



# Strengthening Our Practice:

## A Classroom Teachers' Approach to Evaluation

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE VIVA MINNESOTA  
TEACHERS IDEA EXCHANGE II

**Prepared for:** Governor Mark Dayton and the MDE Teacher Evaluation Work Group

**Prepared by:** Members of The VIVA Minnesota Teachers Writing Collaborative II

**Delivered:** October 25, 2012

**Abstract & Summation:** Instructional personnel in public schools across Minnesota spent hundreds of hours debating how best to evaluate teaching in a way that would have the most benefit for student achievement. Then a small group of their colleagues distilled those ideas into 10 recommendations for ensuring Minnesota's model teacher evaluation leads to improved teacher quality and, in turn, improved student learning.

**Partners:** Education Minnesota President Tom Doohar and Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius



## Introduction



The VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange II invited instructional personnel — classroom teachers, librarians, technology resource specialists and others from across the state — to share their professional expertise about how to build a better model teacher evaluation. This VIVA Idea Exchange occurred during a pivotal time in Minnesota as the state works to create a model teacher evaluation. The online VIVA Idea Exchange uses a combination of technology operated by New Voice Strategies and powered by SocialSphere. Facilitation is provided by veteran journalist Cindy Richards to ensure the conversation is safe, productive and available whenever teachers are.

The VIVA Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange II was open from August 25, 2012–September 17, 2012.

### The VIVA Minnesota Teachers Idea Exchange II was conducted in three phases:

During **Phase I**, instructional personnel from across Minnesota were invited to share their ideas in answer to the questions:

*“Minnesota is developing its model teacher evaluation right now. To inform that process, tell us what makes the difference between a good teacher and a great teacher. How would you measure whether a teacher is ‘good’ or ‘great’?”*

In response, 365 members added 128 ideas and shared 132 comments with one another.

During **Phase II**, a group of 10 teachers, whose active participation in Phase 1 was clear in terms of both quantity and quality, were invited to join The VIVA Minnesota Teachers II Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: Take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize and synthesize them into discrete, workable recommendations for creating a better teacher evaluation model in Minnesota.

**Phase III** of the process will begin on Oct. 25, 2012, when the members of the Writing Collaborative present their ideas to Governor Mark Dayton’s administration and the MDE Teacher Evaluation Work Group.

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At New Voice Strategies, we believe in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. VIVA Teachers is one example of that power in action. We are inspired by the teachers and grateful for their positive contribution to the strength of our schools and America's democratic process. Many thanks to the VIVA Minnesota Teacher Leaders: **Jim Barnhill, Joyce Baumann, Diedra Carlson, Catherine Chilton-Werner, Lynn Mueller, Kevan Nitzberg, Elizabeth Parr-Smestad, Luke Stordahl, Annette Walen,** and **Pam Winkler**, whose bios can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these teachers spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

We wish to thank our partners in this endeavor, Education Commissioner **Brenda Cassellius** and Education Minnesota President **Tom Doohar**.

We at New Voice Strategies are grateful for the generous partnership and support of the **Joyce Foundation** and the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** as we worked on this project.



## Executive Summary

Minnesota, like many states, is creating a uniform and mandated teacher evaluation system. To some degree, Minnesota's evaluation system is in step with federal and national movements insisting that teachers be evaluated based on their students' performance on standardized assessments. However, Minnesota has, in the legislation, capped the degree that standardized student assessments will count towards a teacher's evaluation at 35%. As a result, the state is taking the progressive step of weighing options and receiving input before both deciding what the other 65% of a teacher's evaluation will look like and how to most accurately measure the 35%.

Since education is an issue of paramount importance and teachers are at the front of the line in terms of educating our youth, teacher evaluation is a topic that has garnered a lot of attention among educators and citizens alike in Minnesota. Teachers are the ones who have the most direct contact with children, and teachers are the ones who are responsible for providing quality and meaningful educational opportunities and experiences. Everyone wants to see high quality teachers because that better ensures a top-level education for our youth. No one, though, has higher standards for teachers and their profession than teachers themselves.

As such, these proposed teacher evaluation recommendations are meant to offer guidance in the formation of the evaluation process from the insights and experiences of Minnesota teachers. At times they recommend improvements in the proposed system and at times they offer clarifications. However, what is most relevant and most clear, is that these recommendations are consistent with a strong desire among Minnesota teachers to create a meaningful, purposeful, and enriching teacher evaluation system. If done right, this is an opportunity to strengthen both our profession and the learning of our students.

The recommendations in this report focus on teacher observations, including fairness and equity issues, measurement of teacher effectiveness, including measuring 35% of a teacher's performance on standardized test scores with Value Added Measures, and the necessity that professional development, along with this evaluation system itself, be fully and sustainably funded by the state.

### Recommendations Included in This Report

**Any evaluation system of teachers *must* be inclusive and flexible** enough to compensate for the diversity in environments, assignments, districts, and classrooms throughout the state.

**Professional growth and reflection** should be the primary goal of teacher observations and evaluations.

**There should be multiple checks to ensure the fairness of the evaluation** including training for observers, requiring more than one trained observer for each teacher evaluation, and having a clear and adequate appeals process for teachers.

**Provide full and sustainable state funding** for *all* aspects of the teacher evaluation plan from introduction and implementation to review and revision.

## Index of Actionable Ideas

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### RECOMMENDATION 1

#### **Adopt a Flexible Evaluation Model Reflecting the Diverse Student Populations and Numerous Variables of Educational Settings across Minnesota**

##### **Proposed Solutions:**

1. Use a proven tool for evaluating best practices by grade level, content area, or position.
2. Develop a list of variables that affect student, school, and teacher interactions, then adjust the data collection accordingly.
3. Allow for ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of the state evaluation model and make revisions as needed with input from teachers across the state.

