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An analysis of state and local alignment of teacher evaluation in Maryland

Serene N. Peterson
College of William & Mary - School of Education

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AN ANALYSIS OF STATE AND LOCAL ALIGNMENT OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS IN MARYLAND

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

by

Serene N. Peterson
March 11, 2014
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OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS IN MARYLAND

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Approved March 11, 2014 by

James Stronge, Ph.D.
Chair of Dissertation Committee

Megan Tschannen-Moran, Ph.D.

Leslie Grant, Ph.D.
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Dedication

I dedicate this research study to my parents, David G. Peterson and Hyacinth M. Peterson, my aunt, Beverly Green, as well as my sisters, Danielle and Talia, and nephew, Jadyn.
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A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS AN APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

ABSTRACT

This study explored the components of Maryland’s newly-implemented teacher evaluation framework and compared state requirements with evaluations to three local school systems’ evaluation procedures. The study sought to investigate the relationship between three evaluation protocols in comparison to the state requirements.

Three local school districts were selected based on their student population served and the availability of their evaluation documents. Howard County Public Schools, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, and Montgomery County Public Schools were selected. State evaluation documents were also included in the study, coming from the Maryland State Department of Education. Evaluation documents underwent a qualitative data analysis using computer coding software and were checked manually repeatedly.

It was hypothesized that the local school district evaluation documents would not be in compliance with the state’s evaluation procedures. However, it was concluded that this was, in fact, not the case. The school districts used in the study each differed in their means of developing the professional practice of teachers, but remained true to the Danielson evaluation model that the state of Maryland utilized. Further study is needed to explore the initial implementation of these evaluation procedures.
SERENE N. PETERSON

EDUCATION, EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PLANNING, AND LEADERSHIP

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA
AN ANALYSIS OF STATE AND LOCAL ALIGNMENT OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS IN MARYLAND
Chapter 1: Introduction

When you study great teachers... you will learn much more from their caring and hard work than from their style.

—William Glasser

Background

Student learning is the professional touchstone for all educational programs and teachers. The purpose of teaching is to nurture learning, and both teachers and schools should be evaluated on the basis of what and how much students learn (Schalock, Schalock, Cowart, & Myton, 1993). The social contract between public education and society requires schools to hire, retain, and improve teachers whose qualities and practices are the most predictive of student achievement. In order to do this, there must be a means to discover the type of education services children receive, and specifically the effectiveness of instruction. The primary purpose of school evaluation is the improvement of the instructional program (Dal Santo, 1970). Meaningful teacher evaluation is a key component to this process. Although it includes an inherent opportunity to improve teacher performance, the desired endpoint of effective evaluations is to create a meaningful, positive impact on student achievement through an evidence of increased performance.

While teacher evaluation is not a new concept in America’s education system, the idea of linking effective teaching techniques to student achievement data is relatively new (Hightower et al, 2011; Markley, 2013). This shift in utilizing data differently regarding
evaluations is an important one, as research has demonstrated that teacher effectiveness is the single biggest contributor to student success, outweighing factors such as class size, socioeconomic status, and even gender (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2012; Gordon, Jane, & Staiger, 2006; Hanushek, 2011; Haycock, 1998; Markley, 2013). A better understanding of what constitutes teacher effectiveness has significant implications for decision-making regarding the recruitment, compensation, training, and evaluation of teachers. Some state and local policymakers have sought to develop career ladders or other compensation plans that take into account various measures of teacher effectiveness for designating teachers for specific roles or rewards (Darling-Hammond, 2009). If an administrator needs to hire effective or, at least promising teachers, for example, s/he needs to understand what characterizes them. Recently, educational administrators have begun to emphasize the importance of linking teacher effectiveness to various aspects of district/school personnel administration, including:

- recruiting and inducting potentially effective teachers,
- designing and implementing professional development,
- conducting valid and credible evaluations, and
- dismissing ineffective teachers while retaining effective ones (Hanushek, 2008; National Academy of Education, 2008; Odden, 2004).

Using effectiveness as a determining factor for personnel decisions is only one of the ways evaluations can be utilized. Evaluations have the power to be a major catalyst for positive change in education, particularly in light of the reforms taking place today. The current educational climate is in a state of change, as evidenced by initiatives such as pay-for-performance, non-traditional means for schooling, common core standards, and
the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation. It does not take much
investigation to realize that there was a major shift in the last two decades in seeking to
solve the problems of United States schools by examining teacher behaviors. As a result,
recent studies have focused on identifying teaching components that have a positive
correlation to student success (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Clotfelter,
Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Kukla-Acevedo, 2007). The information garnered from such
studies only emphasizes the need for established teacher practices and the singular
importance of the student-teacher relationship.

Unfortunately, the manner in which administrators view and utilize evaluative
measures in education is obtuse. During the past three to four decades, the question
regarding appropriate means and ends for education in the U.S. was strongly reflected in
calls for (a) producing, selecting and assessing effective teachers and (b)
understanding connections between effective teaching, teacher evaluation, school
effectiveness, and ultimately effective schools (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003).

Indeed, the concern for a meaningful evaluation process was an issue in the
pivotal reform report *A Nation at Risk* (1983), with the National Commission on
Excellence in Education stating:

> Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards,
to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to demonstrate competence in an
academic discipline...Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be
tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior
teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either
improved or terminated. (p. 30)
The role of teacher evaluations recently resurfaced as an underutilized resource that may hold promise as a mechanism to promote teacher professional growth and measure teacher effectiveness (Mathers, Oliva, & Laine, 2008). Schools nationwide seek to use evaluations as a tool to work with teachers who are not meeting expected outcomes through student achievement, and to eliminate those teachers who are not able to succeed. One may find effective teachers in less effective schools, but conversely will not find ineffective teachers in more effective schools, because those schools have developed processes to get rid of poor teachers (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003). Effective teacher evaluation is one such process to guide underperforming teachers out of schools. There is growing evidence that some well-designed performance-based assessments of teaching detect aspects of teaching that significantly relate to teacher effectiveness, as measured by student achievement gains (Darling-Hammond, 2009). There is clearly a connection between teacher improvement and teacher evaluation (Tucker, Stronge, Gareis, & Beers, 2003), which ultimately creates a more effective learning environment.

