

# Educator Effectiveness: Answering Tough Questions/ Turning Statements into Messages

*Note: This document is intended to train district leadership on how to answer the tough questions they may receive about educator effectiveness and the new evaluation system requirements.*

## Sample Tough Questions and Suggested Answers

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**Q: I have been the principal at this school for [9] years, the school is highly rated with high test scores and my teachers are all fantastic. Why do we have to change our evaluation system? What I've been doing is proven to be successful.**

- Great! The new evaluation system will help you keep your focus on the activities and practices that are working so you can sustain the same, if not higher, levels of success.
- The new evaluation system is focused on **continuous growth and improvement for everybody involved – administrators, teachers and students** – and it will honor and acknowledge your building's successes.
- **Every child in every community deserves** to be in a school – like yours - with a **great leader and excellent teachers**.
- The new evaluation requirements create a system that is **consistent and fair for ALL educators** by setting statewide Quality Standards and using multiple measures of data, ongoing feedback and individualized professional development in the annual evaluation process.

**Q: I have been teaching for [12] years and get great results with my kids. Why do you have to change the way I'm evaluated when I've proven I'm a great teacher over and over again?**

- **Every child in every community deserves excellent classroom teachers like you.** The new evaluation requirements create a system that is **consistent and fair for ALL educators** by setting statewide Quality Standards and using multiple measures of data, ongoing feedback and individualized professional development in the annual evaluation process.
- The evaluation process will honor your work and success and is also geared to assist teachers as they **continue to refine their instructional practices** based on the changing dynamics in their classrooms.
- **Students have the greatest chance to succeed when educators receive support to continuously improve their skills and knowledge.** Just as teachers expect growth from all students, even their top students, the most talented teachers can **continue to refine and improve as they receive feedback and additional support**.
- Many teachers have been teaching for years and get great results. Sadly, many of them report that they are required to participate in professional development that doesn't meet their needs. By having an annual evaluation schools can differentiate their professional development and better meet the needs of teachers like you.

**Q: How can 50% of my evaluation, and ultimately my job, be based on how students do on tests? What if my students had a bad day on the day of the big test?**

- In Colorado, student growth is defined as learning over time.
- The student growth measures standard will be based **on multiple measures of growth including several different assessments, not just one test**. Each school district will get to choose which measures contribute to the overall 50 percent.
- To support this part of the evaluation, the Colorado Content Collaboratives, a group of P-12 educators from around the state, are identifying and creating a **resource bank of high-quality assessments** for all grades and all 10 content areas and, while not required, provide an optional resource for measuring student growth.

- Ultimately, teachers are responsible for student learning and growth and every educator in Colorado will be held to this same standard. Additionally, there will be programs in place to ensure teacher evaluations are tied to the students they taught in their classrooms.
- Your job is very important. Student outcomes account for half of your evaluation, the other half is based on a body of evidence relating to how you teach and operate in the school.
- The evaluation system has been and will continue to be informed and improved based on educator experience and feedback.

**Q: How can I possibly manage yearly evaluations for ALL the teachers in my building? There is not enough time in the day to do everything that is required of me as principal now.**

- It is true that principals have a lot of responsibilities. One of the most important is supporting student learning and teachers. Investing time in classrooms and providing ongoing feedback to teachers will pay off with increased performance for students.
- The new evaluation system will require a team approach; **teachers will play a central role** in goal setting, reflection, and gathering artifacts.
- Principal evaluator “designees” (such as instructional coaches or peer evaluators) can also be used (if principals want) to help manage the workload and give more engagement and responsibility to others in the building that have deep instructional knowledge.
- **Students are most successful in high-functioning schools led by an excellent administrator who devotes time to developing an excellent teaching staff.**
- **Your teachers deserve and need continuous feedback on how their classroom instruction impacts student learning – so do students!**
- The new evaluations will require that we rethink the principal role and develop strategies to build capacity in other school staff so that principals have more time in classrooms.

