Implementing Student Learning-Based Educator Evaluation Systems in Colorado

Opportunities, Challenges and Lessons from Phase I of a Pilot Project in Adams 12

Web-based resources on educator effectiveness and evaluation in Colorado are available from the Colorado Department of Education at: www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/EvaluationAndSupport.asp
INTRODUCTION

Colorado’s new educator evaluation system provides remarkable opportunities and complex challenges for school districts. This report reflects the initial considerations facing a metro Denver-area school district as district leaders embarked on the process of designing and piloting a new system. It is our hope that the report will benefit other districts undertaking the process of transitioning into an educator evaluation system that focuses on student learning and educator effectiveness.

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Fast forward one year: Colorado did not receive the Race to the Top funds anticipated by SB 191, but the hard-fought language of SB 191 requiring full statewide implementation of the new evaluation systems by the 2013-14 school year remained in place. At that point, the state and its school districts had been thoroughly hammered by the recent recession. The Colorado Department of Education, famously referred to as one of the most underfunded state education departments in the country, is charged with following a turbo-charged schedule to develop the details of a model education system. As contemplated by SB 191, CDE invited districts to apply to help pilot the new model system, anticipating that six to eight districts would be selected. Nervous about being left out, more than 40 districts applied for spots in the pilot, and 15 were selected.

One of the districts not selected for the pilot is the optimistically named Adams 12 Five-Star Schools. Adams 12 serves more than 40,000 students in five northern suburbs of Denver. The leader of the District Twelve Educators’ Association played a key role in the state commission charged with making recommendations about the implementation of SB-191, and as a result leader in the district and its teachers’ association are not naïve about the challenges of putting this reform in place.

In the fall of 2011, leadership in Adams 12 decided to be proactive and create the district’s own “rogue” pilot. To facilitate the process, district leadership asked for assistance from the Public Education & Business Coalition (PEBC), a nonprofit organization that has worked in public education in Colorado since 1984. PEBC and Adams 12 have worked closely on other initiatives, including professional development in the district and partnering on the Boettcher Teachers Program, an alternative teacher preparation program intended to train and place teachers in urban settings. For the purposes of the Adams 12 pilot project, PEBC provided two facilitators with extensive backgrounds in education and experience with helping to guide district and school change initiatives.

This is the first in a series of documents that will chronicle the PEBC/Adams 12 pilot project in the hopes that other districts implementing new evaluation systems might benefit from the lessons learned in Adams 12.
The Teaching/Learning Cycle provides a continuous improvement framework for teachers and principals to use in improving instruction and student learning. The TLC is focused on a unit of study and has five phases, all of which occur through collaboration among teams of educators. In the first phase, Study, the team reviews learning goals for the unit using resources such as the Colorado content standards and prior units of study. In the Select phase, the team uses its conclusions from the Study phase to select appropriate mastery criteria and assessments. In the Plan phase, the team translates the prior work into daily learning objectives and instructional strategies. During the Implementation phase, the team implements its previous decisions to structure the classroom environment. In the Analyze phase, the team reflects on evidence of instructional effectiveness and prior units of study. In the Select phase, the team reviews learning goals for the unit using resources such as the Colorado content standards and prior units of study. In the Plan phase, the team translates the prior work into daily learning objectives and instructional strategies. During the Implementation phase, the team implements its previous decisions to structure the classroom environment. In the Analyze phase, the team reflects on evidence of instructional effectiveness and prior units of study.

Simultaneously, the district has adopted yet more cuts to its general fund budget for the 2012-13 school year. The recent recession significantly impacted Adams 12 and other Colorado school districts. In the past five years, the district has had to cut a total of over $70 million, representing an actual decrease of more than $1,000 in per pupil expenditures between 2006 and 2011. The total general fund budget for 2012-13 is $279 million, so the cuts represent a substantial portion of the total budget. These cuts have been challenging for both staff and administrators in the district, although efforts have been made to keep the cuts from affecting classrooms, and limit the district’s ability to invest significant amounts in its reforms. Nonetheless, the district is determined to continue improving instruction and student learning.

In addition to implementation of the Teaching/Learning Cycle, other active reforms in Adams 12 at the time of the new evaluation pilot period included initiatives on the new Colorado content standards, a new system of interim assessments, standards-based grading, Response to Intervention, implementation of new International Baccalaureate programs, a redesign of the high school curriculum, and elementary school content specialization pilots, among others.

The current reform initiatives underway in Adams 12 are taking place within a larger context of significant reforms mandated by federal and state law. This section will discuss the reform environment leading up to the passage of SB 191 and the decision of District 12 leadership to undertake a “rogue” pilot of the evaluation system.

From Highly Qualified Teachers to Highly Effective Educators

Researchers and policy makers have known for years that teacher quality is the most important school-based factor affecting student academic outcomes, and policy makers at the state and federal levels repeatedly tried to improve teacher quality through policies on issues such as qualifications for entry into teaching, professional development, and the content of teacher training programs. One of the most highly visible parts of the No Child Left Behind law, passed in 2001, is its requirement that all teachers of core academic subjects be “highly qualified.” As Colorado defined that term, a teacher is considered highly qualified under NCLB if he or she has a baccalaureate degree, has completed an approved preparation program, and has passed the content test or has a degree that is relevant to the content area in which he or she is assigned to teach. In other words, NCLB attempts to improve teacher quality through mandating teacher inputs, or what teachers bring to the profession.

NCLB also requires states to have standards-based accountability system in which students are assessed on their knowledge of content standards appropriate to their grade levels, and schools and districts are held accountable for student assessment outcomes. Slowly, schools and districts are realizing the need to align other practices and policies with their standards-based accountability systems, so that incentives and resources are fully harnessed to student outcomes. It was perhaps inevitable that discussions about teacher quality would turn from the importance of teacher inputs to the importance of teacher contributions to student outcomes – in other words, measuring quality not by what teachers bring to the profession before they begin to teach, but instead by what teachers demonstrate as their role in improving student outcomes during their teaching career. The policy conversation changed from questions of teacher quality to questions of teacher effectiveness.