Problem Statement

The role of effective evaluations cannot be understated, as they are the basis for clearly defined, objective practices that directly relate to student success. Research shows that student achievement is directly related to both the preparation teachers receive and to the overall effectiveness of teachers in delivering instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Elmore, 2000). Because local districts that emphasize student assessment data in teacher evaluations receive federal money, states are increasingly tempted to restructure evaluation measures to secure much-needed funding. The issue at the crux of the problem is that new evaluation systems replace former ones while educational administrators
cautiously try to find their way in a changing landscape of evaluation and accountability. Much like with any new endeavor, agencies inevitably tweak their evaluation designs as time progresses and feedback is garnered. Indeed, many districts are underway with trials of new evaluation standards. Maryland is one state that completed its trial run of new measures during the 2012-2013 school year, and implemented these measures system-wide in August 2013. Ultimately, determining teacher effectiveness relies on meaningful evaluation data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to analyze the alignment of evaluation measures at the state and local levels in Maryland. In this study I hope to expose any possible discrepancies between state requirements for teacher evaluation and implementation at the local level, as well as identify common themes that may emerge at the local and state levels. To accomplish this task, a collection of teacher evaluation policy documents from three local Maryland school districts will be inspected to determine if these forms comply with state guidelines for evaluation. The state of Maryland was selected due to its recent implementation of a new teacher evaluation model based on Charlotte Danielson’s Model for Teaching. In addition, Maryland schools have consistently ranked first on the school system report card published annually by Education Week (Green, 2013), and was twice awarded Race to the Top federal funding to continue to improve its schools. Due to the inextricable interrelatedness of teacher effectiveness, teacher evaluation, and school effectiveness (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003), this research should add to the body of knowledge about evaluations that positively impact student achievement during a time of great change in
k-12 education. Utilizing student achievement measures to evaluate teachers has increasingly become a fact of life in many states, and as Maryland shifts toward this measurement system, it could provide an example for other states and school districts in the future.

Research Questions

This study will address the following three research questions:

1. How has state mandated policy in Maryland changed regarding teacher evaluation in the last 10 years?

2. How do three of the largest school districts (Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools, and Howard County Public Schools) in Maryland compare and contrast in their evaluation procedures for teachers?

3. How closely aligned are the three selected local school districts' evaluation plans with the state's evaluation model?

Justification for the Study

Nearly all teachers, 99 percent in many districts, earn the satisfactory rating in evaluations, leading many experts to agree that current teacher evaluation systems are not useful (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2011, p. 2). In Maryland, teacher evaluations from the 2011-2012 school year reflect some of the challenges that critics of current evaluation methods articulate. The Baltimore County Public Schools' (BCPS) Teacher and Principal Evaluation Summary report the following evaluation data:
Table 1  
BCPS Teacher and Principal Evaluation Summary, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance level</th>
<th>No. of teachers</th>
<th>% of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BCPS Teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>6,321</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,417</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BCPS Principals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from BCPS Data Warehouse Team (2012).
Based on this information, it would seem that Baltimore County schools have an exceptionally large number of teachers and principals who meet evaluations standards. The fundamental question, however, is: "Are ratings such as those in Baltimore County’s schools accurate or inflated?" If accurate, student achievement should follow suit, with a large percentage of students excelling on measures of student growth or student achievement results, such as improvements on statewide assessments, graduation rates, high employability, or college entrance ratings. Indeed, BCPS saw a 2.02 percent increase in the number of students graduating with an average of 83 percent, which is higher than the state average (BCPS, 2013), yet 10 percent of its schools are in need of improvement based on the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Maryland State Department of Education [MSDE], 2011). In contrast, Baltimore City schools’ graduation rates reached a mere 66.49 percent for the Class of 2012, and Montgomery County schools’ reached 87.40 percent (MSDE, 2013). How, then, can nearly all of the school systems’ teachers be meeting expectations, when students struggle to succeed? Perhaps this data only emphasizes that teacher evaluations in Maryland are not an effective means by which to identify the qualities of effective teachers and ridding the system of ineffective educators, or perhaps the data is not capturing the necessary attributes of effective teachers. Though speculative, it is possible that this viewpoint may have influenced school leaders to employ new evaluation measures and the Danielson framework to better capture the traits of influential teachers.

Significance of the Study

The modernization of teacher evaluation systems, an increasingly common component of school reform efforts, promises to reveal new, systematic information
about the performance of individual classroom teachers (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Now more than ever, research regarding teacher evaluations is necessary to document the monumental changes that are taking place in education and its approach to student achievement. Abundant evidence indicates that a thoughtful approach to teacher evaluation - one that engages teachers in reflection and self-assessment - yields benefits far beyond the important goal of quality assurance (Danielson, 2011). Promising beginnings have been made in some states and local districts that have developed new approaches to examining teacher performance and building career ladders (Darling-Hammond, 2009). While states rush to implement new systems of evaluation, a rare opportunity to monitor this reformation presents itself to researchers. It is quite possible that the data garnered from this study may provide enlightening information for other states designing and initiating new evaluation measures.

Definition of Terms

In order to clarify the vocabulary used in this research, a description of standard terminology will be defined. These terms were adopted from the Maryland State Education Associate (2013).

**Annual evaluation.** A yearly evaluation of a teacher or principal that minimally includes student growth measure standards.

**Assistance process.** A process defined by the district for providing support to teachers and principals rated as ineffective.

**Complexity factors.** Factors recognized by the district that do not diminish student expectations but may have an extraordinary impact on student growth. Factors may include instructional diversity, unusually high number of transient students, specific
unusual facility issues, etc. Complexity factors are not weighted with either professional practice or student growth measure domains.

High School Assessment (HSA). Tests that measure school and individual student progress toward Maryland's High School Core Learning Goals. Passing the HSA became a graduation requirement beginning with the graduating class of 2009. This assessment is being phased out statewide and replaced with the PARCC Assessment.

Lag measures. Scores that have been previously collected by testing and are assigned to teachers who have had an impact on student performance.

Maryland School Assessment (MSA). A test of reading and math achievement that meets the testing requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The test is given each year in early March in reading and math at grades 3 through 8. The science test is given in April or early May. This test is being phased out and replaced with the PARCC Assessment.

Mentoring. Ongoing support provided to teachers and/or principals by a cadre of mentors trained by the district to provide teachers and/or principals with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in their classrooms and schools and enable them to stay in the profession. Mentoring should be focused, systematic, ongoing, and high quality.

Observations of teaching. The process by which a trained evaluator has formally observed the qualitative measures of teaching for each teacher being evaluated.

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. An assessment system aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The new assessments are anchored in college and career readiness; provide comparability across
states; and are able to assess and measure higher-order skills such as critical thinking, communications, and problem solving. The assessments are computer-based and include a mix of constructed response items, performance-based tasks, and computer-enhanced, computer-scored items. The PARCC assessments will be fully implemented in Maryland in the 2014-15 school year and will replace the Maryland School Assessments.

**Performance standards.** Levels of teacher or principal performance resulting in a final rating of ineffective, effective, or highly effective on the individual’s evaluation.

**Professional development.** The training a teacher and/or principal receives relative to the teacher’s and/or principal’s level of performance. It should be research-based, high quality, timely, and relevant. While certain teaching practices and learning principles might be suitable across the board, a one-size-fits-all approach that employs the same professional development programs for all grade levels, though economical, has been proven totally ineffective (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004).

**Qualitative measures (Teacher).** Observable measures and evidence, accounting for 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation, which must include the following domains: planning/preparation, instruction, classroom environment, professional responsibilities, and other local priorities if appropriate.

**Quantitative measures.** Data specific measure, which results from students’ performance on approved state or district multiple measures of student performance.