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### RECOMMENDATION 2

#### **Use a Standardized Rubric for Observation, Which Can Be Implemented Objectively by Any Trained Observer**

##### **Proposed Solutions:**

4. Use a proven rubric that outlines key effective instructional components.
5. Analyze all components of the rubric for legitimacy and fairness.

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### RECOMMENDATION 3

#### **Focus Observations and Evaluations on Professional Growth and Self-Reflection**

##### **Proposed Solutions:**

6. Allow teachers to write a personal professional growth plan aimed at improving strategies used to advance student achievement for each evaluation cycle.
7. Require teachers to provide evidence of progress toward these goals as part of the evaluation cycle.
8. Provide educators with the opportunity to pursue professional development related to the growth plan.

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### RECOMMENDATION 4

#### **Use the Teacher Evaluation as a Springboard to Professional Development that Leads to Continuous Improvement of Practice**

##### **Proposed Solutions:**

9. Provide professional development opportunities based on evaluation criteria that would build each teacher's knowledge and skills.
10. Provide staff development to help teachers interpret testing data and develop and target instructional strategies based on the data.
11. Support instructional strategies by providing professional development activities for all Minnesota educators regardless of subject, grade level, teaching assignment or district size.

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**RECOMMENDATION 5****Measures of Educator Effectiveness Obtained through Observation Should be Averaged over Multiple Observations Done by More than One Trained Observer****Proposed Solution:**

12. Take a longer-term view of teacher performance that includes input from a variety of observers and multiple measures over time.

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**RECOMMENDATION 6****Train Educators as Instructional Coaches for District and/or Inter-District Observations****Proposed Solutions:**

13. Train licensed educators as subject area instructional experts who will serve as coaches in collaboration with the teacher to identify strengths and areas of growth.
14. Provide time for collaboration (PLCs) needed to continue advancing the training and teaching of Minnesota's highly educated teachers.
15. Conduct peer observations and reviews during the review cycle.
16. Create a pool of educator coaches who are instructional subject experts who can provide balanced and unbiased observations.

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**RECOMMENDATION 7****Value-Added Measures Should Be Used to Provide Educators Feedback and to Determine Professional Development Needs, but Should Be Excluded from Consideration in Employment Decisions****Proposed Solution:**

17. Use VAM data only to identify curriculum or instructional strategies that are of greatest value to student achievement and to identify the professional development teachers need to improve.

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**RECOMMENDATION 8****Administrators Should Collaborate with Educators in Non-Tested Subjects to Determine Mutually Agreeable Curriculum-Based Assessment as the Source of Student Achievement Data for Their Subject Area****Proposed Solutions:**

18. Empower principals to work with all teachers to reach mutually agreeable decisions on what data will be collected.
19. Develop appropriate rubrics to capture the growth of students in areas that are difficult to measure through standardized tests.
20. Allow teachers and principals the option of using classroom-based assessments for 35% of the evaluation even when district or common assessments are available.

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**RECOMMENDATION 9****Create a Defined Time-Limited Appeal Process as Part of the Evaluation System****Proposed Solutions:**

21. Create a defined appeal process that teachers would utilize if there are conflicting interpretations of evaluation data and/or teacher performance.
22. Create an appeals committee composed of two each: administrator, teacher, union leadership, peer leader/ instructional mentor and randomly selected leaders from the district.
23. Develop a time-limited collaborative teacher improvement plan.
24. Provide professional development opportunities for educators who need skill development based on evaluation data and/or an improvement plan.
25. Allow teachers involved in the appeals process to request observations be conducted by two evaluators (instructional coach and administrator) concurrently to ensure fairness.

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**RECOMMENDATION 10****Provide Full, Sustainable State Funding and Personnel to Support the Mandated Teacher Evaluation Model****Proposed Solutions:**

26. Provide full and sustainable state funding to allow for effective training for all personnel involved with the mandated evaluation model.
27. Provide full and sustainable state funding including compensation for educator coaches, substitute teachers, staff development, travel and data management.
28. Provide full and sustainable state funding to develop a statewide pool of subject experts who are trained as instructional coaches who can be used in any district.
29. Re-establish state funding of professional development consistent with MN Statue 122A.60.

## Overview

*“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”*

– John F. Kennedy

Minnesota has a great legacy of a strong educational system. Students throughout Minnesota deserve to have educators who uphold that legacy through excellent teaching, and a system that is aimed at creating the best teachers for our students. On the VIVA site, teachers spoke passionately about their profession and the desire for all their students to be engaged, challenged, creative and successful. They also wrote overwhelmingly about the need to grow in their knowledge and skill so they can continue to meet the diverse needs of their students. A positive, solid teacher evaluation system that is strength-based and focused on greater achievement for all students in Minnesota serves a valuable purpose, and teachers welcome the opportunity to hone their craft and improve their practice through meaningful reviews and reflections of their teaching.

**The goal of an evaluation system is simple:** Maximize student achievement by focusing on excellent teaching. Much press has been given to the perception that in order to improve student achievement we must get rid of bad teachers, as if Minnesota schools are filled with ineffectual, inept personnel in the classrooms. The truth is that throughout Minnesota every day tens of thousands of smart, dedicated educators are working tirelessly and effectively to prepare and equip students and create lifelong learners who can be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A fair, balanced evaluation system aimed at teacher improvement rather than punishment honors that dedication and professionalism and continues the legacy of strong Minnesota schools.