The Effect of the Race to the Top Competition

In July 2009, Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced the Obama administration’s Race to the Top initiative. This competitive grant fund dangled huge amounts of funding ($4.35 billion in total) for states that were willing to comply with the administration’s preferred approaches on education reform in the areas of standards and assessments, data and information systems, teacher and leader quality, and turning around low-performing schools. The request for proposal made it very clear that successful state applicants would reform their educator evaluation systems so that teachers would be evaluated primarily on the learning outcomes of the students in their classes. In this way, the federal government could incentivize states to change policies in ways that were politically impossible to do via federal mandate.

In announcing the teacher and leader quality component to the Race to the Top challenge, Secretary Duncan referenced a 2009 report by The New Teacher Project titled The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Teacher Effectiveness. The New Teacher Project described current teacher evaluation systems as treating teachers as “widgets,” effectively interchangeable cogs in the system. Evaluations were treated as compliance checklists rather than as opportunities to distinguish between effective and ineffective teachers, and in the large urban districts studied in the report (includ-
ing Denver), virtually all teachers received the same evaluation rating.

Colorado, like many states that had increased expectations of education paired with stagnant education funding, found the Race to the Top competition irresistible. Building on reform discussions already started in Governor Ritter’s P-20 Council and in other reform venues, a broad coalition of education stakeholders came together to craft the state’s Race to the Top application. The Colorado Education Association, already a participant in early talks about reforming the evaluation system, agreed to support a new teacher evaluation system that would focus on student products, provided that a commission appointed by the Governor’s office would craft the details of the system and ensure a smooth transition. Governor Ritter issued an executive order establishing the Governor’s Council for Educator Effectiveness on January 13, 2010, shortly before the state submitted the Race to the Top application.

The Race to the Top funding decisions were announced during Colorado’s 2010 legislative session. Only two states received initial Race to the Top funding, and Colorado was not one of them. Secretary Duncan announced that states could compete for a second round of funding, using the same criteria. Eager to strengthen Colorado’s application, and for a second round of funding, using the same criteria Duncan announced that states could compete for a second round of funding, using the same criteria. Writing, and the education, arguing that the accurate and consistent measurement of teacher effectiveness involved technology still in its infancy and so should not be rushed. Other education stakeholders focused on amending SB-191 from a practical standpoint.

SB-191 ultimately passed with its dramatic changes to evaluation systems and to tenure decisions intact, but with a slightly more forgiving timeline. The Commission was given until March 1, 2011 to make its recommendations, and the State Board of Education had until September 1, 2011 to promulgate rules. A one-year pilot program was built in to allow the state and districts to test various approaches and tools used in the new system. Ultimately, however, SB-191 still contained a daunting deadline — the new evaluation system had to be rolled out statewide in the 2013-14 school year, and finalized in the 2014-15 school year. The provisions requiring tenure and placement decisions to be tied to teacher effectiveness remained in the bill.

Colorado submitted its application in the second round of Race to the Top, outing its tough new law. The Colorado Education Association, praised by the SB-191 battle, did not support the application. In August 2010, ten more states won Race to the Top funding. Much to the dismay of education pundits everywhere, Colorado was not one of them. Now the state had a mandate requiring the quick design and implementation of a complex new evaluation system for teachers and principals, and no additional funds to make it happen.

The Report and Recommendations of the Governor’s Council for Educator Effectiveness

As of May 2010, the Governor’s Council for Educator Effectiveness was charged with the difficult task of filling in some of the more pesky details of SB-191, specifically with developing standards for teacher and principal performance, defining performance categories, and making recommendations for the implementation of the law at the state and local levels. Members of the Council included teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, university preparation program representatives, representatives from the business community, and parent and student representatives. The Council met 24 times between May 2010 and April 2011. Due to the breadth of the undertaking and the tight timeline, the Council convened technical advisory groups that met separately to study the following issues and make recommendations to the full Council:

- Teacher standards
- Principal standards
- Scoring framework and performance categories
- Cost study
- District guidelines for develop and implementation of new evaluation systems
- CDE guidelines for monitoring and implementation of SB 191
- Related state and local policy implications and changes
- Teacher appeals process
- Measuring student growth

The Council submitted its Report and Recommendations to the State Board of Education in April 2011. The Report begins by stating five Key Priorities that the Council believes must inform the development and implementation of the new evaluation system if it is to be successful. These Priorities and the accompanying explanations are included here because they represent the values used by Adams 12 in developing its own pilot evaluation system:

HUMAN JUDGMENT

Data Should Inform Decisions, but Human Judgment Will Always Be an Essential Component of Evaluation.

Although this report and its many technical recommendations may give the impression that evaluation is a scientific process that relies solely on objective data, Council members are acutely aware that evaluations ultimately rely on the perception and judgment of individuals. Like other decisions that rely on human judgment, evaluations are subject to error and even bias.

Many of the recommendations in this report are directed towards processes and techniques used to improve individual judgment and minimize error and bias. For example, it is absolutely essential that evaluators have adequate training to exercise judgment in a way that is fair. It is also essential that evaluators understand the various ways to measure performance and the benefits and limitations of these methods, so they can make appropriate decisions about their implications. The most technically impressive evaluation system will fail if the human aspects of the system are neglected.

The implementation of the recommended evaluation system is designed to provide as much learning as possible about ways to inform human decision-making in order to make fair, reliable, and credible judgments. In addition, the state and its districts will need to actively use data to identify when evaluations are inappropriate, inaccurate, or inconsistent.
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
The Implementation and Assessment of the Evaluation System Must Embody Continuous Improvement.

