

# Starting the Journey

Progress Report on Colorado's Educator Evaluation and Support System



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

January 2015

As a **dynamic service agency**, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) provides leadership, resources, support and accountability to the state's 178 school districts, 1,826 schools, 53,910 teachers and 4,961 administrators to help them build capacity to meet the needs of the state's 876,999 public school students. CDE also provides services and support to boards of cooperative educational services, early learning centers, state correctional schools, facility schools, the state's libraries, adult/family literacy centers and General Education Development (GED) testing centers reaching learners of all ages.



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# Executive Summary

Great teachers aren't born. They are trained and encouraged throughout their career. Classroom teaching and school leadership are the strongest school-based factors impacting student achievement. Every Colorado child in every classroom deserves to have excellent teachers and school leaders who are supported in their professional growth. That means educators need clear, frequent feedback about how their teaching and leadership impact student learning.

To meet these goals, in 2010 Colorado lawmakers passed Senate Bill 10-191, changing how principals and teachers are supported and evaluated with the goal of ensuring college and career readiness for all students. It also requires evaluating educators based on statewide standards of practice and measures of student learning (for teachers and principals) or student outcomes (for specialized service professionals).

This report provides an update on how the model evaluation and support system for teachers and principals is being implemented in 26 school districts that have been piloting the system since 2011. And it describes how the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) continues to make improvements as the new system is now rolled out in all of the state's 178 districts.

## PRELIMINARY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RATINGS

During the first two years of the phase-in, the pilot districts rated teachers and principals on a five-point scale (from *basic* — well below state standard — to *exemplary* — well above state standard) based on their professional practice in several areas (as measured by a rubric). They also practiced measuring student growth. The following results are based only on the ratings given for the professional practices and should be considered preliminary because districts are still in various stages of implementation.

**TEACHERS.** In 2013–14, 39 percent of teachers in the pilot districts were considered *proficient* (meeting state standard) based on the five Quality Standards, and 53 percent were *accomplished* (above state standard). Only 5 percent received the top rating of *exemplary*, and 3 percent were deemed *partially proficient* (below state standard).

**PRINCIPALS.** In 2012–13 (the 2013–14 data are not yet available), 48 percent of principals in the pilot districts received one of the top two ratings based on the six Quality Standards,

and an additional 46 percent were considered *proficient*. Only 5 percent were deemed *partially proficient*.

For both teachers and principals:

- The ratings vary based on the district, school level, subject taught, probationary status, experience and demographic characteristics. For example, early childhood educators received the highest ratings, followed by elementary, middle and high school teachers.
- Teachers performed differently across different elements, indicating that the elements capture distinct aspects of teaching rather than measuring the same thing.
- The variability in the distribution of ratings suggests that evaluators are able to differentiate among teachers and among principals.

Considering the combined state model for teachers and principals, these initial findings provide evidence for validity and reliability. There are areas that CDE is tracking in an effort to improve validity and reliability over time.

### Distribution of Teacher Ratings, 2013–14



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.  
Source: Colorado State Model Evaluation System for Teachers: 2013–14 Pilot Report

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIRST THREE YEARS

Based on surveys, interviews, focus groups and data submitted from the pilot districts, several overarching patterns have emerged.

**The new model system is generating actionable feedback for teachers and principals.** Nearly 80 percent of principals and 60 percent of teachers say that the model system is influencing their practice. Approximately 70 percent of principals and about half of teachers say that the new system provides actionable feedback and is useful in making instructional decisions.

**The model system is causing more focused conversations among educators.** Surveys of teachers found that 76 percent agree that they have meaningful opportunities to confer with their principal/evaluator about their practice, and 76 percent agree that the information helps identify areas for improvement.

**The model system is helping educators take more ownership of their professional growth.** Many teachers say that the system helped “push them out of their comfort zone” and write

more ambitious goals, according to focus groups conducted by the Colorado Education Initiative. For example, teachers are able to be more intentional with planning and more frequently incorporate technology into instruction.

**Pilot participants, especially principals, are more supportive of the system as they gain more experience with it.** On every measure, principals surveyed in spring 2013 strongly believe the model system is superior to the system they were using in fall 2011. The increase in positive responses ranged from 44 to 65 percentage points.

**Challenges remain.** At the end of the 2012–13 school year, 80 percent of teachers and 94 percent of principals said that the system is at least *somewhat effective* (thus there is room for improvement). Key concerns include how time-consuming the more detailed observations and feedback sessions are, the validity and reliability of the measures, and whether the same system can accurately measure the performance of all teachers in all grades and subjects.

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## GOING FORWARD

CDE will continue being transparent, accountable and committed to continuous improvement based on lessons from the field. In the coming year, CDE is focusing on four major priorities.

**Validating the rubrics** to ensure that the evaluation system is fair for all educators and measures what it is intended to measure. CDE also is studying how the measures of student learning are being used.

**Ensuring more consistent evaluations**, using tools such as Elevate Colorado, an online system to help promote common

interpretations of teacher quality and help evaluators provide consistent, useful and actionable feedback to educators.

**Helping reduce the time burden** by creating an online performance management system to reduce the paperwork. More than 90 local education agencies (LEAs) are using the system, and additional LEAs are considering it.

**Evaluating specialized teachers** (early education, special education, art, etc.) by developing guidance that provides informal advice to help teachers and their evaluators understand the evaluation process within their specific context.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** A change of this magnitude clearly is challenging but already is making a difference in classrooms across the state. This is hard work but worthwhile. Colorado is making progress, and there is room for continued improvements.

# Where We Are and How We Got Here

*All students in Colorado will have effective teachers in their classrooms and effective leaders for their schools. Evaluation provides teachers and principals with clear expectations for their performance and with ongoing feedback and support needed to improve performance.*

— State Council for Educator Effectiveness

Great teachers aren't born. They are trained and encouraged throughout their career. Classroom teaching and school leadership are the strongest school-based factors impacting student achievement. Every Colorado child in every classroom deserves to have excellent teachers and school leaders who are supported in their professional growth. That means educators need clear, frequent feedback about how their teaching and leadership impact student learning.