**Q: This is just another ‘initiative’ that is going to take away from my time in the classroom... I can’t get everything done now, how can I do more?**

- The new evaluation system does not require teachers to do more (unless you haven’t ever been setting goals and reflecting on your practice, which we think is critical). You will have the opportunity to reflect on your practice and will receive targeted, specific feedback to help you refine your instructional practice resulting in an immediate impact on student learning. If anything, your time in the classroom will become even more effective and your results with students will continue to improve as a result of the new process.
- Colorado’s commitment to continually improving student growth requires that we regularly revisit the learning we seek for children AND support the growth of educators who dedicate themselves to student success.
- The new Colorado Academic Standards provide students, parents and teachers with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn at every grade level. The Teacher Quality Standards are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards; student outcomes improve when students, parents and teachers are on the same page and working towards shared goals.
- There are many things that teachers and principals are required to do. With the Teacher and Principal Quality Standards being aligned, the possibilities for refining how your work is done and supported are endless. Also, the new Colorado Academic Standards are fewer in number to allow for deeper focus and better preparation for college and career.

**Q: S.B. 10-191 is really just a way to take away tenure, right?**

- Senate Bill 10-191 is intended to help schools and districts **to invest in teachers** that are engaged in the school vision and **getting results with students**.
- No, S.B. 10-191 and the new evaluation requirements aim to make non-probationary status, or tenure, a **meaningful step** in an educator's career tied to results with students rather than time in the classroom. **Every child in every community deserves a teacher who is successfully able to impact student learning.**
- S.B. 10-191 also aims **to improve student achievement and support the professional growth of the educators who dedicate themselves to student success.**

**Q: You say this new evaluation process is about professional growth, but how?**

- Historically, educator evaluations systems have not provided **ongoing, meaningful feedback** and an opportunity for personal reflection as to how a teacher's instructional practice is impacting student learning in their classroom. Additionally, professional development has been more of a 'one-size fits all' approach rather than giving teachers the opportunity to select professional development that is geared towards their **identified growth goals**.
- We are moving **from a binary evaluation system** of "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" **to a system that has multiple performance ratings and is based on a continuum of professional growth**. The new system elevates you as a professional by **showcasing growth and excellence**.
- The new system focuses on **more frequent and specific feedback** as well as professional development that is targeted towards **your individualized areas for professional growth**.
- **Teaching is incredibly complex** and we know that **all teachers deserve ongoing feedback and the opportunity to continue to refine their practice based on the changing needs of their students**.

**Q: You know I'm a great teacher – you tell me all the time and you see how my students excel. Can you just evaluate me the old way?**

- You are a great teacher and the new system will honor that. The system acknowledges **that all teachers, whether new to the classroom or experienced veteran teachers, can continue to grow professionally and increase results with their students**.
- The new system is based on a **continuum of growth** and is intended to move average teachers to good, good teachers to great and great teachers to exceptional teachers.
- This is about more than the evaluation instrument; it's about access and opportunity. Many traditional instruments make it difficult for supervisors to identify specific areas of focus. Many teachers report that they only see their evaluator once or twice every three years don't get the feedback they need to continue being great or improve in specific areas. The new system requires evaluators to break down evaluation into smaller elements in order to recognize you for what your strengths are and give you feedback and support to improve in any areas identified.
- The new evaluations will be required for every teacher in Colorado to ensure that **every child in every community has the opportunity to have a great teacher**.

