

## A Closer Look at Model Teacher Evaluation Plans

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has again proposed linking school aid increases to approval of Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) plans.

With 90 percent of school districts having one-year plans in place, school leaders must revisit their APPR plans for the 2013-14 school year. This presents an opportunity to analyze the model APPR plans held up by the State Education Department as offering “approvable options for other districts to consider in their plans.”<sup>1</sup>

NYSSBA randomly selected five of the 10 model plans (Campbell-Savona, Kings Park, Pembroke, Jamesville-Dewitt and Valhalla) to offer a snapshot of how they deal with the components of the APPR law: state assessments (20-25 percent of the evaluation), local measures (15-20 percent), other measures (60 percent) and the appeals process.

School board members should be aware of the many options available within each component of the APPR law. This is especially important given resource limitations on schools. For example, the choice to include more classroom observations may contribute to a more accurate evaluation, but would demand a greater time commitment from building principals.

Moreover, the new APPR law has cost implications. Based on an analysis of data from 80 school districts, NYSSBA estimates that districts outside the state’s five largest cities expect to spend an average of \$155,355 on the new system this year. That’s \$54,685 more than the average grant awarded to school districts to implement the program.



What follows is how the five model APPR plans reviewed by NYSSBA deal with various components of the law.

### State Assessments (or Comparable Measures) of Student Growth

State exams that provide data on student achievement between two points in time, together with a value-added model (upon Board of Regents approval), determine student growth.

Schools must incorporate a state or Regents exam to measure student growth if such an exam exists for a course. Only teachers with more than 50 percent of students covered by state-provided growth measures will receive a growth score from the state. If the state does not provide a growth score, or if a course has no state assessment, districts must use a Student Learning Objective (i.e., an academic goal set at the start of the course). For the state portion of the evaluation, SED’s model plans include baseline student achievement measures as well as student achieve-

ment goals. But how the plans address these concepts differs. To get a baseline measure, some districts (such as Valhalla) use pretests, while others (Kings Park) use pretests for some courses and prior year data for others.

Outside of courses in which state assessments must be used, some districts stick to one measure. Pembroke, for example, uses the Genesee Valley Educational Partnership (GVEP)-Developed Assessment. Jamesville-Dewitt also uses a locally-developed assessment. Campbell-Savona, however, uses a variety of measures other than state or Regents assessments. Examples include a state-approved third-party assessment – the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), district-developed assessments, and BOCES-developed assessments.

Districts must link student growth data to a point system that corresponds to teacher ratings of *Highly Effective*, *Effective*, *Developing* or *Ineffective*. This is the so-called “HEDI” rating system.

In general, the model plans reviewed for this research brief link student growth data to the HEDI system by the number (or percentage) of students who either meet or exceed a goal, or who make improvement.

In some cases, districts use a score calculated by a vendor. In Campbell-Savona, the assessment vendor, Northwest Evaluation Association, calculates a “growth score” that corresponds to the HEDI point ranges. Each district decides how its data relates to the HEDI rating system.

<sup>1</sup> NYSED. SED Releases 10 Model Evaluation Plans; Provides Feedback to Over 100 Districts. August 22, 2012 <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/SEDReleases10ModelEvaluationPlansProvidesFeedbacktoOver100Districts.html>

## Locally Selected Measures of Student Achievement

The local portion comprises 20 percent of the overall evaluation. That percentage will change to 15 percent with the use of a value-added model. The local portion focuses on student achievement, but may use student growth instead. However, if the district uses a state or Regents assessment to measure student growth, the way in which the district measures that growth must not be the same as for the state portion. The choice of measures and points given to teachers within state “scoring bands” (i.e., HEDI ratings) is collectively bargained.

Jamesville-Dewitt uses **student achievement** for this portion of the evaluation. The district uses a local assessment for all courses and has developed a scoring formula attributing test scores to “performance levels.” The formula is slightly modified

for use with a value-added model; otherwise, it is consistent for use in all courses for this evaluation section.

The Pembroke school district is using **student growth** for the local portion of the teacher evaluation. More specifically, the district is using the Genesee Valley Educational Partnership (GVEP) Assessment for all courses and from “regionally developed pre-assessments,” either (1) creating “specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (SMART) goals” for the end assessment for every student; or (2) giving the whole class a baseline cutpoint. To determine how teachers are rated under the HEDI system, the district uses either the “number of students that meet established S.M.A.R.T. goals” or the “increase or decrease in the percentage of students that exceed the baseline cutpoint.” Teachers, upon consideration of “students’ prior academic history” and advisement with the principal, decide which to use – S.M.A.R.T. goals or a baseline cutpoint.

## IN DEPTH Lessons Learned: The First Year of APPR

While this research brief focuses on the characteristics of model APPR plans, NYSSBA reached out to superintendents and curriculum and instruction specialists in model districts to find out their major takeaways from the first year of APPR.