To meet these goals, Colorado lawmakers passed Senate Bill 10-191 in 2010, changing how all educators are evaluated and supported in their professional growth. The goals are to:

- accelerate student results;
- serve as the basis for improvement of instruction by providing meaningful feedback to educators; and
- provide a basis for making decisions in the areas of hiring, promotion, professional development and earning non-probationary status.

Colorado began piloting its model evaluation and support system in 2011 in 26 school districts of varying size. The teacher and principal pilot continues through the 2015–16 school year. In addition, 19 sites across the state are piloting evaluation and support systems for specialized service professionals from 2013–14 through 2015–16. Meanwhile, evaluation requirements for all Colorado school districts went into effect in the 2013–14 school year.

This report provides an update on how SB 10-191 is being implemented and describes how the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) continues to make improvements as the new system is rolled out in all of the state's 178 school districts. Some districts are choosing to implement their own evaluation system that meets or exceeds the requirements of SB 10-191. This report focuses mostly on the development of and improvements to the Colorado State Model Evaluation System that more than 160 districts have chosen to implement.

## KEY ELEMENTS

The Colorado State Model Evaluation System is guided by five principles outlined by the State Council for Educator Effectiveness:

- Data should inform decisions, but human judgment will always be an essential component of evaluations.
- The implementation and evaluation of the system must embody continuous improvement.
- The purpose of the system is to provide meaningful and credible feedback that improves performance.
- The development and implementation of the evaluation system must continue to involve stakeholders in a collaborative process.
- Educator evaluations must take place within a larger system that is aligned and supportive.

## KEY REQUIREMENTS

- All principals, assistant principals, teachers and specialized service providers (such as counselors) are evaluated annually.
- Evaluations are based on multiple measures, including observations and professional leadership as well as student growth over time.
- Non-probationary status (tenure) is earned after three consecutive years of demonstrated effectiveness.
- Non-probationary status is lost after two consecutive years of ineffective ratings.

### Multiple measures for teachers

Quality Standards for content knowledge, classroom environment, instruction, reflective practice, leadership



Multiple measures of student learning over time

### Multiple measures for principals

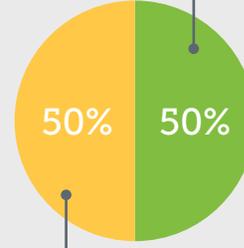
Quality Standards for leadership: strategic, instructional, cultural and equity, HR, managerial, external development



Multiple measures of student learning over time

### Multiple measures for specialized service professionals

Quality Standards for content knowledge, classroom environment, instruction, reflective practice, leadership

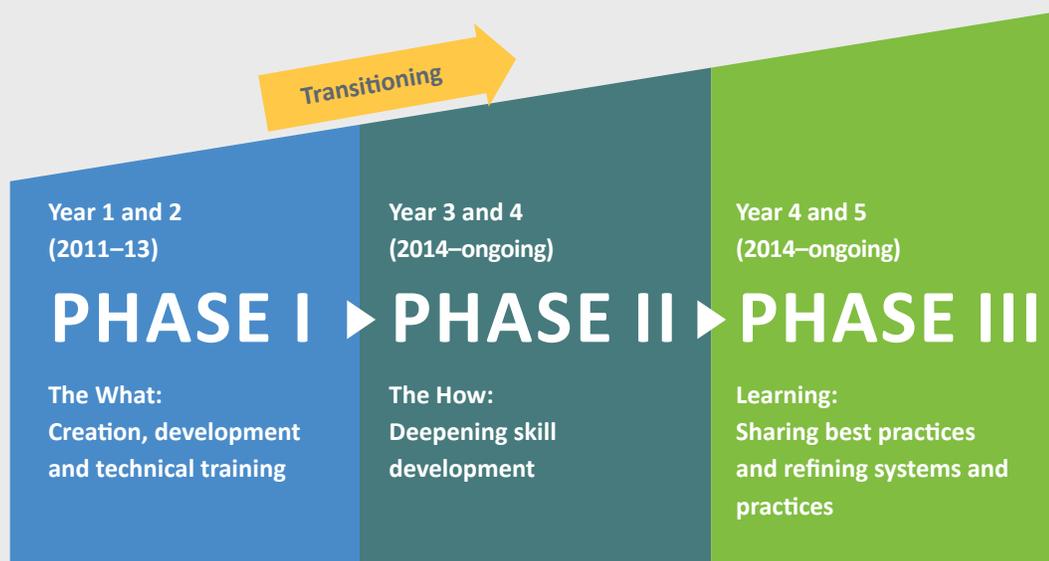


Multiple measures of student outcomes

## A GRADUAL PHASE-IN

Colorado is completing the first phase of the rollout of the model system. During Phase I (2012 and 2013), CDE worked with educators to develop and refine the guidelines, tools and training, largely based on the recommendations of the State Council for Educator Effectiveness and the experience of the more than two dozen school districts that volunteered to pilot the new system. All districts statewide that adopted the model system started using it during the 2013–14 school year.

Now, CDE is moving into Phase II, focused on continued refinement of the system and deepening the skills of educators in effectively using the tools to get better at providing meaningful feedback for improvement. Throughout the process, CDE has helped develop the skills of evaluators, strengthened professional development, listened closely to the field and fine-tuned the system accordingly. Going forward and as described in more detail on page 18, CDE will continue to share best practices and refine systems and practices.



### 26 DISTRICTS are piloting the Colorado State Model Evaluation System

- Centennial
- Center
- Crowley
- Custer
- Del-Norte
- Eads (Kiowa)
- Jefferson\*
- Miami-Yoder
- Moffat RE-1
- Mountain Valley
- Platte Canyon
- Salida
- San Juan BOCES
  - Archuleta
  - Bayfield
  - Delores RE-2
  - Delores RE-4
  - Durango
- Ignacio
- Mancos
- Montezuma Cortez
- Silverton
- South Routt
- St. Vrain
- Sterling
- Thompson
- Wray

\* This district piloted a principal evaluation system only.