**Q: Will the new evaluation be modified for me – I'm a gym teacher [I have high-needs kids; I have low-income kids, etc.]? (My classroom/students are different)**

- Every teacher and school operates within unique contexts; however, in Colorado there is a unified goal to prepare ALL students to be college and career ready regardless of their demographic characteristics.
- Evaluation is intended to be applied to you in a way that is appropriate for your specific content.
- The new evaluation system for teachers is based on six Quality Standards. Five of the quality standards measure elements of a teacher's professional practices which encompass what it means to be a great teacher no matter what type of classroom. The other quality standard measures student growth. To support this part of the evaluation, the Colorado Content Collaboratives, a group of P-12 educators from around the state, are identifying and creating a resource bank of high-quality assessments for all grades in 10 content areas (including gym, art, etc.) and, while not required, these assessments will provide an optional resource for measuring student growth. The assessments will measure your ability to enhance student growth in your content area standards as you serve all students with their unique needs.
- The evaluation system is fair to all educators by setting a statewide standard and using multiple measures of data in the annual evaluation process.
- **The evaluation system has been and will continue to be informed and improved based on educator experience and feedback.**

**Q: I agree that teacher evaluations haven't been the best, but I'm concerned about the new process and system. Will it be fair?**

- **Colorado is committed to designing and maintaining an evaluation system that is fair to all educators.**
- Decisions about effective practices will be based on multiple types of data.
- **The State Model Evaluation System was developed with considerable educator involvement and input and as the evaluation system is being piloted, educators continue to provide feedback to inform improvements.**
- In addition, the group that is creating the CDE Resource Bank (optional assessments to measure the 50 percent student growth portion of the evaluation) is made up of P-12 educators from around the state.
- We also recognize that educator evaluations must take place within a larger system (i.e. your district policies and practices) that is aligned and supportive.

**Q: There seems to be so many questions that we don't have the answer to yet – what aren't they/you telling us?**

- The implementation of the new evaluation system is a work in progress. **The system was piloted in the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school year and continues to be piloted so educator experience and feedback can inform improvements. The system will continue to evolve and improve based on experience, data and feedback.**
- You're right, this is a complex process it takes time to develop all the elements of the new evaluation system. We don't have all the answers, but we are sharing information as it becomes available.
- CDE is making every effort to develop a fair and reliable evaluation system. The state is working collaboratively with organizations such as the Colorado Education Association (CEA), the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE), the State Council for Educator Effectiveness, and the State Board of Education to develop the rules and processes aligned to S.B. 10-191. The process takes time and we are sharing all information as it is available.

**Q: So, will this new evaluation system just turn my success as a teacher into some sort of mathematical formula?**

- Absolutely not. **One of the guiding principles of the new evaluation system states that data should inform decisions, but human judgment will always be an essential part of the evaluations. The professional practices rubric is influenced by judgment and discussions with your evaluator and the student growth portion is influenced by the choices your district makes on the use of multiple measures of student outcomes.**
- **Teaching is incredibly complex and the new system honors educators' successes by including multiple measures of data** to further validate the professional practices (observation) portion of the evaluations.

## Examples of How to Turn Statements into Communications Messages

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**Statement #1:** Colorado is reforming teacher and principal evaluation systems to make sure we have more effective teachers and principals.

**Better Message:** Colorado is improving how teacher and principal evaluation systems are constructed and implemented to provide our educators with **more meaningful feedback and ongoing, targeted support** so they can **continue to grow professionally** and achieve maximum **results with students**.

**Statement #2:** The Colorado Model Evaluation System is being developed by CDE because there is an urgent need to increase teacher effectiveness and improve student achievement.

**Better Message:** The Colorado Model Evaluation System is being developed by CDE and Colorado educators with a commitment to providing **more meaningful feedback and targeted support** so educators can **grow professionally** and continue to increase **results with students**.

**Statement #3:** We're going to have to change our evaluation system to comply with state law.

**Better Message:** The expectations for how evaluations are conducted are changing so teachers can have access to **timely, meaningful feedback and targeted support**. It is important that educators are **supported** on an on-going basis in their **professional growth** so they can continually increase **results with students**.

**Statement #4:** (Supt. to principal) You need to start telling the teachers in your school to get ready for the new evaluation system that is coming.

**Better Message:** It's important to build awareness of the new requirements and **core values of implementation** for the new evaluation system with teachers in your building. Remember that the new system will help **improve the evaluation process** for you and your staff by **supporting teachers as they support all students' learning**.