Lessons Learned on Communication and Engagement for Educator Evaluation: Colorado Case Study

Key to generating teacher effectiveness policies that are sustainable and achieve their intended outcomes is stakeholder engagement and buy-in. As states and districts seek out examples of what works in stakeholder engagement and communication, this policy brief provides lessons learned from Colorado's strategies to lay the foundation for strong stakeholder involvement for its educator evaluation reforms.

Policy-to-Practice Brief

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August 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Transforming educator evaluation systems, as with any large-scale reform, requires the support of stakeholders from a range of perspectives. Successful engagement contributes to making the most informed decisions, gaining the buy-in of key constituents, and increasing the likelihood of long-term sustainability. Sincere engagement of stakeholders requires compromise and honest, respectful dialogue, which can be challenging and necessitates a significant investment of time and resources. However, implementing reform without substantive stakeholder engagement could result in time and resources being lost as the reform falters from lack of support. This reality has been seen in a number of reform efforts where states or districts who experience success have engaged stakeholders throughout the process, and unsuccessful ones have experienced setbacks from a failure to obtain stakeholder input and support (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2004; Wallner, 2008).

States must plan authentic efforts to engage teachers, principals, and the broader public in shaping key education policy decisions. Educator evaluation reform is more likely to lead to improved instruction and increased student learning when a cross-section of teachers and principals meaningfully participate in, and even lead, design and implementation efforts. Although state education agencies (SEAs) often embrace the importance of stakeholder engagement and communication, finding a practical, effective, and coherent means of accomplishing it remains an ongoing challenge. States need to take strategic and practical steps to capitalize on the expertise and valuable resources stakeholders offer. Therefore, states ought to consider multiple communication and engagement methods, with multiple audiences and at multiple times throughout the development and implementation process.

With many efforts underway across the United States, SEA leaders have the opportunity to utilize the expertise of their contacts in other SEAs and regional comprehensive centers (RCCs) in their region and throughout the country to exchange ideas and share the lessons they have learned about involving stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways. To assist with this exchange, we provide a detailed example of one state's experience with stakeholder engagement and communication efforts: Colorado. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) selected Colorado after reviewing engagement and communication efforts in 24 states (see "The National Picture: How Do States Reach Out?"). Based on the variety and coordination of multiple communication strategies, Colorado emerged as a promising case to highlight.

Lessons Learned on Communication and Engagement

The National Picture: How Do States Reach Out?

To provide a snapshot of state-level efforts in reaching out and communicating with stakeholders, the TQ Center reviewed 24 states' communication and engagement efforts around educator evaluation.[1] Although data on the quality and impact of these efforts are difficult to collect, it is possible to explore the multiple and varied methods of communication and stakeholder engagement that states have employed to date, as follows:

- **Websites.** All of the states reviewed maintain a website related to the evaluation reforms.
- **Advisory committees.** Most states (92 percent) have a state-level advisory committee that includes stakeholders as members.
- **News or social media.** Only a handful of states have focused on news media (press conferences and news articles) or social media (13 percent); however, slightly less than half (42 percent) produce press releases highlighting their reforms.
- **Surveys.** Less than half of the states reviewed (42 percent) used surveys (usually online) to collect stakeholder views.
- **Guidance and training material.** Less than half of the states reviewed (42 percent) provided guidance, training material, and FAQ documents online.
- **Forums.** Less than half (42 percent) hosted a series of regional forums to introduce reforms and/or hear stakeholders' perspectives.
- **Presentations.** SEAs and state-level committees used webinars or in-person presentations to LEAs, professional associations, teachers' unions, or other stakeholder groups slightly less frequently (38 percent).
- **Online video or communication.** One-third of states used additional online communication methods such as video or periodic e-newsletters to communicate information to stakeholders.
- **Focus groups.** Focus groups are the least utilized in-person form of engagement, with 33 percent of states selecting this option as one means of gathering stakeholder views.

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[1] Researchers drew on data from the TQ Center's State Teacher Evaluation Policy database (http://resource.tqsource.org/stateevaldb/) as well as additional reviews of SEA websites. The states reviewed included Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Washington, and Hawaii, as well as Washington, D.C.

