaluation practices—including teacher observations— are implemented within high schools in WCPSS and what can be done to improve these practices and expand said practices at scale to work towards improved student learning outcomes and overall teacher capacity.

Organizational Context

As the nation's 15th largest public school district, WCPSS currently serves more than 160,000 students and employs approximately 10,320 teachers who work in 196 different school sites. The district spans 857 square miles and encompasses 14 different towns and municipalities all with their own unique identities and niches. Given the sheer size of the district, geographic areas were developed to group schools, which fall under the supervision of an area superintendent who is the direct supervisor for building principals. There are currently nine assigned areas, each with approximately 20-24 schools.

In considering the vastness of the district, district leaders and other stakeholders have engaged in considerable work to develop and solidify a consistent brand of sorts. Nearly six years ago, for example, various stakeholders connected to the organization collaborated over the course of months to develop a strategic plan that would serve as the district's guiding star for the next five years. Through a series of town hall meetings, online surveys, and committee meetings, the district adopted its strategic plan, often referred to as Vision 2020, which focused on the collective desire to educate and graduate students who "will be prepared to reach their full potential and lead productive lives in a complex and

changing world" through the provision of a "relevant and engaging education" rooted in the 4 Cs—collaboration, creativity, communication and critical thinking.

Acknowledging one of the central factors influencing the education that WCPSS students receive are their teachers, this plan highlighted five specific objectives that would underpin the larger vision and mission behind the work. These objectives focused on learning and teaching, achievement, balanced assessment, human capital, and community engagement as the figure below illustrates along with the overarching goal of each objective also referenced in the figure below.

Figure 1. WCPSS Strategic Plan Objectives

Learning and Teaching	Achievement	Balanced Assessment	Human Capital	Community Engagement
To provide educators and students with the opportunity to participate in a relevant, rigorous, innovative, and comprehensive learning environment.	To increase proficiency and growth rates across all groups and eliminate predictability of achievement.	To develop and implement a balanced assessment system that accurately reflects students' knowledge of core curriculum standards as well as the ability to collaborate, be creative, communicate, and think critically.	To identify, recruit, develop and retain highly effective talent.	To foster shared responsibility for student success by building trust, collaboration, and engagement among staff, families and community partners

While each of these objectives can be connected back to teachers, the one that most directly puts teachers at the center of the work is the objective around human capital. Within this particular objective, the district identified and adopted five action steps that would serve to assist them in fulfilling this objective, which are as follows:

1. Identify human capital best practices from school districts and private organizations in order to transition WCPSS to a human-capital focused organization.
2. Continuously attract and acquire talent throughout the organization to impact learning and teaching.
3. Develop career pathways that will support personnel at all levels of the organization to enhance and build the skills necessary for professional growth, leadership opportunities, or career advancement.
4. Enhance the process by which employees are recognized and rewarded for continued exemplary and innovative performance.
5. Throughout ongoing review and analysis, both internally and externally, develop and maintain a competitive salary structure that supports the district's mission to attract, recruit, and retain our employees.

As evidenced by these supporting actions, the district acknowledged the supreme charge to not only recruit a highly-qualified teaching base, but also the need to retain them. To do this requires not only support, but also opportunities to grow and develop professionally. As research has shown, teachers wield an inordinate influence on the students they serve, in some cases having two or three times the impact of any other in-school variable (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). In his research on high-yield influences on student learning outcomes, for example, John Hattie uncovers a number of factors that affect student learning. Of the more than 195

effects Hattie identifies, his research consistently holds that the single-most important factor is the teacher in front of the student—whether in relation to that teacher's belief in their ability to positively impact student learning, which he refers to as collective teacher efficacy (CTE), or through the teacher's credibility (2019), both things that teacher evaluation practices can impact.

Given the complex work that teachers engage in each day to improve educational outcomes for students, it is critical that every teacher receives high-quality support to improve their practice in hopes of that translating into greater outcomes for students. This is the work that educators within WCPSS are called to do for every student, each day.

Problem of Practice

Consistent with current scholarship, one of the primary mechanisms for teacher improvement in WCPSS is through teacher evaluation processes. As a part of the state-defined and district-adapted process, building-level administrators (principals and assistant principals) are charged with assessing "the teacher's performance in relation to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards and to design a plan for professional growth" (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2015). Sometimes, however, the latter part of this policy directive is either overlooked or clouded by compliance-oriented beliefs and practices as is often highlighted by even the most cursory review of professional literature on teacher evaluations (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Danielson 2010; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Furthermore, in a district that consists of nearly 200 schools, the spirit of this mandate and the manner in which the evaluations are conducted is easily

misinterpreted and often varies in implementation from one school to the next, and sometimes even from one administrator to the next administrator within the exact same school.

The Teacher Evaluation System at Work

To better understand the evaluation process within WCPSS, it is first important to understand the state-level requirements and guidance on who is evaluated, how they are evaluated, and how often they are observed as a part of the larger teacher evaluation structures. As previously stated, the turn of the 21st century marked a distinct shift in the educational arena as scholars and legislators began to look at teacher evaluation practices as a particularly powerful lever for school improvement and increased student achievement. Beginning with the Bush Administration's 2021 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that focused on ensuring that teachers were "highly qualified" and that formal measures be adopted to monitor student gains, teacher evaluation reform efforts in North Carolina and across the country gained even more traction with the Obama-era Race to the Top grant, which explicitly called for reforms in teacher evaluation processes.

As a part of the RttT competitive grant application process, state education agencies received explicit guidance around six areas, which included details regarding how states' teacher evaluation plans would be evaluated. According to the Institute of Educational Science's evaluation brief, among these areas of focus were specific criteria around teacher evaluation, which tasked states with doing the following (Hallgren, Burdumy, & Perez-Johnson, 2014):

1. Establishing clear approaches to measuring student achievement growth for individual students.
2. Designing and implementing rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers.
3. Differentiating effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take student achievement growth into account as a significant factor and are designed with teacher involvement.
4. Conducting annual evaluations that include timely and constructive feedback and provide teachers with data on student achievement growth for their students, classes, and schools.
5. Using evaluations to inform decisions about staff development, compensation, promotion, tenure, certification, and removal of ineffective teachers.

In the case of North Carolina, many of these efforts were already underway due to 2007 revisions of the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, which prior to these revisions, were last reviewed when the State Board of Education originally adopted them in 1998 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015). As a result of these revised professional standards, North Carolina also revised the teacher evaluation process. Included among these revisions were changes to the annual process for evaluation (shown in Appendix A), which outlined a linear process through which teachers would engage in a four-part process that would guide them through:

1. training and orientation;

2. self-assessment and goal-setting;
3. the observation cycle; and
4. the summary evaluation and future goal setting

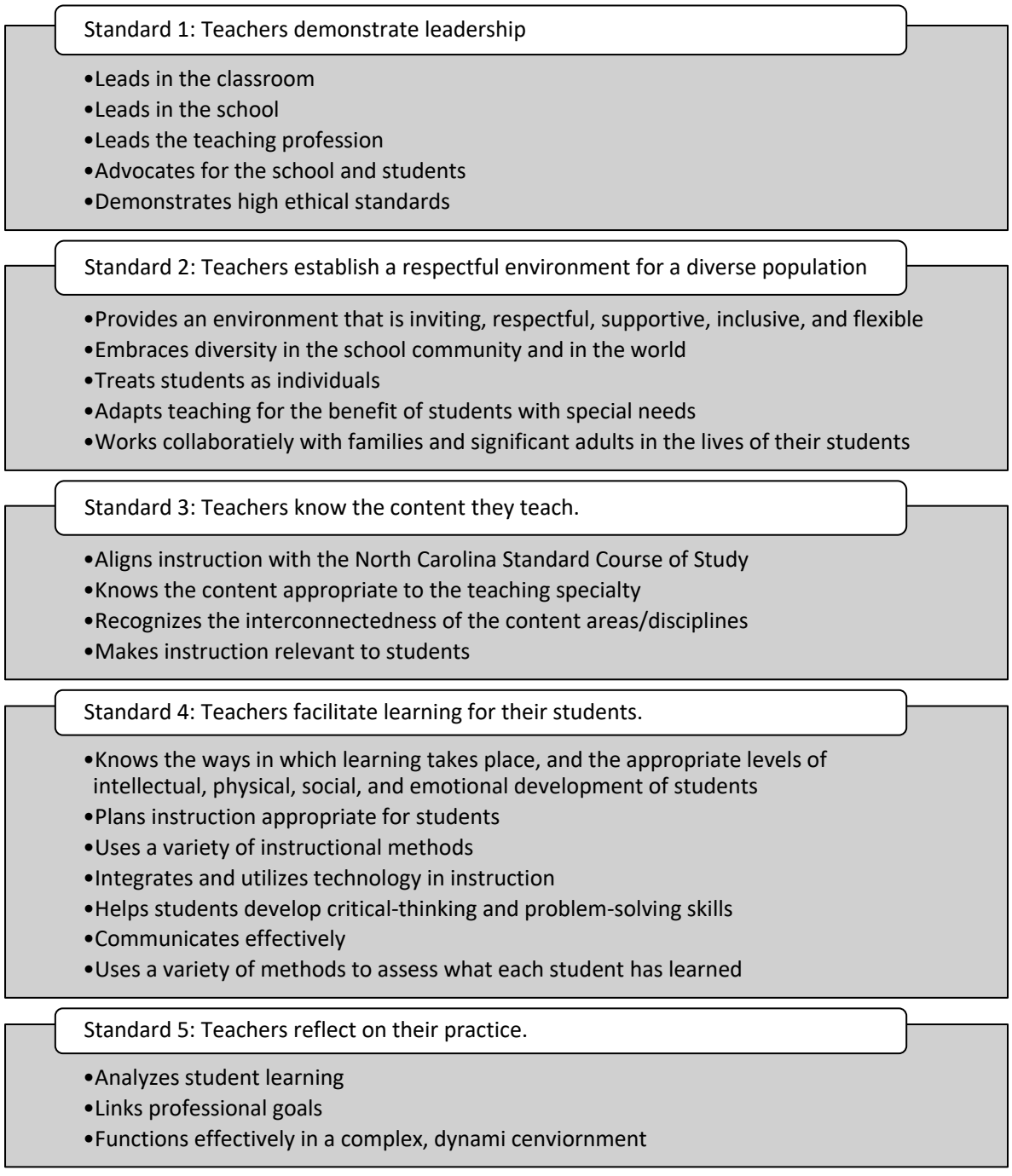
The NC Teacher Evaluation/Observation Rubric

In addition, revisions were also made to the teacher evaluation and observation rubric in partnership with Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), a self-described "nonprofit, nonpartisan education research, development, and service organization" whose mission it is to help schools and other education agencies improve learning outcomes for students.

As a part of this revised rubric, principals would observe and ultimately evaluate teachers across the five standards represented within the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards along with a variety of elements that fall beneath each standard as illustrated in Figure 2 that follows, along with descriptors outlining different teacher practices that fit within these standards and respective descriptors. As outlined in the NC Teacher Evaluation Process manual (2015), during observations, principals would be tasked with checking off evident descriptors within observations to "describe [a teacher's] levels of performance" based on what they observe and/or what they know to be. As is illustrated in many of the elements listed in the figure on the next page, however, there is substantial room for subjectivity on the part of the evaluator. Take for example one of the elements under Standard I which is about the teacher "lead[ing] the teaching profession."

For some evaluators, to be marked on the higher end of this element, they might expect teachers to be leading professional development at the county or state level, although this is not explicitly stated in this particular element or within any of the descriptors for that matter. As highlighted in archived observations and evaluations that were reviewed, other evaluators, however, might mark staff on the higher end in this element on the basis of their serving in certain leadership roles within a school like a club advisor or as a coach for an athletic team, while neither of these actually reference specific instructional leadership within a classroom setting. Each of these examples provides supporting evidence to illustrate part of the challenge that faces administrative observers.

Figure 2. NC Professional Teacher Standards and Corresponding Descriptor Categories Reflected in Observation and Evaluation Rubric



Not all teachers, however, follow the same evaluation plan in that some teachers receive more observations than others. As outlined in GS 115c-333.1(a), annual evaluation

requirements for teachers are to be determined based upon a variety of factors, but most notably their years of experience. Below are the three different cycles that districts are permitted to use when evaluating teachers:

Figure 3. Teacher Evaluation Plan Types

Comprehensive Evaluation Plan	Standard Evaluation Plan	Abbreviated Evaluation Plan
•Teacher Self-Assessment •Professional Development Plan •Formal Observation (with pre- and post-conference) •Formal Observation (with post-conference) •Formal Observation (with post-conference) •Peer Observation (with post-conference) •Summative Evaluation Conference •Summary Rating Form	•Teacher Self-Assessment •Professional Development Plan •Formal Observation (with pre- and post-conference) •Observation (formal or informal) •Observation (formal or informal) •Summative Evaluation Conference •Summary Rating Form	•Teacher Self-Assessment •Professional Development Plan •Observation on Standards 1 and 4 (Formal or Informal) •Observation on Standards 1 and 4 (Formal or Informal) •Summative Evaluation Conference on Standards 1, 4, and 6*

As per state law, teachers with less than three consecutive years of employment must be evaluated on a comprehensive cycle, the most involved of the three available evaluation plans. Teachers with at least three consecutive years of teaching experience may be evaluated using any cycle at the discretion of the school district in which they are employed. In many cases, where there are not performance concerns, an employee with more than three years of experience might be assigned to an abbreviated plan, whereas the standard plan would be an appropriate plan for a teacher with more than three years of teaching experience, but who is within their licensure renewal year.

District-Specific Teacher Evaluation Policies and Practices

Generally speaking, WCPSS policies and practices for teacher evaluation tend to align with the general parameters established by state policy and guidance. In some areas, however, the district has adopted more stringent requirements that provide additional layers of support and supervision. One example of this can be seen through the additional requirements imposed upon teachers who have not taught within WCPSS for three consecutive years. As per the state policy previously mentioned, individuals with more than three years of teaching experience are able to be evaluated using an abbreviated evaluation plan that would consist of two informal observations over the course of the year. This is the bare minimum as outlined by the state. Within WCPSS, however, teachers who have more than three years of experience, but who do not have three consecutive years of teaching experience within the district are required to be evaluated using a full comprehensive cycle that is the norm statewide for beginning teachers. This evaluation cycle brings with it the three formal administrative observations along with a peer observation.

Despite the firm alignment in evaluation plan assignment though, there still appear to be gaps within the ways that these evaluations—buttressed by teacher observations—are implemented across the district. As evidenced by a brief review of different evaluations conducted by different administrators across the district, practices seem to vary widely between and among schools, resulting in significant variance in the type and quality of feedback that teachers receive. In some schools, evaluations are viewed merely as operational tasks that are required by law and that produce little, if any, meaningful fodder for professional growth. In other schools, the exact opposite may be true. To assist with

providing stronger support to calibrate the quality of the feedback that teachers receive, the Performance Management Team within the Human Resources office works to assist employees and supervisors in the evaluation process by providing a range of support.

Description of Problem of Practice's Significance

In working with district administrators from the WCPSS Office of Performance Management, I pinpointed a specific problem of practice that served as the focal point of this research project. In general terms, the problem was that teachers across the district received inconsistent—and possibly, in some cases, ineffective—feedback through the teacher evaluation practices and processes in place due to the significant variance in evaluation practices at different schools. The reasons for this problem are potentially multi-faceted; however, through this research study, I intended to identify the most pervasive drivers along with some potential recommendations for beginning to address the problem. Whereas teacher evaluation is a fairly broad topic as it encompasses whole-scale summative evaluations of performance, this study focused more pointedly on observations in which an administrator would observe classroom lessons and provide teachers with feedback specifically on what was observed.

The variance in experiences relating to teacher observations and evaluations as a whole is a grave problem that has the potential to result in drastically different end-user experiences when it comes to receiving feedback that may or may not be meaningful in promoting professional growth. If feedback is truly one of the things that we believe is a factor in professional growth, what happens when the feedback that is given or received fails

to deliver? In contexts outside of education, lack of authentic and meaningful feedback could contribute to or directly impact bottom lines an organization maintains; however, in the education sector, the bottom line that educators work with are actual human beings whose life trajectories are dependent upon the work of a highly-qualified and effective teacher, presenting both a business and moral case for careful consideration and action.

Without measures in place to normalize and operationalize common measures for developing strong feedback cycles, this system—like many others of its size—runs the risk of unintentionally hindering the development and education of thousands of students whose futures are in their hands. As it stands, the type and quality of the feedback that an individual teacher receives through observations in the district is contingent largely upon where they work, their school leaders' personal beliefs about teacher observation practices, and what these leaders have experienced and conceptualized as quality feedback. Given the scope of the work that is done within this district to support a vision rooted in developing strong future global citizens, we must commit to more to ensure that every teacher is afforded the opportunity to learn and grow in their teaching to support the students of this county.