**Student growth measures.** Multiple measures of student academic and affective outcomes directly related to the teacher or principal. These measures account for 50 percent of a teacher’s or principal’s evaluation.
**Student learning objectives.** Specific, rigorous, long-term goals for groups of students that educators distinguish to guide instructional and administrative efforts. They are measurable instructional goals established for a specific group of students over a set period of time. SLOs serve as one of the measures of student growth for the State Teacher Evaluation model and may represent 20% - 35% of the evaluation.

**School-wide index.** A portion of a teacher’s evaluation that utilizes school-wide data as a percentage of the evaluation. Data is taken from test scores of the general student population, attendance of school staff, and other sources to account for 25% of the overall rating for teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools. Of the school districts examined in this study, only Anne Arundel County Public Schools included school-wide index measures as part of the evaluation process.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

As with any research, various assumptions will have to be made during this study. Researcher assumptions include:

- Evaluation data is able to be accessed from both the State of Maryland and Local Education Agencies.
- The methodology utilized by this study was crafted to accurately provide answers to the research questions posed.
- The methodology is appropriate to the problem addressed and the purpose of the study.
- The analysis selected and the size of the sample is sufficient to detect significant differences/relationships, if they exist in the population studied.
No study is without limitations, and this proposed research has many that may pose challenges to the data collection, analysis, and conducting of the study. Identified limitations are:

- A small sample size may prevent appropriate generalization to other districts and/or states.

- The use of only one evaluation system method, the Danielson Model, may hinder the findings from being applicable to other states that use other evaluation techniques.

- Time constraints of the research prevent the study of the first year of full implementation of new teacher evaluations in Maryland. This information would provide invaluable data as to the expected and garnered outcomes of the new system.

Potential errors in theme identification, coding, and analyzing during the process of reviewing the various state and local documents may cause some data to be missed or misinterpreted/misrepresented in the findings.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Review of the Literature

There is a wealth of information in educational and social science literature discussing teachers, evaluation systems, and student achievement. In order to pare down the abundance of knowledge presently available, this review of literature focused on the relevance of teacher evaluations and their impact on student achievement, as well as detailed the specific background of evaluation methods employed in the state of Maryland in the past, present, and near future.

Teacher Evaluation and Student Achievement

Years of research on teacher quality supported the fact that effective teachers not only make students feel good about school and learning, but also that their work actually results in increased student achievement (Stronge & Tucker, 2005). Wong (2004) reported that Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2001) found that the magnitude of the teacher effect is striking. Based on research in Texas, the importance of having an effective teacher instead of an average teacher for four or five years in a row could essentially close the gap in math performance between students from low-income and high-income households (p. 41).
Table 2

Influences on Student Achievement as Noted by Hattie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>% of variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* (Hattie, 2009).
There was an abundance of evidence that has suggested that certain teachers were significantly more effective than others at improving student achievement (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Hanushek, 1992; McLean & Sanders, 1984; Murnane, 1975; Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Rockoff, 2004; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). While this has been established in literature, the research on the specific traits that led a teacher to be more or less effective than others varied. Although individual studies found that certain aspects of teacher background are associated with student achievement or learning, comprehensive reviews of the research literature produced inconsistent conclusions, and there does not appear to be a consensus opinion (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008). Goldhaber and Brewer (1996) conducted research seeking to explain the traits of effective teachers due to inconsistent findings of the relationship between student achievement and teacher degree levels. Their study found that the years of teaching experience and degree level did not have a positive correlation to a teacher’s effectiveness; however, certain teacher characteristics such as certification did have an effect on student achievement level. Palardy and Rumberger (2008) found that instructional practices have more impact on student achievement than teacher background qualifications, even as early as in the first grade.

In contrast, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) found just the opposite; based on statewide assessments, teacher credentials do have a statistically significant link to student achievement at the high school level. They also found there was an uneven distribution of teaching credentials by race and socioeconomic status, which lends itself to considerable achievement gaps in high school students. Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) found that teacher qualification is tied to student achievement, and studies that use
value-added student achievement data have found that student achievement gains are much more influenced by a student's assigned teacher than other factors like class size and composition (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

Outside of credentials and teacher background, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the magnitude of teacher effects on achievement, with an abundance of studies determining that these effects are dominant factors in academic gain (Nye et al., 2004; Wright et al., 1997). Wenglinsky (2000) believed that classroom practices are important to learning. In his research, Wenglinsky found that what happens in the classroom is critical and that how a teacher teaches is important. Furthermore, Stronge et al. (2008) examined the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement in an exploratory study, which found that effective teachers scored high in areas of instruction, student assessment, classroom management, and personal qualities. Studies such as these reflect the need for a comprehensive evaluation system that takes into account not only the qualifications of teachers, but the actual processes that take place in the classroom and how they have a significant impact on student success.

Current and New Perspectives on Teacher Evaluation and Effectiveness

According to Danielson (2011), deficiencies of traditional teacher evaluation systems include:

- outmoded evaluative criteria, usually in the form of checklists;
- simplistic evaluative comments without any consistency as to what those words mean;
- the same procedures for novice teachers and veteran teachers; and
- lack of consistency among evaluators (p. 35).
Peterson (2004) asserted that the most common method of teacher evaluation in current practice was to use administrator reports, based on one or two classroom visits that use a checklist, rating form, or anecdotal record. Practitioners, researchers, and policy makers agreed that most current teacher evaluation systems do little to help teachers improve or support personnel decision-making (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012). When evaluating teachers, one of the major concerns was the weight placed on classroom observations, which were often infrequent and measured only a miniscule amount of actual performance (Marshall, 2005). Scriven (1981) noted validity deficits of evaluations conducted mostly by classroom visits: no comprehensive look at curriculum content, absence of student achievement data, and lack of many professional performances of teachers that were not observable in the classroom, but were critical to understanding quality. Local school districts in the U.S. continue to implement teacher evaluation programs designed to measure minimally essential teaching skills, often with little regard for student learning (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003). It is possible that soon this approach will be a thing of the past, as evaluations seek to flesh out the true measures of how teaching impacts student achievement.

Teacher evaluation systems must account for the contexts in which teaching takes place if they are to guide teacher and school improvement (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003). Traditionally, evaluations typically occurred within snapshots in time, and were ultimately not the best way to measure teacher performance. This sort of "fuzzy snapshot" prevented evaluators from gauging teachers' true strengths and weaknesses (Mathers et al., 2008). Marshall (2005) also noted several other problems with the way schools conduct evaluations, specifically when evaluations relied primarily on
observations to gather data: the lessons teachers present when given advance notice, glamorizing a lesson for the principals’ benefit, and even when they do not, having an administrator enter the classroom usually reduces discipline problems and results in a more orderly lesson than students generally experience.

