Dallas Independent School District (DISD)

Evaluation System: Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI)

History: Implemented in 2014 under Superintendent Mike Miles and continues under Superintendent Michael Hinojosa.

How it works: Teachers earn one of seven evaluation ratings that are then combined with other criteria (e.g., previous year's ratings, additional evaluation processes) which determines teachers' pay levels.

Impact on salary: Maximum: *$100,000 ($90,000 in salary, plus up to $10,000 in bonuses)[20] , achievable in as few as six years.*

Maximum prior to evaluation system implementation: *$87,338, achievable in 37 years with a Ph.D.*

REFLECTING ON SYSTEM

Notable features

- The district sets a target distribution for the percentage of teachers earning each rating. This policy forestalls the upward creep in ratings that may not be correlated with achievement and allows the district to budget responsibly.

- While all teachers are evaluated on core aspects of their job (classroom performance, students' achievement, students' classroom experiences), teachers must go through an additional review to reach the higher rating levels. Only teachers who are in the top 30 percent of their peer group[21] , are in at least their third year of service, and meet other performance criteria can apply to be in these elite categories.[22]

> Dallas is "able to identify our most effective teachers… [and we see that] retention of our most effective teachers is a strength of the system."
>
> — Suzy Smith, *Manager of Performance Management*[37]

- All teachers are formally observed several times a year, but the district also requires short "spot observations," which can save principals time and give them more real-time opportunities to engage with teachers and learn about their strengths and areas for growth.[23]

- To provide more salary stability and protect teachers from an anomalous bad year, Dallas averages a teacher's current and previous year's ratings to determine salary. Also, teachers' salaries only drop if they have earned a lower effectiveness level for three consecutive years.

- Teachers who earn one of the lowest two rating categories do not receive a raise.

- The Dallas evaluation system has a targeted distribution for all of its evaluation ratings, meaning that the district limits the number of teachers who fall into one of the ratings categories it has created. No more than 3 percent of teachers can receive the lowest rating, and no more than 2 percent can receive the highest rating.

Opportunities for improvement

- The system involves two different rating systems: one to measure performance in the most recent school year and a more cumulative system that incorporates annual ratings and other data to determine pay. These two systems have similar names, which has caused confusion.

- In a 2017 survey, roughly a quarter of teachers felt the evaluation system was unfair to teachers facing greater challenges in low-performing schools.[24]

Notable changes to system since inception

- When this system first started, salaries were based entirely on performance. Now, Dallas offers retention bonuses (which grow as teachers earn higher ratings) so that teachers earning all but the lowest ratings can see their compensation increase each year.

- The district plans to reduce the number of possible compensation levels, as well as increase the current cap on the percentage of teachers who can qualify for the highest rating.[25]

BUILDING BUY-IN

Steps to build buy-in

The district gathers feedback on the evaluation rubric from teachers, principals, and other stakeholders and calibrates it through campus walks and data analysis.[26] Dallas also recruits teachers on each campus to attend regular evaluation system trainings and to share this information with their colleagues.

Surveys of teachers and administrators

In a 2017 survey, only 41 percent of teachers were satisfied with the system, but this is an improvement from 2014-2015 when only 31 percent were satisfied.[27] Despite this level of dissatisfaction, many teachers like the individual pieces of the system. About three quarters of teachers found each aspect of the evaluation (spot observations, extended observations, and summative evaluation feedback) helpful.[28]

A 2017 survey found that administrators generally liked the system (72 percent were satisfied).[29]

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Recognizes strong teachers and keeps them in the classroom?

Yes, 98 percent of the highest rated teachers stayed in the district after the 2016-2017 school year.[30]

Encourages consistently less effective teachers to leave the classroom?

Yes, 50 percent of consistently unsatisfactory teachers left the district after the 2016-2017 school year.[31]

Helps all teachers improve?

Yes, teachers' average spot observation and overall evaluation scores are rising, suggesting that teachers may be performing better over time (although score inflation could also cause these increases).[32]

Because of ongoing calibration training for evaluators, "we know that proficient is proficient, regardless of campus, content area, or grade level."

— Suzy Smith, *Manager of Performance Management*[38]

Correlates with increased student achievement?

Yes, student proficiency across all subjects and grades (already on a modest upswing) increased more steeply by 7 percentage points from 2015 to 2017, closing the proficiency gap between Dallas and the state of Texas by 3 points.[33] Note that these gains cannot be tied directly to the evaluation system without a controlled study.

Other evidence of impact?

Dallas focused resources on a set of schools identified as "Improvement Required" by the state education agency. These resources focus heavily on strategic staffing, including using incentives to attract effective teachers to work in these schools. Since the program's inception, these schools have improved in both student performance and attendance.[34] Dallas credits the drop in the number of designated low-performing schools (from 43 in the 2013-2014 school year to only four for the upcoming 2018-2019 school year)[35] largely to its evaluation system.[36]