# PRELIMINARY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RATINGS

During the first two years of the phase-in, the pilot districts rated teachers and principals on a five-point scale (from *basic* — well below state standard — to *exemplary* — well above state standard) based on their professional practice in several areas (as measured by a rubric). They also practiced measuring student growth.

The following results are based only on the ratings given for the professional practices and should be considered preliminary, because districts are still in various stages of implementation and are learning a great deal about the best ways to implement such comprehensive systems. For example, some educators may have received more training than others, and some districts implemented the model with more fidelity than others — both of which could impact the evaluation. That said, all of the pilot districts are committed to continuous improvement and need time to make this challenging transition. As districts begin conducting more meaningful evaluations, they are learning a lot about how to implement the system in high-quality and consistent ways.

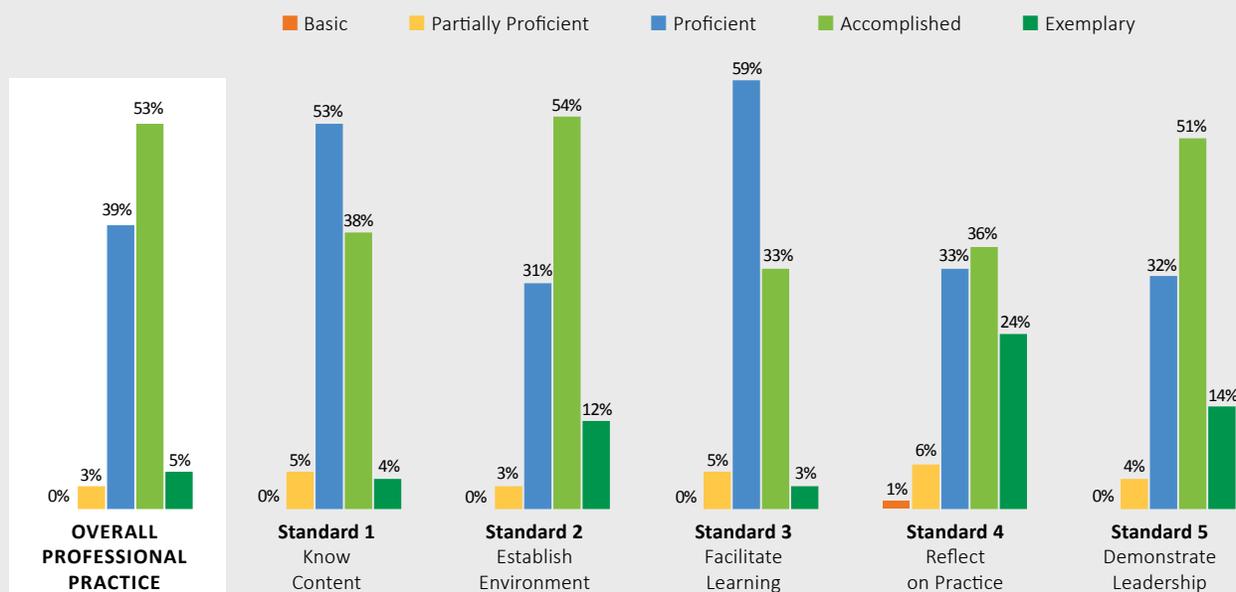
“It is definitely helping me. The best part about the evaluation is the rubric, and I can see where I fall on the continuum and can see what areas I can improve on.”

— Allison Sampish  
Kindergarten teacher  
Fall River Elementary School  
St. Vrain Valley School District

## TEACHERS

In 2013–14, 39 percent of teachers in the pilot districts were considered *proficient* (meeting state standard) and 53 percent were *accomplished* (above state standard), according to CDE’s 2013-2014 Pilot Report. Only 5 percent received the top rating of *exemplary*, and 3 percent were deemed *partially proficient* (below state standard).

### Distribution of Teacher Ratings, 2013–14



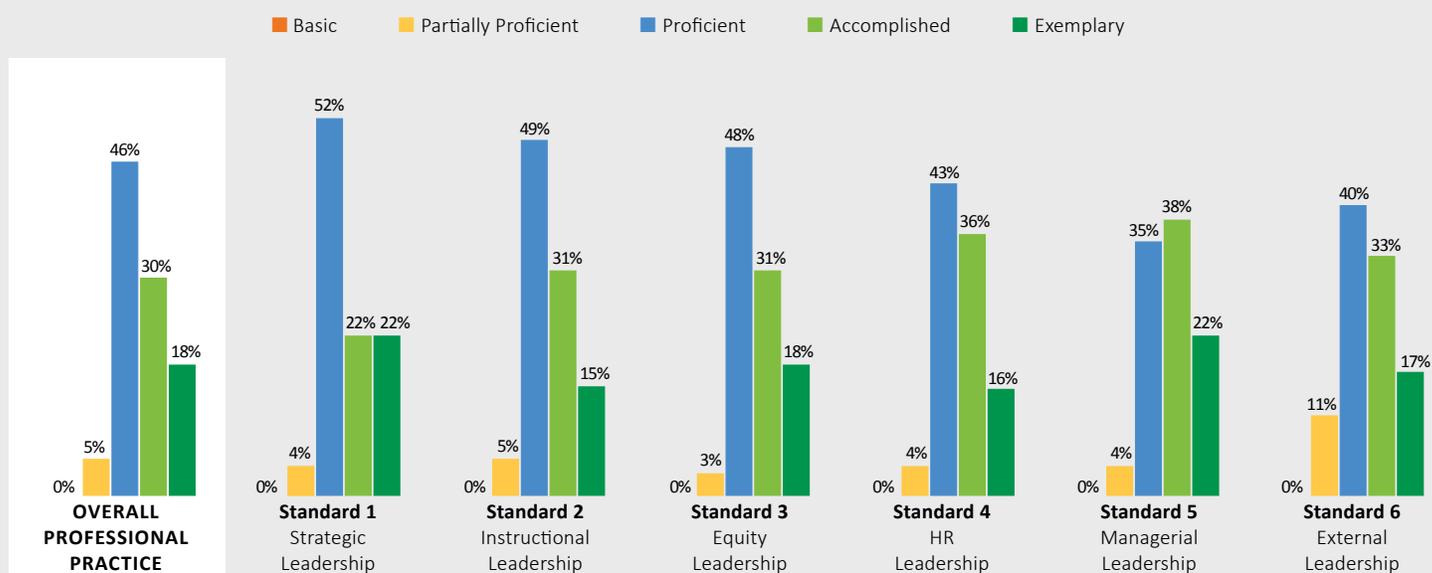
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.  
Source: Colorado State Model Evaluation System for Teachers: 2013–14 Pilot Report