Stronge and Ostrander (1997) noted that in current evaluation practice, (a) opportunity for error exists based on subjective judgments about what is good teaching; (b) there is disagreement about what constitutes the best practices with regard to the complex act of teaching; and (c) a subjective-judgmental model is dominant. While the ideal situation was that student gain should play a critical role in teacher evaluations, student achievement data was hard to obtain on all teachers in a school district (Peterson, 2004). In addition to this conundrum, teaching effectiveness research theorists asserted that the underlying problem with teacher evaluation is the lack of agreement on what constitutes good teaching. Researchers argued that passion, reflection, planning, and love for children were integral to good teaching practices (Devine, Fahie, & McGillicuddy, 2013), while at the same time things such as prior experience working in a low-income school do not seem to matter as much as a teacher’s extracurricular accomplishments when predicting successful teaching (Ripley, 2010). With such varied perspectives on determining best teaching practices, states were tasked with selecting evaluation models that incorporated whatever they felt was reflective of effective teaching. In time, however, subjective criteria gave way to research-based evaluation models as research was conducted on what measures were truly effective (Hazi & Rucinski, 2009). This shift occurred steadily, and was advanced by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Hazi & Rucinski, 2009). As a result, school systems have included research-based
interventions (RBIs) in evaluation criteria, and states have mandated essential teacher competencies from the research (Gullatt & Ballard, 1998).

Teacher evaluation and teacher effectiveness. Teacher evaluation systems have been studied for several decades to determine if there is a meaningful connection between the tools districts use to measure teachers and the academic impact teachers have on student achievement. During that time, the research has indicated that there is a connection between the two, although not always a consistent one. Gallagher (2004) identified a strong connection between performance-based, subject-specific teacher evaluation scores and student achievement, particularly in the area of reading. These findings were similar to those of Kimball, White, Milanowski and Borman (2009), who studied the relationship between teacher evaluation scores and state and district level student test scores in reading and mathematics. Jacob and Lefgren (2008) report results from Milanowski’s (2004) study that showed that scores from a rigorous teacher evaluation system can be substantially related to student achievement and provide criterion-related validity evidence for the use of the performance evaluation scores as the basis for a performance-based pay system or other decisions with consequences for teachers.

Findings from White’s (2004) study on teacher evaluation scores and student achievement revealed that standards-based evaluation scores provided some evidence of teacher quality in terms of value-added student achievement, more than measurements of only teacher experience. Appropriately administered evaluations, then, could be good sources of information for determining potential student achievement. Since effective teaching has such a direct relation to learning, linking these two components through
evaluation appears justified. Based on his synthesis of over 500,000 studies, Hattie (2003) found that excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence on student achievement. A reasonable estimate of the relative effects of teachers versus the school environment has been identified as 2:1, with teachers being responsible for about a 20 percent variance in student achievement (Marzano, 2000). This was similar to findings from Wright et al. (1997), who determined teacher effectiveness was the dominant factor affecting student academic gain. This research therefore concluded that an appropriate evaluation system should include the teacher's impact on student growth over time as a major factor. Echoing this idea, Milanowski et al. (2004) asserted that, unless teaching according to the standards leads to more students learning, implementing a standards-based evaluation system will not contribute to student achievement.

Despite evidence that teacher evaluations have a positive impact on student achievement, there continues to be uneasiness regarding tying such evaluations to teacher accountability measures. Subjectivity of evaluation scoring and concerns about linking evaluations that rely on student performance to teacher pay, continues to alarm a large number of educators. In Florida, critics of linking teacher evaluations to student test scores called the move “political” and “unfair;” this was after only two teachers out of nearly 5,000 in two counties were rated as unsatisfactory under the new evaluation system (O’Donnell, 2012). New York, a state that has endorsed the Danielson model, has even more challenges related to pending evaluation changes. The new measures authorized by the state Education Department has up to 40 percent of teachers’ scores based on an analysis of students’ state test scores, and up to 60 percent of teachers’
ratings coming from administrative observations of their work in the classroom ("Teacher Plan," 2013, para. 12). These changes have not been popular with teachers.

The shift in including student achievement as a key indicator within teacher evaluations is not limited to Florida and New York. The National Council on Teacher Quality (2012) reported that as many as 30 states now require that teacher evaluations include objective evidence of student learning. This was a dramatic change from 2009, when 35 states did not require these sorts of measures. Over the years, one of the major goals of teacher evaluation research has been to identify characteristics of excellent teaching in order to enhance student learning and achievement (Ellett & Teddlie, 2003). The recent interest in accountability in education by policymakers has only heightened the need for data-conscious decisions related to hiring, evaluating, and retaining quality teachers.

Legal Challenges in Evaluating Teachers Based on Student Achievement

Teacher evaluation is certainly not without its critics or flaws and new evaluation systems are being legally challenged by educators in numerous states. One of the major concerns that educational leaders have with new evaluation models is its insistent linkage of student achievement data and teacher evaluations. To say that this is a messy topic is an understatement. While a large number of states are changing to reflect that student achievement is necessary to consider in teacher evaluations, statutes that speak to dismissing educators have yet to change with the new standards and do not address firing a teacher based on failing to increase student achievement (Hungerford, 2013). The conundrum then arises about what to do with teachers who do not meet student achievement criteria in teacher evaluation procedures, yet who also do not have formal
procedures for termination based on this newly-added criterion. In Colorado, for instance, state law requires student growth measures be used in teacher evaluations, but nothing in the law explains when a teacher who is ineffective in producing adequate student academic growth may be terminated. There are, however, due process protections for teachers who are found to be ineffective, such as requesting an appeal or a third-party review and a remediation plan. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a union representing workers in education, health care, and public service, published its process to align teacher evaluations with appropriate due process procedures to provide teachers with identified as needing improvement with support they need to improve (AFT, 2013). The AFT New Mexico union filed a lawsuit to further declare its opposition to the new teacher evaluation system that places a strong emphasis on student test scores and grades. In Louisiana, school systems have adopted a shortened version of Charlotte Danielson’s Framework in order to comply with Act 54, a law focused on improving teacher quality through more intensive teacher evaluations. Half of a teacher’s rating is calculated based on how that teacher scores in the observation, and half is determined by how students perform on standardized tests (Garland, 2012). The Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) sought to obtain a court injunction to stop state-approved teacher evaluation systems, which did not succeed. Yet as a result of all the uproar regarding the new procedures, the Maryland State Department of Education applied for a one-year delay on using new teacher evaluation systems to inform personnel decisions. Similarly, the Florida Education Association has challenged the state teacher evaluation law, in part because one of the teachers filing in the suit was evaluated using students at a different school (O’Connor, 2013).
Another legal challenge states face is that not all classes require a standardized assessment, meaning that teachers are subject to an evaluation based on students they did not teach or in subject areas in which they aren’t familiar. A group of teachers in Florida filed lawsuits regarding the issue, claiming new procedures in their evaluations violate their constitutional rights to equal protection and due process ("Teachers mount legal," 2013).

One particular concern with the quality of value-added estimates is measurement error, which can result in considerable imprecision in estimating teachers’ effectiveness (RAND Corporation, 2010, p. 5). Teachers who have small class sizes or teach students with missing achievement scores are at a significant disadvantage with value-added calculations of their students’ success. Corcoran (2010) and Baker et al. (2010) assert that students who move around frequently between school systems will further hinder the estimation of a teacher’s effectiveness. Another concern educators have regarding implementing evaluation models that rely on student achievement is the fact that value-added estimates can only be calculated for certain subjects and grades that are tested annually based on a state’s accountability system (RAND Corporation, 2010).