The implementation of this work MUST have a true continuous learning approach. The new teacher and principal evaluation systems will be implemented over a four-year period, with development and beta-testing activities beginning in 2011 and full statewide implementation in place by May 2015. The design of this pilot and rollout period is intended to capture what works and what doesn’t (and why), and provide multiple opportunities to learn from failure and spread success. In that spirit, the state will need to vigilantly monitor and act on the following:

- What school districts are doing that is or is not working;
- What other states are doing that is or is not working;
- Changes in assessment practice and tools expected over the next few years, especially with respect to student growth; and
- Emerging research and best practice findings with respect to educator evaluations.

As more and more states and districts across the country experiment with improved performance evaluation systems for their educators, more evidence will arise that should continue to inform Colorado’s system. The present report makes recommendations for what Council members believe to be the best possible evaluation system using current knowledge, but we must commit to learning from knowledge yet to be discovered.

FEEDBACK
The Purpose of the System Is to Provide Meaningful and Credible Feedback That Improves Performance.

The goal of Colorado’s performance evaluation system is to provide honest and fair assessments about educator performance and meaningful opportunities to improve. If evaluators simply label and sort without providing actionable information and opportunities for improvement, the system will have failed. Students will be limited in their ability to perform at their best, and educators will not receive the support they need.

As Council members have often stated, evaluation is a process, not an event. It is the Council’s hope that the collection of information about educator effectiveness and feedback to educators will take place on an ongoing basis, and not be restricted to the dates and processes set for formal evaluations. Teachers and principals should be talking about instructional improvement constantly, and the performance evaluation provides just another forum for that continuing conversation.

COLLABORATION
The Development and Implementation of Educator Evaluation Systems Must Continue to Involve All Stakeholders in a Collaborative Process.

The Council’s work was conducted in an environment that emphasized the value of the engagement and input of all stakeholders affected by evaluation. Consensus was achieved not through compromise, but by listening intently to each other’s key needs and seeking to address them in meaningful ways. This collaborative approach must continue as systems are further developed and implemented at the state and district level, and as they are incorporated into the culture of each school.

Change is always difficult, and communication is vital. Every stakeholder, from students and families, teachers, related service providers, administrators, school board members, and others, needs to be operating with the same information and with a clear picture of what the new system is, how it will be implemented, and how it will impact them. The new evaluation system and its goals of continuous learning also provide new opportunities to engage the parents and guardians of students and the students themselves.

ALIGNED SYSTEM
Educator Evaluations Must Take Place within a Larger System That Is Aligned and Supportive.

The focus of this report is on new educator evaluation systems, anticipating that improving the ways in which educators are evaluated will lead to improvement in their effectiveness and, in turn, to improved outcomes for students. For this result to occur, evaluators must be part of a larger system that is also effective. If the larger system is not aligned to be supportive, success will continue to be limited to the work of outstanding individuals who succeed despite the systems in which they work. If education is to dramatically improve in this state, all components of our education system must serve to increase the numbers of educators who are able to be successful, rather than providing excuses for failure. This report represents an important step, but it must be viewed as one step in a long process. The state and its districts must be willing to commit to the process of ensuring that the education system operates in a way that is coherent and supportive of both educator effectiveness and student outcomes.

The report of the State Council for Educator Effectiveness made sixty separate recommendations to the state. These included recommendations on the language of teacher and principal effectiveness standards to be used in evaluation systems across the state; the measures to be used in evaluating performance and the involvement of teachers and principals in selecting those measures; the use of student growth objectives to assess student learning; placing teachers and principals in performance categories based on the results of evaluations; the role of the Colorado Department of Education in helping to implement the evaluation system; evaluating the outcomes of the evaluation system; and state policy changes needed to
support the goals of the evaluation system. Certain aspects of the evaluation system must be uniform across the state, as mandated by SB 191, such as the use of common standards and the emphasis on student learning as the most important component of evaluation. Other decisions, such as how to weight various standards depending on district priorities, are left to districts.

The Council’s recommendations formed the basis for rules promulgated by the State Board of Education.

The State’s Work in Developing Resources and Working with Pilot Districts

As the Council for Educator Effectiveness had discovered, the design and implementation of an educator evaluation system focusing on student learning was very complicated. The system needed to be accurate and fair in evaluating teachers and principals, but to meet the goals of focusing evaluations on student learning, the system also needed to use information about student outcomes that was not always objective or statistically perfect. The system needed to be implemented in all districts across Colorado, a state with large districts that have sophisticated internal data analysis and professional development capacities and smaller, isolated districts with limited capacity and resources. SB 191 had anticipated that many districts would need to rely on evaluation tools and rubrics developed by the state department of education. The law directed CDE to develop a bank of evaluation resources that could be accessed by districts and to direct a pilot project intended to test out the evaluation framework developed by the Council on Educator Effectiveness prior to mandating implementation statewide.

Many, if not all, of Colorado’s districts are likely to rely heavily on the state-developed system, so its quality is immensely important. Due to budget constraints, however, CDE began this work with only three dedicated staffers, although three more have been hired since. Just as the districts will rely on CDE, CDE will rely on the resources and information from districts in developing and rolling out the evaluation system.

In this context of heightened education expectations, multiple complex reform initiatives, and limited financial resources at both the state and local levels, the leaders of District 12 hope to build on the district’s history of collaboration and use their own “rogue” pilot to help the state’s efforts to put the best possible system together, as well as prepare their own staff for the changes ahead.

SETTING UP STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES FOR MAKING DECISIONS

When the leaders of the Adams 12 school district and the District Twelve Educators’ Association decided to embark on a “rogue pilot” of a sweeping new educator evaluation system mandated by state law, they knew that this was only the first of many tough decisions. Designing the new evaluation system would involve wrestling with complex technical questions, such as how to fairly calculate a particular teacher’s contribution to student academic growth. Other decisions would have political implications, such as the extent to which parents should be involved, and how to best balance the interests of the district with its employees. Although the district and association leaders knew each other well and enjoyed good relationships, they also knew that they would benefit from professional assistance and a defined structure for decision-making given the tasks ahead.