- Teacher ratings vary based on the district, school level, subject taught, probationary status, experience and demographic characteristics. For example, early childhood educators received the highest ratings, followed by elementary, middle and high school teachers.
- The distributions of teacher ratings across elements and Quality Standards indicate that the professional practice rubric captures multiple aspects of teaching and differences in teacher practice.
- The variability in the distribution of ratings suggests that principals (and other teacher evaluators) are able to differentiate between teachers and assign ratings in a meaningful way (i.e., not just assigning the same ratings within or across teacher groups).
- In general, year 2 of the pilot had less rating variability than year 1, with more ratings clustered in the middle performance categories.
- Most teachers maintained or improved their ratings in year 2.
- Teachers received the highest ratings (indicated by an average of the ratings within each standard) on Standard 4 (Reflect on Practice) and the lowest ratings on Standard 3 (Facilitate Learning).

These initial findings suggest that, while the rubric can be a useful tool for guiding practice and there is evidence of validity and reliability, there are still areas to monitor and improve.

For a full explanation of the five teacher Quality Standards, see [www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/teacherqualitystandardsreferenceguide](http://www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/teacherqualitystandardsreferenceguide).

## Distribution of Principal Ratings, 2012–13



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Colorado State Model Evaluation System for Principals: 2012–13 Pilot Report

## PRINCIPALS

In 2012–13, 48 percent of principals in the pilot districts received one of the top two ratings, and an additional 46 percent were considered *proficient*, according to CDE’s 2012–13 Pilot Report (the 2013–14 data are not yet available). Only 5 percent were deemed *partially proficient*.

- There is a moderate amount of variability in the distributions of principal ratings, indicating that the professional practice rubric captures multiple aspects of school leadership and differences in principal practice.
- Principals received the highest ratings on Standard 5 (Managerial Leadership) and the lowest ratings on Standards 2 (Instructional Leadership) and 6 (External Leadership).
- A large majority of principals maintained or improved their ratings from 2011–12 to 2012–13.
- Principal ratings vary based on the district, school level, job category, years of experience and gender. For example, elementary principals were rated more highly than secondary principals, principals more highly than assistant principals and women more highly than men. Principals with more than five years experience received the highest ratings.
- CDE continues to find evidence that the Colorado State Model Evaluation System is reliable (consistent over time) and valid (measures what it is supposed to measure) for principals.

## SPECIALIZED SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

Specialized service professionals (SSPs), sometimes referred to as “other licensed personnel” in SB 10-191, are also evaluated annually and supported in their ongoing professional growth. There are nine categories of SSPs:

- School audiologists
- School psychologists
- School nurses
- School physical therapists
- School occupational therapists
- School counselors
- School social workers
- School speech language pathologists
- School orientation and mobility specialists

Given the implementation timeline, CDE will not have data on these professionals until spring 2015.

# Lessons Learned From the First Three Years

Based on surveys, interviews, focus groups and data submitted from the pilot districts, several overarching patterns have emerged from the initial implementation of the model evaluation and support system. In the pilot districts, the evaluations are generating feedback that teachers can use in their classrooms and more focused conversations among educators. Teachers and principals are taking more ownership of their professional practice. For the most part, educators are more supportive of the system the more experience they have with it. Principals are considerably more supportive of these changes than teachers.

At the same time, a change of this magnitude clearly is challenging. Educators have been forthright in raising concerns about the time commitment and whether the multiple measures accurately reflect their performance. And CDE continues to adjust support to districts and make refinements based on these concerns.

The bottom line: This is hard work but worthwhile. Colorado is making progress, and there is room for continued improvements.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY DATA

In fall 2012, pilot teachers completed an initial survey to establish a baseline understanding of their opinions of their current evaluation system (before piloting the state model system). Then, they were introduced to and evaluated by the Colorado State Model Evaluation System during the 2012–13 school year. Teachers and principals were surveyed at the end of the 2012–13 and 2013–14 school years to gauge their perceptions of the state model system for teachers. A sample of survey items is reported on here, based on the most recent data CDE has (2013–14 data are still being compiled).

