

Case Studies in Learning-Centered Evaluation: School Integration of Educator Effectiveness with Educator Support Processes *Preliminary School-Level Results for Oliver Wendell Holmes School June 2018*

This report summarizes preliminary findings from Case Studies in Learning-Centered Evaluation. The study examined practices and outcomes in Wisconsin schools that have focused their evaluation efforts on educator growth and development during the 2017-18 school year.

Six districts were selected, including Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). MPS was included in the study in the fall of 2017 in order to study the evaluation process in schools within a large urban district.

Up to three schools were selected within each participating district from the elementary, middle and/or high school level. Interview data and documents related to the EE process were collected during school visits. The following findings emerged from interviews conducted with two administrators, one School Support Teacher (SST) and three classroom teachers at Oliver Wendell Holmes School (Holmes).¹

Preliminary Findings: Implementation of the EE System

The WI EE System is a series continuous improvement cycles with milestones that occur over the course of the school year (Figure 1). Interviewees generally agreed that all of milestones within the cycle occurred or were scheduled to occur before the end of the 2017-18 school year at Holmes.

Figure 1. Major Milestones in the EE System Annual Cycle²

AUG - OCT	NOV – APR	MAY - JUN
<p>Orientation Meeting: Overview of the system measures and processes, identify who can support, discuss timeline and schedules.</p> <p>Self-Review: Educator analyzes student, school, and personal data to determine areas of strength and those for improvement.</p> <p>Educator Effectiveness Plan (EEP): Educator creates the EEP.</p> <p>Planning Session: Review EEP, discuss and adjust goals if necessary, identify evidence sources, actions and resources needed.</p>	<p>Evidence Collection & Ongoing Improvement: Based on collected evidence & observations, reflection, and adjustment. This continues throughout the cycle.</p> <p>Mid-year Review: Review Professional Practice Goal (PPG) and Student Learning Objective (SLO), adjust goals if necessary.</p>	<p>Goals Outcomes: Determine degree of success in achieving SLO and PPG based on evidence. Self-score SLO. Evaluator assigns a holistic SLO score in Summary Years.</p> <p>End-of-cycle Conversation and Conference: Receive feedback on PPG and SLO achievement, discuss results on components of FFT and SLO results. Identify growth areas for upcoming year.</p>

Between the first and second interviews at Holmes, the original principal was promoted to a central office position and the assistant principal was promoted to acting principal for the remainder of the year.

¹Due to the small sample size, findings should be interpreted with caution. This report is intended to be used for reflection and not for accountability purposes.

²Retrieved from the WI EE System 2017-18 User Guide for Teachers, Teacher Supervisors and Coaches at: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ee/pdf/teacherprocessmanual.pdf> on 5/25/18.

Therefore, this report reflects interviewees' perspectives from before and after the transition at the leadership level and includes interview data from both the original principal and the acting principal. The original principal was reported to be a strong instructional leader for the school and his abrupt departure came as a surprise to staff members. The acting principal had been in his new role for a few weeks at the time of the second interviews. While his knowledge of the year-long EE cycle was somewhat limited, he was able to build on previously-established relationships with staff from his time as assistant principal. Additionally, Holmes had a district representative focused on EE since the start of the school year who was able to coach the acting principal throughout the remainder of the year, including during the end-of-cycle conferences that had yet to take place.

The SST at Holmes was reported to serve as a support to teachers in developing their practice when teachers requested her assistance. This support included conducting observations, assisting with lesson planning and identifying appropriate resources.

Interviewees described Holmes as having a supportive community in which teachers and administration help each other and the entire school shares responsibility for students. Due to the sudden nature of the departure of the original principal, however, staff expressed disappointment and sadness given the progress made by the school with the prior leader. The departure also appears to have created uncertainty and affected trust within the school.

Preliminary Findings: Five Learning-Centered Principles

The WI EE approach encourages learning by fostering the five principles in Figure 2. Major themes for each principle, along with recommendations, are presented below.

Figure 2. Five Learning-Centered Principles of EE System³

1. *A foundation of trust that encourages educators to take risks and learn from mistakes*
2. *Using the Danielson Framework for Teaching as a common, research-based framework on effective practice*
3. *Regular application of educator-developed goals based on data*
4. *Cycles of continuous improvement, guided by timely and specific feedback through ongoing collaboration*
5. *Integration of evaluation processes within school and district improvement strategies*

Principle 1 - Context of Trust

Staff described the original principal as having an “open-door” policy, in which he encouraged staff to come to him with concerns. The original principal framed the EE process as one focused on growth instead of a punitive process and allowed for a back-and-forth exchange between himself and the teachers.