This section of the report addresses the “how” of making decisions about complex change initiatives such as a new evaluation system. In the case of Adams 12, district and association leaders found it necessary to address the following questions before jumping into the challenge of the new evaluation system:

Who is at the table?
- Who should be part of the leadership group making decisions?
- Should the leadership group solicit input from others?

What is our purpose?
- What decisions need to be made?
- What is our shared purpose and intent?
- How do we frame our goals?

How will decisions be made?
- Do we need a facilitator? What is the facilitator’s role?
- Are decisions reached by consensus, majority vote, or some other method?
- How do we communicate with each other, such as when a member of the leadership group is absent from a meeting?
- What is our timeline for making decisions?
- What happens if we get stuck?

Planning the work
- What can we learn from change research that can help us plan the work?
- What needs to happen to get the work done?
- What resources will we use to get the work done?
- Who is responsible?
- What are the timelines?
- How do we incorporate feedback loops?
- What is our communication plan?
A decision-making group can be as small as one or two people in the central office, or as large as a community stakeholder group that brings in as many diverse voices as possible. Benefits of a smaller group include the ability to act more quickly and efficiently, while benefits of a larger group include the diversity of viewpoints and a sense of inclusion. In deciding on the size and composition of the decision-making group, leaders should keep the following questions in mind:

- Who possesses the technical knowledge required to make good decisions?
- Who has the authority to make decisions?
- Who needs to have a strong sense of commitment to the decisions made?
- How much time is available to make the decisions?
- Are there any legal requirements that mandate the inclusion of certain people or groups?
- What values do we want to express in selecting the decision-making group?
- What other characteristics unique to our district should be considered?

For example, a technical decision that must be made quickly might be best served by a smaller group of decision makers who are expert in the topic. A decision with lasting organizational implications might require a longer process with greater stakeholder involvement to ensure inclusion and buy-in. Districts with teachers’ associations will typically need to include representatives from the association in making decisions that substantially affect teachers’ working conditions.

In Adams 12, the district and the educators’ association negotiated a memorandum of understanding concerning the pilot. The MOU called for a Steering Committee that would be responsible for making the ultimate recommendations about the pilot to the superintendent and the association. The Steering Committee was kept intentionally small, and included the district head of human resources, the head of assessment and accountability, the chief academic officer, the district’s director of school leadership, and the president of the DTEA. With the selection of this group, the district was able to send a message that district leadership valued the project highly. A very different message would have been sent by assigning staff with less authority.

Another important message was sent by the inclusion from the outset of the educators’ association. DTEA played an important role in negotiating the MOU, is playing an important role in the pilot process, and will ultimately negotiate with the district the permanent terms of the new educator evaluation system. In Adams 12, the district and its teachers’ association enjoy a solid working relationship, and use the bargaining process to collaborate proactively. The president of the DTEA was viewed as an expert, having been part of the Educator Effectiveness Council that had created the final recommendations for implementation of SB 191. As a result, in this district it was obvious to all involved that leaders of the District Twelve Educators’ Association would play prominent roles in decision-making from start to finish. This is not the case in every school district, and sometimes districts and teachers find themselves in relationships that are more adversarial than collaborative.

The MOU also provided for an Advisory Committee that could provide regular input to the Steering Committee from a variety of perspectives. The advisory group included art, science, and special education teachers; principals from elementary, middle, and high schools; a DTEA coordinator; and a community member who was retired from the district.

In forming the Advisory Committee, leadership could have drawn from other advisory committees existing in the district. For example, SB 191 requires that each district have a certified personnel performance evaluation council (informally called “1338 Councils”). The 1338 Council is responsible for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and quality improvement of the district’s evaluation systems. By law, the 1338 Council must include a diverse group of stakeholders, including at least one teacher, one principal, one administrator, one parent, and one non-parent community member, plus other members who are appointed by the board of education. At the time of this writing, the Advisory Committee included all required members for a 1338 Council, having just added a parent representative. Other committees that might also be considered include district accountability committees or school accountability committees.

In thinking about soliciting input from other stakeholder groups, it is often very tempting to stick with those who are a “known quantity” and/or those who already have expertise in the topic area. This can make the process more comfortable, and can also speed up decision making because the group members possess similar amounts of information. However, this can also be limiting in that it cuts out perspectives that are truly from outside the system, and can also raise suspicions that a supposedly diverse group is actually engineered to reach predetermined results. District leaders should make conscious decisions about the appropriate people to include, and should be aware of their own tendencies to lean towards the familiar.
WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE?

It seems obvious that the first task of a group must be to articulate the group’s purpose. Sometimes this seems so obvious that group members assume that everyone has a common understanding of the group’s purpose, and there is no conversation that makes these assumptions explicit. This can lead to serious problems down the road if those assumptions were incorrect.

In Adams 12, the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee first identified the purpose of the new evaluation system: “to ensure that every student has effective teachers, leaders, and educators in all learning environments.” The roles of the two groups flowed from the overarching goal of the evaluation system. Districts that use multiple groups for decision-making and feedback should be careful to clarify the respective roles of each group, to avoid duplication of effort and misunderstandings.

After conversations, the role of the Advisory Committee was defined as advising the Steering Committee about important considerations from multiple perspectives to maintain a seamless transition and implementation of SB 191. The role of the Steering Committee was to orchestrate the implementation of SB 191 using the multiple perspectives provided by the Advisory Committee, and ultimately to make recommendations to the superintendent to ensure that the purpose of SB 191 is fulfilled in the district.

In addition to setting the overall purpose of the new evaluation system, the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee also identified the important questions to be answered by the pilots:

- What worked or didn’t work in supporting principals/teachers during the piloting period?
- How were professional learning needs identified?
- How were the rubrics understood and utilized to support growth?
- What frustrated those in the pilot, and what made those in the pilot feel more efficacious or successful?
- In what ways will the pilot information be communicated to others?