## LESSON 1: THE NEW MODEL SYSTEM IS GENERATING ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

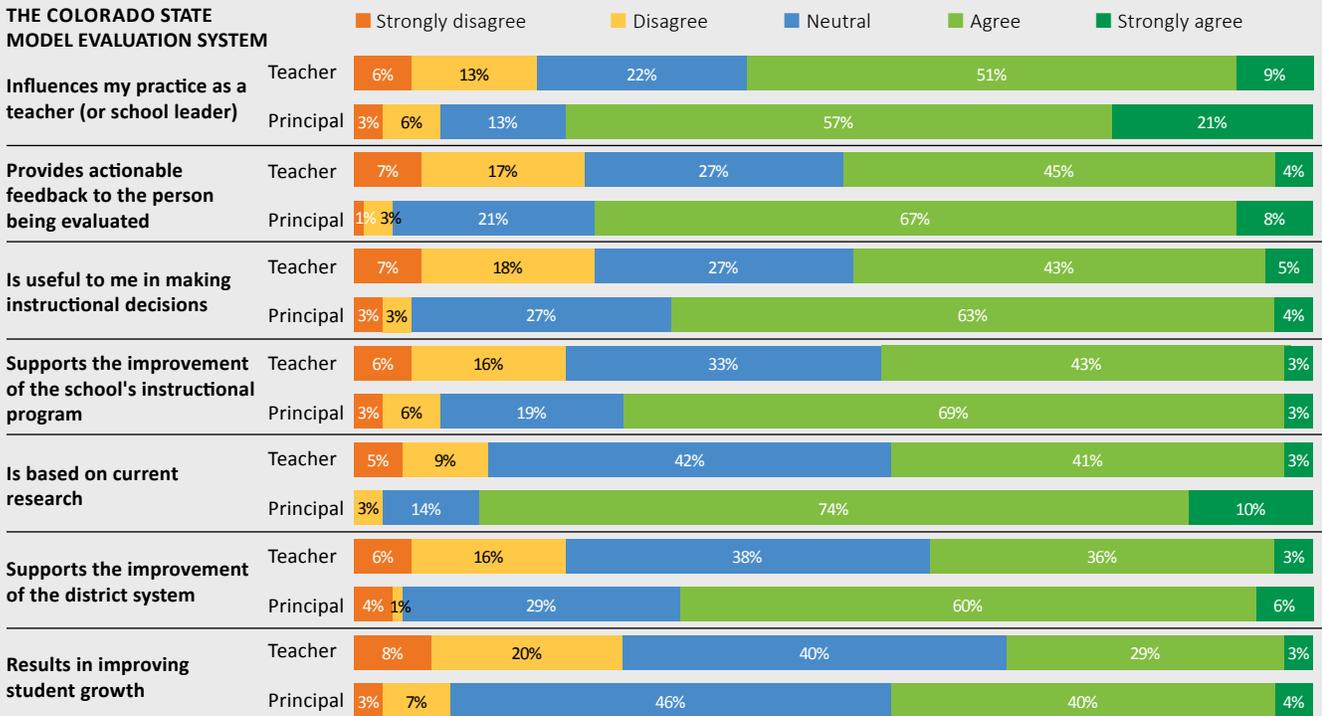
Nearly 80 percent of principals and 60 percent of teachers say that the model system is influencing their practice. Approximately 70 percent of principals and about half of teachers say that the new system provides actionable feedback and is useful in making instructional decisions.

**“It has led to a much richer dialog in my building around pedagogy... We had a great dialog about what our common assessments should look like, what our instruction looks like and what are we teachers responsible for doing to help teachers with that.”**

— Jessica Keigan  
High school English teacher  
and instructional coach  
Adams 12 Five Star Schools

But teachers, in particular, are not sure yet whether student achievement is improving as a result of the new evaluation system, and they are evenly split on whether the data help them make instructional decisions.

### Teacher and principal responses on items pertaining to the *utility* of the system



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: 2012–13 Colorado State Model Evaluation System Pilot: Detailed Analysis of Educator Survey Data

In focus groups led by the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI), a nonprofit organization that advocates for quality education, teachers frequently described how the rubric helped them identify their priority professional growth areas and guide meaningful conversations with their evaluators. Others expressed optimism that it would result in more meaningful discussions, even if they had not experienced that yet. A common theme was that the rubric is a “conversation tool” but not an “observation tool.” Teachers appreciated having a framework that drove discussions, commenting that they received “meaningful feedback with the rubric rather than simply a pat on the back and a ‘good job’” from their evaluators.

**“I appreciate that you can’t get an *exemplary* or *accomplished* rating without leading in and beyond your classroom. It is no longer sustainable to just close your door and teach. If you aren’t working to make the whole profession better, then you are not an effective teacher.”**

— Jessica Cuthbertson  
Middle school English teacher  
Aurora Public Schools

## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS SAID:

// The rubric tells us what best practices are.//

// The rubric does help with the professional growth plan. When I didn't have a tool like this, it was overwhelming; it isn't attainable because there are too many things that you are trying to achieve. It made my professional growth plans more meaningful.//

// I got immediate feedback. My principal met with me and talked about her observations. I think it did change my practice. She and I exchanged ideas; she told me what she'd like to see. After teaching for so many years, the conversation helped me remember the diamond [instructional strategy or curriculum material that also includes assessment and standards] that I forgot and inspired me to take it out and polish it.//

// I like observations, they keep teachers honest. Our principal comes and does a quick walkthrough; the sheet is always in my box by the end of the day. The biggest thing I have changed from last year is to have the objective and state standard number on the board. If it is important to my principal, it becomes important to me.//

// I had seven observations. Other people had one. I'm not a fan of that. I don't see the equity in that. I don't know how anyone can gauge effectiveness with just one observation.//

## LESSON 2: THE MODEL SYSTEM IS CAUSING MORE FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS AMONG EDUCATORS

Surveys of teachers found that 76 percent agree that they have meaningful opportunities to confer with their principals/evaluators about their practice; 75 percent agree that the information helps identify areas for improvement; and 67 percent agree that their principals/evaluators help identify relevant professional development opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

Again, there were significant differences across districts and school level, which shows that *how* districts implement the system has an impact on the perceptions. For example, in one district, teachers were more likely to *disagree* with all three items listed above (54 percent, 47 percent and 55 percent respectively), while teachers in another district were slightly more likely to *strongly agree* with each. CDE also found differences within districts for each item. There are a number of plausible explanations for this, which may include how engaged teachers were in the training, whether their districts had relevant professional development to offer or how often the teachers had conversations with their principals. We know that in the first year(s) of implementing the system, districts will learn a lot about the most effective ways to roll out the evaluation processes.

CEI focus groups conducted in fall 2013 also found that some teachers reported deepening collaboration with colleagues. Specifically, teachers in several different

"The rubric is really great teaching practice and I'm taking an instructional coaching way of doing it. When I do walkthroughs and observations I ask the teachers what they want me to look for in what the students are doing. Are they engaged? Are they making connections across the curriculum? I take rosters of kids and take notes on what each child is doing, and then we talk about each one afterwards and give them suggestions. There are a lot of 'ah-hahs!' It's a learning experience."