Teachers’ unions and other leaders in Maryland sought a one-year moratorium of student testing due to the fact that the Common Core Curriculum, which will be a major gauge in teacher evaluations, will not have assessments ready to give students until the 2014-2015 school year. Instead, the state plans to test students with the annual assessments it used in the past, regardless of the fact that the scores cannot be used to measure school progress. State officials have acknowledged the testing will not provide reliable data for evaluating schools and teachers because the curriculum is being phased
out to make way for the Common Core. The cost of continuing the test despite these issues is around $6 million (Bowie, 2013).

Maryland Teacher Evaluation: Past and Present

Teacher evaluation in the state of Maryland saw major reforms and modifications as research on teaching and learning shaped the way school systems used educational policy. During the first wave of reform (1989-2002), the Maryland Department of Education focused on developing a comprehensive system of public assessment and accountability ("Maryland’s Third Wave," 2010). This thrust of accountability focused both on student performance and an increased examination of teacher evaluations. In 1989, state education leaders, educators, and other representatives, to include governors from across the country, participated in the National Education Summit, a gathering to discuss solutions to common classroom and school problems. The six national education goals that came out of the Summit became the centerpieces of educational reform in the 1990s, and were later incorporated into legislation in 1994 (The National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], 1999). Since that time, other Summits were held to reaffirm and collaborate on the state expectations for their schools, focusing on improving the quality of teaching, strengthening accountability, and achieving high standards for all students, all of which were major focal points for Summits in 1996, 1999, and 2001. This commitment is demonstrated by the 2001 Summit’s dedication to closing the achievement gap in America’s schools:

We must raise achievement for all students while closing the achievement gap separating the educational “haves” from the “have-nots.” These goals are an irreducible educational minimum for the United States. Nothing less than their
full attainment will serve the nation’s social, democratic, and economic interests.  

(Grasmick, 2002, p. 11)

Mirroring the national movement to raise standards and improve the quality of education, Maryland initiated an independent school reform in 1989. This initial wave of reform was sparked by the publication of the Sondheim Commission Report (Governor’s Commission on School Performance [Sondheim Commission], 1989), which recommended a comprehensive system of assessment and accountability for schools. The Report provided many recommendations to improving Maryland’s schools, including the notion that “the judgments of teachers should always be the major part of the ongoing evaluation of students’ progress in our schools” (p. 7) and a system of public accountability that included measures beyond student test scores to determine achievement. The Sondheim Report illustrated a landmark shift in thinking about reform. The Report examined change from the perspective of what schools could change; the findings focused on schools instead of students as the primary unit of accountability and focus for educational improvement (Grasmick, 2002).

In 2001, the Visionary Panel for Better Schools followed directly on the heels of No Child Left Behind mandates that ushered in Maryland’s second wave of education reform. Of the eight major recommendations suggested by the panel, not one addressed how to link student achievement and teacher evaluations. The closest such consideration was found in Recommendation Four: Local school systems should more closely link compensation, incentives, and evaluation to reflect more accurately the new responsibilities of the principalship (Jennings & Amos, 2002). As part of the Visionary Panel, a Teacher Quality Task Group was formed to focus on providing students with
qualified and competent teachers. The Task Group made three major recommendations to the state of Maryland each of which dealt more with creating incentive systems, comprehensive teacher preparation programs, and collaborative opportunities as opposed to more rigorous evaluation methods (Jennings & Amos, 2002).

The authorization of No Child Left Behind in 2001 was the catalyst for Maryland’s second educational reform wave (2002-2009), which resulted in the state aligning k-12 curricular standards and eliminating performance gaps among various student subgroups (The College Board, 2012). At the 2001 National Education Summit, participants further strengthened their commitment to firm, fair, and balanced accountability systems in which all education stakeholders, including policymakers, were held accountable for raising student achievement (Grasmick, 2002).

In 2002, Maryland enacted the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act. This legislation established a standards-based approach to public school financing based on the premise that all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or socioeconomic background can achieve when they have access to rigorous curriculum, highly-qualified teachers, and programs that employ proven strategies and methods (“Education Reform,” 2013). During this second education reform wave, the 2003 Performance-Based Evaluation Handbook was developed by the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS). This Handbook was heavily influenced by an organizational approach created by Edwin M. Bridges in Managing the Incompetent Teacher (1990). The BCPSS is the most unique political and educational subsystem within the state, as it serves more than 12 percent of all Maryland students, including 29 percent of the state’s minority student population and 34 percent of its Title I participants. It also has the
lowest wealth per pupil in the state (Grasmick, 2002, p.12). During periods of reform change, the teacher evaluation techniques used by BCPSS were required to take the unique dynamics of Baltimore schools into account.

The evaluation system used by the Baltimore City Schools staff was based on four domains: Planning and Preparation, the Learning Environment, Instruction/Instructional Support, and Professional Responsibilities. In order to evaluate teachers, school leaders were required to utilize a three-level rating system using data sources such as observations, pre- and post- observation conferences, and other informational sources like student achievement data and artifacts to base scores on a holistic rubric that focused on the four domains developed by Bridges.

During the time that Baltimore City was evaluating teachers based on domain criteria, Montgomery County Public Schools used a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) component of its Professional Growth System (PGS) to evaluate teachers. Beginning in 2000, the purpose of PGS was to enable teachers to grow and improve in their craft using a number of elements: teacher professional development plans, standards-based evaluation for experienced teachers, and peer assistance for new teachers and experienced teachers performing below standard (Koppich, 2004). Still in operation today, PAR uses several hundred senior teachers to mentor both newcomers and struggling veterans. If the mentoring does not work, the PAR panel - made up of eight teachers and eight principals - can vote to fire the teacher (Winerip, 2011, para. 2).

Transitioning to the use of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 initiated what policymakers see as the most recent educational reform in the state. Along with enhancing curriculum and raising expectations for all students, Maryland seeks to
use the Common Core to use student achievement data to better inform teacher
evaluations ("Maryland’s Third Wave," 2010). The state is already entering the final
phase of initiating system-wide adoption of the CCSS standards, as diagrammed in Table 3.

Directly stemming from the reform efforts over the past 15 years, Maryland
continues to focus on policies to improve its public educational system and raise student
achievement. All of the emphasis in performance appears to be paying off, as
demonstrated by Maryland students making greater gains on national tests than peers
nationwide and narrowing the gap with students in top-performing nations in the world
(Bowie, 2012).