**When asked what makes a great teacher and how effectiveness should be assessed, VIVA contributors were united in their themes:** Evaluation of great teaching must recognize and take into consideration the vast diversity of students and teaching situations, and measurements of effective teaching must be fair and flexible. The VIVA Writing Collaborative has concentrated on making recommendations for a statewide evaluation system that addresses *who* best should do the evaluations, *what* should be evaluated and *how* the evaluations should be done. Anchoring these recommendations is the belief that an evaluation system should be used as a resource for professional development, with the educator taking ownership of the process.

Our students face a rapidly changing world, and teachers want to equip them with all the knowledge and skills they need to be reflective decision makers and successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Every day teachers want to “pay it forward” by kindling a lifelong love of learning.



They strive to foster and nurture budding passions in their students in hopes that all our young people will continue to develop throughout their lives into the leaders and problem solvers we need for our nation's future.

*"In my classroom of less than 20 young children, I have two students with Asperger's-type symptoms, eight students that qualified for Title 1 services, one speech and language student and several students from the local shelter. The reading levels vary from not knowing all of their sounds and letters to reading chapter books. I have one-third of my class that cannot write their numbers to 120 and do not have one-to-one correspondence. I do everything from daily cares including toileting, nose blowing, nurse care, social skills instruction, and teaching students the expectations of being in school."*

– First grade teacher

This teacher's reality is why we can't have a "one size fits all" teacher evaluation. It is why evaluations need to be based on individual student growth over a school year. It is why teachers need to have a say in their own evaluation. Ultimately, this is why evaluations need to be about helping all teachers improve their practice rather than punishing teachers who do not appear to measure up.



## Recommendations for the State of Minnesota Teacher Evaluation System

### RECOMMENDATION 1

#### **Adopt a Flexible Evaluation Model Reflecting the Diverse Student Populations and Numerous Variables of Educational Settings across Minnesota**

##### **Statement of the Problem**

Through VIVA, Minnesota teachers voiced their concern about the need for a flexible evaluation model. It cannot be “one-size fits all” because there is no typical classroom. Differences in teacher assignments and classroom populations must be considered when designing and implementing the evaluation model. All teachers should be evaluated with a fair and flexible tool that recognizes these vast differences and the specific competencies needed to be a successful educator across all possible teaching assignments. There are numerous variables and unknowns when implementing an evaluation model of this scope. There must be flexibility within the model to reflect variables and the model itself must be revisable. For this reason, it will be important that the model be open to ongoing evaluation and revision and include an avenue for appeals.

##### **Proposed Solutions**

1. Use a proven tool for evaluating best practices by grade level, content area, or position. There are many options for measurement that have already been vetted by professional organizations. Some of these are: The National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE ), American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Modern Language Association, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and American School Counselors Association.
2. Develop a list of variables that affect student, school, and teacher interactions, then adjust the data collection accordingly. We know that variables such as school location, class size, income level, student mobility, English proficiency, and special education needs all impact student performance so a corresponding formula should be applied to teacher evaluation for these mitigating variables that are present in classrooms around the state but outside the control of a teacher. (See Appendix 1 Classroom/School/District Variable Information)
3. Allow for ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of the state evaluation model and make revisions as needed with input from teachers across the state.



## Why We Believe This Will Work

We believe that all students in Minnesota schools should be achieving at the highest levels. Teacher evaluation must be based on best practices to maximize student achievement. Teacher competencies will be optimal only when data obtained through the use of flexible evaluation models is synthesized and used to guide teacher development. An evaluation model that allows for inclusion of variables will provide a more accurate view of the teacher's performance, growth, and increases in student achievement. In addition, the evaluation model must be evaluated, necessary revisions must be made, and teachers must be involved in examining the effectiveness of the new evaluation model.



## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Use a Standardized Rubric for Observation, Which Can Be Implemented Objectively by Any Trained Observer

#### Statement of the Problem

Because teaching is as much art as it is science, subjectivity becomes an issue as individuals try to assess an educator's abilities during observations. Because there are multiple ways to approach instruction and because observers may have a bias toward their own methods, it is important to develop an observation tool that allows educators flexibility in how they apply current research to their instructional methods but retains essential inter-rater reliability.

#### Proposed Solutions

4. Use a rubric that outlines key effective instructional components, such as Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, those outlined in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or from another research-based plan.
5. Analyze all components of the rubric for legitimacy and fairness so they clearly apply to what is being observed and allow enough flexibility for variation in instructional method.

#### Why We Believe This Will Work

Well-constructed, standardized rubrics will provide a fair and flexible tool that can be used throughout the state as instructional coaches observe and collaborate with educators. It is the teacher's pedagogy that is examined and discussed in the post-observation but the goal is ultimately to improve student achievement through improved instruction. In addition, the rubric will be used to direct discussion for targeted professional development goals and provide increased inter-rater consistency.



## RECOMMENDATION 3

### Focus Observations and Evaluations on Professional Growth and Self-Reflection

#### Statement of the Problem

An educator evaluation model that only includes assessment from an outside observer deprives teachers of the opportunity to reflect on their own professional practice to build on and improve it. Growth for students and teachers drives the profession, but teachers seldom get the opportunity to determine how they pursue that growth. Teachers already self-evaluate and make efforts to improve their instructional practice, leading to improved student achievement. This self-evaluation often is informal so the evidence of the process and the impact on student learning are not always documented. Therefore, observers may be unaware of the teacher's instructional adjustments and the positive impact these have on student learning.