— Catherine Epps  
Principal  
Marcos Elementary School

<sup>1</sup> CDE, CEI, American Institutes for Research: Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Standards, Assessments, and the Evaluation System, November 2014

schools have worked together to interpret the rubric, discuss what the five performance categories look like in practice and discuss how they will apply the professional practices in their setting.<sup>2</sup>

Teachers reported that they are documenting their practice and processes more frequently and collecting artifacts such as lesson plans, examples of student work and student feedback to share with their evaluator. Teachers in different districts reported using professional growth goals and the self-evaluation to group teachers for professional learning communities.

When educators work together to ensure that different evaluators are making similar judgments about what they see in the classroom, they report having deep conversations about what constitutes high-quality teaching. Teachers and evaluators who are coding video of classroom observations for Elevate Colorado (an online project on inter-rater agreement to help ensure that what gets a *proficient* rating from one evaluator gets the same rating from a different evaluator) report that it is the best professional development and generates the most targeted conversations they have ever had about effective teaching.

## LESSON 3: THE MODEL SYSTEM IS HELPING EDUCATORS TAKE MORE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

During focus groups conducted by CEI,<sup>3</sup> many teachers reported that the system helped “push them out of their comfort zone” and write more ambitious goals. Goals are grounded in the rubric and self-evaluation. Examples of goals mentioned include being more intentional with planning, more frequently incorporating technology into instruction, taking a leadership role in the school and working to improve teachers’ use of math software.

**// [The Model System has] changed the focus of our collaboration and deepened it. It has allowed us to put aside the stuff that’s not important and get down to what we need to get to.//**

**// I like that this is not a one shot deal. I can always go back and change my practice. I like the idea of going back and changing my self-assessment at different dates so I can see my progression and reflection.//**

“I have one teacher who is working on adjusting content to students’ skill level. She said she would work with students in small groups two times a week using different texts and different modalities. So when I meet with this teacher, I am really going to focus in on this goal. I’ll ask how it is going, and how can I support you in it, and what resources do you need to do differentiation better?”

— Kerstin Rowe  
Assistant principal  
K–8 Aurora Academy Charter School

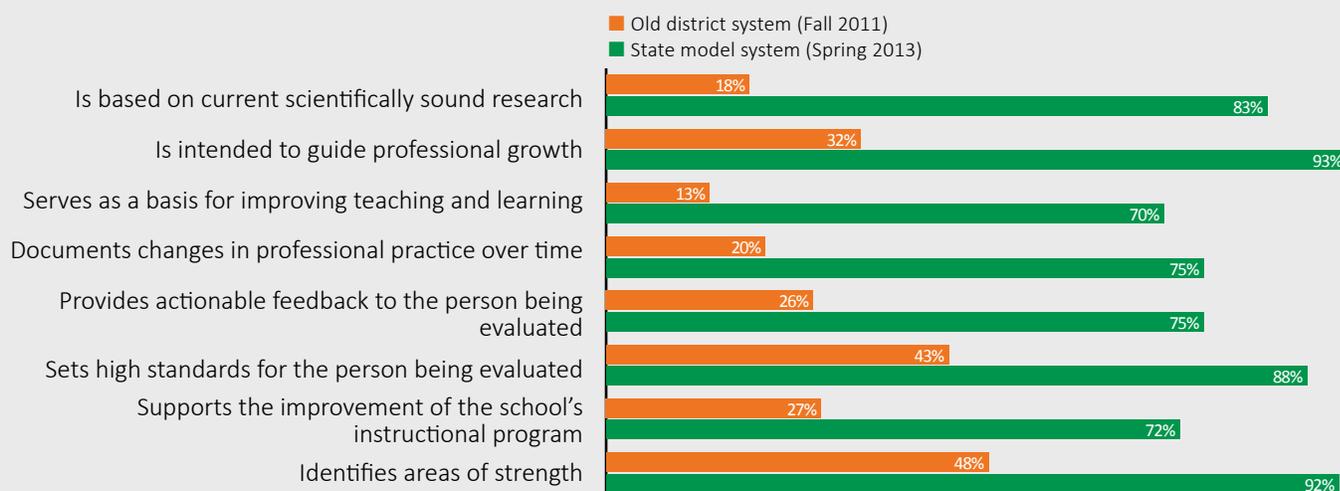
<sup>2</sup> Colorado State Model Evaluation System: Teacher Focus Group Results

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## LESSON 4: PILOT PARTICIPANTS, ESPECIALLY PRINCIPALS, ARE MORE SUPPORTIVE OF THE SYSTEM AS THEY GAIN MORE EXPERIENCE WITH IT

On every measure, principals surveyed in spring 2013 strongly believe the model system is superior to the system they were using in fall 2011. The increase in positive responses ranged from 44 to 65 percentage points.

### Principals: Percentage of positive responses given in baseline and feedback surveys



Source: 2011–13 Principal System Pilot: Feedback Survey Results

// I enjoyed being a part of the process. When we started this whole thing, I had great apprehension on how it was all going to work. Now I'm so glad we were at the table with all of you.//

// I believe it is hard to capture all that a principal does through an evaluation system but feel that this tool is the best that I've seen to date attempting to do that.//

// The system has improved as the state folks have received ongoing feedback. I appreciate the commitment to develop the best tool possible.//

// The state model system provided an opportunity to have a richer discussion which was supported by narrowing the focus to more specific targets of needed improvements.//

// It is a better tool than before. The tool identified strengths and weakness in my performance.//

Teachers' views were more mixed — more positive on six indicators, less positive on five. Most teachers remain neutral on the majority of issues — they are waiting to see how well the policies are implemented in their schools. Teachers in the pilot districts felt most strongly that the model system sets high standards, identifies strengths and areas of improvement, and is intended to guide professional growth. Educators felt less positive that the system provides an accurate assessment of their performance.