Given Maryland’s history of education reform and accountability, Maryland
assumed a national leadership role in the CCSS Initiative (The College Board, 2012, p. 2), and with it a reconfiguration of its teacher evaluations. With the adoption of Charlotte
Danielson’s teacher evaluation model, Maryland will continue to raise the bar on teachers
and their impact on student achievement.
Table 3

Common Core Timeline for Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New common core curriculum</td>
<td>Transition plans and writing new curriculum</td>
<td>Transition plans and writing new curriculum</td>
<td>Full implementation of new state curriculum</td>
<td>Full implementation of new state curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARCC assessment</td>
<td>Assessment development begins</td>
<td>Pilot field testing, research, data collection</td>
<td>Full Field testing, research, data collection</td>
<td>PARCC assessments fully implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New teacher and principal evaluations</td>
<td>Pilot in 7 LEAs</td>
<td>Statewide field testing</td>
<td>Evaluation system fully operational</td>
<td>Evaluation system fully operational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Reproduced from Maryland Public Schools (2013).*
Maryland State Department of Education evaluation models. MSDE developed two models based on its incorporation of Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching: the State Teacher Evaluation Model (Figure 1) and the Local Teacher Evaluation Model (Figure 2). Both models provide stipulations that MSDE requires from local school systems, while also providing opportunities for slight variations that each district can make in order to better tailor the evaluations to their districts’ individual needs. For instance, MSDE’s State Teacher Evaluation Model provides for a teacher’s evaluation to be comprised of 50% qualitative measures, and provides a breakdown of which measures and what percentages this 50% is comprised of (i.e.: planning and preparation at 12.5%, instruction at 12.5%, etc.). For student growth, MSDE requires that teachers of specific subjects have certain Student Learning Objective (SLO), Middle School Assessment (MSA), or High School Assessment (HSA) “lag measures” incorporated into their evaluation measures. Lag measures are scores that have been previously collected by testing and are assigned to teachers who have had an impact on student performance. For example, if an elementary teacher provides instruction in two tested content areas, 20% of their student growth measures will come from the most recent student test scores available in reading and math (see Figure 1), even if these scores are from the previous year. These measures track progress toward student achievement; however, they are always in the past and may not be readily accessible to teachers in a timely manner to have as powerful an impact on professional growth.
MSDE also generated an example of a potential Teacher Evaluation Model that local districts could choose to adopt rather than crafting their own. A reader will notice that, although professional practice qualitative measures account for 50% of a teacher’s evaluation, the specific domain percentages are not stipulated. Local districts also are at liberty to insert additional domains from Danielson’s framework at their own discretion, but ultimately must receive approval by MSDE.
Figure 1

MSDE State Teacher Evaluation Model

Reproduced from Maryland Public Schools (2013).
Figure 2


**Professional Practice**
- Planning and Preparation
- Instruction
- Classroom Environment
- Professional Responsibilities

**Student Growth**

**Elementary/Middle School Teacher**
- Two Content Areas
- Either
  - 5% - Reading MSA (Class)
  - 5% - Math MSA (Class)
  - 10% - School Progress Index
  - 10% - Reading MSA (Class)
  - 10% - Math MSA (Class)
  - 30% - LEA proposed objective measures of student growth and learning linked to state and/or local goals and approved by MSDE

**Elementary/Middle School Teacher**
- One Content Area
- Either
  - 10% - Reading MSA (Class) or Math MSA (Class)
  - 15% - SC100 Progress Index
  - 20% - Reading MSA (Class) or Math MSA (Class)
  - 30% - LEA proposed objective measures of student growth and learning linked to state and/or local goals and approved by MSDE

**High School Teacher**
- LEA proposed objective measures of student growth and learning linked to state and/or local goals and approved by MSDE; no single measure to exceed 35%.
- For tested area teachers, one Student Learning Objective must include an HSA data point.

**Elementary/Middle School Teacher**
- Non-Tested Subject
- LEA proposed objective measures of student growth and learning linked to state and/or local goals and approved by MSDE; no single measure to exceed 35%.

*MSA/MSI gifted students to 15% in 2013-2015 and became 20% in 2015-2016.
Student Learning Objectives

The use of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in the teacher evaluation process is new to Maryland. These objectives can be developed by teachers or schools and can be used as part of an evaluation tool for teachers in both tested and non-tested content areas. SLOs are developed by practitioners, both teachers and principals, in conjunction with their supervisors or other designated evaluators. The Maryland State Department of Education asserts that these objectives are focused on student learning and use evidence of student growth to guide professional development. At the classroom level, teachers create SLOs geared toward student achievement; at the school level, principals also design SLOs aligned with school improvement plans through the use of school-level data. The objectives must align with Maryland’s College and Career Readiness Standards, school improvement and master plans, and LEA priorities. Following the creation of SLOs, they are required to be approved and are validated for quality and rigor by the LEA, which receives assistance and guidance from the state.

Student Growth Measures

As seen in Figures 1 and 2, the MSDE guidelines for teacher evaluation require that 50% of a teacher’s evaluation is centered around evidence of professional practice and another 50% on “student growth measures”. These measures of student growth and progress come from a variety of sources: the MSA, HSA, and other LEA-proposed objective measures. In the future, LEAs will transition to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments to measure student learning in place of the MSA and HSA. The issue of student growth measures is noted because each district involved in this study was given the opportunity to determine what specific
measures will be used in each district. Student growth measures are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

**Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching**

Historically, evaluation systems were designed with a focus on teacher behavior or performance without concern for student outcomes. Today, with recent educational reform initiatives, the impact of teacher evaluations on student gains is wildly popular among states. Instruments developed in response to the value-added evaluation movement included popular names such as Marzano’s Causal Teacher Evaluation Model, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, the Stronge Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Performance System, and Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (Walsh, 2012). Maryland’s education commission selected Danielson’s teaching evaluation criteria in 2010, and continues to move toward full implementation of the model. Due to Maryland’s adoption of this model, it is important to describe the key components and its significance in this research study.

*Charlotte Danielson’s Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996) was a research-based examination of teacher practices and responsibilities that served as a guidepost for educators to understand their work and encourage professional development (Pennsylvania State Education Association [PSEA], 2010). The concept was born out of Danielson’s work at Education Testing Service (ETS), the company that administers the SAT, GRE, and Praxis examinations. Originally, Danielson was tasked to establish a method for new teachers to receive licensure through ETS after undergoing an evaluation by ETS-trained teachers in a test known as the Praxis III. After ETS declined to use the evaluation protocol to assess veteran teachers,
Danielson independently published her Framework as a manual (Toch & Rothman, 2008). Danielson's framework has a clear but complex rubric for observation, which means that it requires multiple classroom visits as well as evidence provided through teacher/student artifacts (National Education Association [NEA], 2011, p. 4). Danielson's 2013 evaluation instrument focuses on four domains, each with their own specific components.

As noted above, the four domains consist of 22 components. These components are designed to capture the behaviors of effective teachers (Danielson, 2013). Danielson's framework then dissects the 22 components into a total of 76 elements, ranging between xx and xx elements per component. For instance, Engaging Students in Learning is a component of Domain 3: Instruction, and one of the elements of this component is Grouping of Students. In total, there are between 2 and 4 different elements under each of the 22 components. This may be better reflected graphically as in Figure 4.