In designing its evaluation reforms, Colorado has taken a strategic approach to stakeholder communication and engagement. The key lessons that Colorado reform leaders have learned along their journey include the following:

- **Relationship building:** prioritizing face-to-face interactions with stakeholders and approaching these as opportunities to genuinely listen to teachers and others.
- **Inclusiveness:** involving all relevant parties, most particularly the statewide professional associations, at each stage of development and implementation.
- **Vision:** keeping the vision central to the reforms to ensure that the SEA's efforts and discussions with stakeholders stayed focused and avoided "vision creep," in other words, losing sight of what they hope to accomplish and for what purposes. Referring back to this vision when obstacles arise is especially important, as is communicating to stakeholders concerning how the new policy will benefit them.
- **Expertise:** recognizing the need to consult with experts, in addition to engaging with stakeholders. For example, as the scale of work demanded that the Colorado Department of Education educator effectiveness team expand from a close-knit group of three to nine, the group's communication functions became more complex and the decision was made to hire a communication expert to assist with this task. A second expert consultant was hired to assist with rubric development.

- **Time:** understanding the importance of allowing adequate time—although there may never be *enough* time—for each phase of the reform to be completed thoughtfully and in a way that allows for stakeholder engagement.

Colorado invested significant time and resources into developing a comprehensive approach to stakeholder communication and engagement. Part of this approach included a strong emphasis on transparency, resulting in many of the state's communication tools being freely available online for other SEAs to draw on in their own communication work (see "Online Access to Colorado Tools" for more information).

Online Access to Colorado Tools

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) provides access to its process and communication tools for other SEAs to use and learn from. CDE Director of Educator Effectiveness Toby King notes that there is enough else to do around educator evaluation, so "don't reinvent the wheel—take whatever you can from Colorado." Information found at the following sites offers guidance:

State Council for Educator Effectiveness (SCEE)
http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/Partner-SCEE.asp

SCEE resources
http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/Partner-SCEE-Resources.asp

Councils, boards, and partners
http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/Partners.asp

Educator Effectiveness and Support (main page)
http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/index.asp

Colorado's Model Evaluation and Pilot information
http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/RB-CDEModelEvaluationSystem.asp

Four-part video series on educator evaluation in Colorado
http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/index.asp

We offer this Colorado case study to help clarify the key decisions, events, print and Web resources, and other specific communication approaches that SEAs and districts need to consider. In addition, this case study can be used as a companion piece to *A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems* (www.tqsource.org/publications/practicalGuideEvalSystems.pdf; Goe, Holdheide, & Miller, 2011), a tool that guides state planners through the eight components of teacher evaluation design. Component 2 of this tool, Securing and Sustaining Stakeholder Investment and Cultivating a Strategic Communication Plan, lays out the key considerations in four focus areas for ensuring stakeholder support for a new system. The four steps are (1) identifying the stakeholder groups, (2) establishing group roles and expectations, (3) developing a communication plan, and (4) soliciting feedback. The case study that follows is organized around Colorado's activities and lessons learned under each of these four areas. The brief concludes with an overview of additional guidance and lessons learned from stakeholder engagement efforts in Teacher Incentive Fund districts and through work by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as an overview of existing resources on this topic area.

COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN COLORADO

Background

In 2010, the Colorado Legislature passed Senate Bill (S.B.) 10-191. Under this legislation, Colorado school districts have the option of selecting the state's teacher evaluation model system or developing their own system by school year 2013–14. The legislation charged Colorado's State Council on Educator Effectiveness (SCEE) with providing recommendations and guidelines to the State Board of Education (SBE) on a new system for evaluating teachers and principals.

The various phases of the lawmaking process took place along the time frame shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Educator Evaluation Reform Timeline

Time Period	Phase of Evaluation Reform
April–June 2011	SCEE presented its recommendations to SBE
June–November 2011	SBE held three rule-making hearings and gathered written comments on the proposed rules
November 2011	SBE approved the final SB 191 rules and submitted them to the General Assembly for comment and revision
May 2012	Final approval of the rules
August 2011–May 2015	Piloting process
August 2013	Full statewide implementation

The policy specifies that by July 2013, each of Colorado's 178 school districts will make publicly available its written teacher and principal evaluation systems and submit assurances to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) that certain requirements are met. Included in the legislation is that:

- Multiple performance measures are required.
- Student growth measures must be included, and they must account for at least 50 percent of a teacher's final evaluation score. Local education agencies (LEAs), however, may choose the student growth model they use.
- Observation is a required feature of evaluations; however, no observation instrument is mandated by the state.
- The state established minimum weights for each of the teaching standards, each of which must have a "measurable influence"; however, LEAs retain control over final decisions about how multiple measures should be aggregated into a final rating for a teacher.
- Evaluation systems must have four levels of teacher performance.
- The state requires that struggling teachers be provided support through professional development in order to improve within an established, reasonable time period.