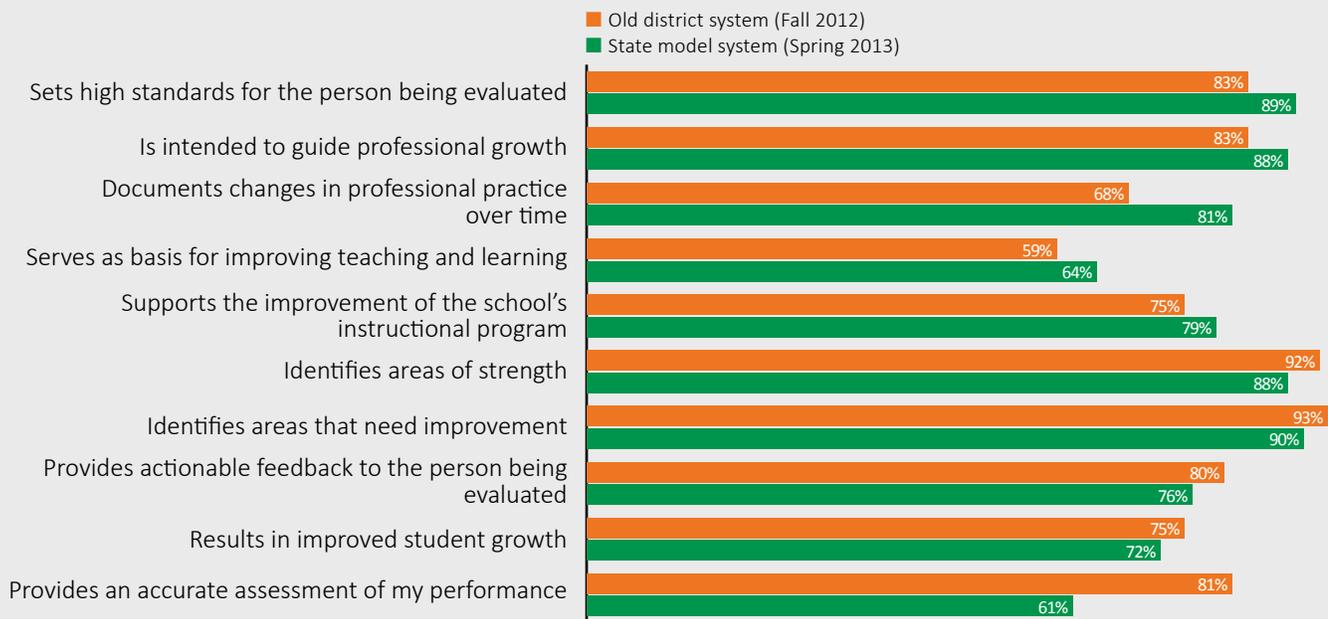
"There are a lot of supports out there for principals. It's a matter of using them and trying them and getting comfortable with them. We're still in that phase of trying it and questioning how to go about it. Once you do it, you get better and more comfortable."

— Catherine Epps  
Principal  
Marcos Elementary School

Early childhood education classroom teachers, interventionists and librarians in particular responded less positively. This finding reflects some educators’ concerns that the teacher professional practice rubric does not capture some of the unique nature of their work.

To address these concerns, CDE has adjusted the language in the rubric, is creating guidance to help evaluators and is focused on improving inter-rater agreements (see page 18). The department also developed rubrics to be used by specialized service professionals, such as nurses and counselors. CDE will continue to monitor the extent to which different educator groups believe that the model system provides an accurate assessment of their performance.

### Teachers: Percentage of positive *and* neutral responses given in baseline and feedback surveys



Sources: 2012–13 Colorado State Model Evaluation System Pilot: Detailed Analysis of Educator Survey Data and 2012–13 Teacher System Pilot: Baseline and Feedback Survey Data

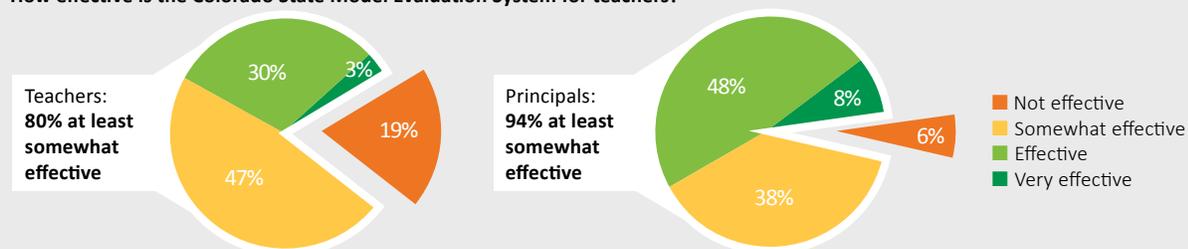


## LESSON 5: CHALLENGES REMAIN

At the end of the 2012–13 school year, 80 percent of teachers and 94 percent of principals said that the system is at least *somewhat effective* (thus there is room for improvement). When probed to explain their ratings, teachers and principals raised similar concerns. They worried about how time consuming the more detailed observations and feedback sessions are. They wondered about the validity and reliability of the measures. They wanted more clarity about the rubric — what differentiates effective practice from ineffective practice. Teachers especially questioned whether the same system can accurately measure the performance of all teachers in all grades and in all subjects.

### Teacher and principal responses on items pertaining to the *effectiveness* of the system

How effective is the Colorado State Model Evaluation System for teachers?



### Teachers and principals identify their top concerns

Teachers	% of responses highlighting this issue	Principals	% of responses highlighting this issue
Time intensity	21%	Time intensity	23%
Evaluating all teachers on same system	20%	Validity of measures	14%
Validity of measures	14%	Evaluating all teachers on same system	11%
Degree of implementation	11%	Reliability of system and evaluators	11%
Reliability of evaluators	11%		

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: CDE State Model Evaluation Feedback Survey: Evaluation of Teacher and Principal Open-ended Responses, December 2013

"It is still unclear what the 50 percent growth piece is going to look like. The state has given enough flexibility to define how it is going to look, and our district is still working that out. But that's hanging out there and is a big unknown for us."