HOW WILL WE WORK TOGETHER?

A skilled facilitator is able to balance the need to gently push the group to making decisions with the need to allow time and space for group members to process their own thinking and emotions. This balance requires the facilitator to be constantly reading and interpreting the group dynamics as they occur, and deciding which tools and skills are most helpful in the moment. In many cases, the facilitator will be active behind the scenes as well as in group meetings, gathering information about individual interests and goals that can help them interpret and guide the actions of the group. Ultimately, the goal of the facilitator is both to skillfully facilitate the current conversation and simultaneously build the internal capacity of the group to work productively together in the future.

Facilitators can be most helpful when the issues are complicated and the stakes are high. In the case of Adams 12, the design and implementation of the pilot involved not only complex technical decisions about the details of how Adams 12 educators would be evaluated, but also a range of emotions among the members of the decision-making groups. The tight timeline and high stakes for this and other reform initiatives in the district resulted in a great deal of stress and pressure for the people trying to do the work. It can become very easy for group members to get lost in the emotions associated with change, and to cope with the individual sense of anxiety diminishes. The work itself is still difficult and challenging, but it is being taken on together in an environment of support. The facilitator, as the objective outsider, can take on this aspect of leadership in a way that can be difficult for someone “inside” the system.

In the case of Adams 12, the group was able to build on a foundation of past collaboration and trust. It is doubtful that the district would have chosen to go through the incredible amount of work required by a rogue pilot if there was not already an underlying sense that working together was possible. All members of the group were committed to the work, and all understood that the other members of the group shared this commitment. As a result, the PEBC facilitators did not need to implement specific tools and strategies for building trust in a group without a history of collaboration. Instead, for Adams 12, the facilitators recognized that the biggest challenge of the work would be the need to make progress on doing the work while staying focused on the overall goal of the work—building systems that are focused on improving student learning.

One of the strategies used by the PEBC facilitators to ensure that the group stayed cognizant of the purpose of the work was to alternate “big picture” conversations with conversations that focused on the details of planning and implementing the pilot. For example, at one meeting the group heard a presentation on overall district goals and key initiatives, and...
then broke into small groups to draw visual representations of how the new evaluation system fit with the district goals. Following that exercise, the group had a discussion of specific design decisions to be made concerning the teacher pilot. This juxtaposition allowed the conversation about pilot details to be placed within the larger framework of district goals.

In planning how to work together, the group also needs to define how decisions will be made. Decisions can be made by a single individual or a smaller subset of the group; by majority vote of the group; or by consensus among all members of the group. Each of these models has strengths and weaknesses. When an individual or a smaller subset of the group makes decisions, it is easier to place accountability, and can also lead to quicker decisions. However, this may not fit with an already established collaborative culture, and it can also harm confidence in the process in situations where there is low trust. Majority vote is an individual or smaller subset of the group makes decisions, but it can bring the group to a complete halt if one or more individuals are not in agreement. Often a group that chooses consensus as its decision-making process will also specify that consensus will include not only those who are advocates for a particular position but also those who might have chosen differently but “can live with” and agree not to sabotage the group decision.

In the case of Adams 12, the pre-existing culture of collaboration and the skills of the PEBC facilitators meant that group decisions were generally arrived at through consensus, after making sure that issues were thoroughly discussed. The facilitators recognized early on that there was a need to decide how to handle situations in which persons absent from a particular meeting later disagreed with a decision reached at the meeting; the group agreed in the interests of maintaining forward progress that those who were not present at a meeting could not challenge decisions made at the meeting.

A project management plan is a systematic way to capture the who, what, when, and how of the work. The tight timelines of SB 191 virtually demanded careful project management planning from the start: the Colorado Department of Education teacher evaluation pilots would be fully underway in the fall of 2012, so Adams 12 needed to align with this time line in order to meet the goal of providing feedback to CDE. In this case, Adams 12 prepared a preliminary project management plan that was shared with the Advisory Committee; however, that project management plan is now coming into conflict with some of the realities of the work, such as the end of the school year, the disappearance of key personnel over the summer, and some confusion around how best to provide professional development. Project plans should be thought of as living documents that are constantly referred to and revised; a project plan that is too vague will not be useful and will be forgotten, and a plan that is too directive will be avoided out of frustration when the inevitable detours occur.

In complex change initiatives such as this one, it may be helpful for leaders to think of the action plan as more of a “learning plan”– to achieve the goals of this work, what learning needs to occur, and what actions need to happen so that the learning does occur? Framing an action plan as a learning plan forces leaders to be thoughtful about what they and others need to know to move forward, and also reminds everyone involved that the purpose of the work is to learn and to act on the learning. Often reflection about lessons learned can be lost in the scramble that occurs just to get the tasks done and move on to beat the next deadline. In the piloting of a new evaluation system, learning must occur in order to design the pilot, to prepare participants for the work itself so that the pilot is implemented as designed, and to complete the loop by providing information back to those who will be designing and rolling out the evaluation system across the district and statewide.

In the case of the pilot plan in Adams 12, the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee might have benefited from a comprehensive learning plan that was structured using questions that would be answered by the pilot. This would have allowed the group to map backwards and identify the tasks, information, and resources needed to answer each question.

Finally, as discussed in the next section and reflected in the various change models in the Appendix, planning for communication is critically important in the successful implementation of change initiatives. The project management plan should expressly include the communication goals and strategies appropriate for each stage of implementation.
Planning: Key Considerations for District Leadership:

• What are the questions we need to have answered?
• Who needs to be at the table to have the right combination of authority, expertise, and stakeholder buy-in?
• How much time do we have? How much pressure is on us?
• Can this initiative build on other district and school initiatives?
• How can we make sure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined?
• How can we ensure that those responsible for making decisions and taking action have the time and resources necessary to do this?