Time was built into the school schedule at least twice per month for teachers to collaborate on EE and instructional planning in grade band meetings. Teachers reported discussing best practices, interventions for specific students and aligning their curriculum. Some of the teachers who were interviewed aligned their SLO for the year with another teacher in their grade band. In addition, teachers are in one of three Professional Learning Communities (PLC), discussed below.

³ Retrieved from the WI EE System 2017-18 User Guide for Teachers, Teacher Supervisors and Coaches at: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ee/pdf/teacherprocessmanual.pdf> on 5/25/18.

◆ **Considerations for increasing trust:** Leadership at Holmes can continue to build a culture in which professional conversations take place throughout the year by providing specific, actionable feedback outside of the EE process. Devoting dedicated time during the school day to EE demonstrated its importance to leadership. As mentioned above, the sudden change in leadership created uncertainty among staff even though they had prior relationships with the acting principal. Since the EE cycle runs the entire school year, it was impossible to completely avoid disruption to the process. The district EE representative provided support to the acting principal to conclude the year, but it may take time for the new leader to reestablish trust with staff members.

Principle 2 - Using the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FfT)

Interviewees reported that the FfT was integrated into most meetings between staff and that the original principal discussed components of the FfT during staff meetings that connected to what he observed throughout the school. During grade band meetings, teachers chose domains and components to discuss together, reviewed related data and developed plans to implement the component in their practice. The SST asked teachers to complete a note-taking form about their discussion and turn it into her for review.

Staff also discussed school initiatives that related to domains and specific components of the FfT. This year, the school focused on project-based learning (PBL), which helped them to address domain 1: planning and preparation, component 3c: engaging students in learning, and component 2e: organizing physical space. Staff participated in professional development (PD) for PBL and had time to develop PBL lesson plans; one interviewee described receiving support from the SST to improve her PBL lesson plan.

◆ **Considerations for using the FfT:** Leadership at Holmes could continue to emphasize components of the FfT during staff meetings and by encouraging teachers to focus on components during their collaborative planning time. Leadership could emphasize why individual components are important by connecting them to school and district priorities, to what is being observed throughout the school or to areas for growth that teachers identify. Leadership could also build on the successes staff experienced with PBL in the next school year by gathering feedback from teachers about what supports they need to continue to implement this strategy within their classrooms, such as PD or observing peers.

Principle 3 - Educator-developed Goals

Holmes prioritizes showing student growth on the STAR assessment. Teachers discussed using student STAR scores from the beginning of the school year, sometimes along with other assessment data, to identify their target group. Teachers discussed revisiting their SLO at the mid-interval and revising their original SLO. Additionally, teachers reported collaborating on their SLOs with teachers within their grade bands or with co-teachers. Interviewees reported a data-driven culture at Holmes in which data was regularly collected, analyzed and discussed so that staff could gauge progress, try new interventions and provide evidence of student success.

◆ **Considerations for educator-developed goals:** Continue to support the culture of data-driven goal setting and progress monitoring. Leverage MPS staff to provide PD around accessing and examining

different data sources that can be used in setting SLO goals. Encourage teachers to set challenging SLO goals.

Principle 4 - Continuous Improvement, with Feedback

The culture of continuous improvement at Holmes is supported by some of the systems and processes discussed above, such as an established EE process, dedicated time for teachers to collaborate, and an emphasis on the FfT. Holmes organizes teachers into one of three Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on math, English Language Arts or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Each PLC meets at least twice monthly. PLCs encourage teachers to set goals and then collect data about those goals within each concentration area. After examining the data, the PLC provides feedback to teachers and suggestions for new interventions. An interviewee discussed how the PLCs reached a point in the year at which they were unclear about how to continue to move students forward and lost momentum.

In addition to reflecting on their practice within the PLCs, teachers discussed reflecting through the feedback process with their evaluator. Interviewees reported that not all teachers were as focused on their own growth and development, however. Through the data-driven culture with time for reflection, all teachers were encouraged to examine student growth. Teachers reported being open to critical feedback as an important catalyst for their growth but had difficulty recalling specific feedback that helped them develop their practice in meaningful ways that would impact learning.

◆ **Considerations for continuous improvement efforts and feedback:** Self-reflection, peer feedback and evaluator feedback encouraged teachers to examine their practice and try new strategies to improve. However, teachers discussed reaching a limit in how far these approaches would take them in their development. Leadership could consider leveraging MPS experts for resources and training for school staff about the most difficult areas they seek to improve once the expertise and innovative thinking within the school becomes stymied on the PLCs, within the grade band meetings or during observations.