### What would you do differently now?

According to the respondents, submitting a plan (and getting subsequent approval as a model) according to SED’s original time-frame lessened these districts’ efforts to benefit from knowledge later learned of best practices. One superintendent focused on the SLO process. If she could do things differently, she would focus on “getting prior information to write good SLOs.” A curriculum and instruction specialist said “by being out there in front we didn’t have all the options of all that came afterward.”

### What do you consider your greatest successes in the plan?

The greatest successes in the plans tend to align with the mission of APPR. Basically, APPR is doing what it is intended to do. “Many observations to give feedback to teachers” was how one superintendent summed up her district’s APPR success. Another said, “APPR is doing exactly what we hoped it would do” regarding compliance. She noted, “it’s great” that teachers are engaged in the process and asking, “How can I improve?”

A curriculum and instruction specialist emphasized how the “common language” of APPR influences how teacher

practice is discussed – “it’s objectified it,” she said. One superintendent mentioned the success of collaboration and how APPR works to focus the district on student learning. He stated, “The greatest successes are found in the meaningful dialogue about improving instruction that occur on a regular basis. Our teachers were already motivated to be the best they can be, and our plan simply provided a means to focus that motivation. Student learning is the focus, as it should be.”

### What were your challenges in putting it together?

Timelines, expectations and SLOs are themes regarding challenges in putting the plans together. One curriculum and instruction specialist said, “three months of my life was wrapped up in APPR paperwork,” – more specifically, “the writing of the SLOs was monumental.” For another superintendent, both the timeline and expectations took some time, “just to understand it and get your heads around it.” Another agreed that the timelines were the biggest challenge when putting the APPR plan together. One superintendent looked upon the challenge of having enough time to reach consensus from all parties involved as an ultimate victory. He stated, “Our committee consisted of 15-20 people.... That brought many different perspectives to the table, and we realized we needed to schedule more time for meetings.” The scheduling gave way to positive results as “we met all of the challenges in a positive manner, and feel confident about what we produced.”



## Other Measures

The remaining 60 percent of the teacher evaluation is based on other measures of teacher effectiveness. At least two classroom observations – with a minimum of one unannounced observation conducted by the principal or a trained administrator – must carry more than half of the total 60 points for this portion of the evaluation. Any remaining points (a possible 0-29) may be distributed among the following measures: observations by independent evaluators or in-school peer teachers, feedback from students and/or parents using a state-approved survey, structured review of lesson plans, portfolios of student work, or other “teacher artifacts.”

Each district chooses at least one guide – a so-called “rubric” – to measure teacher quality based on New York State Teaching Standards. The choice of rubric and selection of the remaining measurement choices other than the required two observations are collectively bargained.

While there are several New York State-approved teacher (and principal) practice rubrics, four of the five model plans use Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (three use the 2011 revised version and one uses the 2007 version) while one uses the NYSUT Teacher Practice Rubric.

Four of the five plans allocate points between two choices only – “classroom observations by building principal or trained administrator” and “structured review of lesson plans, student portfolios, and other teacher artifacts.” All four distribute more than 31 points to “classroom observations by a principal or other trained administrator.”

All teacher observations for the reviewed plans are being conducted in person, rather than both in person and video, or by video alone. All districts in the reviewed plans conduct all observations (over the required two) by the building principal or other trained administrator rather than by an in-school peer teacher or independent evaluator.

Two districts, Campbell-Savona and Pembroke, conduct two observations for both probationary and tenured teachers. The others conduct more observations for probationary teachers than for tenured ones. For example, Kings Park and Jamesville-Dewitt are conducting two observations for tenured teachers and one or two additional ones for probationary teachers. Valhalla is conducting six observations for probationary teachers and five for tenured ones.

Districts vary in how they distribute points within the HEDI rating system. For example, Jamesville-Dewitt distributes its 60 points (all based on observations) among the seven sections of the NYSUT Teacher Practice Rubric. Each rubric section contains a certain number of elements. Each element within each section is reviewed and given points that are linked to ratings of Highly Effective, Effective, Developing or Ineffective. The points attributed to these ratings vary per rubric section. The “element scores [are] totaled” and the sum links to a locally-determined distribution range of points aligned to the HEDI ratings of Highly Effective (55-60), Effective (41-54), Developing (21-40) and Ineffective (0-20).

## IN DEPTH Other Measures:

### Valhalla School District

Here is how the Valhalla school district is handling the “other measures” portion of the evaluation:

- Pre-Observation Conference (10 points)
- A 40-minute Formal Observation (20 points)
- Post-Observation Conference (10 points)
- Other Measures – short observations (5-10 minutes) for evaluator to provide constructive feedback
- “Alternative Project” (20 points) A research question is examined via selected routes – e.g. a workshop presentation or “piloting a program.”

OR

- “Evidence Binder” (20 points) - An “artifact or sample” highlighting the Danielson rubric’s Professional Responsibilities section with a written statement.
- HEDI ranges:  
H (58-60 points), E (50-57 points), D (41-49 points), and I (40 points or less).

*Source: Valhalla Union Free School District  
APPR Plan 2012-13*

### Kings Park School District

Here is how the Kings Park school district is handling the “other measures” position of the evaluation:

A certain number of points are attributed to each of the four parts of the rubric:

1. Planning and Preparation (15)
2. Classroom Environment (8)
3. Instruction (30)
4. Professional Responsibilities (7)

Classroom observations are assessed via the second and third parts. The 22 points attributed to the first and fourth parts are distributed using “...evidence of student development with the use of a structure review of lesson plans, student portfolios and other artifacts or teacher practice.” If teachers get 0 in any of the four parts, they cannot be rated as Highly Effective.

HEDI ranges: H (56-60), E (51-55), D (41-50), and I (0-40)

*Source: Kings Park  
Central School District APPR Plan 2012-13*

An example of how two districts – Valhalla and Kings Park – allocate their similar distribution of 60 points using Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (2011 revised, and 2007 version, respectively) highlights how the distribution of points for this section can vary (see box on page 3).

### Appeals Process

The APPR law allows an appeals process to take place if a teacher disagrees with the rating. Most of the reviewed model plans describe a multiple-tier appeals process (whereby some level of feedback is provided by each tier), a panel/committee procedure for appeals, or both. Kings Park, however, rests the decision-making authority with the superintendent (in conjunction with evidence for the appeal received from the teacher’s supervisor or principal).

The Pembroke and Valhalla school districts do not use a panel or committee; rather, the appealing teacher proceeds through a multiple-tier process. In Pembroke, prior to a “formal appeal,” the teacher meets with the evaluator (and can be accompanied by a union representative). Then, within a timeframe, the teacher gives the evaluator his or her appeal in writing and receives written feedback back from the evaluator. “If either party further appeals, an appeal in writing goes to the superintendent within a timeframe, who then meets with the teacher and evaluator. The superintendent gives written feedback to the teacher and evaluator and the decision is final.

Campbell-Savona includes both a multiple-tier process and a committee in its appeals process (see box at right).

### Conclusion

NYSSBA’s review of five model APPR plans found that there is a lot of variety among the plans. That is consistent with state lawmakers’ goal of allowing school districts and employee unions to shape their plans through local collective bargaining.

NYSSBA found some consistency among the model plans reviewed in linking growth data to the so-called “HEDI” rating system. This is often done by the percentage of students who meet or exceed a goal. Based on the review, we can also conclude that classroom observations conducted by a building principal continue to be a major part of evaluations. The APPR law requires at least two classroom observations. Most districts actually distribute more than half of the 60 points in the “other measures” portion of the evaluation to classroom observations. There was consistency in the plans NYSSBA reviewed in the choice of rubric (Danielson) for the other measures portion.

While various states throughout the nation have taken differing approaches to teacher evaluation systems, those that seem to be effectively navigating the possible implementation pitfalls tend to:

## IN DEPTH Appeals Process:

### Campbell Savona School District

For Campbell-Savona, “Ineffective” and “Developing” are the two ratings which teachers may appeal. There are two tiers in the appeals process:

1. An “informal” appeal resolution between the teacher and lead evaluator.
2. A more formal process to appeal the first tier. Within a certain time frame the teacher may provide a written appeal to the superintendent, who then provides an Evaluation Appeals Committee, or EAC, with this appeal. The EAC comprises three members – one chosen by the superintendent, one chosen by the Campbell-Savona Teachers’ Association (CSTA), and one agreed upon by both parties. Within a certain timeframe, the EAC makes a decision.

If the EAC cannot make a unanimous decision, the superintendent makes the final decision. This process sunsets on Oct. 1, 2013.

*Source: Campbell-Savona Central School District APPR Plan 2012-13*

- Provide more plan structure such as a default state model as an option for school districts;
- Hone state educational agency resources on a few key areas and cultivate expertise, rather than spread agency resources too thin;
- Collaborate with foundations or outside agencies to pool talent and provide district guidance, ask for frequent feedback for system updates; and
- Think long-term to address knowledge and skill acquisition in teacher certification programs.<sup>2</sup>

Another observation is that, among the model plans randomly chosen for analysis by NYSSBA, districts opted to have the principal or other trained administrator conduct additional teacher observations beyond the two required observations, as opposed to an in-school peer teacher or independent evaluator. Districts also opted to use in-person evaluations rather than video.

As school districts renew their evaluation systems for 2013-14, they will no doubt have to work out the unexpected impacts of their plans on their employees, students and the school communities. This will have bearing on future negotiated APPR plans. Undoubtedly, a strong understanding among district stakeholders of each district’s evaluation system will be a key benchmark toward achieving student success.

<sup>2</sup>McGuinn, Patrick, “The State of Teacher Evaluation Reform: State Education Agency Capacity and the Implementation of New Teacher-Evaluation Systems.” November 2012. [www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org)).

**WORKS CONSULTED**

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