



Springfield's new evaluation system has passed its probationary status. **The crowning achievement so far?** It's both valuable to new *and* experienced teachers, and it's changing education for the better.

THE

By MEG KRUGEL /// Photos by MIKE DAVIS

Jim Tyser, left, and Matt Woodford are two very different educators: one a science guy and the other a music buff; Tyser has 23 years experience in the field, and Woodford, just four. Call it a miracle, but, Springfield's new evaluation tool is making better educators out of both of them.

A young man with short brown hair and glasses is sitting on a green stool in a music room. He is wearing a blue short-sleeved button-down shirt and black pants. He has his hands clasped in his lap and is smiling at the camera. The background shows a music room with several music stands, a drum set, and a whiteboard on the wall.

TOOL THAT BINDS

Four years ago, a fresh face walked in to the band room at Thurston Middle School. Matt Woodford was an inspired recent graduate from Central Washington University. He'd just landed a perfect first job, in the same district where he'd gone to school, where his wife was also employed as a music teacher, and where his parents had taught for over 35 years. But, like a lot of first-year teachers, he'd been given an assignment not completely in his comfort zone. He was to teach an orchestra class – and *middle school* orchestra, no less. “It was like, oh, I have orchestra? I’ve never taught an orchestra before. How do you teach orchestra? I was fresh out of college and thrown to the wolves,” Woodford remembers.

In the weeks that followed that first intrepid day of teaching, Woodford received constant professional support. Quick drop-ins during teaching times, one-on-ones after school with the principal, and perhaps best of all, mentoring from a retired band and orchestra teacher who – in those early weeks of teaching – took time to observe Woodford during class and provided suggestions to the young teacher on classroom management, room organization, and other “tricks of the trade.” But, as might be uncommon in a lot of school environments – the support didn’t end after those first few weeks, or even after that first year.

The system of evaluation Woodford received from his administrators as a probationary teacher of the Springfield Public School district was deep, collaborative and ongoing. “That first year, it’s all about ‘Are you surviving? Are you teaching? And are your students learning?’ Each year, the responsibilities (outlined in) the evaluation grow. The first year, it’s very basic. As you go, the concepts get deeper and more reaching,” Woodford says. And through the process, he thrived.

That hasn’t always been the case for Springfield-area educators. Jim Tyser, a veteran science teacher who’s been working in the district for 15 years and teaching for 23, remembers a time not so long ago when teachers were not evaluated consistently. Often, the evaluations that did take place were not meaningful. He’d observed a few teachers get “railroaded by the process” – caught off guard by a poor evaluation that assigned them onto a plan of assistance without prior knowledge of the concern.

As for Tyser, “I didn’t have a true evaluation for eight years, I think, and it was basically because (my administrators) liked me. ‘Yeah, you’re doing a great job,’ they’d say. Well, how would they know? They just didn’t see any problems.” So, when the opportunity arose for Tyser to join a committee to develop a new evaluation tool for Springfield Public Schools in the fall of 2005, he agreed. Sure, it would mean more meetings, more late nights, and

more hours worked unpaid – but the outcome, if it were successful, would be worth it he believed.

DEFINING DOMAINS, SETTING STANDARDS

Fully launched in the fall 2007, Springfield’s new 50-page evaluation tool is aimed at giving the greatest support to the beginning teacher. “The previous tool was not aimed at probationary teachers, but our thought was that if you can work with probationary teachers, then you don’t have problems later on,” explains Judy Svoboda, President of the Springfield Education Association (SEA) and a member of the district’s evaluation design team. “We looked at this as a growth model, an evaluative model and not a model to ‘ding’ somebody. It’s designed to identify where somebody might need some help and to identify where you have strengths,” she says.

Springfield’s new evaluation tool got its roots from research done by Charlotte Danielson, an educator, administrator and leading consultant on evaluation design as a way to support professional practices. In her book *Framework for Teaching* (which Springfield’s evaluation committee used as a catalyst to begin the design work), Danielson supports an evaluation model that includes self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation. In line with Danielson’s research on the use of domains and standards, Springfield’s evaluation is structured by four domains: 1) Planning and Preparation; 2) Classroom Environment; 3) Instruction; and 4) Professional Responsibilities.