#### Proposed Solutions

6. For each evaluation cycle the teacher, in collaboration with the educator coach and/or a professional learning community, will write a personal professional growth plan aimed at improving strategies used to advance student achievement.
7. As part of the evaluation cycle the teacher will provide evidence of progress toward these goals. Evidence of progress needs to be included as part of the summative evaluation.
8. To reach successful completion of these professional goals, the educator must have the opportunity and funding to pursue professional development related to the growth plan.

#### Why We Believe This Will Work

In the book *How Teachers Learn*, Steve Chappuis, Jan Chappuis and Rick Stiggins state, "The learning-team model helps teachers make changes in practice that lead to improved student achievement.... Just as learning improves for students when they have the structured opportunity to reflect on what they know and don't know in relation to the targets of instruction, adult learning also benefits from intentional reflection on classroom practice. Collaborative learning teams can transform the nature of adult interaction and learning in schools by engaging teachers in the same process of continual learning and improvement that we ask our students to strive for in their work." Educators have repeatedly asserted the importance of having opportunities to have a voice in their own professional development and growth. Employing a strength-based model that focuses on growth and success for teachers rather than a punitive model will benefit all students.

## RECOMMENDATION 4

### Use the Teacher Evaluation as a Springboard to Professional Development that Leads to Continuous Improvement of Practice.

#### Statement of the Problem

The many teacher voices on VIVA from across the state expressed the need for an evaluative system that validates accomplishments and drives the professional growth of an educator to increase student achievement. Teaching is a challenging profession and teachers want to be supported in their work with students. Teachers believe the primary goal of any evaluative plan must be the validation of educators' competencies in order to give Minnesota's children the best teachers in the nation and help all students achieve at the highest levels.

Teachers also spoke of the inequities that exist in schools and districts throughout the state regarding evaluation processes and subsequent staff development opportunities. Teachers want professional development opportunities that meet their needs and result in greater student success. The Teacher Evaluation Legislation requires that teachers "participate in professional learning communities" and formulate an "individual growth and development plan" and study, develop and improve "effective teaching practices." Formal teacher professional development is a necessary and vital part of the plan. Therefore, comprehensive professional development must be easily accessible for every school district in the state.

#### Proposed Solutions

9. Provide professional development opportunities based on evaluation criteria that will build each teacher's knowledge and skills.
10. Provide staff development to help teachers interpret testing data and develop and target instructional strategies based on the data.
11. Support instructional strategies by providing professional development activities such as, but not limited to, peer coaching, mentorship, professional learning communities (PLCs) or cohorts, teacher shadowing, workshops and classes for all Minnesota educators of students ages birth to 21, regardless of subject, grade level, teaching assignment or district size.



## Why We Believe This Will Work

The Teacher Evaluation law targets the improvement of student achievement by having the most qualified and highly effective educators teaching our children. We believe the highest level of student learning will be achieved by equal access across the state to professional development that is closely linked to student achievement data, teacher evaluation data, individual professional development goals and PLC training and implementation. Individual professional goals will vary by content area and teacher/student need. When these needs are addressed, student achievement will increase. Data collection and analysis over a three-year observation/evaluation cycle will contribute to building teacher knowledge and skills.

In addition, we believe student achievement throughout the State of Minnesota will continue to be at high levels and grow even further when there is a collaborative model such as peer coaching, mentoring, or a cohort focus on professional development with statewide access for all the teachers/educators in Minnesota.



## RECOMMENDATION 5

### **Measures of Educator Effectiveness Obtained through Observation Should be Averaged over Multiple Observations Done by More than One Trained Observer**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers, like most people, want to know that the quality of their work has been fairly and accurately assessed in order to improve the impact they have with students. Research validates that a one-time observation of a teacher is a less reliable indicator of the quality of that person's work than when the teacher is observed multiple times throughout a year and the average of the observation results is used to describe the teacher's instructional skills.

#### **Proposed Solution**

12. Take a longer-term view of teacher performance that includes information from a variety of observers and multiple measures over time so a teacher's evaluation is not based on a "snapshot."

#### **Why We Believe This Will Work**

Districts, regardless of size, do not have the capacity to observe every teacher multiple times per year utilizing administrators alone. Given the magnitude of the task posed by a statewide teacher evaluation system, most districts will have no choice but to carry out the task through a variety of well-trained observers from the ranks of both teachers and administrators. Conducting multiple observations by different observers and using an average across all observations ensures fairness and is a more accurate reflection of a teacher's overall instructional effectiveness. Fairness in the process is critical to our students and teachers. Fairness ensures that no teacher is mischaracterized in any way based on a single observation. Teachers working with a well-constructed evaluation system implemented by skilled observers will seek to use it as a tool to help define their performance and the success of students. Failure to gain the trust of teachers could impact teacher retention, teacher recruitment, and teacher morale, all of which are important factors that impact students.





## RECOMMENDATION 6

### Train Educators as Instructional Coaches for District and/or Inter-District Observations

#### Statement of the Problem

“Fair,” “unbiased” and “with integrity”: These are words that educators use when describing the professionals who should be observing and evaluating them. Educators want to have trained, knowledgeable individuals, both peers and administrators, working with them to guide their professional growth and increase their students’ achievement levels.

Educators have said loudly through their input on the VIVA site that they want their evaluation to include both observations and evaluations that include collaborative work with peers and an administrator’s input with the focus on quality instruction for increase student engagement and higher student achievement.