SECURING AND SUSTAINING STAKEHOLDER INVESTMENT AND CULTIVATING A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN (TQ CENTER *PRACTICAL GUIDE,* COMPONENT 2)

1. Identifying Stakeholder Groups

When embarking on educator evaluation reform, a first step should be to identify the relevant stakeholder groups. Stakeholder groups should consist of individuals from across the education spectrum: from legislators to state agency staff to those with technical expertise in a relevant area to teachers, administrators, media, and local community members. Educators in particular bring an important perspective to evaluation design. They have unique insight into what works in the classroom and how to best evaluate their own work. This understanding is critical for the long-term success of a system that will support teaching and learning. Including educator voices also increases the likelihood that the changes will be perceived as responsive, fair, and beneficial, and ultimately that the changes will be accepted and promoted. Giving careful consideration to the members who make up stakeholder groups is an important first step to establishing an initiative that will be viewed as credible and trustworthy. The first step Colorado took was to create the State Council for Educator Effectiveness, a group that not only consisted of stakeholders appointed by the governor with input from the professional associations, but also brought in additional stakeholders (see step 2, "Establishing Group Roles and Expectations").

State Council for Educator Effectiveness (SCEE)

Colorado's commitment to stakeholder engagement began with the governor's 15 appointed SCEE members. Among them, every stakeholder group was represented, with the teachers, through the teachers' union, holding more positions than any other group. Specifically, SCEE consisted of the following stakeholders:

- Two local school board members
- Three teachers and one teachers union representative
- Two principals
- One student
- One parent
- One business member
- One CDE representative
- Two district administrators
- One higher education faculty member

In addition to identifying stakeholders for representation on the state council charged with designing the policy, Colorado identified the key statewide associations that should be at the table on an ongoing basis during the development and implementation process. Referred to as the "Five Cs," the following organizations were included:

- Colorado Education Association
- Colorado Association of School Boards
- Colorado Association of School Executives
- Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Colorado Department of Education

As is described further below, the "Five Cs" were in constant communication with one another and with the various stakeholder groups that these statewide associations represented.

2. Establishing Group Roles and Expectations

Stakeholders play a variety of roles in reform efforts. Different stakeholders engage in different ways for different purposes and carry different levels of responsibility. Reform leaders should set out clear expectations for each individual and group to avoid the pitfalls that can occur when expectations are mismatched. When determining roles and expectations, consider these factors:

- What skills and experience does each stakeholder bring to the work?
- What roles need to be filled? Where are there gaps in the group's expertise?
- What will the time commitment be?
- Are some stakeholders representing another group, and thus should they be gathering feedback from them?
- Which groups will serve as advisors and which as decision makers?

SCEE faced many of these questions as council members tasked with guiding the process and making final recommendations to the State Board of Education. The complexity of the work required stakeholder subgroups in many areas to focus on particular aspects of evaluation design and implementation. To manage this process, SCEE created a network of advisory committees.

Technical Advisory Groups

In addition to the 15 stakeholders represented on the council, SCEE initiated more widespread engagement by setting up 11 technical advisory work groups (TAGs) to identify multiple measures of educator effectiveness, including multiple measures of student growth; evaluate effectiveness in light of the state requirements and local control issues; and create a report that would serve as the basis of SCEE's recommendations in various mandated areas, including the following:

- Teacher standards
- Principal standards
- Scoring framework and performance standards
- Cost study
- District guidelines
- CDE guidelines for implementation and monitoring
- Policy
- Appeals process
- Student growth
- Parent and guardian involvement
- Student involvement

The TAGs included SCEE members as well as staff from education partner organizations in Colorado, CDE, The New Teacher Project, higher education faculty members, charter school representatives, American Federation of Teachers representatives, and even one state senator.

Colorado Content Collaboratives

Relying on teacher expertise in measuring student learning as well as providing another avenue for teacher engagement and ownership, CDE created Content Collaboratives; this initiative involves teachers in the creation of an assessment bank to measure student growth for teacher evaluations. CDE put out an open call for applications from all Colorado educators, and an internal team—along with external content and assessment professionals—blind-reviewed the applications to select participants.

The Content Collaboratives convene educators from across the state to identify and create high-quality assessments, which are aligned to the new Colorado Academic Standards. The collaboratives are an ongoing initiative, with the first-year focus on creating fair, valid, and reliable measures of student learning that can be piloted and peer-reviewed for their utility in educator evaluations. In future years, using the measures, the collaboratives will focus on instructional practice and professional development to support effective practice.

CDE also hired Jean Williams, Ph.D., Vice President for Research and Evaluation at Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, as an expert consultant to lead the development of the evaluation rubrics. In an interview, she noted that, even if an SEA has the expertise internally, convening groups such as the TAGs and Content Collaboratives helps to build credibility around the reform initiative.

3. Developing a Communication Plan

A strategic communication plan keeps the broader school community informed about the steps and progress of the reform. Portraying a clear and consistent message about implementation efforts, results, and future plans for implementation should be a top concern because it reduces room for misunderstanding and confusion. Thought needs to be given to these questions:

- What are the main messages?
- Who should hear these messages?
- How would these messages be best delivered?

Different groups may need different forms and levels of information, and it is important to understand those differences early. After these decisions are made, the most effective modes of communication can be linked with each audience and message type, and the best timing for information dissemination can be established. Colorado provides several examples of keeping key constituencies informed.

CDE Key Communication and Engagement Strategies

When Colorado was ready to launch its new policy, CDE adopted a number of strategies to communicate the new policy statewide. CDE Executive Director of Educator Effectiveness Katy Anthes explained, "The more communication you have, the better. Myths spread very quickly, so constant communication, including repetition of key facts, is critical." Among the most important of Colorado's communication strategies, according to CDE Director of Educator Effectiveness Toby King, was relationship building, both with stakeholders across Colorado and with other colleagues inside the SEA.

Because teacher evaluation can be a hot-button issue, King explained that an important first step was hiring leaders at CDE with the right skills to interact with the field as an understanding partner. Colorado Education Association (CEA) Director of Teaching and Learning Linda Barker agreed: "The CDE team is very accessible, and credible in the field; they are very inclusive." In interacting with stakeholders, CDE consistently reiterated two key messages:

- The SEA does not have all the answers and wants to listen and learn from others in the field.
- Continuous improvement is at the heart of this reform—for teachers, for districts, and for the SEA.

Stakeholders reported to CDE that these messages represented a refreshing departure from the norm and built not only trust but also, in some cases, enthusiasm around the changes. CDE endeavored to speak and provide workshops and feedback sessions at all state association trainings. At the time that the evaluation rubrics were being developed, face-to-face focus groups were held during a statewide CEA conference. In addition, because of the strong relationships built between leaders at CDE and CEA, CEA extended an open invitation to all parties—including school board members, district staff, and others—to join the training sessions the SEA held for teachers on the new legislation. Through each of these activities, Colorado made efficient use of scarce resources by taking advantage of meetings that already were taking place.

The state also prioritized limited resources by frontloading its efforts, focusing on building relationships early on in order to save time and resources later. In CDE's communication efforts, face-to-face meetings were seen as important to building trust. Only after the relationships were built did CDE consider using webinars as a communication and engagement vehicle.

The commitment to building trust applied to relationships both within and outside of CDE. The Educator Effectiveness unit determined that it was equally important to build internal relationships within the department itself. The two-pronged approach to building relationships proved an important component of CDE's statewide communication efforts.

Specifically, because Colorado was simultaneously changing its student performance standards and state assessments, among other policies, it was important to establish coherence in the messaging between the multiple initiatives so that teachers didn't become overwhelmed. CDE's Student Assessment, Teaching and Learning, and Educator Effectiveness units were in constant communication because of the interdependent nature of their work. Anthes explained:

You can't have one reform initiative without the other; they're so interdependent that you couldn't develop them separately or else you would have a very disjointed system. For example, new student standards aren't helpful unless you have a new assessment system to measure progress toward those standards; and if you can't measure progress toward those standards, then you can't measure teacher effectiveness at teaching those standards. So we see it all as incredibly connected and, as such, could not silo the work. We see it as core components of a system all coming together.

The educator effectiveness team, in an effort to improve interdepartmental collaboration, led brown-bag lunches for all staff to share information and to consider alignment and messaging to stakeholders. As a result, the reform efforts and messages could be consistently communicated and questions answered at numerous statewide training sessions and meetings, which demonstrated a consistent, coherent message. At the very least, other SEA staff know with whom to put stakeholders in contact when questions arise. Breaking down these departmental silos will continue to benefit the SEA and the state in the future, both by helping each unit see the larger picture of education reform in the state and by creating efficiencies and greater coherence across initiatives.

Colorado's Communication Events

Many of the strategies discussed here were described in SCEE's *Staying Informed* document, which outlined for stakeholders all the ways in which CDE would be communicating and reaching out to the community, and various means for staying informed.

Educator Effectiveness Symposia. To kick off communications about implementing the new legislation, in June 2011, the CDE Standards, Assessments, and Educator Effectiveness units jointly convened four symposia across the state. Each was strategically held in locations with close proximity to districts. King explained, "We hadn't realized the need to have us come to their territory." He also related that a useful strategy at these symposia was not only to communicate about the legislative changes but simultaneously to also recruit pilot districts. By recruiting pilot participants while they were most excited and most well informed about the reforms, CDE was able to attain twice as many pilots as needed. CDE decided to repeat these symposia again in June 2012.

Educator Effectiveness Summit. Following the four initial symposia, a March 2012 statewide educator effectiveness summit was sponsored by CEA, Colorado Association of School Boards and Colorado Association of School Executives, in partnership with CDE, and hosted by the Colorado Legacy Foundation (a privately funded organization that serves as a "critical friend" and partner to CDE to help implement policy effectively). The one-day summit was attended by more than 500 participants from 94 school districts. It included presentations and opportunities for collaboration between district teams, experts, and pilot districts. Presentations by CDE Executive Director of Educator Effectiveness Katy Anthes and others provided an overview of Colorado's educator evaluation policies, rules, and timelines. In addition, CDE distributed the following user-friendly resources:

- *Educator Evaluation System Implementation Toolkit* that provides guidance to districts on how to prepare for implementation in 2013, including worksheets for assessing a district's readiness for compliance with S.B. 191
- *A District Leader's Guide: Communicating Effectively With Stakeholders* that provides concrete advice and ideas to district leaders by drawing on the experiences and lessons learned from three Colorado districts that already had implemented new evaluation systems
- *A District Leader's Guide: Preparing Your District to Implement a New Educator Evaluation System* that provides district leaders an overview of the first steps they should take—establishing goals, assembling a design team, using guiding questions, and learning from peer districts—as well as tips and lessons learned from early implementer districts in Colorado
- A *Resource Bank* Web page that hosts all information the districts need to begin the design and implementation process, including links to the state's model evaluation system; sample evaluation systems from other districts or states; information on linking evaluation to a larger human capital management system; S.B. 191 rule making; frequently asked questions (FAQs); and wider resources on collective bargaining, evaluation, and compensation reform from national experts and technical assistance providers

Written Communications Initiatives

Features of the SEA's Website. Just like many other states, Colorado's communication and engagement strategies included a page on the CDE website specifically dedicated to the evaluation system reforms. Among other content, the website included the following:

- A linked website that draws the connections between all of Colorado's educator effectiveness initiatives, including recruitment, preparation, licensure and qualifications, induction, evaluation, and professional development and recognition
- Regular reporting of meeting highlights
- Background brochures and slides with overviews of S.B. 191 and SCEE
- FAQs
- Copies of all public comments, CDE responses, and multiple revisions to the rule-making documents, including documents that provide comparisons across different versions

Educator Effectiveness Newsletter. CDE also launched the *Educator Effectiveness E-Newsletter* to provide regular updates (approximately every two months) on progress. The newsletter includes legislative background, updates, and timelines on changes to teacher evaluation in Colorado. All who are interested can sign up on the CDE's Educator Effectiveness home page to receive the newsletter electronically.

Communications With the "Five Cs"

By keeping the website up-to-date, the newsletter frequent, and the channels of communication open, CEA and other statewide associations remained fully in the loop concerning developments to communicate to their members. Communication between Colorado's Five Cs (see pp. 6–7), as well as the Colorado Legacy Foundation is a constant feature. Between meetings on various topics, the CDE educator effectiveness team interacts with the Five Cs in person about once every week or two, as well as weekly—indeed almost daily—contact by e-mail or telephone. At the time of this

writing, the groups were in discussion about co-branding evaluation reform materials to ensure that a consistent and well-articulated message is presented to educators statewide.

According to CEA Director of Teaching and Learning Linda Barker, the legislation could have been better written if all parties had been at the table. After the legislation had been passed, however, the union was able to become "a thoughtful partner." All parties, and CDE leadership in particular, felt fortunate about establishing a positive relationship between CDE and CEA when the work began. Although CEA had opposed the initial legislation, after the bill passed, CEA leaders decided that rather than sitting on the sidelines, they would mobilize their members to make the reforms as smooth and as positive as possible. Indeed, all statewide stakeholder groups shared an "all-hands-on-deck" approach, understanding the need for everyone to work together to make the reforms work.

It is important to note that the emphasis on engaging stakeholders began long before Colorado began bracing itself for implementation. The following description of the rule-making process illustrates how stakeholder communication and engagement were prioritized during that early stage of reform.

Communications During Rule Making

Colorado made specific, concrete plans for communicating with stakeholders and the public throughout the recommendations and rule-making process. The following are examples of plan execution:

- During the rule-making stage, all written comments from stakeholders and the accompanying CDE responses were posted online.
- CDE held three public meetings to listen to stakeholders during rule making, and SBE held three official rule-making hearings at which members of the public could testify.
- CDE distributed a draft version of the rules before each of the three official public hearings, so that stakeholders could respond to the draft rules.

4. Soliciting Feedback

One of the critical roles stakeholders play is to provide informed feedback on a new evaluation model. Individuals and groups with technical expertise, educators and administrators are all constituents with unique perspectives who can provide invaluable feedback on a system's reliability, fairness, feasibility, impact on practice, and more, all of which can be used to enhance system features. Colorado continues to go to great lengths to solicit feedback from across a wide range of stakeholder groups. Through the pilots, the Five Cs, conferences, focus groups, e-mail, webinars, the website, and other means, individuals and groups with technical expertise, educators, and administrators all provide unique perspectives that will strengthen the development and implementation of the new system.

Statewide Stakeholder Input

To solicit input on a wide scale, SCEE also engaged in the following outreach activities:

- The council administered a survey to solicit input and advice on the proposed system; more than 1,750 individuals, mostly teachers, completed the survey.

- CDE and the Colorado Legacy Foundation conducted 25 meetings across the state to discuss the recommendations, which included asking the more than 500 participants to (1) share their "best hopes and worst fears" about the new evaluation system and (2) contribute their advice and recommendations to the council.
- All council meetings were publicized and open to the public, and each meeting's agenda set aside time for attendees to give feedback to SCEE. At the meetings, 35 individuals and organizations gave public feedback, including parents, teachers, state legislators, CDE staff, school administrators, early childhood educators, superintendents, school board members, Board of Cooperative Educational Services representatives, business leaders, Colorado Education Association, Colorado Association of School Boards, and Colorado Association of School Executives.
- The public also could submit comments directly via e-mail to the council, and these comments were sent directly to all council members.

SCEE compiled the findings from these public input efforts in its *Public Input and Survey Information Overview* document that was posted online. Communicating back to stakeholders about how their input had been used, however, was an area in which interviewees agreed more could have been done.

Focus Groups on Evaluation Rubrics. CDE invested in hiring Jean Williams, an expert rubric developer. To ensure that stakeholders were involved in designing the teacher and principal evaluation rubrics, Williams held many focus groups during a four-day CEA conference. On the final day of the conference, she presented to all participants the changes that were being made to the rubric as a result of their feedback. Thus, Williams used the focus groups not only to garner input from stakeholders, but also to demonstrate how their suggestions had been addressed.

Williams drafted the initial rubrics on her own, but not without significant input from those who would be using the tools on the ground. Rather than selecting educators at random, she recruited a purposive sample of teachers and principals who were considered "deep thinkers" to provide assistance. Sixty teachers, including teacher leaders from CEA and the Center for Teacher Quality's New Millennium Initiative, were involved in designing the teacher observation instrument. About 30 of these teachers also had input into the principal evaluation rubric, and principals likewise weighed in both on the principal and teacher evaluation instruments. Teacher and principal input continues to be sought during the pilot process.

Engagement and Feedback Through the Pilot Process. Although it required that Colorado push back full implementation, the state determined to conduct a three-year pilot of the new system, which includes 27 districts. The goals of the piloting process are to develop, identify, and/or test the following:

- The teacher and principal evaluation rubrics
- The measures of student academic growth
- The methods of collecting teacher input for principal evaluations
- The method of collecting student and family perception data
- The method of aggregating measures and assigning final evaluation ratings
- CDE monitoring methods

Colorado is using the pilot process to collect stakeholder feedback about modifications to make to the system prior to statewide implementation, as well as to communicate CDE's key message about the importance of continuous improvement in both the system itself and each individual—from policymakers to students—affected by it.

In the view of Educator Effectiveness Executive Director Katy Anthes, a key engagement strategy during the initial rollout of these policies was to implement principal evaluations before teacher evaluations. Not only did that strategy help teachers see that their principals would be going through a similar evaluation process, but it also ensured principal engagement and understanding with these reforms, at scale.

GUIDANCE FROM BEYOND COLORADO

The Colorado example illustrates one approach to stakeholder engagement in educator evaluation design that is comprehensive in terms of identifying stakeholders, establishing group norms, communicating, and soliciting input. Communicating with and engaging stakeholders is not only best practice but also a required component of certain federal grant programs. In Race to the Top, for example, in order for a state to earn a high level of points within the State Success Factors section, it must demonstrate that it both provides and receives support from LEAs around the state—with a special mention of principals and teachers, including teachers unions. An Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waiver requirement states: "Each SEA must engage diverse stakeholders and communities in the development of its request [for flexibility]" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 7). The Education Department highlights the need for input from a wide range of perspectives and asks SEAs applying for an ESEA waiver to demonstrate how they have requested feedback from diverse groups and how this information has influenced their planning. One section of its guidelines states directly, "To receive this flexibility, an SEA and each LEA must commit to develop, adopt, pilot, and implement, with the involvement of teachers and principals, teacher and principal evaluation and support systems" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 6). This requirement underscores the importance of meaningfully including those most impacted by performance evaluations.

Other education reform incentive programs also have led to learning around stakeholder communication and engagement. For example, teacher-performance-related pay reform efforts preceded the current wave of teacher evaluation reforms and offer lessons to the latter. Those involved in these compensation reforms as Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees have learned a number of important lessons regarding stakeholder engagement and communication that can be useful beyond TIF initiatives. Julia Koppich (2010) sums up these lessons in *Meeting the Challenges of Stakeholder Engagement and Communication: Lessons from Teacher Incentive Fund Grantees.* Specifically, she describes two groups of stakeholders: internal and external. Internal stakeholders are those who are most directly affected by the reforms. New evaluation plans affect teachers and principals more than any other groups. External stakeholders are those who may have an interest in the reforms but are less directly impacted; examples include parents, the media, and business and community leaders. The internal-external distinction is important because each group requires different communication and engagement approaches in order for their valuable contributions to be made. The following lessons from TIF grantees about communicating and engaging with internal and external stakeholders are useful to evaluation system developers:

- Identify from the beginning who the main stakeholders are, internal and external.
- Invite internal stakeholders into the process early on, and continually engage with them throughout implementation.
- Develop a comprehensive, multistrategy communication plan that will communicate efforts throughout planning, development, and implementation.
- Reach out for help when challenges arise. Chances are that others have faced similar issues regarding engagement and communication (Koppich, 2010).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in promoting new teacher evaluation reforms, lends further support for the importance of stakeholder communication and engagement. In 2009, the foundation requested that nine school districts and an association of charter school management companies develop plans for transforming their evaluation systems. To guide the participants, the foundation laid out a few principles that drew on the expertise of district leaders, school administrators, and teachers identifying best practices in teacher evaluation. Among the lessons that the school districts learned was the importance of stakeholder engagement during planning and implementation, and the creation and execution of a multidimensional communication plan. In fact, all 10 participants highlighted this as a key recommendation for others embarking on similar reforms (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). Recognizing the value of stakeholder perceptions, the Gates Foundation has since begun funding a "teacher voice" initiative to support more than a dozen grassroots efforts across the country working to better engage teachers in the policymaking process.

Resources to Support Effective Stakeholder Engagement

Marketing and communication are generally not an area of expertise with most educators, especially in smaller districts; however, several resources are available that provide guidance and ideas regarding how to effectively communicate with and engage stakeholders at every stage of development. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) created *A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems* and *A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Principal Evaluation Systems.* These guides are tools intended to facilitate discussion around the important components of system design, of which communication and stakeholder engagement is one. They present questions to work through that help states and districts ensure that critical considerations are not being left out.

A related resource from the TQ Center is the *Communication Framework for Measuring Teacher Quality and Effectiveness: Bringing Coherence to the Conversation.* This brief describes a four-component framework that promotes productive dialogue around teacher effectiveness. Finally, the TQ Center has also created *State Teacher Evaluation Policies* (STEP) and *State Principal Evaluation Policies* (SPEP), databases of state policies and practices related to the eight design components of teacher and principal evaluation. Using STEP and SPEP, educators and policymakers can review the state-level policies currently enacted in states across the country.

The *Center for Educator Compensation Reform* (CECR) was established by the U.S. Department of Education in 2006 to support Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees, policymakers, states, districts, and schools with tools, information, and other resources in their move toward performance-based compensation systems. Because incentive-based compensation and evaluation are so closely linked, educators and policymakers designing these systems experience many of the same challenges. CECR provides research, state examples, and detailed information on data systems, student growth measures, and program evaluation. The center also suggests concrete ideas for communicating strategically and building stakeholder support through a six-step guide to implementation.

Everyone at the Table: Engaging Teachers in Evaluation Reform is an initiative of American Institutes for Research and Public Agenda, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

This free online resource center provides an easy-to-use model for widespread teacher-led conversations on evaluation reform that are constructive and solutions oriented, using structured conversation tools and activities, with the end goal of increasing teacher input into the policies that are developed. It includes:

- A two-minute video that captures the importance and enthusiasm of education leaders around the country for broader, more genuine involvement of teachers in evaluation reform (http://www.everyoneatthetable.org/leadersVideo.php)
- An eight-minute teacher discussion-starter video (http://www.everyoneatthetable.org/gtt_video.php) that gives teachers the chance to think and talk about the pros and cons of different kinds of evaluation systems.
- Materials such as moderator's guides, PowerPoint presentations, and discussion summary templates to help leaders organize discussions with teachers and bring their voices to the table.

Everyone at the Table has been used with success in Los Angeles, Detroit, Washington state, and elsewhere. To read their stories and learn more about this innovative approach to teacher engagement around evaluation, visit www.everyoneatthetable.org.

CONCLUSION

Colorado has strived for accessible, credible, and inclusive stakeholder engagement, bringing in a broad representation of internal and external stakeholders. This strategy and the state's commitment to transparency and regular and clear communication in a variety of formats have combined to lay the foundation for strong stakeholder involvement, increasing Colorado's chances for a sustainable educator evaluation system. Although the process has not been without obstacles, leaders in the effort have faced these challenges as collaborators working toward the same ends, not as adversaries. It is this "all-hands-on-deck" attitude that has allowed Colorado to move forward in promising ways.

Although each state has its own unique context, many experiences and challenges are shared, a situation that positions states to be helpful resources to each other. Much can be borrowed from the Colorado example and adapted to fit other states' contexts. Key ideas include a clear and consistent message of continuous improvement—a standard the leaders applied to themselves as well as to schools and educators—and face-to-face communication whenever feasible until relationships are firmly established. Colorado strategically hired new staff to fill expertise gaps within the organization and devoted the time necessary for each phase of planning and implementation. Colorado's lessons apply to any state context, and the practices detailed in this brief are intended to provide other SEAs and RCCs with concrete examples that can be adapted and modified to meet contextual needs.

To spark these initiatives, states should communicate and engage with one another to share their successes, challenges, and innovative ideas. In addition, Web resources such as those mentioned in this brief support states and districts in their efforts for meaningful engagement and are relevant at every stage of reform—design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the system—and at every level—state, district, and school. Although earlier is always better, it is never too late to bring invested groups into the process and authentically engage them. Leveraging the knowledge, ideas, and concerns of your state's educators whenever possible is a cost-effective investment. Investing in stakeholders could mean the difference between a system with little stakeholder support that does not meet the professional needs of educators and a robust, enduring system that all educators believe will make a measurable difference in teaching and learning.

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL COMPREHENSIVE CENTER FOR TEACHER QUALITY

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) was created to serve as the national resource to which the regional comprehensive centers, states, and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring that highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

The TQ Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is a collaborative effort of ETS; Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research; and Vanderbilt University. Integral to the TQ Center's charge is the provision of timely and relevant resources to build the capacity of regional comprehensive centers and states to effectively implement state policy and practice by ensuring that all teachers meet the federal teacher requirements of the current provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act.

The TQ Center is part of the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers program, which includes 16 regional comprehensive centers that provide technical assistance to states within a specified boundary and five content centers that provide expert assistance to benefit states and districts nationwide on key issues related to current provisions of ESEA.

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