Principle 5 - Integration within School and District

Closing the achievement gap by 10% annually is a goal of MPS that has been adopted as a school goal and often by teachers as the basis for their SLO. Since nearly all of Holmes students are African American (95%) and economically disadvantaged (99%), the school works to close the achievement gap by gender and for special education students since about a third of the students have special education needs.⁴ One school priority is related to improving the engagement of students significantly behind grade level in reading, the largest group being eighth grade boys. The school priority to focus on PBL supports various components of the FfT and a district priority to focus on student engagement.

⁴ Retrieved from WI DPI WISEdash at <http://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/portalHome.jsp>.

- ◆ **Considerations for integration:** PBL aligns well with the FfT and therefore offers teachers at Holmes the opportunity to leverage their work implementing PBL in support of EE. For example, teachers could upload PBL artifacts or create SLO or PPG goals around PBL.

Summary

Impact on Teacher Practice and Growth

Interviewees provided numerous examples of teachers changing their practice to reach their SLO goal. Some were unsure if the changes would impact improvement in student achievement scores or reported that they would be implementing their SLO goal even outside of the EE process.

Teacher practice seemed to be most impacted through collaboration and by gathering and examining student data. Teachers collaborated with peers during their grade band meetings and PLCs to reflect on their practice and to share data, strategies and resources. Teachers also reported collaborating with the SST, special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Interviewees discussed the importance of examining student data throughout the EE cycle and during PLC meetings. Both collaborating with colleagues and making data-driven decisions allowed teachers to try new interventions, reflect on their practice, differentiate instruction and receive informal feedback from peers and the SST.

The following is a summary of the Promising Practices that surfaced at Holmes.

Promising Practices	Considerations for Reflection
Framing EE as a growth model and encouraging dialogue between the evaluator and teachers about practice and feedback	Continue to build a culture in which professional conversations take place regularly by providing specific, actionable feedback outside of the EE process
Dedicating time during the school day to EE demonstrated its importance to leadership and allowed teachers to collaborate with peers	Continue to offer dedicated time during the school day for teachers to collaborate on EE Encourage teachers to collaborate on SLO goals
The FfT is discussed in staff meetings and during collaborative planning meetings	Strategically connect components to school and district priorities, to what is being observed throughout the school or to areas for growth that teachers identify
Prioritizing PBL as a school-wide initiative with PD, time for planning and support from the SST allowed teachers to practice this strategy throughout the year	Gather feedback from teachers about the supports that would help them to continue to build on the success of PBL next year Utilize district staff and resources or targeted PD for staff about PBL practices to continue growth
Data-driven culture in which data was regularly collected, analyzed and discussed so that staff could gauge progress, try new interventions and provide evidence of student success	Continue to emphasize the use of multiple sources of data for goal setting and monitoring growth with students Leverage MPS staff to provide PD around accessing and examining different data sources that can be used in setting SLO goals Encourage teachers to set challenging goals
PBL aligns well with several FfT components, including student engagement, which is a district priority	Encourage teachers to leverage their work on PBL to support EE by uploading quality artifacts or by creating a PBL SLO or PPG

The following is a summary of the Areas for Potential Improvement that surfaced at Holmes.

Area for Potential Improvement	Considerations for Reflection
Mid-year transition of principal	Preserve promising aspects of EE next year Allow time for trust to be established between new leader and staff Continue to utilize district supports and resources to assist with transition
Self-reflection, peer feedback and evaluator feedback were not always sufficient to continue to move practice forward	Leverage MPS experts for resources and training for school staff about the most difficult areas to improve once the expertise and innovative thinking within the school becomes stymied Use open-ended questions during conversations with teachers to encourage reflection and offer resources to support areas of growth that are identified Strive to provide specific, actionable feedback in alignment with the evaluator training that can be used to improve teacher practice

The following is a summary of considerations for MPS that surfaced at Holmes.

Considerations for Reflection
The sudden promotion of the original principal in the middle of the school year adversely impacted the supportive and collegial culture at the school
The involvement of the district EE representative and the acting principal as the assistant principal at Holmes prior to the leadership transition helped the school complete the final steps of the EE cycle for the year
Offer PD to SSTs similar to that of the evaluators so that they better understand the rating process and can better target interventions and supports for teachers
Offer PD about the EE process that is differentiated for new teachers and veteran teachers

About This Project

The project team consisted of Elizabeth Cain, G. Scott Davis, Curtis Jones and Joseph Schmidlkofer and was completed in partnership with the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This report was prepared by Elizabeth Cain.

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