

Case Studies in Learning-Centered Evaluation: School Integration of Educator Effectiveness with Educator Support Processes

*Preliminary School-Level Results for Wedgewood Park International 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, two School Support Teachers (SSTs) and two classroom teachers at Wedgewood Park International School.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 Wedgewood Park.

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>

In addition to implementing the basic system requirements, the SSTs offered voluntary drop-in sessions for teachers at a computer lab in the weeks leading up to the deadlines to complete the EEP, the mid-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.

review, and the end-of-cycle conference. These sessions were reported by various interviewees as a widely-known support to teachers. During these sessions, SSTs helped teachers to use Frontline; discuss, develop and update their SLO and PPG; and brainstorm the types of documentation to use as quality evidence.

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

The school leadership team encouraged collaboration among staff, especially between teachers within the same subjects and grade-levels. Since Wedgewood Park is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, staff have adapted and improved their practice to meet the requirements of the program. There were some concerns expressed that a teacher's feedback and performance level rating was impacted by which evaluator they were assigned. Interviewees perceived a lack of consistency across evaluators, whereby the same practice would be rated differently depending on the evaluator. In some instances, interviewees felt that practices that qualified as distinguished (level 4) were rated as proficient (level 3). Others felt that practices were rated too highly due to a personal relationship between the evaluator and the teacher, or because evaluators were uncomfortable leading difficult conversations.

Ensuring that the process was framed as a growth opportunity for teachers was reported to be dependent on the approach of the individual evaluator. Interviewees shared their perception that some teachers viewed the EE process as a "hoop to jump through" or a checklist that they had to complete. However, interviewees also expressed the potential benefits to teachers when the process went well, such as seeing their evaluator as a mentor and trusted supporter, or trying a different strategy in the classroom. Additionally, SSTs worked to establish trust with teachers by visiting their classrooms and offering their support through coaching cycles that included strategies for data collection, observations and feedback.

- ◆ **Considerations for increasing trust:** Establishing trust may be undermined by a perception that ratings across evaluators are not calibrated. Administrators could examine teacher ratings across evaluators over time to identify and address inconsistencies. Evaluators could calibrate their ratings by conducting observations in pairs, completing ratings separately and then comparing and discussing the ratings to arrive at a shared understanding of what constitutes practice at each of the four performance levels. An EE expert from MPS could be incorporated into the calibration process to facilitate

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.

conversations about evaluating teacher practice consistently. Continue to frame the EE process as a growth-oriented model and to build a culture in which professional conversations take place regularly by encouraging evaluators to provide specific, actionable feedback outside of the EE process.

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

The leadership team and SSTs selected one or two components of the FFT, such as teacher use of questioning techniques, to focus on each month by conducting non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs. The team visited every classroom in the building twice over two weeks and documented what they observed in a Google spreadsheet. Interviewees reported that the visits allowed them to get a sense of what was happening throughout the building. The data from the walkthroughs were compiled by grade band across the school and shared with teachers during their collaborative planning time. Teachers discussed how their practice could be improved around that component. The team planned to incorporate teachers on the observation team. One interviewee reported that the process could be strengthened by including the teachers when choosing which components to focus on and by explaining why they are important.

The SSTs discussed the importance of the FFT in framing their support for teachers. They used it as a resource in their conversations and coaching cycles with teachers.

- ◆ **Considerations for using the FFT:** There was some confusion among staff whether the monthly walkthroughs would be continued the following school year and what role teachers should have in the process. Thought could be given to ways in which teachers can be brought into the process as observers, to provide guidance on which components to focus on, and to choose the types of professional development (PD) that would help them improve. The walkthroughs may serve as another way to acclimate teachers to observations of practice and further encourage a culture of growth within the school.

Principle 3 - Educator-developed Goals

Teachers at Wedgewood Park developed their own EEP with input from their evaluator and could access the support of SSTs at the optional drop-in sessions discussed above or by scheduling one-on-one meetings. Interviewees indicated that teachers' had varying levels of comfort in examining student data to create goals. Interviewees discussed ways in which the culture was shifting to become more data-driven: gathering 2-3 sources of evidence to triangulate the outcomes of their goals, examining the data from the monthly walkthroughs, and through coaching cycles that incorporate data sources.

- ◆ **Considerations for educator-developed goals:** Administrators at Wedgewood Park may want to leverage MPS staff to provide PD around accessing and examining different data sources that can be used in setting SLO goals. In addition, technologically-savvy staff members could offer support to those teachers unfamiliar with using data to craft or track SLO goals.

Principle 4 - Continuous Improvement, with Feedback

Teachers at Wedgewood Park are observed for one formal, announced observation and two unannounced mini-observations. Evaluators and teachers have in-person meetings before and after the announced

observations and feedback from the mini-observations are made via email. Teachers were able to demonstrate progress from their formal observation during the mini-observations and by uploading artifacts. This process was further supported by MPS training that Wedgewood administrators received in Learning-Focused Supervision over the past two years about providing feedback to teachers that promotes development through a focus on teacher-led discussions that promote reflection.

As an IB school, Wedgewood staff also participate in cycles of continuous improvement for IB including PD; collaborative planning meetings to coordinate two-month curriculum units, assessments and rubrics; interdisciplinary approaches; reflection; and collaborating with an IB Coordinator. Although outside the EE system, these practices support teacher practice and development. While the administration works to integrate the requirements of each, these separate systems may introduce complexity and strain the resources (including staff time) needed to adequately address them both.

- ◆ **Considerations for continuous improvement efforts and feedback:** Due to the overlapping demands of EE and IB, administrators might clarify the connections and distinctions between the two systems to reduce confusion among staff. This may also change the perception among some teachers that the EE process is a compliance practice instead of growth oriented.

Principle 5 - Integration within School and District

Closing the achievement gap by 10% each year is a MPS goal that is passed along as a priority to the school and is incorporated into some teachers' SLOs. As discussed above, IB is a school priority that the administrative team strives to integrate with EE. These two continuous improvement systems offer the school an opportunity to encourage and reinforce staff growth through practices that support common goals across the two systems. Wedgewood staff are working with MPS staff to develop additional bilingual course offerings for students. Another school priority is improving the math achievement of eighth graders. The principal chose this as an area to explore with the principals at other schools during on-going Principal Institutes held by MPS. The eighth grade math teachers attended 3-4 PD sessions over the course of the year with a district math specialist to improve their practice.

- ◆ **Considerations for integration:** Encourage teachers to develop PPGs and SLOs that incorporate IB priorities or in support of math achievement. Continue to leverage the FFT and Wedgewood Park's approach to EE in support of the goals of IB.

Summary

Impact on Teacher Practice and Growth

Interviewees provided numerous examples of teachers changing their practice to reach their SLO goal, including the work of the eighth grade math teachers discussed above. Some were unsure if the changes would impact improvement in student achievement scores or if teachers would continue implementing the changes after their summary year was over.

The most consistent theme around the impact on teacher practice was a focus at the school on FFT components 3b - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques and 3c - Engaging Students in Learning.

These goals were reinforced through the monthly walkthroughs, an emphasis on culturally-relevant pedagogy and SSTs modeling techniques teachers could use in their classrooms during staff meetings. Interviewees discussed how engaging students in learning and encouraging student participation had the potential to improve an array of factors at the school including relationships with students, student attendance, student behavior and student achievement.

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

Promising Practices	Considerations for Reflection
Open drop-in sessions offered by SSTs	Continue to offer these sessions for teachers
Monthly walkthroughs based on the FFT	Engage teachers as active participants in the planning, execution and follow-up Continue to frame as low-stakes, non-evaluative opportunities for reflection and growth
Evaluators and coaches encourage and support teachers to use multiple sources of data to develop goals and monitor their progress	Offer district-led PD for teachers regarding data sources and related practices Engage technologically-savvy staff in supporting their peers in using data
EE cycle allows for teachers to reflect and improve upon their observed practice	Strive to frame the EE process as focused on growth and ensure that all evaluators are comfortable offering critical feedback anchored in the FFT
IB has continuous improvement efforts and collaboration embedded within the requirements	Build connections between these separate systems to leverage the strongest aspects of each
Focus on FFT components 3b - Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques and 3c - Engaging Students in Learning	Engage staff regularly in exploring why these components are important Continue to integrate into school culture via walkthroughs, PD, PPGs and staff meetings

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

Area for Potential Improvement	Considerations for Reflection
Perception among staff that teacher ratings are inconsistent across evaluators	Examine historical ratings data to identify if this perception is supported Develop a calibration process among evaluators with support from the district
EE perceived by some as more of an evaluative tool than focused on growth	Continue to build a culture in which professional conversations take place regularly by encouraging evaluators to provide specific, actionable feedback outside of the EE process
Develop consistent understanding across evaluators, coaches and teachers about what represents “distinguished” practice and assign level 4 to practices that meet the criteria	Leverage MPS FFT experts for resources and training for school staff about performance levels, such as incorporating videos available on Teachscape into PD

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

Considerations for Reflection

Offer EE PD earlier in the school year so that staff at schools with an early start can participate prior to the deadline to submit their EEP

Offer PD that explores what the “distinguished” performance level of the FFT looks like in action in various grade levels and subjects

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 more resources and strategies for evaluators to use in scoring Domain 1: Planning and Preparation and Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities of the FFT

About This Project

The project team consisted of Elizabeth Cain, G. Scott Davis, Curtis Jones and Joseph Schmidkofer 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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