Each of the 76 elements has a rubric which includes descriptions of four performance levels for that element: Unsatisfactory, Basic, Proficient, and Distinguished. A teacher is assessed based on evidence collected during the observation process.
Figure 3

Danielson's Components of Professional Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 1: Planning and Preparation</th>
<th>Domain 2: Classroom Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>la Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy</td>
<td>2a Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lb Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</td>
<td>2b Establishing a Culture for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lc Setting Instructional Outcomes</td>
<td>2c Managing Classroom Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ld Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources</td>
<td>2d Managing Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le Designing Coherent Instruction</td>
<td>2e Organizing Physical Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lf Designing Student Assessments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 3: Instruction</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3a Communicating With Students</td>
<td>3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c Engaging Students in Learning</td>
<td>3d Using Assessment in Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3e Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4a Reflecting on Teaching</td>
<td>4b Maintaining Accurate Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4c Communicating with Families</td>
<td>4d Participating in a Professional Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4e Growing and Developing Professionally</td>
<td>4f Showing Professionalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4

Danielson Domain Details

- Domain: Instruction
- Component: Engaging Students in Learning
- Element: Grouping of Students
Summary

There are many mixed opinions regarding Danielson’s standards-based model. Empirical studies have shown that each component of the Framework for Teaching is associated with improved student learning, and the model has also been subjected to numerous studies measuring its validity (Danielson, 2012). The Teacher Advancement Program operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching has employed Danielson’s model as the focal point of its teaching evaluation program, and modified its teaching standards and some wording in the performance rubric (Toth & Rothman, 2008). Chicago Public Schools conducted a two-year pilot of the program, and found that evaluations were conducted consistent with the original rating scale. Findings from the pilot also found that 57 percent of principals were highly enthusiastic about the Danielson process (West, 2011). Chicago principals do not appear alone in their enthusiasm for Danielson’s model. The Framework for Teaching has been adopted in more than 20 states; it is the default teacher evaluation framework in New Jersey and Illinois, and is the only recommended framework for classroom observations in schools and networks in New York City (“Record Growth,” 2011, para. 2).

There is little doubt that Danielson and her company have been profitable in marketing their evaluation protocol to states and garnered positive feedback. This doesn’t, however, stop the criticism associated with teacher evaluation models. For instance, Schmoker (2013) asserted that evaluation frameworks such as Danielson’s that have complex, bloated templates will only increase teacher anxiety while lowering morale. In addition, teacher evaluations in general still remain a hotly debated issue as states increasingly link student scores and teacher tenure. Critics feel that current
evaluation systems are dysfunctional, failing to recognize teachers who are exemplary, providing little help to average teachers and skimping on the evidence needed to dismiss the weakest teachers (National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2009, p. 2). Models like Danielson’s seek to eliminate such critique and provide a cohesive format for school districts to determine effectiveness of their programs and teachers.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used to conduct the research study proposed in Chapter One. The research questions addressed were:

1. How has state mandated policy in Maryland changed regarding teacher evaluation in the last 10 years?

2. How do three of the largest school districts (Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools, and Howard County Public Schools) in Maryland compare and contrast in their evaluation procedures for teachers?

3. How closely aligned are the three selected local school districts’ evaluation plans with the state’s evaluation criteria?

Sample and Participant Selection

In order to examine the evaluation systems of Maryland school districts, three school districts with high student populations from the state were selected for inclusion in the study. The number of school districts was capped at three in order to both provide a timely evaluation and to garner feedback from a meaningful number of the state’s 25 Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Based on enrollment data calculated by the American School and University Magazine (2012), the schools selected for the study include:

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPSS) – 144,023 enrolled students
Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AAPC) – 75,481 enrolled students
Howard County Public Schools (HCPSS) – 50,969 enrolled students
Data Sources

This study focused on the teacher evaluation protocol dictated by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Data collection was acquired through contacting MSDE and relevant education agencies to retrieve documentation regarding current and future evaluation procedures that took place beginning in August 2013 statewide.

Artifacts. Selected documents were used during the course of this research, including:

Teacher evaluation protocol documents from the MSDE.

- Maryland Teacher and Principal Evaluation Guidebook, 2013
- State Teacher Evaluation Model, 2012
- Local Education Agencies’ teacher evaluation designs, policies, and procedures

Montgomery County Public Schools.

- Teacher Evaluation Form, 2012

Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

- Multiple Measure Evaluations, 2012

Howard County Public Schools.

- Framework for Teacher Evaluation, 2013

Outside agency documents.

- Achievement Matters Most (2002)
- Every Child Achieves (2000)

**Data Analysis**

The primary means for conducting the proposed research was content analysis methodology, a systematic examination of oral, written, or visual communication. Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique that interprets meaning from the content of text data. For this research experiment, policy documents were examined from MSDE and the three selected LEAs, and the text will be coded into various categories such as word, phrase, sentence, and/or theme. This process, though time-consuming, provided a means to isolate occurrences among the state and LEA documents to ascertain alignment.

Analyzing text involved several tasks: (a) discovering themes and subthemes, (b) winnowing themes down to a manageable few, (c) building hierarchies of themes or code books, and (d) linking themes into theoretical models (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once completed, policy documents were studied using a conceptual analysis approach. This approach allowed words/themes from documents to be quantified and tallied according to frequency, focusing on select terms both implicit and explicit. Explicit words and phrases were readily identified; the challenge in conceptual analysis was in coding implicit terms and their level of implication and ensuing researcher judgments that may play a role in coding. For instance, it was easier to identify and classify the word “jogging” then it was to classify the phrase “periods of activity.” Both are not synonymous, yet taken in context of the sentence, could, in fact, be grouped under the code of exercise. It is at this point that data analysis required researcher adherence to specialized coding guidelines in order
to minimize subjectivity. This limited issues of reliability and validity, and therefore makes the research more meaningful to the education community.

Content analysis was conducted by careful comparison of words, language, and themes of the various evaluation tools in order to see a consistent methodology that remains true to the MSDE teacher evaluation policy. In order to do this, I utilized a descriptive coding method, a software called NVivo 10, which was fully aligned within qualitative research parameters. To identify themes accurately, various scrutiny techniques were employed, beginning with proofreading material, identifying key phrases, and noting repetitions that present themselves. A search of similarities and differences were used as a comparative method analysis amongst the various teacher evaluation types. This information was systematically categorized and tabulated in order to find similarities and possible discrepancies between, MSDE’s evaluation protocol, and the Local Education Agencies’ evaluation procedures. A breakdown of applicable data sources, analysis techniques and their alignment to the research questions in this study can be found in Table 4.

I coded for frequency of a concept because this allowed me to determine the potential importance assigned to certain concepts found in MSDE and LEA documents. One of the most obvious decisions that I made when conducting this conceptual analysis was determining the number and type of concepts I coded for, otherwise called a coding scheme or coding frame. The identified concepts that were coded are detailed in Table 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Data analysis technique</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How has state-mandated teacher evaluation policy in the State of Maryland changed in the last ten years?</td>
<td><em>Maryland Teacher and Principal Evaluation Guidebook</em> by MSDE, 2013; <em>Achievement Matters Most</em> report by MSDE, 2002;</td>
<td>Content analysis; Historical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do three of the largest school districts in Maryland compare and contrast in their evaluation procedures for teachers?</td>
<td><em>Teacher Professional Growth System Handbook</em> by MCPS; <em>Multiple Measure Evaluations</em> by AAPCS; Framework for Teacher Evaluation by HCPSS</td>
<td>Content analysis; Comparative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How closely aligned are the three selected local school districts' evaluation plans with the state's evaluation criteria?</td>
<td><em>State Teacher Evaluation Model</em> developed by MSDE; <em>Teacher Professional Growth System Handbook</em> by MCPS; <em>Multiple Measure Evaluations</em> by AAPCS; Framework for Teacher Evaluation by HCPSS</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major and minor themes</td>
<td>Coding label</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>Developing professionally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student learning objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
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<td>Classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation ratings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent themes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations

The American Psychological Association (APA) provides guidelines that direct researchers to collect data, protect identities of subjects, and be prudent and conscientious scientists that "do no harm." There are numerous ethical codes of conduct that police researcher activities while conducting research. As with any major research study, considerations were made to ensure that poor data storage and retention did not occur, as all information in this proposed study is available for verification by other scholars and future researchers. In addition, care was taken to minimize faulty data-gathering procedures.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Chapter 4 breaks down the data analysis and findings of the study with the results discovered in relation to the research questions discussed in the preceding chapters. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to analyze the alignment of evaluation measures at the state and local levels in Maryland; the aim is to expose the possible discrepancies between state requirements for teacher evaluation and the requirements school systems have at the local level, as well as to identify common themes that may emerge at the local and state levels. Overall, this research was conducted to explore the available evaluation data and determine the current state and local alignment of teacher evaluations in Maryland. Six different data sources were used to answer the three research questions. This chapter synthesizes the empirical findings to answer the study’s three research questions and provide additional detail to the preceding chapter.

Research Methodology

I conducted a qualitative content analysis on multiple data sources that discuss the different teacher evaluation models followed in Maryland. The use of the software program NVivo10 was selected due to its ease of use, accessibility, and ability to graphically represent the number of word and phrase occurrences found in the text. Following the program’s search of word themes, I identified words and phrases related to the study by manual coding. The documents were each manually coded five times in order to ensure accuracy.
To answer the research questions, I followed Mayring's (2000) procedures for a qualitative content analysis. According to Mayring (2000), qualitative content analysis is the technique of "empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification" (p. 2). Klenke (2008) explained that Mayring’s (2002) "qualitative content analysis tries to overcome the shortcomings of quantitative content analysis such as providing answers to how the categories were derived by applying a systematic, theory-guided approach to text analysis" (p. 90). With the definitions and characteristics of what a content analysis is and how it is performed, I decided to employ the method with the four data sources, as the process was deemed to match the needs of this particular study. Mayring (2000) presented the steps in completing an inductive content analysis and posited that the major design of the procedure was to formulate a criterion of definition. Derived from the theoretical background and research question (p. 4), this puts into action and actually describes the parts of the text that pertain to the topic at hand. The second step of the content analysis involves examining the gathered data and tentatively distinguishing groups, deducing them step-by-step (p. 4). By using what Mayring (2000) tagged as a “feedback loop” (p. 12), the groups formed are then revised and evaluated repeatedly. These categories are then trimmed down and transformed into main categories or themes and are checked by the researcher according to their validity and reliability (p. 4).

Findings

Research question 1. How has state mandated policy in Maryland changed regarding teacher evaluation in the last 10 years?
By its nature, the first research question required a historical analysis of teacher evaluation methods in the state of Maryland documented for at least the last decade. In order to fully comprehend the differences in Maryland’s current evaluation methods from what existed 10 years ago, I found it necessary to examine records that spoke to former evaluations and their procedures. The Maryland Teacher and Principal Evaluation Guidebook by MSDE (2013), Achievement Matters Most (2002), the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework (2005), Helping Teachers Help All Students: The Imperative for High-Quality Professional Development (2004), Aiming Higher: The Next Decade of Education Reform in Maryland (2002), the Sondheim Report (1989), and Every Child Achieving (1999) were analyzed. Each document provided a different piece of a historical puzzle related to how Maryland’s views on teacher evaluation and accountability have shifted within the past decade. In order to detail the full spectrum of change that has occurred based on an analysis of the aforementioned documents; I have presented findings from each data source separately. A graphic comparing all of the documents is also included for ease of understanding.

Aiming Higher (2002) data analysis. Achieve, Inc. was commissioned by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its education system in 2001. The results of this study provided the state with a host of recommendations based on Achieve’s findings of student performance, local school district initiatives, and measures undertaken by MSDE. While there was no direct mention of teacher evaluations in Aiming Higher, there was a wealth of information detailing the then-current status of education in Maryland. This provided critical background information related to the climate of educational policy at that time.
Overall, the state increased its scores on state testing that started nine years earlier, with 83 schools scoring at least a 70 percent satisfactory rate on testing compared to only 11 schools in 1993. However, achievement gaps were already persistent in the state’s education realm: The percentage of students achieving the satisfactory standard was lower in every subject at each of the tested grades (3, 5, and 7) for African-American students. The results were especially glaring in math, where 53.9 percent of Caucasian students reached the standard compared to only 19.5 percent of African-American students, and in science, where 52.8 percent of Caucasian students rated satisfactory compared to 21.9 percent of African-Americans.

Despite the disparity in performance, teacher evaluations were not mentioned in the Achieve, Inc. document. Instead, there was a focus on the professional development of teachers. This is evidenced by the fact that of the 127 mentions of assessments or evaluations in the document, none refer to an evaluation of teachers or their professional capabilities. The majority of assessment commentary focused on student performance and testing, specifically phasing in a new era of Middle School and High School Assessments (MSA and HSA, respectively) designed to measure student achievement. There was mention of schools and educators being accountable for student results, yet there was no direct mention of measures taken toward teasing out a teacher’s value-added instruction on a student’s performance. Mentions of the term ‘assessment’ can be seen as tied to systems gauging student ability:

- Clearly, Maryland’s assessment system – not content or performance standards – has been the primary driver of teaching and learning over the last decade (p. 18).
• This should help encourage students to take the assessments seriously, even before they count for graduation (p. 20).

• Achieve recognizes that staying the course with ambitious assessments for more than seven years is a major accomplishment, and we especially commend the state for moving to bring higher standards to high school with the upcoming High School Assessments (p. 31).

Similarly, of the 76 mentions of “accountability” or “accountable,” the directive is tied to holding schools collectively as responsible for improving student achievement, instead of measuring the performance of individual teachers and their impact on students:

• As Maryland enters the next decade of accountability for elementary and middle schools, we feel that the state should seriously examine its current school rating policy (p. 34).

• Yet an optimal accountability system identifies and rates all schools in the state. To ensure sufficient progress and fairness, all schools need targets for absolute performance, as well as for adequate progress (for example, improving achievement by a certain percentage) from year to year (p. 35).

• It is now time to extend accountability from schools in Maryland to students and ask higher education and employers to take responsibility for results in their hiring and admissions decisions (p. 37).

• