



*News from Commissioner Mitchell Chester & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - March 10, 2017

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents:

On February 28, 2017, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) voted to amend the regulations on Evaluation of Educators (603 CMR 35.00). Under the [amended regulations](#), evaluators do not have to report a separate rating about an educator's impact on student learning. Instead, student learning will be embedded as an indicator within one of the evaluation framework's four standards (Standard II: Teaching All Students for teachers and Standard I: Instructional Leadership for administrators).

In light of the amendments, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) will not require districts to report Student Impact Ratings for the 2016-17 school year. By the start of the 2017-18 school year, districts should incorporate the regulatory changes into their local evaluation systems.

This memo provides background and explains next steps for districts.

Background

For the past five years, districts have been implementing educator evaluation systems aligned to the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework. Rollout began with the summative performance rating, a rating of an educator's practice against the four standards described in the regulations. The Framework also included a student impact rating, a separate rating of an educator's impact on student learning.

Shortly after implementation began, administrators and educators alike began favorably describing the challenging but meaningful work of transforming local evaluation systems into cycles of continuous feedback and improvement associated with the summative performance rating. However, the student impact rating proved more difficult to establish. Through many conversations with a range of stakeholders, the Department heard concerns about requiring districts to report a separate rating of educator impact on student learning. At the same time, stakeholders have consistently maintained that evidence of student learning, including evidence from classroom assessments, common assessments, and statewide assessments, is an important component of educator evaluation.

Summary of Amendments

In response to these concerns, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved the [amendments to the educator evaluation regulations](#), eliminating the separate impact rating and embedding impact on student learning as an indicator within Standard II: Teaching All Students (for teachers) and Standard I: Instructional Leadership (for administrators). What do these amendments mean for local evaluation systems?

First, the categories of evidence used in the evaluation process have not changed. Educators and evaluators will continue to use multiple sources of evidence to paint a full picture of educator effectiveness.

Second, the process is more streamlined. Under the former model, looking at teacher practice and impact on student learning happened separately because of the two-rating structure. Now, conversations about practice and impact can happen at the same time throughout the five-step cycle, reinforcing the interconnectedness of teacher actions and outcomes for students.

Finally, the amended regulations retain a focus on holistic evaluation where professional judgment is applied to a wide array of evidence to provide meaningful feedback and determine performance ratings. There are no formulas in the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework and it does not reduce the complexity of teaching to a numeric score.

Student Learning Indicator

The new student learning indicator is part of Standard II: Teaching All Students for teachers and Standard I: Instructional Leadership for administrators. While the other indicators in the regulations are included in the model rubrics, the Department does not plan to modify the model rubrics to include the student learning indicator. The model rubrics describe educator practice, providing clear criteria across the four performance levels for elements of practice that are largely input-driven (educator actions and behaviors), while the student learning indicator is about the results of educators' actions. The Department will provide guidance for evaluators on using the new student learning indicator to provide meaningful feedback to educators about their impact on student learning and how multiple measures of student learning inform a teacher's rating on Standard II and an administrator's rating on Standard I.

Evaluators will review results from multiple measures of student learning against pre-determined anticipated student learning gains when considering an educator's impact on student learning. The amendments call for educators and evaluators to discuss anticipated student learning gains during development of the Educator Plan. They will identify the measures, using statewide and common measures where available, that will be used as part of the evaluation process, include them in the Educator Plan, and work together to identify anticipated student learning gains for each measure. This approach puts critical conversations about student learning in the hands of educators and evaluators.

Anticipated Student Learning Gains

The new term, “anticipated student learning gains,” signals the importance for the educator and evaluator of setting up-front expectations for student performance against which actual results will be measured. A well-informed conclusion about an educator’s impact on student learning must be based on multiple high-quality assessments. For many educators, this includes statewide assessments, common assessments used by educators across the district, and classroom assessments most often unique to an individual educator. Each type of assessment provides different valuable information educators can use to improve practice and evaluators can use to provide educators with meaningful feedback about their impact.

The process for setting anticipated student learning gains for each type of assessment is unique. For statewide assessments, the Department will set anticipated learning gains. For district common assessments, districts should work with educators to define anticipated student learning gains. Districts that have followed the Department’s guidance for [setting parameters for assessments](#) should be able to capitalize on this work. Educators and evaluators should work together to identify anticipated student learning gains for classroom assessments that will be part of the evaluation process. Not all classroom assessments need to be included in this process. Just as with other types of evidence used in evaluation, educators and evaluators should focus on a reasonable sample.

While it may be challenging to determine anticipated learning gains at the beginning of the evaluation cycle, doing so sets up a richer conversation when educators and evaluators reflect on student results during the later stages of the cycle. Consistent with the overall goal of the evaluation framework, educators should receive regular feedback and not be surprised when they receive their summative evaluation. The evaluation framework is holistic, and the evaluator’s professional judgment remains the final determinant of educator ratings. If students fall short of anticipated student learning gains on a particular measure, the first question educators and evaluators should ask is whether this is an isolated occurrence or part of a pattern. Does the other evidence collected as part of the student learning indicator support or refute the notion that students are not meeting the mark? As with all evidence used in evaluation, a single measure of student learning should not be the basis of a conclusion about the educator’s impact.

Implementation Timeline

The Department encourages district leaders to incorporate these changes into local educator evaluation systems with a minimum of disruption to the evaluation process. As a result of the amendments, districts are not required to report to the Department Student Impact Ratings for the 2016-17 school year. By the start of the 2017-18 school year, districts should incorporate the regulatory changes into their educator evaluation systems. For the many districts that already use state, common, and classroom assessment data within their evaluation systems, the new regulations will not require substantial changes.

I appreciate the thoughtful work that administrators and teachers have put into implementing the educator evaluation system over the past five years. I am confident that these regulatory changes will support meaningful educator evaluation and maintain student learning as a central consideration. If you have questions on educator evaluation, please contact Craig Waterman at 781-338-3244 or by email at cwaterman@doe.mass.edu.

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester
Commissioner