Planning: Key Considerations for Facilitators:

• Does this group have a history of working together in the past? Is there trust among the members of the group?
• What are the political, fiscal, professional, and personal constraints on individuals in the group?
• How can the emotions of group members best be addressed and managed throughout the process?
• How can this process be used to model collaboration and decision-making skills so that the organization will be better prepared to address future issues?

Communicating with staff:

• Develop a communications strategy up-front – who needs to know, and when do they need to know?
• Balance the need for information with avoiding overwhelm
• Aim for consistency in describing the change itself as well as its fit with other district initiatives
• Commit to communication as continuous process – it is hard to overcommunicate!

Develop strategies for consistent communication among the leadership group:

• Create a group website where documents can be shared
• Create agendas and meeting minutes for each meeting that reflect decision items
• Assign communication “buddies”

ESTABLISHING STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATION

The importance of communication in preparing for and managing complex change initiatives cannot be overemphasized. Clear and effective communication is needed to plan for change, to explain the vision for change, to build the motivation to change, and to learning about and adapting to lessons learned during the change process.

Communicating in a school district the size of Adams 12 is often challenging under the best circumstances. There are always new reforms following on the heels of previous reforms that were never fully implemented, so that the risk of confusion among the reforms is high. Emergencies and crises, big and little, dot the typical day, and there is little time for teachers and principals to absorb and fully reflect on the constant stream of announcements, memos, emails, and phone calls. Information comes from many directions, even in a single school district, and is not always consistent. Not all educators are equally comfortable with new communication media, such as email and texting. And there are many times during the year that large segments of the employee population are simply not around, such as during summers and holiday breaks.

In Adams 12, the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee knew that communicating about the piloting period would be a challenge for all these reasons. The committees needed to consider how they would best communicate internally as well as externally so that the goals of the pilot had the best chance of being realized. Identifying the groups targeted for communication, as well as the specific messages and information needed by each group, would be an important part of the work.
COMMUNICATING INTERNALLY WITHIN THE COMMITTEES

The first challenge was to ensure that all members of the Steering Committee and Advisory Committee understood the importance of communication and had structures in place to ensure that information would be shared accurately. Each person had an extremely busy schedule, and not everyone could make every meeting. In some meetings, individuals were called away by issues that needed their immediate attention. Even among those who were present at meetings, it was clear that attention was often distracted by the constant need to check email to ensure that no new emergencies were developing.

This extremely busy and easily distracted group needed a solid system for information sharing to ensure that everyone was on the same page. Without this structure, the group’s work would only occur in fits and starts, and time would be wasted trying to bring everyone up to speed with what had happened at the last meeting. In addition, the quick timeline meant that decisions made at one meeting could not be reopened for discussion at subsequent meetings just because not everyone was at the previous meeting.

The PEBC facilitators introduced the idea of the “communication loop” – the need to ensure that everyone on the Advisory Committee was looped in with the most current information. The group decided that members would use “communication buddies” who were responsible for updating those absent from a meeting. Finally, the group established norms for decision-making that addressed when decisions were deemed to have been made, so that they were not eternally revisited. For example, the group established that a decision made at a meeting could not be reopened for discussion at subsequent meetings just because not everyone was at the previous meeting.

Members of a leadership group involved in a change process will themselves experience the complex emotions caused by change. Providing forums for the leadership group to have structured and productive conversations, explore emotions and assumptions, and collaborate on next steps is an extremely important part of this work. Adams 12 leadership was able to come into these conversations with a history of collaboration; obviously, structuring skillful communication among the leadership group is even more critical in districts without a history of working together collaboratively.

Effective communication within a decision-making group also requires trust among the group members and confidence that individual views are heard and considered. Much of the work of facilitation is directed at building trust and at creating group processes that make participants feel their views are valuable. The facilitators deliberately structured the meetings so that there were opportunities for discussions as a group and as partners, and also opportunities for individuals to check in and provide their perspectives on the larger conversations. The fact that the members of the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee understood the respective roles of their committees and how the committees worked together provided even more clarity about how people would participate in the process. These structures made it easier for everyone to have multiple opportunities to be heard, which in turn created trust in the process and among the group members.

Most of the critical components of successful change initiatives discussed in the Appendix can only be established through communication – for example, creating the vision and motivation for change, providing the resources necessary to adapt to change, and identifying and addressing reasons for resistance to change. As a result, districts implementing change must recognize the centrality of communication to their efforts, and consciously develop communications materials and strategies that are derived from the research on managing change.

In Adams 12, the group discussed the Why, How, What, and When of the messages that needed to be delivered to staff. They agreed that communications should convey that (1) this evaluation system will be different; (2) the new evaluation system involves evaluating effectiveness and doing the right work as opposed to compliance; and (3) the evaluation system is intended to and will have the impact of elevating the profession. Staff would need clarity about what was new about the system, and what remained the same. They also needed to be reassured that the evaluation of student growth would use multiple measures of learning, and that the process of the pilot and the evaluation system would be collaborative and represent multiple viewpoints.

It is also important that staff understand the intended magnitude of the change. One Advisory Committee member said, “It would be easy to say we are implementing forms, the state or the district is giving us forms. We want this to be more of a systemic change. The Adams 12 leadership knew that their communications with the people who would be affected most by the new evaluation system – the teachers and principals – would be fraught with importance. The passage of SB 191 had been extremely public and divisive, and its impact would have high-stakes consequences for teachers and principals. In particular, the focus on student learning growth can be intimidating for educators, who are well aware that student learning represents a very complex process with multiple factors affecting outcomes. When the Advisory Committee began meeting, there were already rumors flying about the new system, and the teacher members of the Advisory Committee reported hearing a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty about what would happen next.

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER DISTRICT PERSONNEL

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As discussed previously, the new evaluation system was not being implemented in a vacuum. There were already numerous change initiatives underway in the district. Committee members also needed to think about overall consistency in the messaging around the district’s initiatives – how does this initiative fit in with other district reforms, and how can this fit be communicated in a way that helps to relieve the pressure felt by staff? The new evaluation system could not just be seen as the latest flavor of the month.