An evaluation is, “The making of a judgment about the amount, number, or value of something; assessment.” An observation is, “The action or process of observing something or someone carefully in order to gain information; the ability to notice things, especially significant details; a remark, statement, or comment based on something one has seen, heard, or noticed.” This distinction is necessary.

Administrators are now required by law to do evaluations of educators. Due to their increasing workload and the structure of the evaluation systems used, administrators do not have the time needed to get a full, balanced view of an educator’s knowledge, the application of this knowledge and how it impacts student achievement levels. Educators are comfortable being observed but strongly voiced that they want a system that is fair, unbiased and reliable across the different content areas and developmental levels. Consistently, educators, as well as researchers on the topic, have said that a balanced approach using observations in addition to evaluations would provide that full, rich picture of an educator’s competence.

This balanced view (observation and evaluation combined) will lead to increased teacher knowledge, effective application of data, productive instructional strategies, and collaboration and professional growth among educators across the state. As professionals, educators want to continue to grow and implement strategies that help all students achieve their full potential.



## Proposed Solutions

13. Train licensed educators as subject area instructional experts who will serve as coaches in collaboration with the teacher to identify strengths and areas of growth.
14. Provide time for collaboration (PLCs) needed to continue advancing the training and teaching of Minnesota's highly educated teachers.
15. Conduct peer observations and reviews during the review cycle.
16. Create a pool of educator coaches who are instructional subject experts who can provide balanced and unbiased observations that hold equal weight as the administrator's in the summative evaluation.

## Why We Believe This Will Work

Trained instructional coaches will engage in cognitive discussions centered on observations and the use of current, research-based, relevant teaching methods that reflect best practices. These coaches will facilitate balanced and open communication to celebrate successes, improve instruction, and plan professional growth, all aimed at increasing student achievement. Instructional coaches will mentor and work with their peers, building a greater level of trust and openness in conversation focusing on students' growth and success. Utilizing trained instructional coaches will provide opportunities for principals to efficiently and effectively observe staff on a rotating basis.



## RECOMMENDATION 7

### **Value-Added Measures Should Be Used to Provide Educators Feedback and to Determine Professional Development Needs, but Should Be Excluded from Consideration in Employment Decisions.**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

While Value-Added Measures are intended to demonstrate the effects of a teacher's work on student achievement, researchers widely agree that use of VAM to make conclusions about a teacher's effectiveness includes a degree of error that makes it inappropriate for use in employment decisions. Students should never lose a great teacher because of a tool that has so many limitations.

VAM have limitations and can only estimate a range of effectiveness for a teacher. However, VAM outcomes can change from year to year for reasons other than a teacher's effectiveness, and numerous different employment situations such as co-teaching, short-term leaves of absence, or a change of assignment that makes it extremely difficult to interpret the meaning of the data. The amount of this measurement error is also increased when small numbers of students are included in the data, when Value Added data from a single year is used to make conclusions, and when class size is not taken into consideration. Researchers agree that it is inappropriate to use VAM as a factor in making a high-stakes employment decision. Researchers also caution that the use of VAM in a high-stakes employment decision may lead to the practice of "teaching to the test," which fails to show real student growth because of the distorted results.

#### **Proposed Solutions**

17. VAM data should be used only to identify curriculum or instructional strategies that have been of greatest value to student achievement and to identify the professional development teachers need to improve.

#### **Why We Believe This Will Work**

VAM is not appropriate for use in a high-stakes employment decision, but it can be helpful to educators, and therefore students, for other purposes. VAM can be a helpful tool to educators in determining whether curriculum or teaching strategies they use in the classroom have improved student achievement. This diagnostic use of VAM has a positive influence on student achievement by helping districts and educators determine appropriate professional development needs.



## RECOMMENDATION 8

### **Administrators Should Collaborate with Educators in Non-Tested Subjects to Determine Mutually Agreeable Curriculum-Based Assessment as the Source of Student Achievement Data for Their Subject Area**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

To meet the requirement that 35 percent of an evaluation be based on student achievement data, districts face a great temptation to find one-size fits all testing sources that can be administered by as many teachers as possible. It is an understandable temptation considering the magnitude of the task posed by evaluating every teacher in a district. There is no one-size-fits-all testing source, any more than there is a one-size-fits-all “student need.” All of our students have different needs and teachers ardently want to target these needs to increase their students’ achievement. Using student achievement data in an evaluation system requires that we find reliable and valid sources of information that identify how students are growing. But, to be of greatest use to a teacher, student data must reflect actual classroom content based on the needs of specific groups of students. Using state, district, or even common assessments by grade or subject turns the art of teaching into a mechanical process, void of the creativity needed to inspire students toward a thirst for knowledge, toward curiosity, and toward higher-order thinking. Teachers have expressed their concern for years that testing has made a significant and negative influence on what and how students are taught. The new emphasis on collecting student data for the purpose of measuring teacher effectiveness will make this situation even worse.

#### **Proposed Solutions**

18. Districts should empower their principals to work with all teachers to reach mutually agreeable decisions on what data will be collected. Such decisions allow the greatest degree of flexibility for teachers to determine, based on their curriculum and the needs of their current students, what will be measured, how it will be measured, and how it will drive instruction in the various teaching assignments in our schools today. (See Appendix 2, *List of Teaching Assignments*)
19. Appropriate rubrics should be used or developed to capture the growth of students in areas that are difficult to measure through standardized tests.
20. Even when district or common assessments are available, teachers and principals must be allowed to choose classroom-based assessments due to the variety of teaching assignments in our schools in order to meet this requirement of the statute covering 35% of the evaluation.



### **Why We Believe This Will Work**

Teachers already have and use curriculum-based assessments now. This will avoid a major time and financial investment in creating common assessments which would detract from actual teaching time with students. It will also save the money being spent now to purchase commercial products that were not intended for such use in the first place. While some teachers may benefit from using common assessments, those who have well-established measures of student progress will maintain the kind of autonomy and flexibility that professionals need and expect in order to serve the individual needs of their students. While work will need to be done to increase the reliability of curriculum-based assessment tools, this work is worth the investment-return of empowering teachers as professional decision-makers who know their students' needs best and desire for all their students to be successful learners.

## RECOMMENDATION 9

### Create a Defined Time-Limited Appeal Process as Part of the Evaluation System

#### Statement of the Problem

Teachers from around the state of Minnesota weighed in on the topic of teacher evaluations and overwhelmingly agreed that being evaluated was necessary and also strongly stated that the evaluation model must be fair. Teachers voiced serious concerns that all required steps would not be taken prior to disciplinary action “for not making adequate progress” in the teacher improvement process. There must not be any shortcuts taken in the improvement process: The steps are evaluation, improvement plan, followed by re-evaluation, and concluding with a decision for either “no discipline” or “discipline”, as laid out in the law.

There is currently no process or committee to ensure that teacher evaluations and resulting decisions are fair and unbiased. Due to differences in perspectives of evaluation results, arbitrary goals set by administrators, interpretation of data and teacher situations, mitigating circumstances, or bias on the part of the evaluator, it is essential that teachers have access to a clearly defined progressive appeal process.

#### Proposed Solutions

21. Create a defined appeal process that teachers would utilize if there are conflicting interpretations of evaluation data and/or teacher performance.
22. Create an unbiased, systematic appeal process involving a committee composed of two each: administrator, teacher, union leadership, peer leader/instructional mentor, and one randomly selected leader from the district to balance the decision.
23. Develop a collaborative teacher improvement plan focus that has a defined, limited timeline, which leads to teacher improvement and greater success for students based on evaluation data.
24. Provide professional development opportunities for educators who need skill development based on evaluation data and/or an improvement plan.
25. Allow teachers involved in the appeals process to request observations be conducted by two evaluators (instructional coach and administrator) concurrently to minimize bias, maximize inter-rater reliability and ensure fairness.



### **Why We Believe This Will Work**

The ultimate goal of teachers is for the highest student achievement possible. With this focus we believe it is essential to dialogue about the interpretation of evaluation data. It is also important to reach a consensus and concur on the validity of the results of this data. We believe a process for appeals is necessary and fair in this Teacher Evaluation Legislation because teachers have the right to challenge and defend any evaluative interpretations and actions resulting from the evaluation. The current legislation violates districts' labor agreements where due process is guaranteed, undermines teacher morale and trust, and affects the quality of daily classroom connections with students, thus having the opposite effect on our ultimate goal of increasing student achievement to the highest levels possible.

## RECOMMENDATION 10

### Provide Full, Sustainable State Funding and Personnel to Support the Mandated Teacher Evaluation Model

#### Statement of the Problem

Teachers sharing their ideas with VIVA expressed deep concerns in regards to the inequity of funding and personnel across districts. Successful implementation of a mandated comprehensive evaluation program requires full sustainable state financial support. For many districts there are limited or no available funds for implementation and support, to pay for training and compensation of evaluators and peer coaches, substitutes, data management and other related and/or yet to be determined evaluation expenses.

Teachers in districts of all sizes have expressed that being observed, coached and/or evaluated by someone who understands research-based best practices for their particular discipline would be an essential element of any evaluation model. In some school districts there may be personnel that can serve as evaluators and/or coaches. In other school districts, there may simply not be enough personnel to take on those roles. It is important that the evaluation process not become an additional burden to teachers by taking them out of the classroom on a regular basis to observe other teachers. A limited number of teachers who can serve as instructional coaches means more time out of the classroom and reduced quality of instruction for students.

#### Proposed Solutions

26. Provide full and sustainable state funding to allow for effective training for all personnel involved with the mandated evaluation model.
27. Provide full and sustainable state funding including compensation for educator coaches, substitute teachers, staff development, travel, and data management.
28. Provide full and sustainable state funding to develop a statewide pool of subject experts who are trained as instructional coaches for any district needing personnel to serve in this role. Statewide pools of subject matter experts should be available to all regions (use the Minnesota Association of School Administrator MASA job site regions) of the state.
29. Re-establish state funding of professional development consistent with MN Statue 122A.60 as formerly mandated by state law for this mandated evaluation law.



### **Why We Believe This Will Work**

The Minnesota Teacher Evaluation Model must include full and sustainable state funding. Only when the state funds the training for instructional coaches, staff development, and management of data, will this investment in the evaluation model be successful. This will result in meaningful teacher development that will drive classroom instruction and positively impact student achievement.

In addition, the differences in district size and funding will create an undue burden for many districts as they struggle to manage this new legislation with limited time and personnel resources and diminishing general funds, thus removing resources from student instruction. With full, sustainable funding, this burden would be minimized, allowing dollars and personnel to remain in the classroom and have a positive, direct and significant impact on student achievement.



## CONCLUSION

# Strengthening Our Practice: A Classroom Teachers' Approach to Evaluation

Every day, the voices of tens of thousands of teachers in Minnesota are heard saying to their students: “Here is what you need to know. Here is why you need to know it. Here is how you can learn it. Here’s how I will help you to know it. Here is how you can show me you know it. Here’s what you can do if you already know it.” These questions sound so clear and simple, but teaching is anything but clear and simple. Teachers stand before students with one overriding passion: to help each of these children, adolescents and young adults reach their full potential.

Teachers need to be supported in this monumental task, to be trusted in their skill and expertise of their subject matter and pedagogy to move all our students forward in their learning. This is a team effort of all the teachers, school support personnel, administrators and parents to prepare students for the future. It needs to be the mission of all.

Every student deserves to have a great teacher, and one way for us to ensure this is to create a solid evaluation that teachers can believe in and can have a say in and that adequately accounts for the many challenges teachers face every day. An effective evaluation model can direct our energies to hone our craft and strengthen instructional practice, resulting in optimal student achievement.

Minnesota teachers are committed to upholding our state’s great education legacy. We want to continue and build on this legacy with a solid evaluation model because it can be a powerful tool to help us achieve our utmost priority: to maximize student learning.



## APPENDIX 1

### Classroom/School/District Variable Information

This is a suggested list of a few of the variables over which teachers have no control and therefore should be considered as mitigating factors in teacher evaluations.

#### Variables

Number of Schools in district? \_\_\_\_\_

School District is

☐ Rural ☐ Urban ☐ Suburban

Number of consecutive years in this teaching assignment

☐ 1–3 ☐ 4–6 ☐ 7+

District per-student spending.

☐ \$5,900–7,500 ☐ \$7,501–10,000 ☐ \$10,001–16,000 ☐ 16,001–22,000 ☐ 22,002–41,000

Teacher is directly responsible for giving state standardized tests to students

☐ Yes ☐ No

Teacher does not give standardized tests

☐ Yes ☐ No

School mobility rate is

☐ 0–5% ☐ 6–12% ☐ 13–20% ☐ 21–28% ☐ 29%+

English Language Learner percent per school

☐ 0–5% ☐ 6–12% ☐ 13–20% ☐ 21–28% ☐ 29+

Number of teacher involvement in activities/committees/coaching beyond classroom

☐ 0 ☐ 1–3 ☐ 4–5 ☐ 6+

Teacher teaches off school site (home etc.)

☐ Yes ☐ No

Teacher has adequate classroom space

☐ Smaller ☐ Adequate ☐ No classroom ☐ Larger classroom

Number of students on free or reduced lunch: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher is evaluated on

☐ Test scores of student population as a whole ☐ Test scores of students s/he directly teaches





## APPENDIX 2

### Teaching Licensure Areas

This is a partial list of educators whose work falls outside of standard tested subjects. These are the professionals who should be empowered to work with their district leaders to reach mutually agreeable decisions on what data will be collected and used to measure their performance, based on the needs of their current students. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list.

- Elementary Generalist
  - K6
  - K8
- Social Studies
- Science
- Math
- Business
- Computer Science
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Co-teaching
- Team teaching
- Job sharing
- Teacher of Visual Impaired
- Teacher of Physically Impaired
- Teacher of Emotional Behavior disordered
- Teacher of Developmentally Cognitively Delayed
- Early Childhood Education
- Developmental Adaptive Physical Education
- Social Worker
- School Counselor
- Psychologist
- Vocal Music
- Instrumental Music
- Theater
- Visual Arts
- Physical Education
- Cultural Studies
- Gifted and Talented
- Montessori
- Young Scholars
- Technology
- Industrial Tech
- Family and Consumer Science
- Nurse ( some districts are on teacher contract)
- Communication Disorders
- Reading Specialist
- Occupational Therapist
- Special Education
- Title 1
- Basic Skills
- English Language Learner
- World Language
- Language Arts

## THE VIVA PROJECT

### Minnesota Teachers Writing Collaborative II

Bios



**JIM BARNHILL** has been a special education teacher since 2001 working primarily in the Minneapolis Public School district in various roles including as a resource and self-contained program teacher. He currently works in the South High Life Skills Program teaching transition-based courses and oversees a work-based learning program. He was a nominee for Minnesota Teacher of the Year in 2011, and has served on the Executive Board of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers Local 59 since 2008. He currently serves on a district-level committee overseeing a teacher evaluation system under development in the Minneapolis school system.



**JOYCE BAUMANN** is a kindergarten teacher at Cold Spring Elementary in the ROCORI School District. In her 18-year career, Joyce has also taught second and fifth grade. She completed her Masters of Teaching and Learning through St. Mary's University. Joyce will receive a 2013 California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence and was a 2011 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Finalist. She is a member of the Executive Council of Education Minnesota-ROCORI and serves the students of the ROCORI School District as an Elementary Knowledge Bowl Coach.



**CATHERINE CHILTON-WERNER** is a junior/senior high Spanish and English/language arts teacher at Lake Park Audubon High School in Lake Park, Minnesota. Catherine received a BA in Spanish and Portuguese from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and a BA in English Education at North Dakota State University in Fargo, ND. She previously taught for the Rural Cass Consortium and the Northern Cass district in North Dakota. At LPA, Catherine also works as the local integration coordinator for the West Central Minnesota Multi-District Cultural Collaborative. Catherine chairs the Teacher Assistance Team, is a member of the Student Assistance Team, the National Honor Society advisory board and directs the one act and junior high plays. She served as LPA Education Minnesota president for five years and is currently a teacher rights advocate for the local.

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### Minnesota Teachers Writing Collaborative II

Bios



**DIEDRA CARLSON** teaches Montessori for ages 9 through 12 at Crossroads Elementary in St. Paul. She is a member of the American Montessori Society, and a member of the Council of Exceptional Children. Diedra is a graduate of St. Catherine University in St. Paul, where she received her bachelor's degree in oral communications, her masters in elementary education and her Montessori certification. A Montessori student herself, Diedra is the mother of three children who also are Montessori students. She been married to her husband, Joel, for 20 years and they enjoy camping and cooking.