Sample Context Surrounding Problem of Practice

In high school settings, which is where this study was situated, this can pose an additional challenge. Given the increased complexity of what is taught within high school environments, I intentionally wanted to focus my attention on this group of administrators who may often be asked to support and evaluate teachers in content areas with which the

evaluator may not be familiar. This is in direct contrast sometimes with administrators at lower grade levels who, even though they may not always be content experts in certain subjects, may be more comfortable and skilled in providing targeted feedback in class settings where the content is not something like AP Calculus or an advanced chemistry class. Regardless of the grade level at which a teacher teaches, however, they are entitled to high quality feedback to help them grow professionally, which will lead to improved learning for the students they serve.

The central purpose is rooted around a desire to better understand the perceptions around administrator-derived feedback within the context of the traditional teacher observation/evaluation process. More specifically, this research will serve to accomplish the following in hopes of arriving at that aforementioned 360-degree understanding of the evaluation process and how it can be improved:

- To identify what constitutes meaningful, high-quality feedback from the perspective of evaluators and educators being observed
- To identify barriers that make it challenging for evaluators to provide meaningful, high-quality feedback
- To identify and explain the barriers that prevent evaluators from providing the types of feedback that teachers in WCPSS feel are most beneficial
- To generate knowledge that allows for the development of accessible resources/tools that educators and evaluators can use to develop and sustain a more impactful observation/evaluation process

Literature Review

In this section, I will highlight a series of primary ideas that emerged from existing literature surrounding my research focus on administrator feedback as part of teacher evaluation. First, I will synthesize the literature around the importance and characteristics of high-quality feedback. Following this will be a synthesis of research on the importance and impact of the evaluator/observer conducting evaluative observations of teachers, as much in the world of educational reform has begun to question who is charged with observing teachers and how varying individuals might provide different levels of skill and expertise in the provision of feedback. As an extension of this, I will also review research on the role that perceptions play in shaping the value—be it perceived or actualized—of evaluator-performed observations. The final lever that I will review is a bit broader as it underscores many vital components that go into both the observation processes and feedback in general—which is the utility of time.

Importance of Quality Feedback

As has been illustrated in different research studies, quality feedback during evaluation processes can play an enormous role in building teacher instructional capacity, which in turn, impacts student learning outcomes (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft, Papay, & Chi, 2020; Marzano 2012; Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2002). As Wiggins (2012) simply defines it, feedback is any "information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal" (para. 4) In the context of teacher evaluation processes, this often is coupled with judgments about effectiveness or suggestions on improving practices. An emerging and growing body of

professional and scholarly literature suggest that instead of focusing on transactional, compliance-driven components of evaluation, school leaders should instead focus on feedback and coaching. In their 2018 study, for example, Papay and Richard concluded that teachers in Tennessee who had received more frequent observations and feedback showed greater signs of improving their teaching practices than those who did not. Like Papay and Richard, other researchers have noted similar findings, identifying correlations between levels of coaching and feedback teachers received with increases in student math achievement scores, student growth measures, and improvements in effective teaching practice indices (Grissom & Loeb, 2017; Hill & Grossman, 2013; Kraft & Blazar, 2017).

Characteristics of High-Quality Feedback

Much has been written about the necessity and importance of effective feedback and the role that it plays in promoting employee growth and development. When looking at it from a more granular level, however, there is considerably less research when it comes to the intersection of effective components of feedback as perceived by those being evaluated and those doing the evaluating, along with ways in which structures can be operationalized to evoke stronger consistency and greater impact.

One of the most important components of teacher observations and evaluation cycles in general is the feedback that evaluators provide to those being evaluated. However, too often it seems that teachers are not provided quality feedback. In many cases, teachers are offered what some have even described as “shallow” or even in some cases inaccurate given an evaluator’s limited capacity to provide feedback in specific contexts. To truly shape

teacher practices, meaningful and well-designed feedback must be provided to initiate levels of reflection and sensemaking that will materialize in the form of professional growth (Marshall, 2005; Feeney, 2007).

In reviewing extant literature on the topic of high-quality feedback, three central themes continuously surfaced—whether specifically related to the educational arena or in other sectors—about what makes feedback particularly effective. Among these themes was the idea of feedback that is focused, referencing both specificity and orientation towards particular goals. Circling back to the simplistic definition that Marzano (2012) provides about feedback, let us consider an analogy of an athlete working towards learning how to perform a new skill. To truly master that skill, the athlete must receive targeted feedback on that item. Evaluators and coaches can provide a host of information and details about what they observe; however, this information alone does not constitute feedback until it is operationalized as specific information related to a specific goal. As Wiggins (2012) shares, this information "becomes feedback if, and only if, I am trying to cause something and the information tells me whether I am on track or need to change course" (para. 12).

Another important theme that contributes to feedback being effective is the way it is given (Chappelow & McCauley, 2019; Wiggins, 2012). While there will always be occasions for providing both positive and negative feedback, it is important to note that feedback must be delivered in as non-confrontationally as possible, with respect and care for the person on the receiving end. Research aside, most people understand that receiving negative feedback or feedback that is relayed in a negative manner might quickly elicit negative and defensive responses from individuals.

A final theme centers around the timing of feedback. When thinking about feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) provide a three-part model for effective feedback that could be applied in the context of teacher evaluations. According to the researchers, effective feedback answers three major questions, which are: "[1] Where am I going? (What are the goals?); [2] How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?); and [3] Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?" (p. 86). To answer these questions and to provide an avenue for actual improvement, feedback must be provided as close to the event that is serving as the focus of the feedback. In many organizations, schools included, feedback cycles are viewed as a terminal product. We conflate the idea of performance reviews and evaluations with the idea of feedback, which at its core is intended to be a formative tool to assist individuals in achieving a certain goal.

For teachers to be able to adjust their performance in the classroom, it is incumbent upon evaluators to not only provide feedback, but to provide teachers with opportunities to use the feedback (Wiggins, 2012). Extending upon this idea, Wiggins (2012) frames the orientation of feedback as a formative vehicle that leads to improved summative performance, noting, however, that "what makes any assessment in education *formative* is not merely that it precedes summative assessments, but that the performer has opportunities, if results are less than optimal, to reshape the performance to better achieve the goal. In summative assessment, the feedback comes too late; the performance is over." To accomplish this, feedback cannot just come one or two or even three times a year. It must be carefully and strategically integrated into myriad practices and processes.

Evaluator Expertise

Just as important as—and perhaps even more important than—the feedback that teachers receive is the individual who provides that feedback or the individual who is perceived as the observer of practice. Recognizing the importance that trust plays in any transformation process relating to performance review or critique, most who are receiving feedback and/or being evaluated would expect that the person providing these items would be qualified and skilled at doing just that. Given the recent attempts and focus on improving teacher evaluation models across the nation, many school districts have begun to look quite extensively at who observes teachers and how their individual capacities can be better developed to provide meaningful feedback, recognizing that teacher performance improvements are more often correlated with concrete and systematic observation by highly-trained and well-supported evaluators (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015).

Extending upon these ideas, Kraft and Gilmour (2016) tease out some of the subtle nuances and consequences that seem to stem from individuals without requisite expertise and/or content knowledge performing observations and general evaluative processes for those whom they supervise. Within a qualitative study examining the perceptions of building administrators, they found that a collective lack of grade-level or content-area experience often resulted in administrators providing feedback oriented around generalized instructional strategies and practices (p. 733), which is but one part of the equation. Reinhorn et al. (2017) go one step further in their research by drawing attention to the disconnect that often results from teachers perceiving evaluators as credible resources for

providing feedback outside of their fields. Within their study that surveyed 91 teachers on a range of topics, the overwhelming majority of teachers reported feeling that their evaluator lacked comparable experience either at the grade level or within the content area, and as such, could not offer "detailed, subject-specific recommendations" to them (p. 400).

Perceptions and Beliefs about Importance of Observations

Another lever that seems to impact the type and quality of feedback that evaluators provide and that teachers receive stems from centralized beliefs about the purpose of these evaluations. To put it simply, teacher evaluation often tends to serve one of two purposes: measurement and development. Through the measures that state and local education agencies put in place through teacher evaluation policies, they seek to identify effective teachers and conversely those who may not be cut out for the profession, while also trying to grow and develop practitioners. Unfortunately, however, as can often be seen in policies and practices related to teacher evaluation, many evaluation systems are built almost squarely around compliance-oriented measures, which in return perpetuate a narrative that becomes operationalized in the form of observation feedback that serves mostly to ensure accountability for the sake of dismissing ineffective teachers (Hanushek, 2009).

The Barrier of Time

While it is a commonly held belief that if implemented well, teacher evaluation systems and structures could contribute to significant gains for both teachers and students, a sobering reality scholars and practitioners alike contend with is the constant constraint

that principals face given the varied demands placed upon them (Donaldson & Papay, 2014; Grissom & Loeb, 2017; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). As a part of their study, in which they interviewed 24 principals across a large urban school district in the Northeast, Kraft and Gilmour found that principals often found themselves incapable of attending to the full scope of evaluations given the various other items that required their attention. In the pair's 2016 research article discussing their findings, Kraft and Gilmour (2016, p. 731) included the remarks of one of the principals who shared a very specific critique about how his time is spent implementing the teacher evaluation process within his school:

> *I would say writing it up is the majority of the time. Evaluation shouldn't be mostly writing, but I think that I would say that it's meeting with teachers that is probably the least amount of time. I'd say that's probably 5-10% of it. Observation is probably 10-15, and then the rest is devoting to writing it.*

In theory, as lead instructional learners within schools, administrators should spend the majority of their time focused on developing teachers and improving the quality of instruction within the sites they lead; however, historically, this has not been the case—not necessarily because of a desire that building leaders have, but instead because of how education and school administration has been structured for decades. For various reasons, principals and assistant principals have long been encumbered by operational tasks that pull them away from the classroom, which in turn reduces their ability to provide meaningful feedback to teachers and to provide appropriate avenues for others to do the same. Even in cases where school administrators have the affordance of spending considerable time in

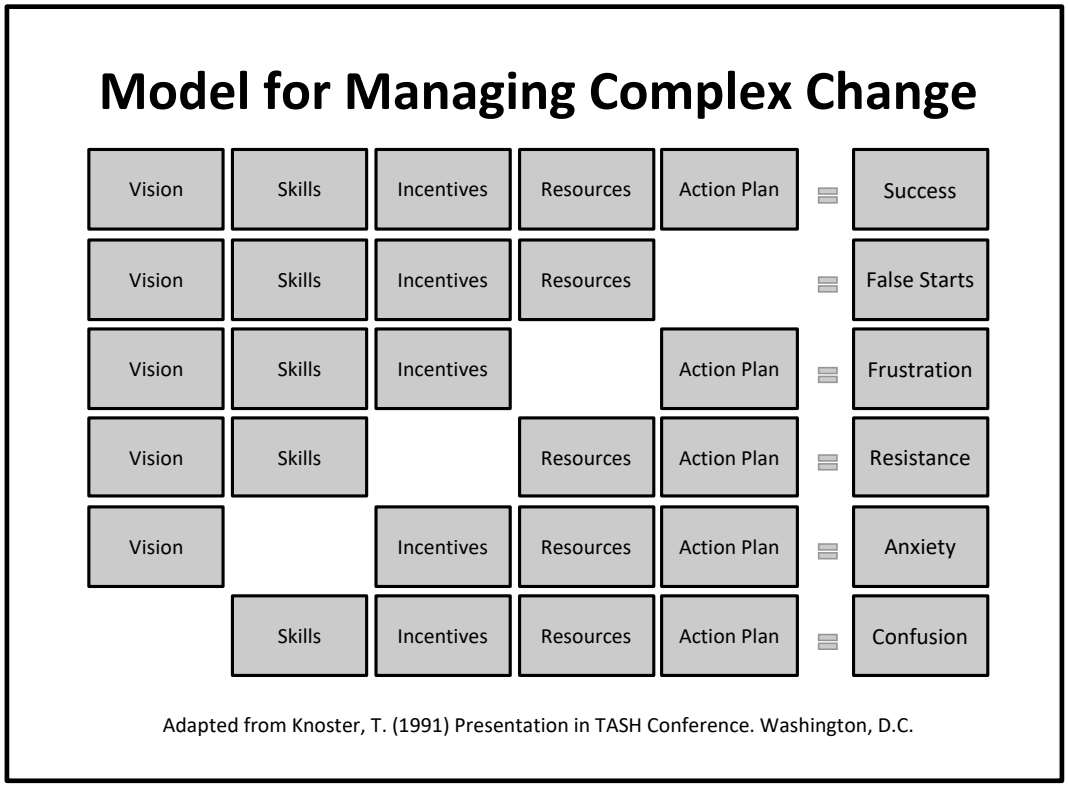
classrooms, the evaluation load that falls on them can often push most of the focus to the actual completion of rubrics to document what was observed as opposed to how teaching and learning could be improved (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

In consideration of these four research questions, an existing framework emerged as a prism through which this investigation could be conducted. For years, the Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change has been a staple in organizations seeking to initiate change initiatives of varying scopes and intensities. As a part of this framework that he initially introduced to at a conference for The Association for Severely Handicap in 1991, Knoster conceptualizes five central components that are critical to any organization's successful implementation of change initiatives: 1) vision, 2) skills, 3) incentives, 4) resources, and 5) an action plan.

As evidenced in the figure below, Knoster suggests that without each of these things working together, organizations and the initiatives they forged were destined for great challenges. In the context of my partner organization and the respective participants (high school administrators), this framework provides what could be considered an ideal state of implementation and provides an avenue to collect and analyze myriad data to assess the extent to which these elements—or at least, some iteration of them—are present and contributing to the existing teacher evaluation processes at individual school sites and within the district at large.

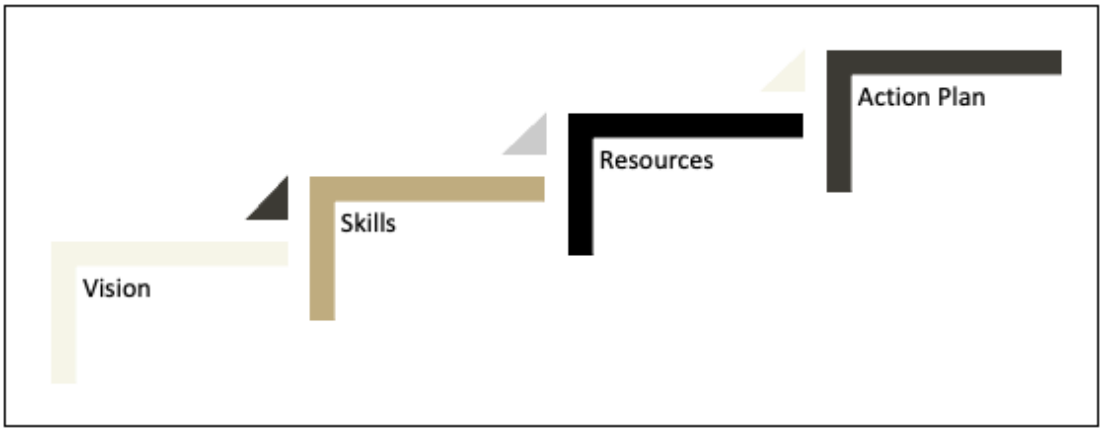
Figure 4. Knoster's Model for Complex Change



When situating Knoster's model along alongside the existing research on feedback provided within teacher evaluation processes, however, I pinpointed the four critical components that would serve to sustain an existing system without introducing a multitude of change initiatives. This modified framework reflected in the figure below looks at the first and last two components of Knoster's model: vision, skills, resources, and an action plan. As illustrated in the stairstep design within the figure, each of the components connects to the previous one, providing a cyclical orientation that continuously builds upon prerequisite steps. Through identifying and investigating the extent to which these items are present within the current organization and the system that the organization produces in relation to

teacher observations and larger evaluation practices, it is my hope that we will be able to not only evaluate the present levels of performance, but also hypothesize about potential courses of action that could lead to improved outcomes for all stakeholders.

Figure 5. Adapted Knoster Model



Research Questions

Given the aforementioned problem of practice around inconsistent feedback provided through teacher observations and evaluations as a whole, coupled with the literature on feedback and teacher observations along with conceptual framework previously referenced, below are the research questions that guided the work of this capstone project.

1. What is the function of teacher evaluation within WCPSS?
2. To what extent do WCPSS administrators' beliefs align with research-based characteristics of high-quality feedback?

3. What barriers prevent school administrators from providing high-quality/impact feedback to teachers?
4. What support do administrators need to provide teachers with high quality feedback to improve instructional practices?

Study Design

To address the research questions, this study utilized a mixed-methods design that relied on school administrator surveys, informal focus groups/interviews, and artifact reviews, all of which are detailed more fully below. Given the environmental context in which the study was situated—during the global COVID-19 pandemic in which many school buildings were closed or just recently re-opening—many elements of study design had to be adapted to account for safety and general feasibility. For example, whereas the initial desire was to utilize parallel surveys of school-based administrators and classroom teachers, it was only feasible to conduct surveys and interviews with administrators given the limited access to teachers during school building closures and district parameters around survey distribution and action research involving teachers. Below is a detailed description of each of the methods I used within this project.