— Jessica Keigan  
High school English teacher  
and instructional coach  
Adams 12 Five Star Schools

"The CDE is definitely doing their job. They've been equitable, transparent and supportive. But in a local control state, there is only so much the state can do. It's still on the local school district to take the tools and make the system work and monitor it and actualize it."

— Jessica Cuthbertson  
Middle school English teacher  
Aurora Public Schools

## PRINCIPALS SAID:

- // I'm going to have to find my way from a time-management perspective. To address this in a thorough manner is going to be extremely time consuming, which is fine, but a principal's day includes a lot of management and not enough time in the leadership domain.//
- // I think the potential for high value exists, but I am seriously doubtful it will transpire without significant changes in the time demands placed on all public education professionals. At best, some staff will find a way to make parts of the process worthwhile as they juggle mandates and expectations in a resource-deprived environment.//
- // The time spent by principals is extraordinary, especially if a principal has 40+ evaluations to do.//

## TEACHERS SAID:

- // I understand what you are trying to accomplish with this evaluation system, but it is very labor intensive ... the more time we as teachers spend in paperwork and evaluations, the less time we have to work on making our efforts better with children.//
- // The system is fairly ineffective at this point, especially for non-classroom teachers. We are assessed on standards that are not encompassed in our jobs. Many of the standards are not attainable by special education students. There are many aspects of my job as a special education teacher that are not assessed in this model.//



# Going Forward

Three years into implementation, Colorado is moving forward in providing more accurate evaluations and feedback to help teachers and principals become more effective in their classrooms and schools. CDE will continue being transparent, accountable and committed to continuous improvement based on lessons from the field. In the coming year, CDE is focusing on four major priorities.

## 1. VALIDATING THE RUBRICS AND STUDYING THE USE OF MEASURES OF STUDENT LEARNING

Part of ensuring that the evaluation system is fair for all educators and measures what it is intended to measure is conducting a validation study of the instruments being used. Now that the state has sufficiently piloted and refined the rubrics, CDE is conducting an official validation study to ensure that the rubrics are accurately measuring teachers' practices; that they are fair; and that they are clear, understandable and reflective of current practice. Marzano Research, selected through an open request for proposal process, will provide an initial report in spring 2015. CDE will conduct/commission ongoing research to continue validating the system in the coming years.

Marzano Research also will help CDE develop a sustainable plan to continue its practice of incorporating feedback from educators, researchers and other critical stakeholders in the continuous improvement of the rubrics, tools and guidance documents that support the state model system.

CDE and other partners (including CEI) also are conducting research into (1) how the measures of student learning (MSLs) are being used and in what ways, (2) how to use MSLs in more meaningful ways, and (3) overall system implementation issues (what is working, what isn't and where CDE needs to provide more support).

## 2. ENSURING MORE CONSISTENT EVALUATIONS

To support fair and consistent evaluations, CDE is developing tools to promote common interpretations of teacher quality and help evaluators provide useful and actionable feedback to educators. One such tool is Elevate Colorado, an online inter-rater agreement training system being developed in partnership with My Learning Plan. This online system helps evaluators develop a deeper understanding of the professional practices in the teacher rubric. Evaluators can view short videos of practicing teachers, rate the videos according to the state's rubric and then receive feedback showing how closely they rated the videos relative to ratings from master scorers.

In addition, CDE has created a *Resource Guide for Deepening the Understanding of Teachers' Professional Practices*, with research, examples and a glossary of common terms. The guide can help observers and coaches accurately identify evidence for the professional practices, and it helps classroom teachers accurately reflect on their teaching and implement specific practices in their instruction. This school year, CDE plans to put the guide into an online platform that will include searchable features and video examples of high-quality teaching practices.

See more at [www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/interrateragreement](http://www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/interrateragreement).

### ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS INCLUDE:

- Regional professional learning communities on how to get better consistency with evaluators — so that two or more evaluators, using the same evaluation tool, give the same rating to an identical observable situation (such as a classroom lesson or a video);
- An Educator Effectiveness Liaison network to build skills of evaluators in high-quality observation and feedback techniques; and
- Regional support staff to help districts one-on-one in implementing high-quality evaluation systems.

To learn more or get involved, go to [www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/contactus](http://www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/contactus).

## 3. HELPING REDUCE THE TIME BURDEN

In response to concerns about how much time it takes to implement the model educator evaluation system, CDE selected RANDA Solutions to create an online performance management system that will reduce the paperwork burden and support evaluators in the overall management and implementation of the evaluation process. The optional tool, available beginning in the 2014–15 school year, includes electronic interfaces and data collection tools for the state model evaluation rubrics, MSLs/outcomes, final effectiveness ratings, and aggregate reports to support principals and district leaders in providing useful and actionable feedback and possible professional development opportunities for educators.

To date, more than 90 local education agencies, or LEAs (including districts, boards of cooperative educational services and charters), are using the RANDA system, and additional LEAs are considering it. Initial feedback from districts has been very positive. Some recent emails from users to CDE say:

- “We are very appreciative of the development of the RANDA tool.”
- “The interface is extremely easy — intuitive.”
- “The graphics are incredibly helpful for organizing the work.”

See more at [www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/copms](http://www.cde.state.co.us/educatoreffectiveness/copms).

## 4. EVALUATING SPECIALIZED TEACHERS

In response to requests for additional guidance about evidence and artifacts that may be used by specialized teachers, CDE is developing a set of briefs written by practitioners for practitioners. They will provide informal advice to help teachers and their evaluators understand the evaluation process within their specific context. The briefs are under development for the following groups:

- Early childhood teachers
- Special education teachers
- Teachers of English language learners/culturally and linguistically diverse education specialists
- Art teachers (dance, music, theater and visual arts)
- Teacher librarians

The briefs will include specific “look-fors” to guide classroom observations and help ensure that all licensed teachers receive fair, valid and reliable evaluations.

CDE will coordinate additional briefs as feedback from the field warrants.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** A change of this magnitude clearly is challenging but already is making a difference in classrooms across the state. This is hard work but worthwhile. Colorado is making progress, and there is room for continued improvements.







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