**LYNN MUELLER** is a licensed K-12 Visual Arts Specialist teaching in the Rosemount-Eagan-Apple Valley School District. She is currently teaching in a K-5 elementary school, where approximately 840 students rotate through the art room every week. Lynn has worked continuously in the public school system since 1990, serving in a variety of teaching and administrative roles in both elementary and secondary settings. She also teaches community education art enrichment classes for adults and youth in her district. Since 1988, Lynn has been a teacher, coordinator, supervisor and planner with the ArtStart nonprofit arts organization, which provides multicultural summer camp experiences for youth in the Twin Cities.



**KEVAN NITZBERG** has been teaching since 1972 beginning with teaching art at a high school for drop-outs called the Lower East Side Prep. He also taught art in a community education youth program and in a well-to-do private K-12 school in Queens. Since moving to Minnesota in 1976, he has taught art at St. Bernard's High School in St. Paul (19 years), and at Anoka High School (17 years). He also served as the Fine Arts Facilitator for the A-H District, served as an ArtsConnectEd trainer for the MIA/WAC, PSEO art instructor for the St. Paul Connections program, and Fine Arts Facilitator and Visual Arts Tournament Director for the MSHSL. He has served on the Art Educator of Minnesota Council since 1994.



**ELIZABETH PARR-SMESTAD** is a K-6 physical education/National Board Certified instructor at Wellstone Elementary School. She was the 2010 Paul Schmidt MN state physical educator for her outstanding contributions, which included testifying at the state capitol. She was the 2007 St. Paul Saint of the City for contributions in the community/school. Her peers nominated her as St. Paul Physical Educator of the year in 2011. As an athlete on the first USA women's national bobsled team, she was a pioneer in paving the way for its Olympic debut in 2002 and was selected as a 2002 Olympic Torchbearer.

## THE VIVA PROJECT

### Minnesota Teachers Writing Collaborative II

Bios



**LUKE STORDAHL** is an English Teacher at Litchfield High School. He belongs to the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English and serves on the board for Central Lakes United. He's also served on several MCA assessment advisory panels for MDE. In addition to teaching English, Luke serves as the advisor for the Student Council and Youth Energy Summit team. He earned his Bachelor's of Science from University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in English Literature and Political Science. He received his Master's degree in Education from the College of St. Scholastica. He's married and has three (soon to be four) lovely children.



**ANNETTE WALEN** is an Instructional Coach in the Osseo School District. After graduating from Augsburg College, she served as Director of Education at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, where she was responsible for education programs for birth through adult. She has served in Osseo area schools for 25+ years, teaching 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades, in addition to being a children's church choir director for 13 years. She has a Masters degree from the University of Minnesota and an Elementary Science Certificate from Hamline University and spends her summers working for Concordia Language Villages. Her passion for learning and impacting the world through teaching extends to her own 3 children, who also are actively trying to make the world a better place.



**PAM WINKLER** has been an educator for 24 years. She has taught in traditional and progressive classrooms, and currently teaches in a Primary Years Programme International Baccalaureate World School in White Bear Lake, MN. Pam holds a BA in French, a BS in Elementary Education, a Master's in Teaching and Learning and most recently attained her Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership along with her administrative license K-12. Pam is an active union member, having served as Members' Rights Advocate, TALL Advocate, Communications Chair and Vice President. She is involved in supporting local politics and social issues.

## New Voice Strategies

**New Voice Strategies**, an Illinois nonprofit corporation, operates the VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) Project. The VIVA Project is the creation of a group of seasoned, passionate advocacy professionals who believe in the power and wisdom of individual citizens in the public arena. VIVA taps into the power of technology to bring together individuals with a passion for finding practical solutions to complex problems and gives them a new way to build consensus around ideas for change. Through our web-enabled platforms, we create opportunities for people with expertise earned by training and day-to-day work experience to collaborate, exchange ideas and influence public policy. Our first online collaborations—we call them Idea Exchanges—launched in September 2010. These Idea Exchanges engage classroom teachers directly in one of the most important discussions our country is having now: the future of American public schools.

\* The VIVA Idea Exchange is powered by SocialSphere proprietary collaboration technology, ARENA™.

### Board of Directors

**JILL BASS** taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master's in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge's National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

**ELIZABETH EVANS**, founding CEO, is a recognized national leader in building unconventional alliances and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems. For the last decade, her work has focused on education reform, and she has spent her career promoting the interests of children. She was executive director of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS), where she was the chief architect of a successful statewide campaign that culminated with Illinois being the first state in the nation to enact comprehensive charter law reforms in 2009. Before joining INCS, Elizabeth was part of the Illinois Facilities Fund leadership team, where her responsibilities focused on Illinois government relations, communications, and advocacy. Elizabeth also worked at the Civic Committee of The Commercial Club of Chicago and was a political organizer in Washington, DC, and Michigan. She practiced law from 1990 to 1998 for the US Securities and Exchange Commission Enforcement Division and was a staff attorney in the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

**KIPLUND "KIP" KOLKMEIER** is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Coie, LLC & Kolkmeier Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the following law firms: Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

**ASHLEY WARLICK**, Chair, teaches elementary school in the Cambridge, MA Public Schools. She has a concentration in teaching students with special needs and brings a strong interest in the arts to her work. She serves on the Board of Directors of her school's affiliated nonprofit organization, which brings urgently needed resources to the students at the school.