Artifact Review

I initiated my qualitative analysis by conducting a procedural audit of the district's evaluation website that is accessible to employees through a district intranet site. In speaking with members of the performance management team who, as I have mentioned

before, lead the work around evaluations within the district, this site is intended to serve as a one-stop shop for administrators responsible for supervising and evaluating employees by providing them with readily accessible resources to fulfill their responsibilities as evaluators. To frame these resources against the research question tied to the vision for teacher evaluation within WCPSS, I reviewed each resource and employed a deductive coding approach that enabled me to sort out resources as mechanisms of ensuring compliance for measuring teacher performance or mechanisms for promoting professional growth, the two key foci for teacher evaluation that emerged from the literature review. Extending beyond this, I also coded each resource by type of resource to try to ascertain certain latent priorities that may be implied through representation.

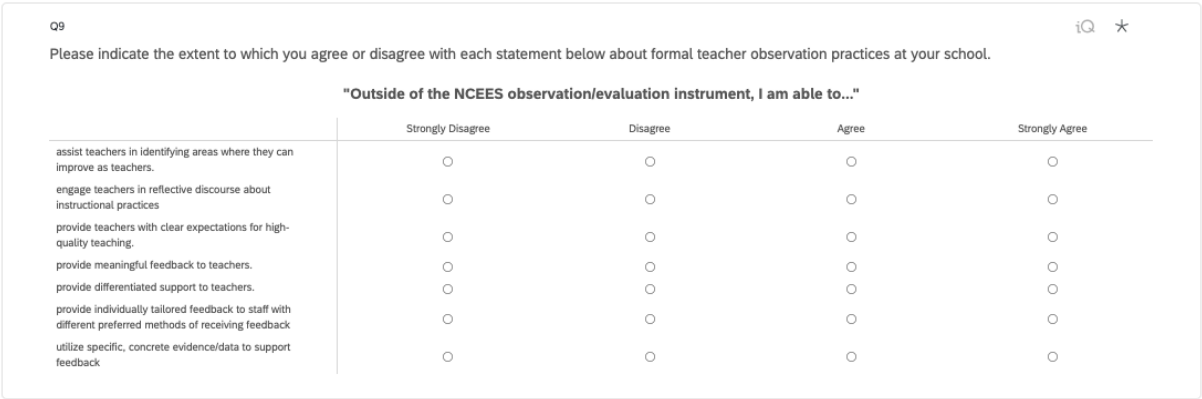
When thinking of this through the lens of my adapted Knoster framework, I wanted to consider whether there was tight alignment among all the disparate parts that should, in theory, work together to create and sustain a comprehensive evaluation and feedback process. As a part of Knoster's framework, the first element that paves the way for strong change initiatives—and possibly any initiative—starts with vision before advancing to any of the other elements, which is what I initially tried to tease out through a deliberate artifact review, followed by the remaining components of Knoster's model.

School Administrator Survey

To gather both qualitative and quantitative data about the varying administrative observation practices across the district to address research questions 2, 3, and 4, I

conducted an anonymous survey that provided insight into administrative perceptions of existing teacher observation practices, the feedback that results from these observations, and the impact that feedback appears to have on teacher practices. To assist with developing a survey to solicit appropriate information, I modeled this survey after similar surveys found within comparable studies on teacher evaluation practices, most notably the 2019 Tennessee Educator Survey for evaluators. Outside of seven demographic questions (e.g., years of experience as an administrator responsible for observing/evaluating teachers, years of experience as a classroom teacher, etc.), the survey consisted of four Likert-scale questions like the sample shown below along with six optional short-answer questions intended to tease out more nuanced details.

Figure 6. Likert-Scale Question from Administrator Survey



Q9

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement below about formal teacher observation practices at your school.

"Outside of the NCEES observation/evaluation instrument, I am able to..."

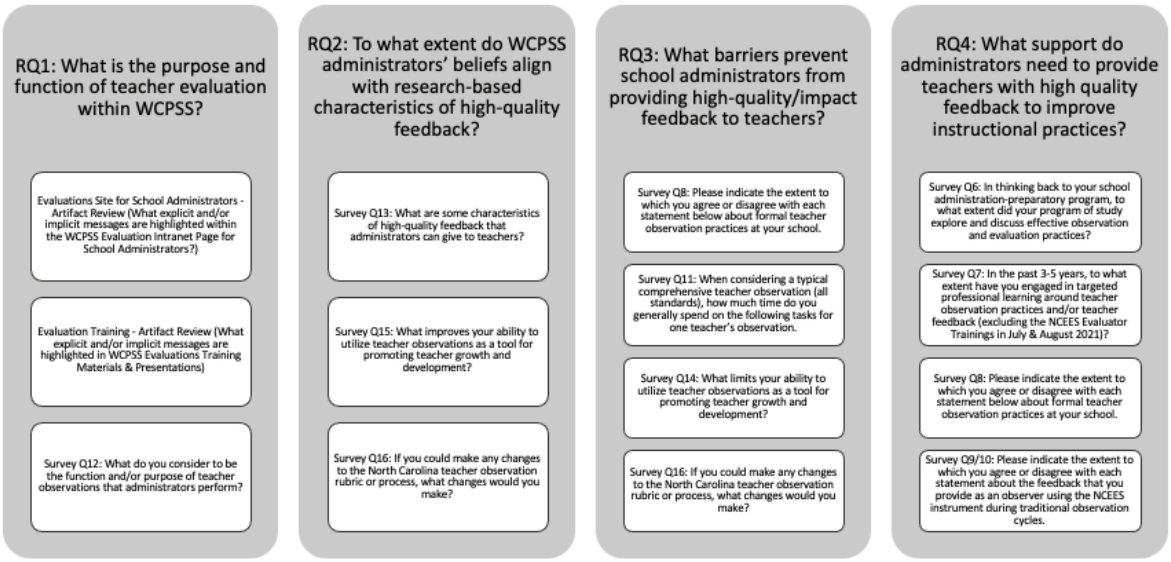
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
assist teachers in identifying areas where they can improve as teachers.	○	○	○	○
engage teachers in reflective discourse about instructional practices	○	○	○	○
provide teachers with clear expectations for high-quality teaching.	○	○	○	○
provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	○	○	○	○
provide differentiated support to teachers.	○	○	○	○
provide individually tailored feedback to staff with different preferred methods of receiving feedback	○	○	○	○
utilize specific, concrete evidence/data to support feedback	○	○	○	○

Given that this survey was completed anonymously without any process for linking responses with any individual respondent or any school, I included a variety of demographic questions to try to tease out whether there were any similarities among individuals' reported beliefs, practices, and ideas on the basis of demographic markers like years of

experience, experience in the level at which they are currently an administrator, etc. A full version of the survey is available in the appendix.

In hopes of ascertaining the extent to which school administrators reported engaging in certain commonly held high-yield feedback practices, I also included a series of four-point Likert-scaled questions. Within these questions, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with varying statements about teacher observation practices at their school. Again, to create as much internal validity as possible, these questions were framed in a manner that asked respondents to respond in accordance with their individual practices within their respective school sites. To assist with ensuring that survey questions appropriately targeted the information needed for this study, I utilized a mapping technique to pinpoint which research questions each of the survey questions would serve to address, shown in the figure below (also available in appendix).

Figure 7. Concept Map Showing Alignment between Research Questions & Instruments



In addition, I also utilized a cognitive testing protocol with four administrators outside of those who would be targeted in the study sample to ensure that questions were framed appropriately to ensure that what was being asked aligned with the information that I sought from respondents. As a result of feedback that each of these individuals provided, I reframed some questions to improve precision and user experience. For example, with the Likert-scale questions, I had initially grouped all items together in one question; however, upon receiving feedback that the volume of statements tied to a single prompt led to some respondent fatigue in that they forgot what the question was asking and had to return to top of the screen, negatively impacting user experience, I opted to chunk these questions in groups of 5-7 to allow for easier end-user experience. Other questions or statements were also rephrased to improve clarity and precision.

Once the survey was reviewed and modified, it was shared with 150 high school administrators within the district via a district email distribution list and remained accessible for a four-week period. Given the size of the district, I chose high school administrators as the target population for this study given the feasibility of communicating and generating responses from 32 school sites, each with anywhere from three to eight full-time administrators, as opposed to approximately 200 school sites. In doing this, it was also my hope to be able to increase internal validity and potential generalizability of findings by limiting the scope of participants to a single grade-band (i.e., 9-12), as opposed to gathering an array of data that did not provide reasonable sample sizes across the three primary grade-bands represented within WCPSS (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12).

At the time in which the survey was initially slated to be administered, schools within WCPSS were operating virtually with limited staff required to report to actual school buildings. Furthermore, the timeline for disseminating the survey had to be pushed back in hopes of securing a strong sample size given the ubiquity of surveys being shared with school leaders on an almost weekly basis within the partner organization's district. Ultimately, the survey was deployed during the summer months leading to the start of a new school year, with respondents being given four weeks to complete the survey. By the survey's conclusion, 67 individuals responded to the survey, representing a response rate of approximately 44.6%. However, 16 of the respondents only completed the first component of the survey, which did not include the qualitative response section.

Upon collecting data from the surveys and interviews, I utilized a two-part method to begin constructing meaning of both quantitative and qualitative data. First, in reference to interviews and short-response items on surveys, I utilized a deductive coding strategy that enabled me to identify different themes that emerged from each domain of questions. While certain themes were identified prior to the dissemination of the surveys and prior to completing the interviews, the ultimate themes were shaped largely by additional patterns or trends that became apparent while engaging in the surveys and interviews.

In addition, having disseminated the survey through the online Qualtrics instrument, I was able to also employ a series of quantitative analyses to look for additional trends. For example, in looking at administrator perceptions data around the Likert-scaled items, I generated a series of cross-tables that analyzed the data across different demographic markers like years of experience as a teacher or level of professional development on

teacher observations and/or effective feedback. Doing so, enabled me to analyze patterns that, at one point or another, began to emerge through an ongoing review of survey responses.

Empathy Interviews

Recognizing the limitations of a traditional survey, I also utilized a series of empathy interviews with a group of school administrators who agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews conducted after the survey window. Through these interviews about observation practices, perceptions, and beliefs, I hoped to gain a better understanding of different administrators' ideas about observations and how they assessed their current levels of performance in providing teachers with meaningful, actionable feedback through observations.

Whereas the opportunity to participate in the anonymous survey was provided to all high school administrators within the district, I utilized a different approach to identify building leaders to interview. Recognizing the diversity of a large district like WCPSS, I utilized a stratified sampling method in which I relied upon four geographic groupings (e.g., north, east, south, west) of the high schools based on the division of the district into nine different areas (e.g., southeastern, central, northwestern, etc.). By doing this, I hoped to account for representational differences that might have surfaced had I simply used a random sampling technique that could have pulled a distorted sampling from schools with affordances and/or challenges that did not represent other schools' realities.

Upon assigning each of the schools into these geographic strata within a spreadsheet, I randomly identified one school within each of the strata and subsequently contacted the lead administrator for instruction at these sites to coordinate either a one-on-one interview or participation in a focus group that consisted of no more than four participants to be conducted virtually through a video conferencing platform like Zoom or Google Meet. Ultimately, six individuals ended up participating in one-on-one interviews, with three other individuals from one school participating in a comparable focus group together that relied on the same questions that were used for one-on-one interviews.

As was previously mentioned, the purpose of these discussions was to surface additional context that might not be able to come through in the form of a survey. With that being said, many of the questions that I used were modeled after the survey questions to provide for as much comparability as possible. A full version of the interview/focus group questions can be found in the appendix. Given the agreement to remain anonymity of participants, I did not utilize any measures to gather or share identifying information about them as it would potentially compromise their identities.

Findings

Research Question 1: What is the function of teacher evaluation within WCPSS?

Finding 1.1: The stated function of teacher evaluation processes is unclear and produces differential beliefs around actualized functions of teacher evaluation processes.

As highlighted in the preceding literature review, teacher evaluation processes and the observations of teachers associated with them generally serve two principal purposes relating to teaching practices—to measure and improve. As a part of the first research question, I set out to examine the extent to which evaluation serves these purposes at WCPSS at large and within high schools in particular. As a frame of reference for answering this question, I examined what appeared to be the espoused function of teacher evaluation processes (i.e., what we say we do, believe, etc.) and that which is practiced (i.e., what we actually do).

To understand the espoused function of teacher evaluation within WCPSS, I relied heavily on the qualitative artifact review I referenced previously. At the center of this artifact review was the internal Evaluations Site for School Administrators. Upon navigating to this site, visitors are greeted by a brief statement that seems to, in some manner, reference an organizational mission around the function of evaluations: "To further the vision of WCPSS and promote employee growth, employees are given regular feedback and evaluated yearly according to established timelines and processes." The statement continues, highlighting that the "Performance Management Team in Human Resources assists employees and their supervisors in the evaluation process through providing professional development, guidance, and online resources." Beyond this, a series of pages are geared towards different audiences. For the purpose of this study, I focused solely on the "Certified Evaluation Information for Evaluators" section, which is geared towards school administrators who are responsible for observing and evaluating teachers.

Here, school administrators find a set of resources organized into different categories. Upon conducting a review of each resource, no clear delineation between resources that seemed to be geared toward measuring teacher performance versus improving it existed. However, there was a notable focus on what could be considered compliance-oriented resources. These were things like process guides to navigate the evaluation system or calendars to highlight completion deadlines. In contrast, relatively few documents/resources and commitment-oriented documents aiming to address the organizational commitment (value) towards providing feedback to and growing teachers. The table that follows illustrates an overview of the resources that were included in this analysis.

Table 1. Resource Distribution on Evaluations Page for Administrators by Thematic Code

	Resource Type	Description of Resources	No. of Items
Compliance-Based Items	General Evaluation Resources	Links to state level evaluation policies, resources for assistance, and code of ethics	4
	Calendars & Timelines	Calendars and checklists outlining evaluation plan deadlines	6
	Instructions & Platform Use Manuals	Guides and one-pagers providing step-by-step instructions on how to navigate the NCEES platform from the start of the evaluation cycle to the end of the cycle	7
Growth-Oriented Items	Professional Growth Resources	Protocols and tools for use by administrators, sample questions for conferencing with staff, SMART goal exemplars and scaffolds	5

From a more cosmetic perspective, it is equally as challenging to identify and distinguish a clear, purported function of teacher evaluation within the district through navigating the sub-pages. However, upon digging into resources available through this site, there is one section on evaluation trainings that provides evaluators with access to a series of modules in a digital learning management system (LMS). These modules are oriented around the different stages of the evaluation process and provide users with concrete guidance on what to do within each phase and how to do it from an operational perspective, but still do not focus on a centralized why.

Considering all of this, it is understandable that there would be some variance among administrator-reported beliefs around what they considered to be the purpose of teacher evaluations and the role that they played in the process. When considering how administrators responded to a survey question around what they considered the purpose of the teacher evaluation process to be within their school, approximately 76 percent of respondents referenced growth and improvement; the remaining 24% however responded by highlighting the need for evaluation processes to provide avenues for evaluators to "discuss the teacher's instruction and its effectiveness based on standards of best practices" or to "provide accountability on behalf of the teacher." One respondent even went as far as to say, "With the current NCEES system, I view the teacher observation cycle most like a checklist with limited impact on teaching and learning." While these respondents were in the minority of respondents, with most others highlighting what one might expect to hear, many of the ideas they shared were echoed by others who recognized the dual nature of the

evaluation process and the way in which there's a resulting tension between the idea of evaluating and improving. Responding to the same question, another respondent wrote,

> "At present, [teacher evaluations are about] compliance. Ideally, however, observations performed by administrators provide opportunities for instructional coaching and feedback that is, as part of a continuous improvement cycle, used to guide professional learning and future supports."

In many ways, this response perfectly encapsulates the tenor of most the responses. Through this response, the respondent acknowledges the seemingly flawed system as it is in practice but recognizes the need to move towards one that truly lives out the espoused functions that research tells us should accompany evaluation processes.

When asked on the survey to describe what they considered the function and/or purpose of teacher observations, 37 individuals provided anecdotal responses that highlighted their beliefs. When these responses were coded deductively as being framed around growth/improvement, measuring performance, or a mix of both, approximately 36 percent of the responses were included references measuring a teacher's performance. The remaining 64 percent referenced improvement in some capacity. Interestingly, however, only seven of the 37 individuals who responded included remarks that addressed both the evaluation perspective coupled with the growth side, again signaling some differences in opinion around the function of teacher evaluation processes and practices. Furthermore, it demonstrates a lack of widespread beliefs around the importance of both promoting growth within teacher evaluation practices, while concurrently providing an avenue to measure performance.

Research Question 2: To what extent do WCPSS administrators' beliefs about feedback align with research-based characteristics of high-quality feedback?

Finding 2.1: Administrators generally report understanding what constitutes high-quality feedback; however, varying perceptions exist around the function and purpose of teacher evaluation and observations more specifically and what role feedback plays in this system.