District leadership assessed current district visions, strategies and initiatives, and determined that they would need to align multiple parts not only for purposes of making sense of implementation but also for communicating with staff. In Adams 12, these multiple pieces included:

• The mission of the district
• The vision for the district, as articulated by the Board of Education
• Other board policies
• The Adams 12 Commitments to student learning, professional practice, and collective responsibility
• The district’s Teaching/Learning Cycle, which provides a framework for continuous and collaborative improvement of instruction and learning outcomes on a unit of study basis

As part of the planning process, the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee realized that the new evaluation system really did fit well with other district initiatives. Everything that the district was doing was in service of improving teaching and learning, and the new evaluation system could be and should be characterized as a logical next step. Communications needed to reduce anxiety about this.

As one member of the Advisory Committee put it:
The timing of communications is important. The Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee discussed the need to balance useful information with strategic timing in communications with educators in the district. For example, committee members felt strongly that Adams 12 educators should not feel blindsided by any part of the pilot. However, they also felt it was important that educators not become overwhelmed by the information and that it be thoughtfully coordinated with other information from the district. Determining the right way to balance these considerations was made even more complex by the sometimes frenetic nature of the environment.

For example, in thinking about an end-of-year communication, the group thought that it would be useful to provide an update about their work to all staff. The email needed to reassure staff that there was a sense that the email would get lost in the “end of year chaos,” thereby causing unnecessary angst. The PEBC facilitators used this as an opportunity to demonstrate “the reality of the work.” Sometimes a group will have laudable intentions about the right thing to do and how to do it, but reality gets in the way. This failure to meet the pre-agreed deadline could have caused resentment towards the members of the Steering Committee, but the facilitators were able to use this as a learning opportunity by soliciting feedback on the decision to delay the email from all members of the Advisory Committee. This allowed the members of the Advisory Committee to stand in the shoes of the Steering Committee on this decision, and eventually everyone agreed that this was probably the right decision to make.

However, the discussion surfaced an important realization about communications in school districts—namely, that finding the right time to communicate is challenging because of the nature of the work. As one member of the Advisory Committee said, “If everything stood still, this work would be simple.” As a result, there also needs to be acknowledgment of the fact that communications will not always go out under perfect circumstances, and that there may never be perfect circumstances.

Another issue raised in thinking about communicating within the district was the need for consistent messages. The Advisory Committee and the Steering Committee agreed that consistency would be best achieved if staff had a central place to go for information about the new evaluation system, such as a website. The groups also agreed that the district would use language from the Colorado Department of Education to characterize the intent and requirements of SB 191, as this source would be perceived as objective compared to characterizations from advocacy groups. Finally, leadership agreed that as future communications were developed, the district’s communications office would become involved to help develop a consistent look and feel for the communications.

Finally, the group understood that communication about the new evaluation system would not be a single event. Instead, communication needed to be ongoing, and each step of the implementation process needed its own communications plan that built on the communications used in the previous step.
Education is an area of intense focus for policy makers, and policies governing education have shifted dramatically. In Colorado, the last two decades of state-level policies have resulted in the implementation of content standards and standardized assessments, school choice and the rise of charter schools, new high school graduation requirements and alignment of policies along a P-20 continuum, the proliferation of alternative teacher preparation routes combined with NCLB’s “highly qualified” requirements, changes in the way districts receive funding from the state, and changes in a multitude of other areas. SB-191 is but one example of the many major recent education reforms in the state.

These changes in policy have led to substantial changes in the daily work of education. Districts, racing to keep up with expectations, implement their own policies and requirements in areas such as school performance accountability, curriculum, teacher assignments, and professional development. Often the changes are fleeting as funding runs out or a new reform requires the abandonment of older reforms. Pressed for time, and having seen so many changes come and go, many teachers and principals choose to “wait out” the push for the latest reform.

Although constant change is now the norm in education, understanding and engaging in the intentional management of change reform — managing the process by which change is developed and implemented — is often underemphasized by educators. The private sector, faced with increasing globalization is often underemphasized by educators.

Although constant change is now the norm in education, the reforms with consideration of the deep cultural and capacity changes required for their implementation. According to Fullan, those who lead education reform initiatives should include consideration of what he calls the seven premises of change knowledge — in other words, the lessons learned about what must happen for change to successfully occur. These are:

- **A focus on motivation.** If people are not motivated to make the individual and collective changes needed, the initiative will fail. While short-term motivational challenges should be expected, the long-term trend must show increasing levels of motivation.
- **Capacity building with a focus on results.** This describes the appropriate combination of increasing individual and collective capacity and resources with positive pressure to change.
- **Learning in context.** To successfully change, educators must be able to understand what change actually looks like in the settings in which they work. Abstract ideas are not very helpful divorced of context.
- **Changing context.** This refers to the ability to learn and change across the system, and to put supports and structures in place that increase motivation and capacity system-wide.
- **A bias for reflective action.** It is critical to understand that shared vision and commitment is created through processes that allow for learning, doing, and reflecting. Behavior changes typically need to occur before beliefs change.
- **Tri-level engagement.** The three organizational levels involved in education reform — the school and community, the district, and the state — need...
commitment to change paired with willingness to make adjustments based on the learning built into the change process. Fullan’s various works also identify common reasons why people resist change and suggest strategies for addressing these issues. The National Staff Development Council has summarized Fullan’s strategies for overcoming resistance as follows:

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<th>Reasons for Resistance</th>
<th>Strategies for Overcoming Resistance</th>
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| People don’t know what to do (lack of knowledge) | • Share information with everyone involved.  
• Provide readings and set up study groups.  
• Conduct knowledge-building seminars.  
• Hold question and answer sessions.  
• Share inside knowledge and reach outward for expertise. |
| People don’t know how to do it (lack of skills/abilities) | • Provide high quality upfront training.  
• Provide ongoing skill-building training sessions.  
• Provide opportunities for feedback and coaching.  
• Sponsor problem-solving groups.  
• Encourage visits to other classrooms and schools so people can see the innovations in action. |
| People don’t understand why (lack of understanding of purpose) | • Explain the rationale.  
• Talk about where it has made a difference – cite examples from practice and research.  
• Explain how it fits into the bigger picture.  
• Articulate anticipated outcomes. |
| People are not involved in the decision making | • Provide opportunities for involvement in decisions; learn a variety of decision-making strategies (consultation, majority rules, consensus).  
• Share the leadership among faculty members.  
• Involve staff in the generation of ideas before making decisions.  
• Establish a collaborative decision making model that spells out who makes what decisions and how decisions will be made. |
| People are satisfied with the way things are | • Create an alternative future picture.  
• Clarify and raise your expectations (walk your talk).  
• Take a hard, honest look at the data (results).  
• Share success stories.  
• Reward change and risk-taking. |
| Workload and work pressure | • Focus on common goals.  
• Promote teamwork and collaborative work culture.  
• Support individuals under pressure.  
• Periodically conduct a school review: make decisions around what you should continue, start, and stop doing. |

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| People can’t see the benefits of changing | • Conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats).  
• Be upfront about the disadvantages.  
• Provide real life stories and examples where benefits have been achieved.  
• Collect data and monitor implementation. |
| People don’t see the change agent or advocate as credible | • Match the innovation with knowledgeable and motivated change agents.  
• Choose people who have a track record to manage and facilitate change projects.  
• Give change agents hard feedback.  
• Ensure change agents receive high quality training on the innovation and the change process. |
| People don’t experience support | • Conduct a human resources needs assessment.  
• Develop an implementation plan that builds in human and material resources.  
• Provide recognition and rewards.  
• Address the time issue and make changes.  
• Provide incentives for change.  
• Monitor implementation. |
| The innovation conflicts with school culture | • Talk about the innovation or change; establish how to gradually introduce changes.  
• Talk about the school culture – how it can support the change. Ask, “How will current beliefs, expectations, or behavior patterns block the change?”  
• Identify forces for and against change in the school.  
• Conduct a problem-solving group on implementation of the change.  
• Involve key cultural players in the initiation and implementation process. |
| People are worried about failure | • Promote a risk-taking mindset – use it as a guiding principle.  
• Help people accept and understand that with change comes increased anxiety – it is okay and it is natural.  
• Conduct “anticipation meetings.” Talk about the implications or consequences of failing; identify false assumptions and unfounded fears.  
• Allow people an opportunity to express fears; let them talk it out. Ask, “What is the worst case scenario? What is the best case scenario?” |
| People have a negative experience with change | • Encourage people to talk about what happened in the past.  
• Ask people to identify how this change is similar and how the change is different from others in the past.  
• Find out what will build their trust – act on their wants and needs.  
• Build their confidence that this will turn out differently.  
• Build in monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure feedback.  
• Discuss, “What will happen if we don’t implement the change?” |
Harvard professor John Kotter has studied multiple change initiatives in the private sector, and identifies the common characteristics of the relatively few initiatives that succeeded and the reasons for the failure of the others. He portrays the successful change process as involving a number of sequential and equally important steps, which, when carried out effectively, usually involve a considerable length of time. These include:

- Establishing a sense of urgency. People who are asked to make significant changes must understand and agree that change is necessary. Kotter reports that well over 50 percent of the failed change initiatives did not establish a sense of urgency.
- Forming a powerful guiding coalition. Change initiatives that are championed by only a few people, or by people perceived as lacking in power or expertise, will never gain the momentum needed for real change.
- Creating a vision. In this step, leaders of change must create an appealing picture of the future that will result from change. In order to buy into change, people need to believe not only that change is necessary but that the proposed change will result in a better state of affairs.
- Communicating the vision. Kotter describes this step as particularly challenging, and one that is commonly underestimated “by a factor of ten” in change initiatives. Often, those who are deeply involved in planning the change forget that those who will implement the change are nowhere near as familiar with it.
- Empowering others to act on the vision. If the previous steps have been successfully carried out, employees are likely to embrace the change on a personal level.
- Planning for and creating short-term wins. Kotter observed that successful change initiatives take time. Celebrating short-term wins helps improve morale and reinforces commitment to the vision.

Periodic evaluation of individual and collective stages of concern can help target necessary resources as well as “normalize” the emotions associated with change.

**Conclusion**

Change is the new norm in education, as it is in much of the rest of society. Research on the process of change has provided helpful roadmaps and diagnostic tools for leaders to use in planning and implementing complex change initiatives, such as the new Adams 12 evaluation system. Common themes include the need for leaders to provide a compelling vision demonstrating the need for change, and to make sure that those being asked to change have the resources and skills they need to successfully adapt. Leaders should also plan from the very beginning of a change initiative to be in constant communication about the change. Periodic assessments of readiness for and resistance to change during the implementation process, through surveys and conversations, can help guide leaders in adjusting to the needs of those implementing the change.

### Assessing Readiness for Change: CBAM

One of the most useful tools for assessing individual and group readiness for change is the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, or CBAM. This framework describes the different levels of engagement, or stages of concern, that an educator may experience during a change initiative. These stages range from 0, or no interest in the initiative, through 6, where the user is fully engaged with the initiative and sharing ideas for improvement.

**Stage 0 – Awareness**

I am not concerned about this change at all.

**Stage 1 – Information**

I would like to know more about this work.

**Stage 2 – Personal**

How does this change affect me?

**Stage 3 – Management**

I seem to be spending all of my time on this work.

**Stage 4 – Consequence**

How is my work affecting others?

**Stage 5 – Collaboration**

How does what I am doing relate to what others are doing?

**Stage 6 – Refocusing**

I have some ideas about what would work even better.