Under the four domains are 15 standards by which to measure success. For example, under Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation), the first standard is: Knowledge of Content. Then, the evaluation defines how each standard is rated, using a tiered system of A, B and C (A for first-year teachers, A and B for second-year teachers and A, B and C for third-year teachers, as well as contract teachers). So, for the standard “Knowledge of Content” under Domain 1,



the teacher will be evaluated using these standards:

- A) Shows an effective command of the subject to guide student learning
- B) Uses effective instructional resources, including technology, to communicate content knowledge
- C) Takes an active role in adapting new content standards and frameworks to their teaching

“Our goal was, if we look at a probationary teacher in the first year, what’s vital to get through that first year? Which domains would be vital for them to survive, and our big emphasis was on classroom management. Before you can expect them to be really exemplary in curriculum, they have to have the class functioning and systems in place,” says Svoboda. After the teacher’s three-year probationary status, he or she enters a three-year growth cycle in the evaluation model (see chart, page 28), which is tied to the teacher’s licensure cycle. Using Danielson’s model of self-assessment, a teacher creates a 2-year growth plan, and in the third year, the teacher enters an observation year, when the growth plan is evaluated.

The system is designed to create a more unified approach to goal setting and observation by administrators. In the old system, “somehow the goals and the observation never meshed. And then on top of that, we had licensure requirements. We felt like there were these three things that were roaming around but nothing came together,” Svoboda says. “Part of our goal was – what can we do that’s meaningful, and what can we do to tie it all together?”

When Matt Woodford began in the district in 2006, he’d never before conducted an orchestra. Now, four years later, and thanks to a lot of support from his administrators, he wears the role comfortably.

Second to meeting the needs of the beginning teacher, the design team wanted to be sure the evaluation was useful for highly proficient teachers, who historically have not been well supported through evaluation processes, says Nancy Golden, Springfield’s School Superintendent. At the completion of a successful evaluation cycle, all teachers have the option to expand professional practice by a number of choices – an action research project, a book study, a critical friends group, a curriculum audit, or through graduate coursework, among other options. The hope, Svoboda says, is that the teacher never stops growing professionally – even in to the later years of his or her career.

For each standard, teachers are evaluated as either exemplary (top 10 percent), proficient, basic or unsatisfactory – categories that the design team agreed on, after a lot of discussion. Golden remembers feeling a sense of surprise over the use of the term “unsatisfactory.” “If it were just me, I’d be more into ‘emerging,’ or something like it. But the way the team felt about it was: someone really needs to know if he or she is unsatisfactory. If you say emerging, you might think, what’s the problem here? Every administrator wants to mark everyone at exemplary – so it was a real cultural shift to say ‘no, you should really only see about 10 percent of your people (at that level).’”

Today, the result is a complex system with multiple metrics, designed not only to evaluate teacher effectiveness but also to improve performance by providing many examples, models and definitions of excellent instruction. And, because teachers were included at each stage in the development, writing and piloting of the new tool, Golden says there is a greater sense of ownership by teachers using this evaluation, than had it been put on the table solely by administrators.

STATE AND NATIONAL EVALUATION TRENDS

State law requires each Oregon school district to develop a system of evaluating teacher performance, in collaboration with their local Association. In Oregon, the evaluation tool is locally co-designed by each district and local teachers' union in order to best meet the needs of the community served. Both Svoboda and Golden agree that it's absolutely critical that an evaluation be developed locally and not mandated by the state – or federal government, for that matter. "I worry about too much prescription. Where's the creativity or the breakthrough idea when you have that? It really starts limiting that process," Golden says of the possibility of a state or federally mandated evaluation system.

However, with the birth of President Obama's Race to the Top

\$4.35 billion incentive fund this last year, many states are approaching teacher evaluation in a new, more standardized way – drawing a tighter link between student test scores and teacher evaluation in order to receive a portion of the Race To The Top grant funds (Oregon was not selected to receive a RTTT grant earlier this year).

Early in 2010, Oregon school districts were lambasted in the media for a failing grade in "identifying teacher effectiveness," outlined in a report by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). In an article in *The Oregonian* published Jan. 29, 2010, the report concluded that, because student-learning gains (in essence, test scores) are not taken into account in evaluations, "Oregon teachers can move from a probationary teaching license to full licensure without having to demonstrate classroom effectiveness."

However, the report primarily looked only at state requirements around teacher evaluations – of which Oregon's are pretty generic. According to the Oregon state statute on teacher evaluation, "the purpose of the evaluation is to aid the teacher in making continuing professional growth and to determine the teacher's

Every week, Springfield Superintendent Nancy Golden visits a different classroom to meet face-to-face with teachers and students. On this day, Golden joins students at Centennial Elementary School for a class observation.





performance of the teaching responsibilities. Evaluations shall be based upon at least two observations and other relevant information developed by the district.”

Vague? Maybe so. But that language has enabled districts, like Springfield, to create models that are far more useful to that district’s teaching demographic than a state mandated model could allow. Svoboda says she wouldn’t want it any other way. “Anytime something comes from somebody else creating it, you don’t really know what the intent is and you also don’t know how to use it properly,” she says. In response to the NCTQ report, education leaders from around Oregon defended the current system – noting that while Oregon has a strong tradition of local control, that doesn’t mean local districts aren’t weighing student achievement or requiring classroom observations.

“Could the state provide a framework to develop an evaluation system? Yeah, I think you can have a rough framework for what it should involve. But I also know we need to create it locally, because then you have buy-in,” Svoboda says. “Now, if the Legislature were able to provide funds for local districts to work on an evaluation tool that is meaningful and gets the results that we all want, that would be great. But, I don’t think mandating ever makes sense, because then we’re back to a mandate with no funding attached.”

Without legislative directives, it’s up to the district to develop effective evaluations that support good teaching. But, in this climate – with meager funding and overburdened educators, who has the

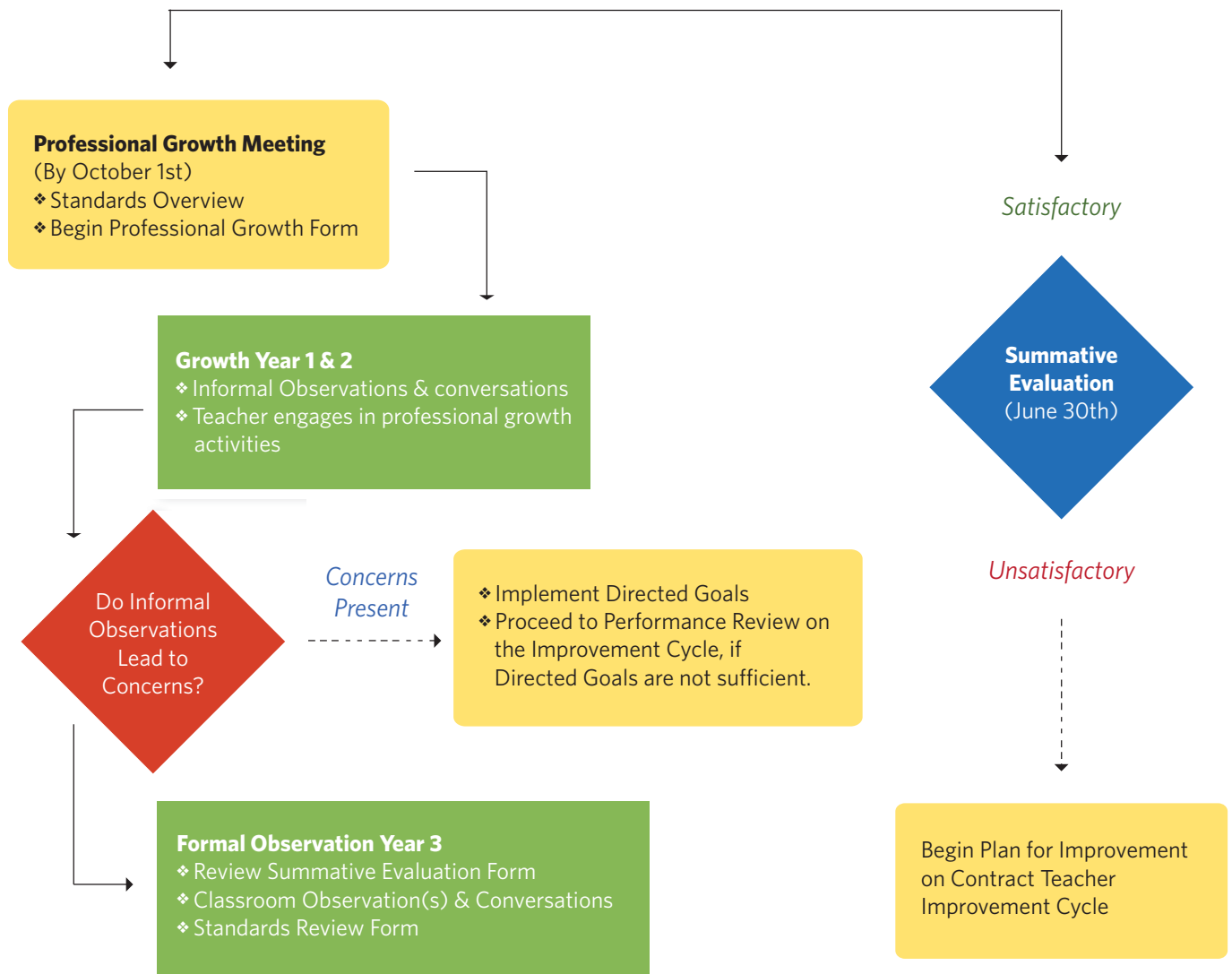
“I was the flowchart guy,” Jim Tyser says of his science-minded role on the evaluation design team. This analytical ability came in useful for developing the evaluation “cycles” contract teachers go through every three years.

time? Who has the resources? To support the work and encourage districts to move forward, the NEA has developed a framework that districts can employ in transforming their evaluation systems. The framework includes the core purposes and values of a comprehensive growth and development system that can meet the demands of the 21st century classroom.

In this system, evaluation is just one component of the broader whole. According to the framework: “efforts to reform a single component, such as teacher evaluation, cannot produce a ‘silver bullet.’ Focusing on only one component can lead to reforms that merely tinker around the edges... true reform of teacher evaluation and assessment needs to be considered in the larger context of transforming the education system.”

For Linda Darling-Hammond, a leading education scholar and expert on teacher quality, evaluation is an important tool, but it is not a silver bullet. In an excerpt recently published in *NEA Today* from her new book, *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*, the Stanford University professor demonstrates how equitable funding and strong teacher preparation are critical factors in achieving better outcomes for students.

Contract Teachers: 3-Year Growth Cycle Evaluation Flowchart



Darling-Hammond cites the example of Finland, which has closed its own achievement gap and now leads the developed world in student outcomes. She notes that Finland has put the foundation for learning in place, noting that all students receive free daily meals, free health care, free learning materials, and access to counseling in all schools. Finland has also decentralized their educational system, shifting the focus from standardized testing to providing local flexibility where highly trained teachers design curriculum aligned to “very lean” national standards.

“This new system is implemented through equitable funding and extensive preparation for all teachers,” Darling-Hammond says. “The logic of the system is that investments in the capacity of local teachers and schools to meet the needs of all students, coupled with thoughtful guidance about goals, can unleash the benefits of local creativity in the cause of common, equitable outcomes.

Darling Hammond is greatly concerned that, by contrast, the United States has been heading in the opposite direction as

Finland. Not only does the United States rank second only to Mexico among developed nations in the number of children living in poverty, but the level of overall funding for schools and other services that support students has created greater inequity. This has been exacerbated by lack of equity in access to highly trained teachers and a testing culture that has not, like Finland’s model system, ensured “access to a ‘thinking curriculum’ for all students.”

Toward this end, before a district sets in motion a new evaluation system, NEA’s framework urges consideration of two essential points: teacher preparation and hiring are the most critical ways to assure teacher effectiveness, and high quality professional development must be available to every teacher. Argues NEA, even the best teacher assessment and evaluation systems are likely to fail in an education system that fails to provide the necessary training and preparation to ensure that prospective teachers acquire appropriate skills, knowledge and dispositions from the very first day of independent professional practice.

Golden is pretty upfront about Springfield's hiring and professional development practices. "We have this system where we've really got to focus on making sure our administrators hire the best. That's primary. Can I say that we've been successful in hiring great teachers every single time? No. But it's our responsibility to make them great. If there is a teacher who doesn't turn out well, I say shame on us, as administrators, for not hiring the best," she says. "And, if somebody's not a right fit for the district, (this evaluation) let's us work with them to understand that and support them in a new direction."

COLLABORATION IS KEY

When Jim Tyser was asked to join the committee to design the evaluation tool, he was reluctant. Though he had long been involved in leadership roles with SEA, his experiences participating on district committees weren't always positive ones. Now, looking back at the time he spent on the design team, he says the experience became a model for the way joint processes should work between the Association and the district. Over the course of the year spent writing the evaluation tool, "I felt we had a lot of input into what was going on. It was honest. We got to hear what our administrators' perspectives were and I think a lot of them were reasonable, even though we weren't always on the same side of an issue," he says.

Tyser's philosophy when he joined the committee was fairly simple: he didn't want teachers to face any "surprises" during the evaluation process. "If a person is going to be put on a plan of assistance, that should be telegraphed way ahead of time... so they don't get blindsided. If there are deficiencies, we want that to be apparent, and we want it to be specific enough to know that there are some things you can do to fix them," he says. Because the district had been using an ineffective evaluation system for so many years, Tyser knew the new system "needed to be done, but it needed to be done in a way that was valuable to our teachers." And, to the district's credit, Tyser says the administrators on the team approached the work in a similar fashion – intent on designing a system that would provide support for teachers along the way, rather than "serving as a 'gotcha' at the end."