As evidenced by the anecdotal responses shared within the administrative survey about feedback, administrators report having a strong understanding of what constitutes high-quality feedback. In considering each of the 32 individual responses to the question in the survey around quality feedback, respondents referenced many of the things that research tells us about feedback—that it should be specific and goal oriented; that it should be supported with tangible, objective evidence; and that it should be framed in a manner so as not to imply judgment or evoke a defensive response. Interestingly, when the qualitative responses were coded to identify particular themes, over half of the remarks about characteristics of high-quality feedback referenced one of four things:

1. Specificity of feedback (i.e., targeting specific moves to reinforce or redirect)
2. Reflective/facilitative nature (i.e., engaging teacher in process for generating potential next steps/actions, not just telling a teacher what they should do)
3. Timeliness (i.e., providing feedback quickly so that it can be used effectively)
4. Supported by evidence (i.e., providing concrete data to support observations in comparison to subjective judgments)

The table that follows provides and itemized list of individual themes that emerged from this particular survey question.

Table 2. Distribution of deductively coded feedback characteristics as identified by administrators surveyed

Feedback Characteristic Referenced	# of References
Specific	16
Facilitative/Reflection Provoking	10
Timely	10
Examples to Support Feedback	10
Focused	6
Action-Oriented	3
Research-Based	2
Clear	1
Constructive	1
Content-Specific	1
Follow-Up	1
Honest	1
Oriented around Improvement	1
Presumed Positive Intentions	1
Realistic	1
Student-Centered	1
Supported with Resources	1

One area where there appeared to be a deviation from the research, however, was around the orientation towards improvement and the focus on follow-up. As the old adage reminds us, what gets measured or monitored gets done; however, based on what surfaces with the responses that the surveyed administrators produced, there did not seem to be a

consistent emphasis placed on the importance of either of these items, which was also shared in the adjacent finding mentioned above.

Despite having a relatively consistent understanding about what high quality feedback looks like, the qualitative responses revealed some deeply variant perceptions around the role that teacher observations play in this process. Moreover, based upon these seemingly misaligned thoughts, this begged the question around what role feedback is meant to play in this system at large.

Research Question 3: What barriers prevent WCPSS school administrators from providing high-quality/impact feedback to teachers?

Finding 3.1: The NCEES Teacher Observation/Evaluation Rubric hinders school-based administrators from focusing on and providing teachers with meaningful feedback

The administrator survey was the key instrument utilized to address the research question around barriers to providing high-quality/impact feedback. Survey respondents highlighted a lack of satisfaction with the teacher observation rubric that administrators must use to evaluate teachers. In addition, simple comparisons between scales of agreement between questions framed around the use of the NCEES instrument and teacher observation rubric and those framed around feedback that is provided outside of the instrument or rubric indicate significant variance in administrator perceptions of value.

As illustrated in Figure 8, for example, we see the relatively stable and strong self-reported beliefs that the respondents maintained in reference to their capacity and

proclivity to perform various observation behaviors that scholars and practitioners alike generally agree contribute to improving teacher performance. For each of the statements included in the survey about how well respondents thought they engaged in these high-yield practices, roughly 88% or more of the administrators surveyed agreed that they are regularly able to complete these behaviors they were asked to evaluate, with the only exception being the indicator that asked them to examine the extent to which they provided "individually tailored feedback to staff with different preferred methods of receiving feedback," in which case approximately 82% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 8. Administrator Reported Agreement Regarding Ability to Perform Specific Observation-Related Tasks Outside of NCEES Instrument

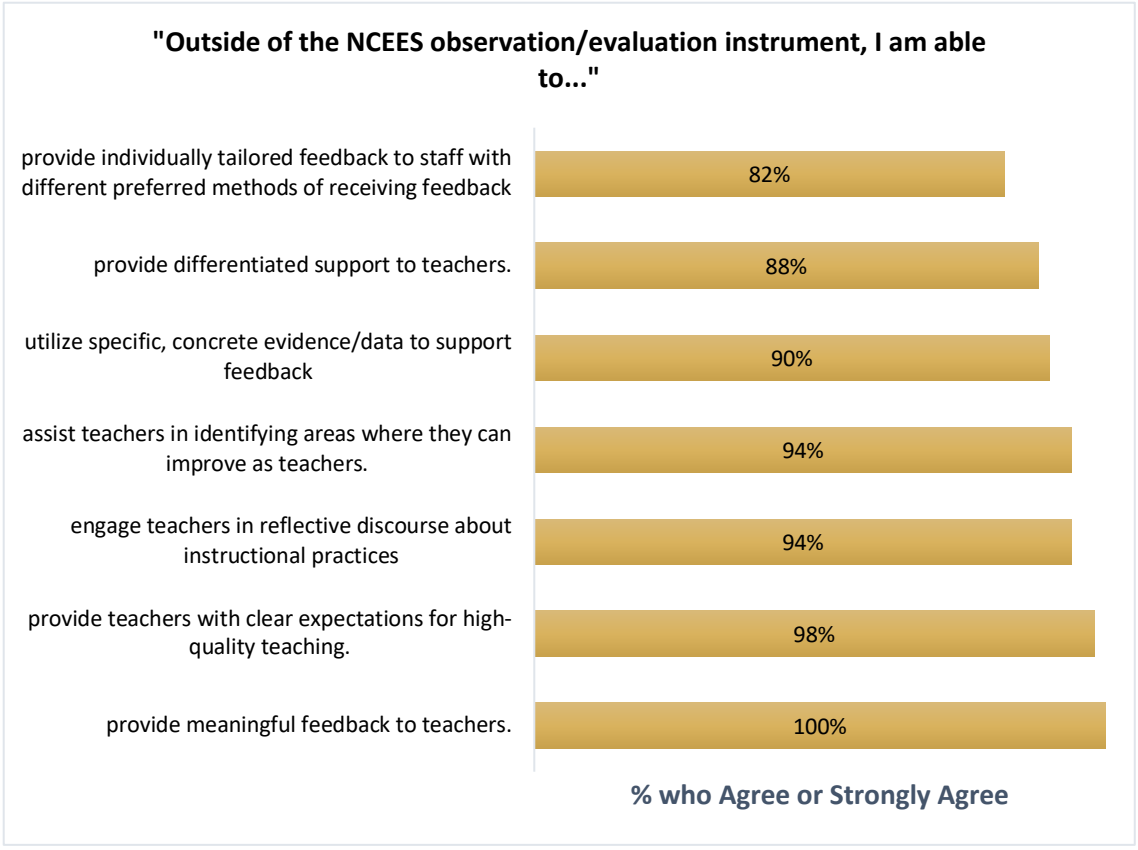


Table 3. Responses to Survey Item on Administrator Observation Behaviors without the Use of the NCEES Teacher Observation/Evaluation Rubric

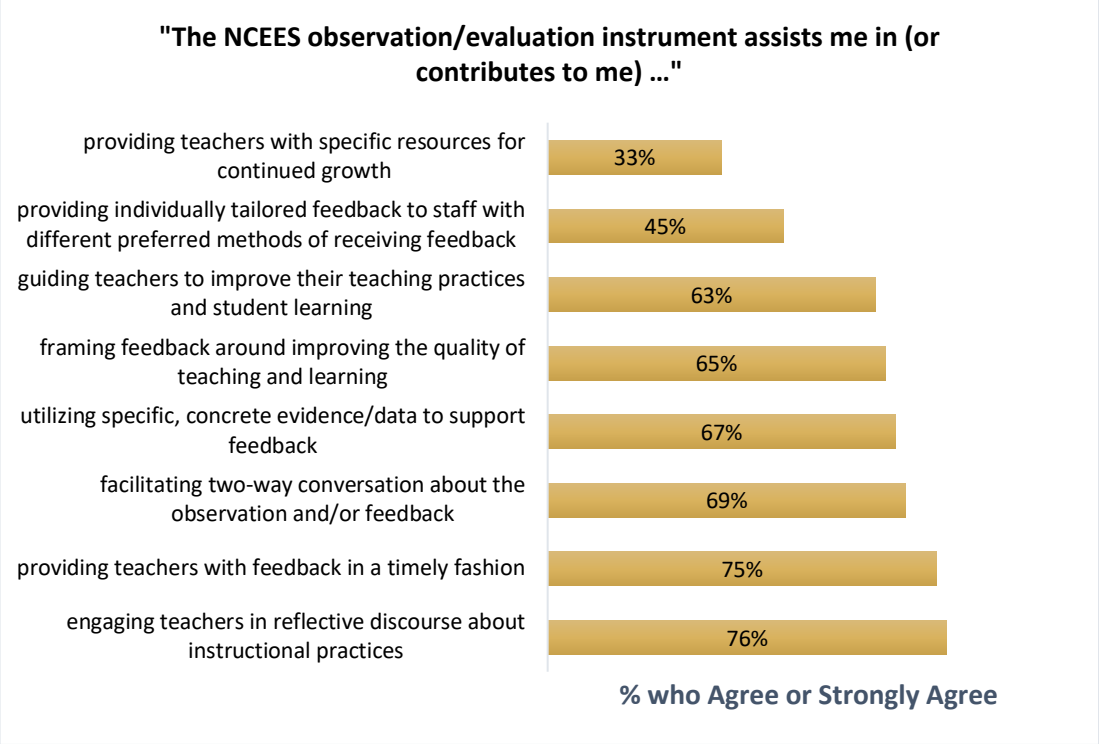
"Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement below about formal teacher observation practices at your school."

"Outside of the NCEES observation/evaluation instrument, I am able to..."	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
assist teachers in identifying areas where they can improve as teachers.	0.00%	6.12%	61.22%	32.65%
engage teachers in reflective discourse about instructional practices	0.00%	6.12%	65.31%	28.57%
provide teachers with clear expectations for high-quality teaching.	0.00%	2.04%	73.47%	24.49%
provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	0.00%	0.00%	75.51%	24.49%
provide differentiated support to teachers.	0.00%	12.24%	63.27%	24.49%
provide individually tailored feedback to staff with different preferred methods of receiving feedback	0.00%	18.37%	57.14%	24.49%
utilize specific, concrete evidence/data to support feedback	0.00%	10.20%	63.27%	26.53%

When contrasted with the responses from questions on the survey developed to tease out the role that the actual teacher observation rubric and the NCEES instrument itself play in contributing to observers' reported ability to perform certain observation-related behaviors, there was greater variance. In fact, in some cases, the general sense of agreement that was widely distributed across the Likert-based statements on the former item seemed to shift in the complete opposite when the NCEES instrument was mentioned.

This was especially true for items oriented around the provision of differentiated feedback and resources needed to improve teacher practices as shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9. Administrator Reported Agreement Regarding Ability to Perform Specific Observation-Related While Using NCEES Instrument



When looking at the breakdown of respondents' level of agreement with these statements mentioned above, there is a clear juxtaposition between respondents' sense of agreement as illustrated in Figures 8 and 9. Looking more squarely at the data, six of the eight survey items in Figure 9 feature at least a third of the respondents disagreeing with the utility of the NCEES instrument. To paint a more precise image, whereas the ranges of disagreement for the survey item about observation behaviors not involving the NCEES instrument fell between 0% and 17.6%, the range of respondents disagreeing with utility

statements focusing on the use of the NCEES instrument, including the two outliers, fell between 23.5% and 66.7%, signaling a number of discordant beliefs in the utility of the NCEES instrument in aiding survey respondents in completing certain observation-oriented behaviors. A more detailed analysis of the data distribution for these survey items can be found in Table 4 that follows.

Table 4. Responses to Survey Item on Administrator Observation Behaviors Using the NCEES Teacher Observation/Evaluation Rubric

"Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about the feedback that you provide as an observer using the NCEES instrument during traditional observation cycles."

"The NCEES observation/evaluation instrument assists me in (or contributes to me) …"	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
engaging teachers in reflective discourse about instructional practices	8.16%	16.33%	69.39%	6.12%
facilitating two-way conversation about the observation and/or feedback	8.16%	24.49%	57.14%	10.20%
providing teachers with feedback in a timely fashion	4.08%	22.45%	61.22%	12.24%
utilizing specific, concrete evidence/data to support feedback	6.12%	28.57%	57.14%	8.16%
providing teachers with specific resources for continued growth	6.12%	59.18%	30.61%	4.08%
providing individually tailored feedback to staff with different preferred methods of receiving feedback	6.12%	46.94%	42.86%	4.08%
guiding teachers to improve their teaching practices and student learning	4.08%	34.69%	55.10%	6.12%
framing feedback around improving the quality of teaching and learning	4.08%	30.61%	59.18%	6.12%

Finding 3.2: Broad scope of the NCEES instrument forces observers/evaluators to consider too many elements/descriptors within observation cycles

Extending upon the disutility of the NCCES instrument, one of the central critiques that emerged about the teacher observation rubric was its size. As one respondent shared:

> The tool is [too] broad and tries to cover the entire teacher rather than just one area. If you help a teacher grow in one area it naturally impacts another area positively without the teacher even being aware they are working on that area. If all the areas of suggested growth are all in their face to improve on it can become overwhelming.

During the course of a formal observation, for example, an observer is tasked with looking at 25 different elements across five different standards. Across these five standards and 25 elements, there are 151 individual descriptors to look for during a comprehensive observation. Within each of the five standards is a mix of "instructional practices" that an observer should be able to observe during any lesson. The figure below highlights descriptors from Standard II that would be considered observable instructional practices.

Figure 10. Element IIb of NC Teacher Observation/Evaluation Rubric

	Element IIb. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world. Teachers demonstrate their knowledge of the history of diverse cultures and their role in shaping global issues. They actively select materials and develop lessons that counteract stereotypes and incorporate histories and contributions of all cultures. Teachers recognize the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other aspects of culture on a student's development and personality. Teachers strive to understand how a student's culture and background may influence his or her school performance. Teachers consider and incorporate different points of view in their instruction.				
		. . . and	. . . and	. . . and	
✓	☐ Acknowledges that diverse cultures impact the world.	☐ Displays knowledge of diverse cultures, their histories, and their roles in shaping global issues.	☐ Uses materials or lessons that counteract stereotypes and acknowledges the contributions of all cultures.	☐ Promotes a deep understanding of cultures through the integration of culturally sensitive materials and ideas throughout the curriculum.	
✓	☐ Demonstrates awareness of the diversity of students in the classroom.	☐ Acknowledges the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economics, and culture on a student's development and attitudes.	☐ Consistently incorporates different points of view in instruction.	☐ Capitalizes on diversity as an asset in the classroom.	

Along with these instructional practices are "professional practices," which can be more challenging—or in some cases, even impossible—to observe within an actual classroom lesson. As such, many of these items must be observed or teased out through different avenues like considering participation in/and or attendance at school functions, examining participation on and contributions to school teams/committees, etc. In Standard 1, for example, only three descriptors out of 33 represented within the standard can definitively be observed within a classroom observation. The remaining descriptors address professional behaviors (e.g., participating in the development of school policies, collaborating with professional learning teams, contributing to the growth of the teaching profession, or taking responsibility for the progress of students to ensure that they graduate from high school), which call on observers to look far beyond the scope of an observed lesson.

While respondents acknowledged the importance of these professional practices and recognized the critical role they play in the work of teachers, they shared that trying to identify when, if, and how to address these items during observation conferences causes great confusion and takes up a substantial part of administrators' time. As different individuals referenced in both the surveys and in the interviews, significant chunks of time could be spent simply perusing PLT meeting minutes or checking attendance reports to ensure that teachers are complying with professional expectations or reviewing teacher websites to make sure that they contain required information; however, to what extent do these actions actually reflect the quality of teaching and learning within that teacher's classroom. More pointedly, are these things that administrators should really spend

significant amounts of time on when provided with the formal occasion to engage in feedback conversations tied to teacher observations? It seems that the majority think not. In thinking of it from a more transactional perspective, administrators at large recognize the finite resource that is time and are seeking clearer guidance on when and how to prioritize these "look-fors" across contexts to maximize the opportunity to focus on high-impact instructional moves.

In considering the mix of instructional and professional practices represented throughout the teacher observation/evaluation rubric, various survey respondents commented on the difficulty of trying to navigate it all, highlighting the challenges between knowing when to look for certain things, understanding how to look for these evidences, and perhaps most importantly, delineating between areas to focus on from a feedback perspective and other matters that do not perhaps have as much of a direct impact on student learning outcomes like those referenced above in relation to the professional practices that may not have as clear of a connection to instruction.

Even in cases where what is to be observed is more concrete, administrators highlighted how difficult it was to "look for everything" when there is so much packed into this particular instrument. Below is a snapshot of just one of these elements found within Standard 4, which includes 11 of the descriptors referenced above. In the case of this particular element, observers should have an easier time in assessing the extent to which the teacher behaviors are occurring or not; however, when trying to contend with what these practices look like in contexts that range from a healthful living course where students are learning about nutrition to an environmental science course where students are learning

about the impacts of global warming to a foreign language course where students are learning to conjugate verbs, administrators acknowledge the desire for more content-based guideposts to assist them in identifying instructional practices to either reinforce or remediate.

Figure 11. Element IVe from NC Teacher Observation Rubric

	Element IVe. Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers encourage students to ask questions, think creatively, develop and test innovative ideas, synthesize knowledge, and draw conclusions. They help students exercise and communicate sound reasoning; understand connections; make complex choices; and frame, analyze, and solve problems.				
✓	❑ Understands the importance of developing students' critical thinking and problem solving skills.	. . . and ❑ Demonstrates knowledge of processes needed to support students in acquiring critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills.	. . . and Teaches students the processes needed to: ❑ think creatively and critically, ❑ develop and test innovative ideas, ❑ synthesize knowledge, ❑ draw conclusions, ❑ exercise and communicate sound reasoning, ❑ understand connections, ❑ make complex choices, and ❑ frame, analyze and solve problems.	. . . and ❑ Encourages and assists teachers throughout the school to integrate critical thinking and problem solving skills into their instructional practices.	

Finding 3.3: Time required to complete elements of current observation requirements along with other managerial/operational responsibilities limit school-based administrators in being able to provide teachers with the growth-oriented feedback

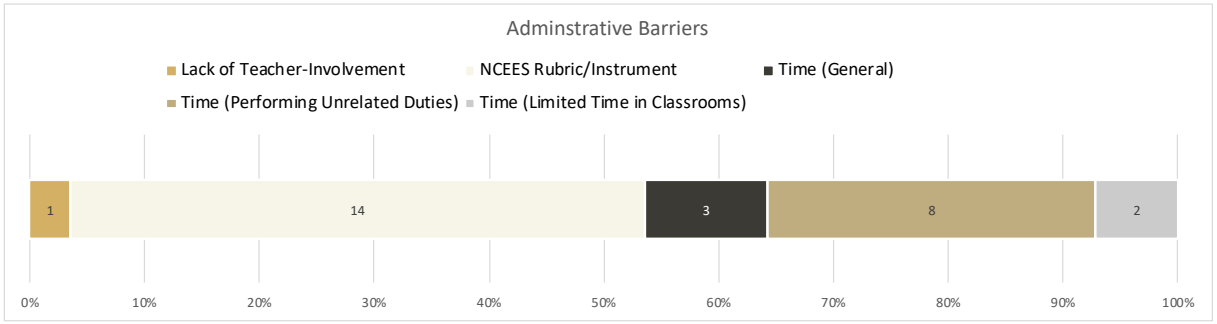
Another barrier to using the existing observation and evaluation process and providing quality teacher feedback revolved around the ever-persistent constraint of time. In relation to school administrators, however, there were two discernable elements at play with time.

The first element pertains to the ubiquity of non-instructional tasks that remove administrators from classrooms and other spaces where they can contribute to and facilitate

the provision of meaningful feedback via classroom observations. Each day, in addition to serving as aspiring instructional leaders, school administrators often become encumbered by various tasks that have little to do with instructional leadership including, but not limited to, responding to discipline issues, supervising lunches, coordinating custodial services, and more. As any educational leader will share, these are all important components of the operational milieu of any school; however, when these items become the priority for school administrators, it presents a significant challenge to getting into classrooms and working directly with teachers.

Through both informal focus groups that were convened with high school administrators across different schools and more formally in the structured survey, this was something that respondents highlighted time and time again. In fact, upon employing a deductive coding scheme for the barriers that respondents identified through their narrative remarks, time constituted about half of the responses, with the majority highlighting the amount of time they must spend tending to matters that do not relate to observations as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 12. Graphic Representation of Deductively Coded Barriers from Survey



In response to the survey question about barriers, a respondent different from the previously referenced one remarked:

> "In the current format, time is the greatest inhibitor. With each rubric taking a significant amount of time to complete and many teachers to observe, it limits administrators' ability to reflect deeply, provide high-quality feedback, and have time to follow up with teachers. Of course, managerial tasks assigned to administrators further impede our ability to effectively engage with teachers regarding pedagogical growth."

As both researchers and practitioners share, more than ever, school building administrators face increasing demands on their time each day, while still having to find ways to serve as instructional leaders within school settings (Donaldson, 2013; Kraft and Gilmour, 2016; Grissom & Loeb, 2017). In response to one of the survey items on barriers to implementing a high-quality evaluation process through teacher observations, one respondent commented, "Time is the biggest hinderance. Other responsibilities will drag you away. Additionally, the NCEES rubric is limiting … so I spend a good deal of time adapting it and going over things in post-conferences to supplement the rubric." A different respondent echoed these sentiments, identifying time as the greatest inhibitor and sharing the labor associated with "each rubric taking a significant amount of time to complete and [having] many teachers to observe." The respondent continued by highlighting how these things together significantly limit administrators' ability "to reflect deeply, provide high-quality feedback, and have time to follow up with teachers."

Study Limitations

While the findings outlined above highlight many things that pave the way for the recommendations that will follow, it is important to note and consider the various limitations of this study. While the methods developed and implemented underwent great scrutiny to gather valid and reliable data, many factors that must be considered from a research perspective.

First and foremost, one of the most significant limitations of this study is oriented around the environment in which it was conducted. As was previously referenced, all components of this study took place during a global pandemic that completely upended many parts of our society, but especially schools. Over the course of the past 18-24 months alone, students and teachers across the nation—and world—have been navigating between various modes of learning, from in-person learning to purely virtual learning to a hybrid of both learning platforms, which has created significant barriers for providing consistent teaching and learning. As more research continues to emerge on the impact that the pandemic has had on the mental health of students, we are also seeing the impacts on the adults, as school employees have reported record levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, with droves of educators leaving or considering leaving the profession (Education Policy Initiative at Carolina, 2021). As such, it is impossible to discount the impact that these psychological moderators may have had on perceptions that were shared in surveys or in other avenues. Furthermore, it is impossible to discount the fact that prior to August 2021, the vast majority of teacher observations and evaluations were conducted in a vastly

different manner (virtually) given the closing of school buildings and the push to remote learning almost overnight.

Furthermore, given the sample size of participants, there are potential threats to external validity on the basis of representation. While over 40% of the subjects who were invited to participate in the study actually did, there was no way of knowing specifically who the respondents were or which schools/areas they represented. Consequently, it is possible that the findings within this study could be limited to specific swaths of administrators within certain types of schools. For example, what if the majority of the administrative respondents were from similar types of schools where the challenges they faced—both relating to teacher evaluation and beyond—were vastly different from those at another school? While this is certainly a possibility, I do not view it as a significant limitation, however, given the size of the response pool in relation to the number of individuals whom I invited to participate.

Another limitation to this study stems from the absence of comparative data that would have come from the dissemination and analysis of a comparable survey to teachers whom these administrators evaluate. In spite of these limitations, however, I sought to triangulate a variety of data points to arrive at the findings that were previously shared along with the recommendations that follow.

Recommendations

At the outset of this project, I set out to answer four central questions about teacher evaluation processes within WCPSS. These questions tapped into the function of teacher

observations and evaluation practices within the district, administrator perceptions around high-quality feedback, barriers to providing this feedback through existing teacher evaluation practices, and the supports needed to improve the system. Through considering these questions over the course of the project, various trends emerged around what Heath & Heath (2010) might consider potential "bright spots," while also shing a light on some apparent areas for improvement.

In thinking about the recommendations that follow and the entire premise of this project, it is first important to understand what has come to be known as the Central Law of Improvement, which plainly states that systems are perfectly designed to produce and deliver the results they produce. Consequently, if—and perhaps more aptly, when—a system continuously produces certain outcomes that may or may not align with what we intended, we must reflect not only on the discrete outcomes that fail to live up to those expectations, but also on the system itself and the disparate processes and structures that make up the said system.

As Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, and Provost (2009) posit, however, seeing the system is challenging, tedious work. Given their definition of a system, which is "an interdependent group of items, people, or processes working together toward a common purpose" (p. 77), it is critical each of these components be addressed in considering potential change initiatives. Furthermore, it is equally important to recognize the role that time should play in this process.

Too often, when implementing change initiatives, there is a proclivity towards urgent and immediate action. We adopt changes and implement so quickly without knowing what

has been proposed will likely lead to improvements or whether they have been developed to address the root causes of the issues at hand. Recognizing these things, below are recommendations aimed at improving the teacher evaluation system within the aforementioned partner organization both in the proximal and distal future.

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement procedures to solicit additional information about district-wide teacher evaluation practices and processes from teachers and administrators at other grade levels not represented within this study.

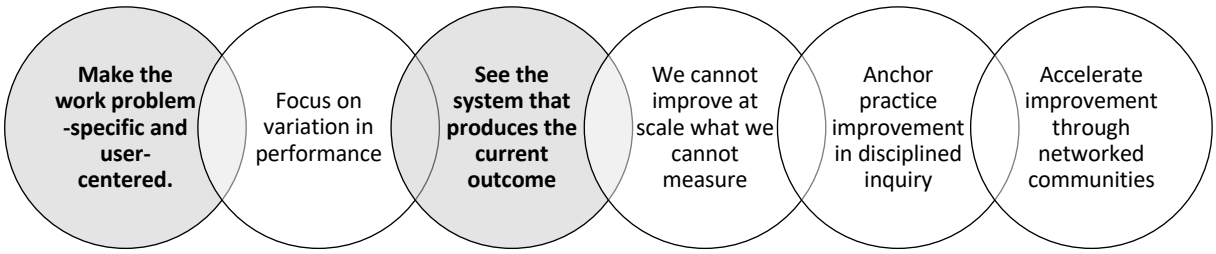
As was referenced above, when it comes to solving complex problems that we face in organizations, there is often a reflexive instinct to circumvent all logical action steps and gravitate directly towards potential solutions. In doing this, however, we obscure our vision to what is often right before us. In these moments, we do what Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, and Provost (2009) advise so adamantly against—we simply commit "more people, more money, more time, more exhortations to work harder" (p. 110) without analyzing what it is we are seeking to improve. This is the crucial misstep that organizations and organizational leaders make time and time again.

Albert Einstein once said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions." Paradoxical as this proclamation may seem, it underscores some of the central tenets of improvement science, which could be used in part or in full to assist the Performance Management team in

engaging in a more robust learning exploration to solicit additional information about district-wide teacher evaluation practices and processes.

Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) outline six central tenets of improvement science, which are highlighted in the figure below. Two that are most relevant for this project—the tenets of making the work problem-specific and user-centered and the tenet around seeing the system that produces the current outcome. In reference to the first tenet, this is already well established and documented within the previous section on the problem of practice and in other sections of this report. Conversely, there is still much to learn about the larger system that is producing outcomes like inconsistent observation practices, limited provision of feedback, etc.

Figure 13. Tenets of Improvement Science



Having framed the work in a way that is problem-specific and oriented around a particular user, the next course of action for the organization would be to embark upon some type of exploratory activity to engage a broader array of stakeholders to identify what is currently working/not working, for whom it is working/not working, and under what conditions it has/has not been working. Whereas the focus of this particular study was focused solely on administrator actions and perceptions, it leaves out a crucial part of the

puzzle in that there is a lack of perspective gathered from teachers. More specifically, given that participants in this study were all high school administrators, it would also be key to expand the reach of these inquisitions.

Pulling from comparable human-centered and user-based design frameworks, I would advise the organization to commit considerable resources to myriad activities that would assist in providing a fuller perspective of teacher evaluation practices and processes across the entire district through empathy-driven processes. Through this empathic exploration in which they would seek to understand the people at the center of the challenge and their ways of engaging and their needs, the organization will build a stronger and broader knowledge base for current practices and processes as they are. To engage in this work, the organization might wish to take the following actions:

1. Conducting empathy interviews with teachers (BTs, experienced teachers, veterans), and school administrators to ascertain what the teacher evaluation process looks and feels like at their respective schools, what structures within this process promote and/or inhibit growth, and what is needed to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of their job.
2. Developing and administering a comprehensive staff survey on the existing teacher evaluation process with the ability to crosslink responses by school, geographic area, and grade level. As it stands, there is no readily available data of this kind. In the most recent iterations of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, there is but one question that addresses teacher evaluation processes, and it simply asks respondents to assess the extent to

which they agree that "procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent" at their respective school.

3. Auditing school-level evaluation data to identify systemic areas of strength and areas for improvement. More specifically, identify specific schools and school leaders who have been able to implement strong teacher evaluation systems to highlight evidence-based best practices that could be expanded at scale.

Recommendation 2: Develop, formalize, and communicate a district-level vision for high-quality teacher evaluation practices and processes

As evidenced by the study findings around the purpose/function of the teacher evaluation process within WCPSS, there appears to be considerable variance between and among the survey respondents. In fact, in parts of the survey where individuals were able to provide anecdotal commentary, several referenced the current purpose feeling like a "checklist with limited impact on teaching and learning" or a tool for compliance. While many of the responses did present some positive ideas around teacher evaluation practices and processes, one thing was noticeably missing from the majority of the responses—and that is a common through line that spoke to a larger framework that was promoted from top to bottom. Put more simply, there did not appear to be a common and consistent narrative surrounding the *why* and *how* behind different parts of the teacher evaluation process.

To address this, one of the initial actions that the organization should take is in creating a process and avenue to develop, formalize, and communicate a district-level vision

for high-quality teacher evaluation practices and processes. Circling back to the adapted Knoster framework highlighted earlier, it is no surprise that the very first thing that is represented within the graphic is the idea of vision as it is—or at least, should be—the driving force behind any initiative. Applying a relatively well-known communications and public relations principle, when we fail to provide a clear, coherent narrative, others will do it on our behalf. To frame this in the educational arena, by failing to have a concrete and operationalized vision for teacher evaluation practices and processes district wide, multiple opportunities abound for individual school leaders to develop personal visions that may or may not align with the work that is required to live out the larger organizational goals. Obviously, in most cases, this is not done intentionally; however, it can be harmful, nonetheless, particularly when trying to correct past behaviors.

Recommendation 3: Develop district-wide supporting documents and resources to assist administrators and teachers engage in vision-aligned teacher evaluation practices

In addition to operationalizing a concrete vision to serve as the guiding light for teacher evaluation practices and processes within the district, it would also be prudent to supplement this vision with the development of a robust resource bank that would provide school administrators with evidence-based tools that could be utilized during the teacher evaluation process—whether relating directly to a teacher observation or to an end-of-year summative evaluation. As the findings around barriers that administrators face when comes to performing their duties related to teacher evaluation, time is one of administrators'

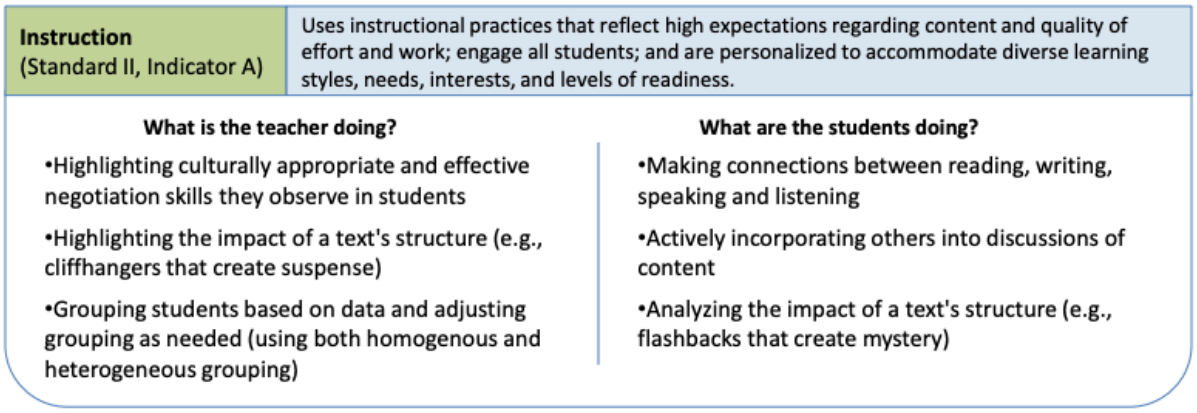
scarcest resources. As such, absent having a clear-cut system for providing administrators with access to appropriately vetted resources that can be pulled quickly and adapted for immediate use, we run the risk of simply hoping that they will accomplish these tasks within other parts of their day.

One area the district may wish to focus its attention is around the development of resources that conceptualize the overly broad in some cases and, in other cases, overly narrow elements of the observation/evaluation rubric in relation to specific grade level bands (e.g., K-5, 6-8, 9-12) and possibly specific discipline areas (e.g., arts, humanities, STEM, etc.). In the current model, a kindergarten teacher in the district is observed and evaluated using the same rubric as would be used for an AP Calculus teacher in a high school. To highlight the challenge this raises, let us consider one of the descriptors provided in Element IIId of the teacher evaluation rubric that seeks to ascertain whether the teacher "integrates core content and 21st century content throughout lesson plans and instructional practices." To frame what this actually means, what if there were supporting documents to unpack what this might look and sound like in a K-2 classroom or a secondary science classroom? What if we bridged the gap between what our teachers are expected to teach students (i.e., the curriculum), how they teach them (i.e., instruction), and an observer/evaluator's assessment of those things using a standardized rubric?

As a part of their current teacher observation model, for example, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary of Education provides school building leaders with a series of "What to Look For" Observation Guides that have been developed for different grade levels and disciplines to assist observers in pinpointing what strong curriculum and

instruction might look like in a specific setting (e.g., a high school science class, a 6-8 math class). The figure below highlights a brief section from one of these observation guides developed for a high school English course that is oriented around the use of instructional practices that reflect high expectations, high-quality work, along with personalized avenues for students to engage with the learning process. A full-length version of the guide from which this example came along with another example from a different discipline can be found in the appendix.

Figure 14. Example from Massachusetts DOE "What to Look For" Observation Guide



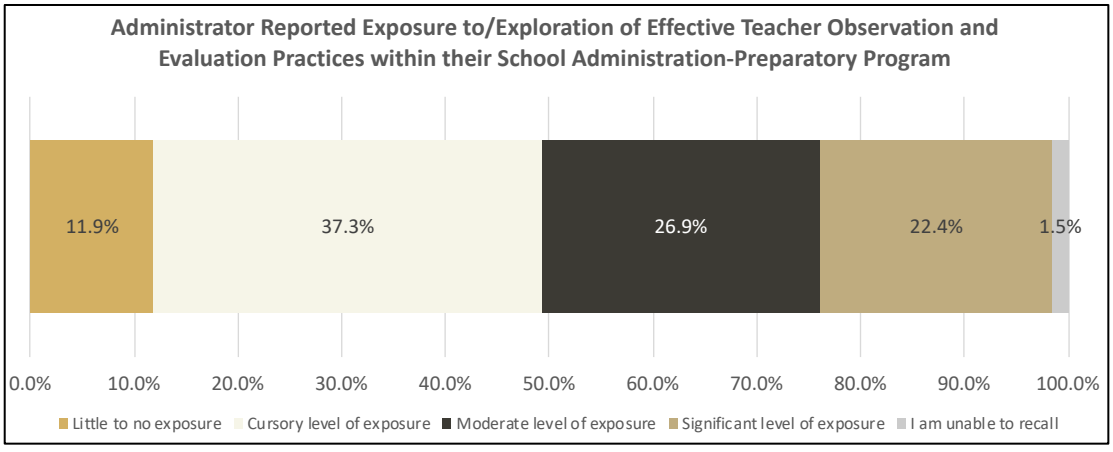
As an extension of this, I would also advise developing specific resources to aid in the consideration of the professional practices captured within elements and descriptors that are not generally able to be observed within a classroom lesson. While some of the training materials that are currently available reference what types of items might serve as evidence for marking certain descriptors within an observation or an evaluation, there does not seem to be a consistent understanding district-wide about when and how to "look for" these things based upon several references to challenges this posed in the administrative survey.

Instead of providing a prescriptive checklist of "must-haves," this would provide the opportunity to level set some beliefs and expectations across the district through clearly framed options that could vary by individual.

Recommendation 4: Revise the professional learning model to provide more comprehensive and ongoing training for teacher evaluators

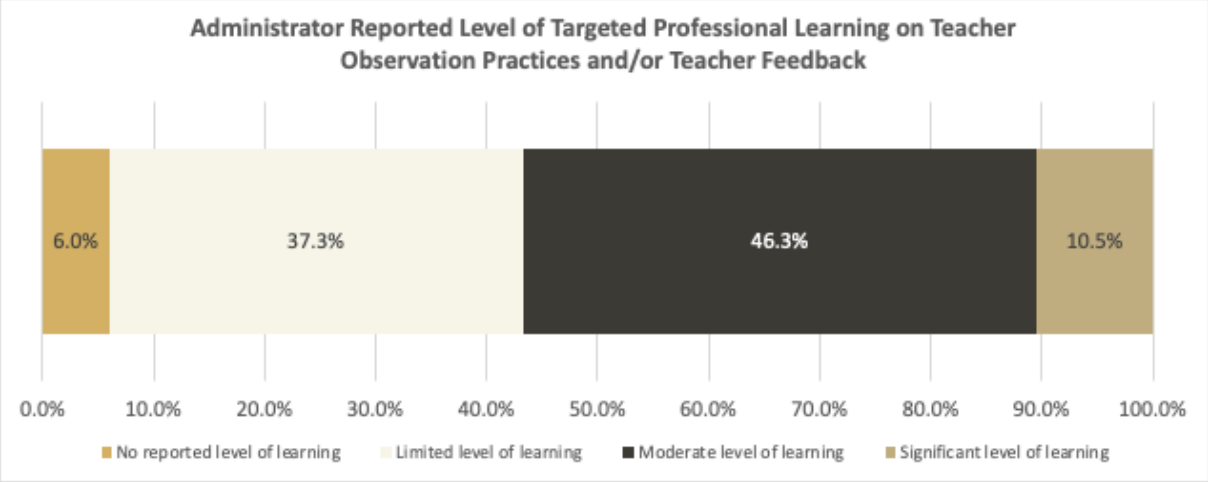
As the findings around levels of professional learning on evaluation practices and process show, the amount of professional learning that administrators undergo—both during administrative preparation programs in college and as current administrators—is quite limited. When considering the extent to which their school administration preparation programs challenged them to explore effective teacher observation and evaluation practices, nearly 50% of respondents said they had either "little to no exposure" or a "cursory level of exposure" to these practices while pursuing their administrative degrees. The figure below highlights the remaining breakdown of responses.

Figure 15. Chart Displaying Administrators' Varying Levels of Exposure to Teacher Observation/Evaluation Best Practices Within School Administration Preparation Programs



To look a little a little deeper, we can see a similar trend when considering the breakdown of self-reported levels of engagement in professional learning over the course of the past three to five years around the topic of teacher evaluation/observation practices and/or effective teacher feedback. As the figure that follow once again highlights, nearly half (43.3%) of the respondents shared that they have had, at most, a "limited level of learning" around these very topics that are critical towards the fostering of a collaborative teacher-evaluator relationship that can lead to positive changes in teaching practices.

Figure 16. Chart Displaying Administrators Targeted Professional Learning Around Teacher Observation and Feedback Best Practices Within Past 3-5 Years



Furthermore, when considering the varying levels of experience that different administrators have and the changing landscape of education and educational priorities, a strong professional learning program would provide at least yearly opportunities for administrators to engage in some type of ongoing learning around best practices relating to teacher evaluation practices and feedback. Just as the research pertaining to teacher

evaluation practices and feedback that may come during these cycles, this learning for evaluators must also be provided in an ongoing fashion. Recognizing the limited human resources that exist within the district's team that supervises teacher evaluation, it would be worthwhile to consider ways in which professional learning could be provided to other ancillary bodies that might be able to assist in not only disseminating learning but also monitoring implementation.

In considering the current structure of the district in which schools are organized by geographic area with a designated area superintendent, who also has under their supervision a senior administrator, there may be opportunities to engage these individuals in evidence-based learning around teacher observation and evaluation practices and provide them with tools to assist and monitor the school-level teams that they manage. When engaging building leaders, for example, an area superintendent might be able to create specific ways to incorporate said tools and resources into their own evaluation of that school leader and their team.

Coming back to the teacher observers/evaluators themselves, I also recommend developing a more interactive model of professional learning that provides authentic and relevant experience-based learning from skilled observers. Stepping back from the idea of evaluation that would come at the end of the cycle, I'm speaking more about the practical uses of the NCEES instrument within the classroom environment. As many shared in the survey and anecdotally in informal conversations, knowing what to mark on the teacher observation rubric and when to mark it and what to write about it still confuses a great many teacher evaluators. To assist with this, I would propose a series of observational tours in

which teacher evaluators have the chance to partake in extended snapshot observations with peers and at least one instrument expert or specialist who would be able to facilitate deeper learning and conversations around the use of the instrument in a real-world context.

Conclusion

As we contend with the current landscape of education and the ways in which we might reimagine certain systems and structures, it is apparent that the process by which we evaluate teachers must be reformed. With observations serving as the key determinant of how we evaluate teachers, the time has come to leverage the decades-long call to action and the growing body of research that provides a clear business and moral case to find better ways to implement teacher evaluation models. Given what we know today and what we have learned in the past two years alone about how quickly teachers can modify practices, it is time for us to take a step back and to reflect on current practices and to honestly evaluate what has come—and continues to come—from them. As researchers and practitioners can attest, if and when implemented well, teacher evaluation processes can be an incredibly powerful lever for improving teaching practices (Hill & Grossman, 2013; Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Papay & Richard, 2018).

If we truly believe that "every student is uniquely capable and deserves to be challenged and engaged in relevant, rigorous, and meaningful learning each day" and that "well-supported, highly effective, and dedicated...staff are essential to success for all students" (WCPSS), this is one step that we can take to make our aspirational visions of graduating students who "will be prepared to reach their full potential and lead productive

lives in a complex and changing world" (WCPSS). This is a step that we can take to ensure that the educator that we put in front of these children is provided every opportunity to succeed and grow, not just for his or her own sake, but for the sake of the students whom they serve each and every day—regardless of their race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sex, gender, or any other element of their identity.

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Appendix A. North Carolina Annual Evaluation Process for Teachers

Annual Evaluation Process – Revised 2015

For more information regarding the evaluation process, go to www.ncpublicschools.org/effectiveness-model/ncees

COMPONENT 2: Orientation

Within two weeks of teacher's first day, the principal will provide:

A. The Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers;
B. Teacher Evaluation Policy **ID Number: EVAL-004**; and
C. A schedule for completing evaluation process.

COMPONENT 3: Teacher Self-Assessment

Using the Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers, the teacher shall rate his or her performance and reflect on his or her performance throughout the year.

COMPONENT 1: Training

Before participating in the evaluation process, all teachers, principals and peer evaluators must complete training on the evaluation process.

COMPONENT 4: Pre-Observation Conference

Goal: To prepare principal for the observation. Before the first formal observation, the principal meets with the teacher to discuss: **self-assessment, professional growth plan and a written description of the lessons** to be observed.

COMPONENT 8: PD Plans

A. **Individual Growth Plans:** "Proficient" or better
B. **Monitored Growth Plans:** at least 1 "Developing"
C. **Directed Growth Plans:** "Not Demonstrated" or "Developing" rating for 2 sequential years

COMPONENT 5: Observations

A. *Formal observation:* 45 min. or entire session/lesson
Informal: at least 20 min.

B. **Teacher <3 years employment:**
Comprehensive Evaluation Cycle:
3 formal (principal) & 1 formal (peer)

C. **Teacher >3 years employment:**
Standard or Abbreviated Evaluation Cycle:
Standard: 3 Observations, 1 must be formal
Abbreviated: 2 Observations on Standards 1 and 4. Abbreviated Observations may be formal or informal.
Teachers Renewing License:
Standard Evaluation Cycle

COMPONENT 7: Summary Evaluation Conference and Scoring the Teacher Summary Rating Form

Prior to end of school, the principal conducts a summary evaluation conference with teacher to discuss components of the evaluation cycle type used: Comprehensive or Standard. At the conclusion:

A. Give rating for each Element in Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers;
B. Comment on "Not Demonstrated;"
C. Give an overall rating of each standard observed;
D. Provide teacher opportunity to add comments to the Summary Rating Form;
E. Review completed Teacher Summary Rating Form with teacher; and
F. Secure the teacher's signature on the Record of Teacher Evaluation Activities and Teacher Summary Rating Form.

COMPONENT 6: Post-Observation Conference

The principal shall conduct a post-observation conference no later than ten school days after each formal observation.

Discuss and document strengths and weaknesses on the Rubric.

Appendix B. Survey for School-Based Administrators (Evaluators)

Questions on this survey were modeled after comparable surveys on teacher evaluation. Many questions included are direct adaptations from the 2019 Tennessee Educator Survey on The Teacher Evaluation and Professional Learning Process.

Demographic Information

1. How many years of experience do you have as an educator?
    a. 0-2 years
    b. 3-5 years
    c. 6-9 years
    d. 10-14 years
    e. 15-19 years
    f. 20+ years

2. How many years have you served as a school-based administrator who is/has been responsible for observing and evaluating teachers?
    a. 0-2 years
    b. 3-5 years
    c. 6-9 years
    d. 10-14 years
    e. 15-19 years
    f. 20+ years

3. In what level are you currently serving as a school-based administrator?
    a. Elementary (K-5)
    b. Middle (6-8)
    c. High (9-12)

4. How many years did you serve as a classroom teacher at the school level at which you are currently serving as a school-based administrator (e.g., If you are an administrator in an elementary setting, how many years did you spend as an elementary school teacher?)?
    a. 0-2 years
    b. 3-5 years
    c. 6-9 years
    d. 10-14 years
    e. 15+ years

5. In thinking back to your school administration-preparatory program, to what extent did your program of study explore and discuss effective observation and evaluation practices?
    a. Little to no exposure
    b. Cursory level of exposure
    c. Moderate level of exposure
    d. Significant level of exposure
    e. I am unable to recall

6. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

The teacher observation process at my school …	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
assists teachers in identifying areas where they can improve as teachers.				
provides teachers with clear expectations for high-quality teaching.				
provides a clear avenue for evaluators to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.				
provides a clear process for providing differentiated support to teachers.				
provides administrators/evaluators adequate time to provide meaningful feedback to teachers using the teacher observation rubric.				

7. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement about the feedback that you provide as an observer.

The feedback that I provide to teachers during the observation conferencing process …	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
is provided to the teacher in a timely fashion				
utilizes specific, concrete evidence/data to support feedback				
explicitly provides reflective prompts to engage the teacher in reflective practices				

allows for a two-way conversation about the observation and/or feedback				
is framed squarely around improving the quality of teaching and learning				
includes specific resources for continued growth				
is individually tailored to the needs of staff with different preferred methods of receiving feedback				

8. When considering your typical comprehensive teacher observation (all standards), how much time do you generally spend on the following tasks for one teacher's observation.

	Less than 15 minutes	Between 15-30 minutes	Between 30-60 minutes	Between 60-90 minutes	Between 90-120 minutes	More than 120 minutes
Preparing for pre-observation conference						
Meeting with teacher as a part of pre-observation conference						
Preparing for the actual observation						
Observing the teacher's lesson						
Completing the teacher observation rubric						

Meeting with teacher as a part of the post-observation conference						

Below is a series of open-ended questions that address proposals to change the teacher observation/evaluation rubric and process. (200 word limit for each response)

9. What limits your ability to utilize teacher observations as a tool for promoting teacher growth?

10. What barriers do the teacher observation rubric and/or state evaluation policies pose for utilizing teacher observations as a tool for promoting teacher growth?

11. If you could make any changes to the North Carolina teacher observation **rubric**, what changes would you make?

12. If you could make changes to the teacher observation **process**—either as dictated by state/county guidelines or by way of how your team conducts the observation process, what changes would you consider making?

13. What other feedback do you wish to provide about the teacher observation rubric and/or process?

Appendix C. Interview/Focus Group Question

1. Talk to me a little bit about your beliefs about teacher observations and teacher evaluation in general.
    a. What purpose/function do they serve?
    b. Do you feel that they are important? Why or why not?
    c. What contributed to these beliefs?

2. There seems to be a divide between the ways in which evaluators and teachers view observations/evaluations. Do you feel that there's a comparable divide within your school on this matter? Why or why not?
    a. ***If the respondent answers "no"***: Why do you think this is the case?

3. When thinking about what teachers need in terms of good feedback in relation to observations, what kind of feedback do you seek from your observers?
    a. Do you generally receive the type of feedback that you desire in the context of what would be useful to you?

4. What most influences your willingness to utilize the feedback that you receive from evaluators? What are some things that might prevent you from considering feedback from an evaluator?

5. If you had to evaluate the quality of the feedback that you have been provided as a part of your school's existing observation/evaluation cycle, how would you rate it? Why?

6. In thinking about the Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers as used in observations and summative evaluations, what is your overall assessment of the

instrument as a means to: 1) assess teacher performance AND 2) promote and facilitate teacher development/growth?

a. Do you feel that it's better at doing one over the other? Is it more oriented towards measuring performance or promoting and facilitating teacher development/growth?

b. How do your evaluators utilize this rubric to measure your performance as a teacher?

c. How do your evaluators utilize this rubric to assist you in growing professionally?

7. Describe the traditional process/cycle for being observed and receiving feedback from the said observation

    a. When a pre-conference is appropriate, what does that conference look like?

        i. What does the conversation entail between you and the evaluator?

        ii. What preparation goes into this conference for you?

    b. After the observation, what happens?

        i. How does your evaluator generally provide their feedback to you?

        ii. What do post-conferences look like? How does your evaluator review their feedback with you?

        iii. To what extent are you an active participant in this meeting?

        iv. How long do these things take?

        v. What does the conversation typically entail?

