

Michigan teachers' jobs would depend on evaluations, student test scores under new proposal

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Deborah Loewenberg Ball is chair of the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness and dean of the University of Michigan School of Education. / Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press

Key recommendations from the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness: Classroom teaching must be observed using one of the four evaluation tools piloted in 13 Michigan districts last school year and adopted in other states. The tools provide frameworks for how to evaluate, observe and rate teachers. One of these tools must be selected to be the state tool, based on results from a competitive bidding process. The state should provide sufficient base funding for technical support and training on using the selected system. Districts that choose to use one of the other three evaluation systems must pay their own expenses. The state must create a value-added growth model and data to estimate teachers' impact on student learning. Administrators must be evaluated using one of two proposed evaluation processes. Qualified peers should be able to conduct some of the observations. Up to 5% of a teacher's evaluation may be based on schoolwide student growth. Teacher ratings must be changed from highly effective, effective and ineffective to professional, provisional and ineffective. In addition to student growth measures, administrators must be evaluated by at least the following evidence for each school: proficiency of their skill in evaluating teachers; progress made in the school improvement plan; attendance rates; and student, parent, and teacher feedback. Districts that are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their local evaluation tools and policies must apply for a waiver.

Michigan's teachers could soon see their jobs hinge on how well they perform for trained observers and on their students' growth on tests under a sweeping proposal being submitted to the Legislature and Gov. Rick Snyder today.

After nearly two years of research and a \$6-million pilot program in 13 districts, the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness is expected to release its recommendations for a new statewide teacher evaluation tool.

PDF: [Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness recommendations](#)

The council, a state-appointed panel of education experts, is recommending that by 2015-16, half of a teacher's evaluation should be based on classroom practices and the other half on student growth as determined by scores on tests. The panel also is recommending that a teacher be dismissed after two years of ineffective ratings.

The recommendations are tied to changes to the state's teacher tenure law, which now stipulates, among other changes, that districts cannot lay off teachers based on seniority but can dismiss ineffective

teachers. The law calls for teachers to be dismissed if they are rated ineffective for three consecutive years.

Evaluations for teachers in subjects that are not tested — such as art and music — must take into account other factors such as student portfolios and locally determined measures, the council said.

State Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, chair of the Senate Education Committee, called the 155-page report “probably one of the most important issues we’re going to have to deal with” and said the Legislature could hold hearings on the recommendations in coming weeks.

The council maintains that its overall aim is to ensure that schools adopt an evaluation process that improves teaching and learning, not simply create a punitive system to weed out bad teachers.

“The system should, at its core, serve to raise the performance of all educators because this is what our students need and deserve,” said Deborah Loewenberg Ball, chair of the council and dean of the University of Michigan School of Education. “We don’t think there’s lots of people out there under-performing.”

Evaluations must include goals with specific suggestions, resources and opportunities for the learning needed to achieve the goals, according to the council.

The state would not tie teacher pay or raises to evaluations if the state adopts the recommendations. And teacher evaluation ratings would not be publicized.

The recommendations were expected to be submitted to Snyder and the Legislature.

The council recommended that the state buy one of four nationally recognized teacher evaluation tools, buy one of two administrator evaluation tools and provide base funding for implementation. The tools are frameworks for conducting evaluations. But Pavlov said it is too soon to say whether or when there could be state funding to pay for the program and train educators on how to use it.

Amid the push to use teacher evaluations to improve teaching and student achievement, Education Trust-Midwest, a nonprofit education policy organization based in Royal Oak, raised concerns last year about evaluations after a survey found that the 30 largest districts rate nearly all of their teachers effective. The numbers suggested that struggling teachers are not being identified or given the training and the support they need to improve, officials from the group said.

The group, in a statement today, called the council’s recommendations a blueprint for improvement and accountability.

“Every Michigan student should have a great teacher,” said Amber Arellano, executive director of the Education Trust-Midwest. “And every Michigan educator should have thoughtful feedback to improve their practice. This is one of the most important opportunities Michigan has had in decades to make this vision happen.”

Ball acknowledged that “scientific concern exists” about the process of isolating the impact that teachers have on student growth from other factors such as parental involvement and attendance. Teachers also have raised concerns about potential bias in evaluations, the overreliance on tests, as well as the impact

of social factors and poverty on student achievement.

Nancy Knight, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Education Association, said the union had not seen a copy of the report, but said any new process the state adopts should employ multiple measures.

“We want a workable teacher evaluation system that increases teacher effectiveness and supports ongoing professional learning,” she said.

In 2012, the nonpartisan Center for Michigan polled Michigan residents and found that 69% of people believe it is important or crucial to hold educators more accountable for student learning outcomes.

Since 2009, at least 36 states and the District of Columbia have changed teacher evaluation processes, according to research by the council.

In Michigan, some school districts, including some charter schools and Detroit Public Schools, have begun implementing new evaluation systems while others have waited for the council to complete its work.

By law, Michigan districts must have a teacher evaluation system with student growth and test data playing a major part — 25% in the 2013-14 school year to 50% in the 2015-16 school year.

The council’s recommendation, if approved by the Legislature, would instead require public Michigan schools to put the state’s new educator evaluation system in place by 2015-16.