Golden says the process was effective for both parties – administration and teachers – because a culture of collaboration had been established in the district prior to starting the design process. "In a lot of districts, there is still a very traditional way of thinking about management and associations, which I don't buy in to," says Golden. "It really requires a cooperative, collaborative model of leadership – and a lot of people don't know how to do that. Some people do. If you tackle this in a way that is going to be successful, you have to have teacher leadership involved, and if you don't trust the teacher leaders, then there is no way to get it done."

THE "CLASS" CULTURE

Like in Springfield, redesigned evaluation systems are shifting the way teachers around Oregon are professionally supported. In the

Teacher Evaluation Systems: Common Elements

Create integrated systems that link evaluation procedures to curricular standards, professional development activities, targeted support, and human capital decisions.

Use validated evaluation measures based on widely accepted standards of teaching, that attempt to capture a range of teaching behaviors and use multiple methods and evaluators.

Establish credibility that involves multiple stakeholders in the design, development, implementation and revision of the system and make procedures meaningful and transparent to all involved.

last five years, new evaluation tools have sprung forward in Salem-Keizer, Oregon City, Beaverton, Forest Grove, Bend-Lapine, Sherwood, Tillamook, and a host of other school districts – urban and rural, small and large. The trend in many of these districts is credited to an initiative called the CLASS Project (Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success), funded by a \$13.2 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund, funneled through the independent non-profit organization Chalkboard Project.

Currently, there are 12 districts and one ESD participating in the CLASS Project. According to the Project's website, once a district is selected to participate, the district receives the financial support and consulting resources of the Chalkboard Project to begin a "Design Year". During the "Design Year" the district brings together a team of education stakeholders to develop plans that integrate expanded career paths, relevant professional development, effective performance evaluation, and new compensation models.

Through the CLASS Project, participating districts' new performance evaluations are underscored by many of the same qualities in Springfield's model: a tool developed for and by teachers, a clear framework with domains that outline how good teaching is measured, and opportunities for professional conversations in addition to classroom observations. Several of the participating districts have gone one step further, and have added new compensation models on to the evaluation tool. Though against the idea of tying teacher pay to student test scores, the CLASS Project does support the practice of additional compensation for teachers who take on new roles and responsibilities that aid student learning.

In September 2010, the SEA Representative Council voted to pursue CLASS Project funding. Though the evaluation tool has been written, SEA leaders decided CLASS funding afforded them the opportunity to expand the professional development piece and enhance administrator training around the evaluation. "It is a hard decision because it's taking a risk. There's this idea that maybe you're deciding to do merit pay," Svoboda says, in reference to the CLASS Project's support of additional compensation models. "But, we have a good relationship with our district... so I am going to approach it in a really positive way."



Since she began with the district in 2003, Nancy Golden has remained focused on the district's vision of "Every Student a Graduate Prepared for a Bright and Successful Future."

On the compensation piece, Tyser agrees. "If we spend a whole lot of time thinking about alternative compensation packages, then that means there's not enough energy or effort to protect our current compensation package. I don't want one to come at the expense of the other. I've taken a pay cut three years in a row now – it's not alternative compensation packages that are the problem. It's getting adequate compensation that's the problem."

KEEPING THE FOCUS

As a superintendent overseeing 25 schools and an economically diverse student demographic, Golden has heard these concerns from all sides. She's excited about pursuing new ideas through the CLASS Project, but she also knows it's important to protect the product her team worked so hard to design. Fads in teacher evaluations – like the value-added model of using state standardized test scores as the primary means for making summative decisions about a teacher – will always exist. But Golden believes the district has a model that's

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– NANCY GOLDEN

working for administrators and teachers, and it's a model that is built not on fads, but on the science that is effective teaching.

Since developing the teacher evaluation, Golden has launched a similar process to co-create an administrator evaluation, with teachers on the design team. She says if the district is to expect professional excellence from its teachers, administrators need to be modeling those practices. Golden, who was recently named the 2010 Superintendent of the Year by the Confederation of School Administrators (COSA), models this expertise through classroom visits at least once per week, observations of her teachers and by offering professional feedback through handwritten notes. She even has her name in the district substitute pool. She says it's important to show that there are instructional leaders at every level in our public schools.

The evaluation design process took resources and it took time – and these days, both are scarce for educators. "But in my mind, there wasn't even a choice not to do this," says Golden. "As there's less of us, we need to be that much stronger." ■