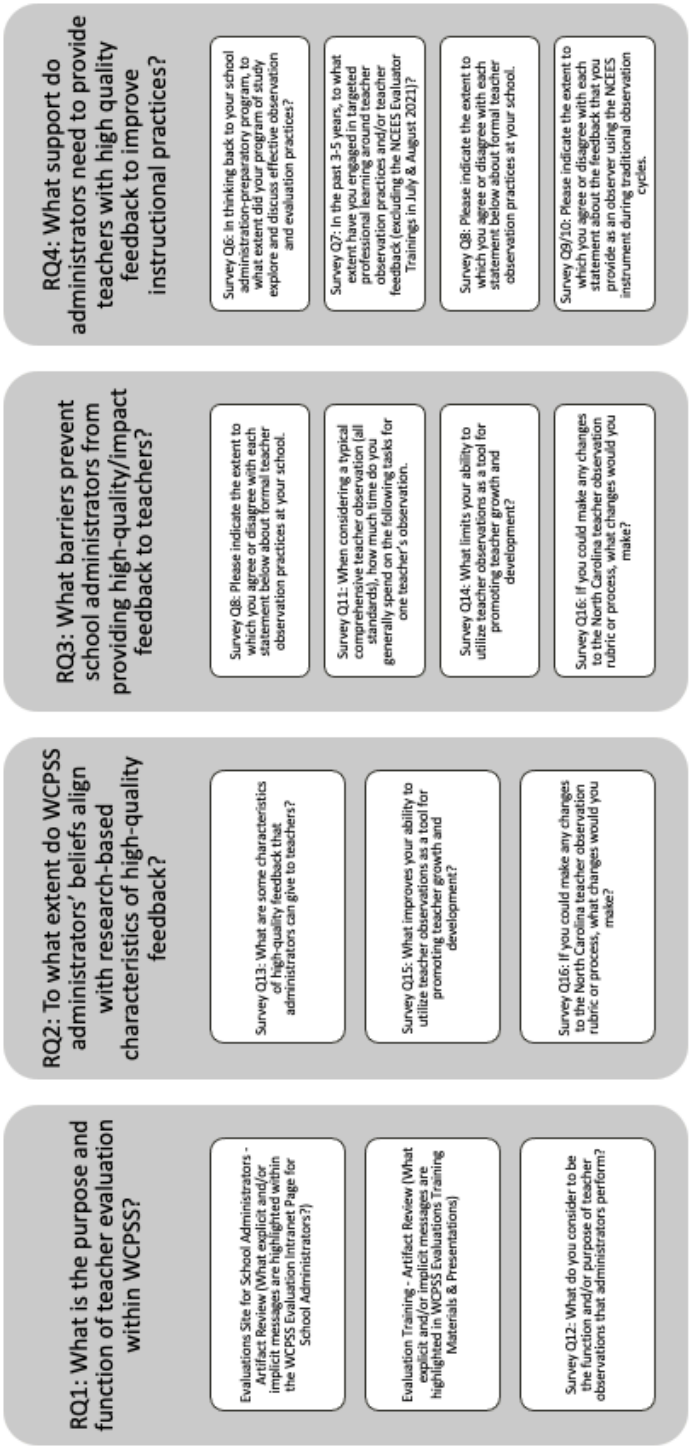
8. To conclude, I'd like to discuss some global ideas that you feel affect the development, implementation, and sustainment of strong systems and structures for teacher feedback via observations. In doing this, I'd like you to think of these actions,

beliefs, perceptions, etc. in one of two ways—as either bridges or barriers. Bridges are the things that will enable us to connect our beliefs and values about strong observation and feedback cycles. They are the things that will make your vision a reality. Barriers, on the other hand, stand to deter us.

What do you see as the bridges and barriers to school-based administrators providing high-quality feedback to teachers via observation practices that teachers can/will then utilize to shift practices to promote and facilitate greater outcomes for teaching and learning?

9. This concludes all of my questions. Are there any additional thoughts of ideas that we did not cover that you wish to speak about?

Appendix D. Concept Map Highlighting Alignment Between Research Questions and Study Instruments



Appendix E. Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers

Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers (Required for Self-Assessment and for Observations)

This form should be used for the teacher self-assessment, classroom observation, and the summary evaluation.

Name: _____ Date: _____

School: _____ District: _____

Evaluator: _____ Title: _____

Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Standard I: Teachers Demonstrate Leadership

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element Ia. Teachers lead in their classrooms. Teachers demonstrate leadership by taking responsibility for the progress of all students to ensure that they graduate from high school, are globally competitive for work and postsecondary education, and are prepared for life in the 21st century. Teachers communicate this vision to their students. Using a variety of data sources, they organize, plan, and set goals that meet the needs of the individual student and the class. Teachers use various types of assessment data during the school year to evaluate student progress and to make adjustments to the teaching and learning process. They establish a safe, orderly environment, and create a culture that empowers students to collaborate and become lifelong learners.				
		… and	… and	… and	
	☐ Understands how they contribute to students graduating from high school.	☐ Takes responsibility for the progress of students to ensure that they graduate from high school.	☐ Communicates to students the vision of being prepared for life in the 21st century.	☐ Encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.	
	☐ Uses data to understand the skills and abilities of students.	☐ Provides evidence of data-driven instruction throughout all classroom activities.	☐ Evaluates student progress using a variety of assessment data.	☐ Uses classroom assessment data to inform program planning.	
✓		☐ Establishes a safe and orderly classroom.	☐ Creates a classroom culture that empowers students to collaborate.	☐ Empowers and encourages students to create and maintain a safe and supportive school and community environment.	
	Element Ib. Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school. Teachers work collaboratively with school personnel to create a professional learning community. They analyze and use local, state, and national data to develop goals and strategies in the school improvement plan that enhances student learning and teacher working conditions. Teachers provide input in determining the school budget and in the selection of professional development that meets the needs of students and their own professional growth. They participate in the hiring process and collaborate with their colleagues to mentor and support teachers to improve the effectiveness of their departments or grade levels.				
		. . . and	. . . and	. . . and	
	☐ Attends professional learning community meetings.	☐ Participates in professional learning community.	☐ Assumes a leadership role in professional learning community.	☐ Collaborates with colleagues to improve the quality of learning in the school.	
	☐ Displays awareness of the goals of the school improvement plan.	☐ Participates in developing and/or implementing the school improvement plan.	☐ Collaborates with school personnel on school improvement activities.	☐ Assumes a leadership role in implementing school improvement plan throughout the building.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element Ic. Teachers lead the teaching profession. Teachers strive to improve the teaching profession. They contribute to the establishment of positive working conditions in their school. They actively participate in and advocate for decision-making structures in education and government that take advantage of the expertise of teachers. Teachers promote professional growth for all educators and collaborate with their colleagues to improve the profession.				
	☐ Has knowledge of opportunities and the need for professional growth and begins to establish relationships with colleagues.	. . . and Contributes to the: ☐ improvement of the profession through professional growth. ☐ establishment of positive working relationships. ☐ school's decision-making processes as required.	. . . and ☐ Promotes positive working relationships through professional growth activities and collaboration.	. . . and ☐ Seeks opportunities to lead professional growth activities and decision-making processes.	
	Element Id. Teachers advocate for schools and students. Teachers advocate for positive change in policies and practices affecting student learning. They participate in the implementation of initiatives to improve the education of students.				
	☐ Knows about the policies and practices affecting student learning.	. . . and ☐ Supports positive change in policies and practices affecting student learning.	. . . and ☐ Participates in developing policies and practices to improve student learning.	. . . and ☐ Actively participates, promotes, and provides strong supporting evidence for implementation of initiatives to improve education.	
	Element Ie. Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards. Teachers demonstrate ethical principles including honesty, integrity, fair treatment, and respect for others. Teachers uphold the *Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators* (effective June 1, 1997) and the *Standards for Professional Conduct* adopted April 1, 1998. (www.ncptsc.org)				
	☐ Understands the importance of ethical behavior as outlined in the *Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators* and the *Standards for Professional Conduct*.	. . . and ☐ Demonstrates ethical behavior through adherence to the *Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators* and the *Standards for Professional Conduct*.	. . . and ☐ Knows and upholds the *Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators* and the *Standards for Professional Conduct*.	. . . and ☐ Models the tenets of the *Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators* and the *Standards for Professional Conduct* and encourages others to do the same.	

Comments:

Examples of Artifacts:

- ☐ Lesson plans
- ☐ Journals
- ☐ Student handbooks
- ☐ Student work
- ☐ School improvement planning
- ☐ Service on committees
- ☐ Relevant data
- ☐ Class rules and procedures
- ☐ Participation in the Teacher Working Condition Survey
- ☐ Professional Learning Communities
- ☐ Membership in professional organizations
- ☐ Formal and informal mentoring
- ☐ Surveys
- ☐ National Board Certification
- ☐ Discipline Records
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IIa. Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults. Teachers encourage an environment that is inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and flexible.				
✓	☐ Appreciates and understands the need to establish nurturing relationships.	. . . and ☐ Establishes an inviting, respectful, inclusive, flexible, and supportive learning environment.	. . . and ☐ Maintains a positive and nurturing learning environment.	. . . and ☐ Encourages and advises others to provide a nurturing and positive learning environment for all students.	
	Element IIb. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world. Teachers demonstrate their knowledge of the history of diverse cultures and their role in shaping global issues. They actively select materials and develop lessons that counteract stereotypes and incorporate histories and contributions of all cultures. Teachers recognize the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other aspects of culture on a student's development and personality. Teachers strive to understand how a student's culture and background may influence his or her school performance. Teachers consider and incorporate different points of view in their instruction.				
✓	☐ Acknowledges that diverse cultures impact the world.	. . . and ☐ Displays knowledge of diverse cultures, their histories, and their roles in shaping global issues.	. . . and ☐ Uses materials or lessons that counteract stereotypes and acknowledges the contributions of all cultures.	. . . and ☐ Promotes a deep understanding of cultures through the integration of culturally sensitive materials and ideas throughout the curriculum.	
✓	☐ Demonstrates awareness of the diversity of students in the classroom.	☐ Acknowledges the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economics, and culture on a student's development and attitudes.	☐ Consistently incorporates different points of view in instruction.	☐ Capitalizes on diversity as an asset in the classroom.	
	Element IIc. Teachers treat students as individuals. Teachers maintain high expectations, including graduation from high school, for students of all backgrounds. Teachers appreciate the differences and value the contributions of each student in the learning environment by building positive, appropriate relationships.				
✓	☐ Holds high expectations of students.	. . . and ☐ Communicates high expectations for all students.	. . . and ☐ Encourages and values contributions of students, regardless of background or ability.	. . . and ☐ Helps students hold high expectations for themselves and their peers.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IId. Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs. Teachers collaborate with the range of support specialists to help meet the special needs of all students. Through inclusion and other models of effective practice, teachers engage students to ensure that their needs are met.				
✓	☐ Recognizes that students have a variety of learning needs.	. . . and ☐ Collaborates with specialists who can support the special learning needs of students.	. . . and ☐ Understands the roles of and collaborates with the full range of support specialists to help meet the special needs of all students.	. . . and ☐ Anticipates the unique learning needs of students and solicits assistance from within and outside the school to address those needs.	
✓	☐ Is knowledgeable of effective practices for students with special needs.	☐ Provides unique learning opportunities such as inclusion and research-based, effective practices for students with special needs.	☐ Effectively engages special needs students in learning activities and ensures their unique learning needs are met.	☐ Adapts instruction for the benefit of students with special needs and helps colleagues do the same for their students.	
	Element IIe. Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students. Teachers recognize that educating children is a shared responsibility involving the school, parents or guardians, and the community. Teachers improve communication and collaboration between the school and the home and community in order to promote trust and understanding and build partnerships with all segments of the school community. Teachers seek solutions to overcome cultural and economic obstacles that may stand in the way of effective family and community involvement in the education of their students.				
	☐ Responds to family and community concerns.	. . . and ☐ Communicates and collaborates with the home and community for the benefit of students.	. . . and ☐ Recognizes obstacles to family and community participation and conscientiously seeks solutions to overcome them.	. . . and ☐ Promotes trust and understanding throughout the school community.	

Comments:

Examples of Artifacts:

- ☐ Student profiles
- ☐ Student surveys
- ☐ Cooperation with ESL teachers
- ☐ Lessons that integrate international content
- ☐ Documentation of referral data and use of IEPs
- ☐ Communications w/parents/community
- ☐ Professional development on cultural attitudes and awareness
- ☐ Use of technology to incorporate cultural awareness into lessons
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Standard III: Teachers Know the Content They Teach

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IIIa. Teachers align their instruction with the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*. In order to enhance the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*, teachers investigate the content standards developed by professional organizations in their specialty area. They develop and apply strategies to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant for all students and provide a balanced curriculum that enhances literacy skills. Elementary teachers have explicit and thorough preparation in literacy instruction. Middle and high school teachers incorporate literacy instruction within the content area or discipline.				
		. . . and	. . . and	. . . and	
✓	☐ Demonstrates an awareness of the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* and references it in the preparation of lesson plans.	☐ Understands the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*, uses it in preparation of lesson plans, and applies strategies to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant.	☐ Develops and applies strategies based on the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* and standards developed by professional organizations to make the curriculum balanced, rigorous and relevant.	☐ Assists colleagues in applying such strategies in their classrooms.	
✓	☐ *Elementary:* Begins to integrate literacy instruction in selected lessons.	☐ *Elementary:* Integrates effective literacy instruction throughout the curriculum.	☐ *Elementary:* Evaluates and reflects upon the effectiveness of literacy instruction.	☐ *Elementary:* Makes necessary changes to instructional practice to improve student learning.	
✓	☐ *Secondary:* Recognizes the importance of integrating literacy strategies within the content areas.	☐ *Secondary:* Incorporates a wide variety of literacy skills within content areas to enhance learning.	☐ *Secondary:* Evaluates and reflects upon the effectiveness of literacy instruction within content areas.	☐ *Secondary:* Makes necessary changes to instructional practice to improve student learning.	
	Element IIIb. Teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty. Teachers bring a richness and depth of understanding to their classrooms by knowing their subjects beyond the content they are expected to teach and by directing students' natural curiosity into an interest in learning. Elementary teachers have broad knowledge across disciplines. Middle school and high school teachers have depth in one or more specific content areas or disciplines.				
		. . . and	. . . and	. . . and	
✓	☐ Demonstrates a basic level of content knowledge in the teaching specialty to which assigned.	☐ Demonstrates an appropriate level of content knowledge in the teaching specialty to which assigned.	☐ Applies knowledge of subject beyond the content in assigned teaching specialty. Motivates students to investigate the content area to expand their knowledge and satisfy their natural curiosity.	☐ Extends knowledge of subject beyond content in their teaching specialty and sparks students' curiosity for learning beyond the required course work.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IIIc. Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines. Teachers know the links and vertical alignment of the grade or subject they teach and the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*. Teachers understand how the content they teach relates to other disciplines in order to deepen understanding and connect learning for students. Teachers promote global awareness and its relevance to subjects they teach.				
✓	☐ Understands the links between grade/subject and the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*.	. . . and ☐ Demonstrates knowledge of links between grade/subject and the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*.	. . . and ☐ Demonstrates knowledge of the links and vertical alignment of the grade or subject area and the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*. Relates content to other disciplines.	. . . and ☐ Collaborates with teachers from other grades or subject areas to establish links between disciplines and influence school-wide curriculum and teaching practice.	
✓	☐ Displays global awareness.	☐ Promotes global awareness and its relevance to the subjects.	☐ Integrates global awareness activities throughout lesson plans and classroom instructional practices.	☐ Promotes global awareness and its relevance to all faculty members, influencing curriculum and teaching practices throughout the school.	
	Element IIId. Teachers make instruction relevant to students. Teachers incorporate 21st century life skills into their teaching deliberately, strategically, and broadly. These skills include leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self- direction, and social responsibility. Teachers help their students understand the relationship between the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* and 21st century content, which includes global awareness; financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health awareness.				
✓	☐ Identifies relationships between the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* and life in the 21st century.	. . . and ☐ Identifies relationships between the core content and 21st century content.	. . . and ☐ Integrates core content and 21st century content throughout lesson plans and classroom instructional practices.	. . . and ☐ Deepens students' understandings of 21st century skills and helps them make their own connections and develop new skills.	

Comments:

Examples of Artifacts:

☐ Display of creative student work	☐ Content standards	☐ _____
☐ Use of NC Standard Course of Study	☐ _____	☐ _____
☐ Lesson plans	☐ _____	☐ _____

Standard IV: Teachers facilitate learning for their students

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IVa. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. Teachers know how students think and learn. Teachers understand the influences that affect individual student learning (development, culture, language proficiency, etc.) and differentiate their instruction accordingly. Teachers keep abreast of evolving research about student learning. They adapt resources to address the strengths and weaknesses of their students.				
✓	☐ Understands developmental levels of students and recognizes the need to differentiate instruction.	. . . and ☐ Understands developmental levels of students and appropriately differentiates instruction.	. . . and ☐ Identifies appropriate developmental levels of students and consistently and appropriately differentiates instruction.	. . . and ☐ Encourages and guides colleagues to adapt instruction to align with students' developmental levels.	
✓		☐ Assesses resources needed to address strengths and weaknesses of students.	☐ Reviews and uses alternative resources or adapts existing resources to take advantage of student strengths or address weaknesses.	☐ Stays abreast of current research about student learning and emerging resources and encourages the school to adopt or adapt them for the benefit of all students.	
	Element IVb. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students. Teachers collaborate with their colleagues and use a variety of data sources for short- and long-range planning based on the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*. These plans reflect an understanding of how students learn. Teachers engage students in the learning process. They understand that instructional plans must be consistently monitored and modified to enhance learning. Teachers make the curriculum responsive to cultural differences and individual learning needs.				
✓	☐ Recognizes data sources important to planning instruction.	. . . and ☐ Uses a variety of data for short- and long-range planning of instruction. Monitors and modifies instructional plans to enhance student learning.	. . . and ☐ Monitors student performance and responds to individual learning needs in order to engage students in learning.	. . . and ☐ Monitors student performance and responds to cultural diversity and learning needs through the school improvement process.	
	Element IVc Teachers use a variety of instructional methods. Teachers choose the methods and techniques that are most effective in meeting the needs of their students as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps. Teachers employ a wide range of techniques including information and communication technology, learning styles, and differentiated instruction.				
✓	☐ Demonstrates awareness of the variety of methods and materials necessary to meet the needs of all students.	. . . and ☐ Demonstrates awareness or use of appropriate methods and materials necessary to meet the needs of all students.	. . . and ☐ Ensures the success of all students through the selection and utilization of appropriate methods and materials.	. . . and ☐ Stays abreast of emerging research areas and new and innovative materials and incorporates them into lesson plans and instructional strategies.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IVd. Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction. Teachers know when and how to use technology to maximize student learning. Teachers help students use technology to learn content, think critically, solve problems, discern reliability, use information, communicate, innovate, and collaborate.				
✓	☐ Assesses effective types of technology to use for instruction.	. . . and ☐ Demonstrates knowledge of how to utilize technology in instruction.	. . . and ☐ Integrates technology with instruction to maximize student learning.	. . . and ☐ Provides evidence of student engagement in higher level thinking skills through the integration of technology.	
	Element IVe. Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers encourage students to ask questions, think creatively, develop and test innovative ideas, synthesize knowledge, and draw conclusions. They help students exercise and communicate sound reasoning; understand connections; make complex choices; and frame, analyze, and solve problems.				
✓	☐ Understands the importance of developing students' critical thinking and problem solving skills.	. . . and ☐ Demonstrates knowledge of processes needed to support students in acquiring critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills.	. . . and Teaches students the processes needed to: ☐ think creatively and critically, ☐ develop and test innovative ideas, ☐ synthesize knowledge, ☐ draw conclusions, ☐ exercise and communicate sound reasoning, ☐ understand connections, ☐ make complex choices, and ☐ frame, analyze and solve problems.	. . . and ☐ Encourages and assists teachers throughout the school to integrate critical thinking and problem solving skills into their instructional practices.	
	Element IVf. Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities. Teachers teach the importance of cooperation and collaboration. They organize learning teams in order to help students define roles, strengthen social ties, improve communication and collaborative skills, interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and develop leadership qualities.				
✓	☐ Provides opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and leadership through student learning teams.	. . . and ☐ Organizes student learning teams for the purpose of developing cooperation, collaboration, and student leadership.	. . . and ☐ Encourages students to create and manage learning teams.	. . . and ☐ Fosters the development of student leadership and teamwork skills to be used beyond the classroom.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IVg. Teachers communicate effectively. Teachers communicate in ways that are clearly understood by their students. They are perceptive listeners and are able to communicate with students in a variety of ways even when language is a barrier. Teachers help students articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.				
✓	☐ Demonstrates the ability to effectively communicate with students.	. . . and ☐ Uses a variety of methods for communication with all students.	. . . and ☐ Creates a variety of methods to communicate with all students.	. . . and ☐ Anticipates possible student misunderstandings and proactively develops teaching techniques to mitigate concerns.	
✓	☐ Provides opportunities for students to articulate thoughts and ideas.	☐ Consistently encourages and supports students to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.	☐ Establishes classroom practices which encourage all students to develop effective communication skills.	☐ Establishes school-wide and grade appropriate vehicles to encourage students throughout the school to develop effective communication skills.	
	Element IVh. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned. Teachers use multiple indicators, including formative and summative assessments, to evaluate student progress and growth as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps. Teachers provide opportunities, methods, feedback, and tools for students to assess themselves and each other. Teachers use 21st century assessment systems to inform instruction and demonstrate evidence of students' 21st century knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions.				
✓	☐ Uses indicators to monitor and evaluate student progress.	. . . and ☐ Uses multiple indicators, both formative and summative, to monitor and evaluate student progress and to inform instruction.	. . . and ☐ Uses the information gained from the assessment activities to improve teaching practice and student learning.	. . . and ☐ Teaches students and encourages them to use peer and self-assessment feedback to assess their own learning.	
✓	☐ Assesses students in the attainment of 21st century knowledge, skills, and dispositions.	☐ Provides evidence that students attain 21st century knowledge, skills and dispositions.	☐ Provides opportunities for students to assess themselves and others.	☐ Encourages and guides colleagues to assess 21st century skills, knowledge, and dispositions and to use the assessment information to adjust their instructional practice.	

Comments:

Examples of Artifacts:

☐ Lesson plans	☐ Documentation of differentiated instruction	☐ _____
☐ Display of technology used	☐ Materials used to promote critical thinking	☐ _____
☐ Professional development	and problem solving	☐ _____
☐ Use of student learning teams	☐ Collaborative lesson planning	☐ _____

Standard V: Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element Va. Teachers analyze student learning. Teachers think systematically and critically about student learning in their classrooms and schools: why learning happens and what can be done to improve achievement. Teachers collect and analyze student performance data to improve school and classroom effectiveness. They adapt their practice based on research and data to best meet the needs of students.				
	☐ Recognizes the need to improve student learning in the classroom.	. . . and ☐ Provides ideas about what can be done to improve student learning in their classroom.	. . . and ☐ Thinks systematically and critically about learning in their classroom: why learning happens and what can be done to improve student achievement.	. . . and ☐ Provides a detailed analysis about what can be done to improve student learning and uses such analyses to adapt instructional practices and materials within the classroom and at the school level.	
	Element Vb. Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals. Teachers participate in continued, high-quality professional development that reflects a global view of educational practices; includes 21st century skills and knowledge; aligns with the State Board of Education priorities; and meets the needs of students and their own professional growth.				
	☐ Understands the importance of professional development.	. . . and ☐ Participates in professional development aligned with professional goals.	. . . and ☐ Participates in professional development activities aligned with goals and student needs.	. . . and ☐ Applies and implements knowledge and skills attained from professional development consistent with its intent.	
	Element Vc. Teachers function effectively in a complex, dynamic environment. Understanding that change is constant, teachers actively investigate and consider new ideas that improve teaching and learning. They adapt their practice based on research and data to best meet the needs of their students.				
	☐ Is knowledgeable of current research-based approaches to teaching and learning.	. . . and ☐ Considers and uses a variety of research-based approaches to improve teaching and learning.	. . . and ☐ Actively investigates and considers alternative research-based approaches to improve teaching and learning and uses such approaches appropriately.	. . . and ☐ Adapts professional practice based on data and evaluates impact on student learning.	

Comments:

Examples of Artifacts:

☐ Lesson plans	☐ Completion of professional development	☐ _____
☐ Formative assessments	☐ Participation in professional learning community	☐ _____
☐ Student work		☐ _____
☐ Professional Development Plan	☐ Formative and summative assessment data	☐ _____

Appendix F. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education "What to Look for" Observation Guide – HS English 9/10

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework | SCIENCE | HS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A quick guide for observing classroom content and practice

In **High School Biology**, instructional time should focus on four core ideas:

LS1. From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes

LS2. Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics

LS3. Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of traits

LS4. Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity

In a **High School Biology** class you should observe students engaged with at least one science concept and practice:

Science and Engineering Practices

- Asking questions and defining problems
- Developing and using models
- Planning and carrying out investigations
- Analyzing and interpreting data
- Using mathematics and computational thinking
- Constructing explanations and designing solutions
- Engaging in argument from evidence
- Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information

Science Concepts

Molecules to Organisms (LS1)

•Using a model to explain the process for building proteins within a cell and the important roles of DNA and RNA communication in regulating cell function.

•Describing the principle structures and functions of the human body systems.

•Using evidence to show how the human body uses both positive and negative feedback mechanisms to maintain a stable internal environment within cells.

•Explaining the life cycle of a cell in multicellular organisms.

•Using a model to explain how plants and other photosynthesizing organisms convert light energy into chemical energy.

•Understanding that large carbon molecules, necessary for life, are primarily composed of six elements.

•Using a model to illustrate the ability of live organisms to convert food into energy.

Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics (LS2)

•Analyzing data to explain how living and nonliving factors affect an area's ability to support life.

•Using math to explain that living and non-living factors affect populations and species within an environment.

•Describing the constant flow of energy throughout an ecosystem and explain how energy affects the individuals living in the environment.

Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics (LS2) continued

•Illustrating the cycling of the carbon molecule throughout the environment.

•Using data to explain how an area which includes living and non-living components, will tend to resist change.

•Analyzing the effects of human activities on living organisms and ecosystem health.

Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits (LS3)

•Using a model to show how DNA passes genetic information from parents to offspring.

•Explaining with evidence that genetic variations in an organism may come from new combinations of genes.

•Apply probability to simulate the passing of gene combinations from a parent organism to their offspring.

•Using scientific information to illustrate how genetic and environmental factors can affect the traits of individuals.

Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity (LS4)

•Using scientific evidence to demonstrate biological evolution.

•Constructing an explanation of Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection.

•Communicating the differences between viruses and bacteria.

•Using models to explain how changes in an environment may result in the modifications of organisms.

NOTES

Comments on the Science and Engineering Practices: For a list of specific skills, see the *Science and Engineering Practices Progression Matrix* (www.doe.mass.edu/stem/review.html); Practices are skills **students** are expected to learn and do; standards focus on some but not all skills associated with a practice.

STE What to Look For The example below features three Indicators from the Standards of Effective Practice. These Indicators are just a sampling from the full set of Standards and were chosen because they create a sequence: the educator plans a lesson that sets clear and high **expectations**, the educator then delivers high quality **instruction**, and finally the educator uses a variety of **assessments** to see if students understand the material or if re-teaching is necessary. This example highlights teacher and student behaviors aligned to the three Indicators that you can expect to see in a rigorous High School Biology classroom.

Expectations (Standard II, Indicator E)	Plans and implements lessons that set clear and high expectations and also make knowledge accessible for all students.

What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
•Creating culturally responsive lessons that engage and sustain student attention •Asking students to apply scientific knowledge and ideas when engaging with real-world problems •Modeling the development of complex, testable models	•Identifying a lesson's standards or objectives and how they connect to unit goals •Using information from observations to construct an evidence based account for natural phenomena •Evaluating the reasoning behind currently accepted explanations or solutions

Instruction (Standard II, Indicator A)	Uses instructional practices that reflect high expectations regarding content and quality of effort and work; engage all students; and are personalized to accommodate diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.

What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
•Providing opportunities for students to communicate ideas, ask questions, and make their thinking visible in writing and speaking •Highlighting culturally appropriate and effective negotiation skills they observe in students •Creating activities that require sophisticated analysis (such as finding an equation) to find patterns	•Evaluating questions and arguments (e.g., to determine whether they are testable and relevant) •Using both linear and nonlinear functions to find patterns in data •Using detailed statistical analysis or models that can evaluate data sets for consistency

Assessment (Standard I, Indicator B)	Uses a variety of informal and formal methods of assessments to measure student learning, growth, and understanding to develop differentiated and enhanced learning experiences and improve future instruction.

What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
•Using multiple formative approaches to assess student learning (e.g., mid-unit quiz, completion of investigation) •Providing opportunities for students to conduct investigations that test models •Providing exemplars of work (e.g. historical examples, student work)	•Reflecting on how they are progressing toward goals •Engaging in challenging learning tasks regardless of learning needs (e.g., linguistic background, disability, academic gifts) •Using exemplars to inform their work

Appendix G. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education "What to Look for" Observation Guide – HS Geometry

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks | MATHEMATICS | MG

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A quick guide for evaluating classroom content and practice

In **Model Geometry**, instructional time should focus on six critical areas:

1. Developing a foundation for the development of formal proof and using it to prove theorems using a variety of formats
2. Applying dilations and proportional reasoning to build a formal understanding of similarity.
3. Developing explanations of circumference, area, and volume formulas
4. Applying the Pythagorean Theorem and continuing their study of quadratics with parabolas
5. Proving theorems about circles and studying the relationships among parts of a circle
6. Extending their work with probability and using it to make informed decisions

In a **Model Geometry** math class, you should observe students engaged with at least one mathematics content and practice standard*:

Mathematical Practices

- Making sense of problems and persevering in solving them
- Reasoning abstractly and quantitatively
- Constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others
- Modeling with mathematics
- Using appropriate tools strategically
- Attending to precision
- Looking for and making use of structure
- Looking for and expressing regularity in repeated reasoning

Content Standards

Number and Quantity (N-Q)

• Reasoning quantitatively and using units to solve problems (*approximate error, significant figures*) «

Geometry (G-CO, G-SRT, G-C, G-GPE, G-GMD, G-MG)

- Experimenting with and drawing transformations (*reflection, rotation, translation*) in terms of angles, circles, perpendicular liens, parallel lines, and line segments, and with rectangles, parallelograms, trapezoids, and regular polygons
- Using geometric descriptions of rigid motions to transform figures and to explore triangle congruence
- Proving geometric theorems, and when appropriate the converse of theorems, for lines, angles, triangles, parallelograms, and polygons *(interior/exterior angles, vertical and corresponding angles, equidistant, bisect)*
- Making formal geometric constructions with a variety of tools and methods
- Understanding similarity in terms of similarity in transformations *(dilation, scale factor)*
- Proving similarity theorems and using congruence and similarity criteria for triangles to solve problems and prove relationships in geometric figures
- Defining trigonometric ratios *(sine, cosine, tangent)* and solving problems involving right triangles *(Pythagorean Theorem)* «
- Applying trigonometry to general triangles *(Law of Sines and Cosines)* (+)
- Understanding and applying theorems about circles *(similarity, radii, chords, inscribed and circumscribed angles)*

Geometry (cont.)

- Finding arc lengths and area of sectors of circles *(proportionality)*
- Translating between geometric description and the equation for a conic section *(derive, parabola, focus, directrix)*
- Using coordinates to prove simple geometric theorems algebraically and using the distance formula to compute perimeters of polygons and areas of triangles and rectangles «
- Explaining volume formulas and using them to solve problems *(dissection arguments, Cavalieri's principle)* «
- Visualizing relationships between 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional objects
- Applying geometric concepts and methods in modeling situations (density, dimensional analysis, unit conversions) «

Statistics and Probability (S-ID)

• Understanding independence and conditional probability and using them to interpret data from simulations or experiments *(events, subsets, sample space, outcomes, unions, intersections, complements, two-way frequency tables)* «

- Recognizing and explaining the concepts of conditional probability and independence in everyday language and everyday situations «
- Finding the conditional probability of an event as a fraction of another event's outcomes and interpreting the answer in terms of the model «
- Using the rules of probability to compute probabilities of compound events *(Addition Rule, Multiplication Rule, uniform probability model, permutations, combinations)* (+)«

*NOTES

(**«**) designates a modeling standard
(+) Designates standards that go beyond course level

Mathematics What to Look For The example below features three Indicators from the Standards of Effective Practice. These Indicators are just a sampling from the full set of Standards and were chosen because they create a sequence: the educator plans a lesson that sets clear and high **expectations**, the educator then delivers high quality **instruction**, and finally the educator uses a variety of **assessments** to see if students understand the material or if re-teaching is necessary. This example highlights teacher and student behaviors aligned to the three Indicators that you can expect to see in a rigorous Model Geometry math classroom.

Expectations (Standard II, Indicator E)	Plans and implements lessons that set clear and high expectations and also make knowledge accessible for all students.

What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
•Communicating a lesson's objectives and their connections to unit essential questions and goals.	•Applying mathematical strategies and concepts when engaging with meaningful real-world problems
•Creating culturally responsive lessons that engage and sustain student attention	•Using mathematical language precisely to convey meaning and understanding of concepts
•Focusing attention on mathematical language (e.g., linguistic complexity, conventions, and vocabulary)	•Justifying a solution method using a logical progression of arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others
•Establishing classroom routines that support students to defend their thinking	•Using sophisticated mathematical models (e.g. computer models)

Instruction (Standard II, Indicator A)	Uses instructional practices that reflect high expectations regarding content and quality of effort and work; engage all students; and are personalized to accommodate diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.

What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
•Creating a culture of being careful and precise when communicating mathematical ideas	•Actively incorporating others into discussions about mathematical ideas
•Highlighting culturally appropriate and effective negotiation skills they observe in students	•Negotiating with others in response to new ideas, preferences or contributions
•Modeling incorporating others into discussions	•Evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of solution methods orally and in writing

Assessment (Standard I, Indicator B)	Uses a variety of informal and formal methods of assessments to measure student learning, growth, and understanding to develop differentiated and enhanced learning experiences and improve future instruction.

What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
•Providing actionable feedback to students about their problem solving processes	•Engaging in challenging learning tasks regardless of learning needs (e.g., linguistic background, disability, academic gifts)
•Using multiple formative approaches to assess students (e.g., mid-unit assessment, group work)	•Using drawings, diagrams, and equations to explain mathematical concepts and relationships
•Conducting frequent checks for student understanding and adjusting instruction accordingly	•Using exemplars to inform their work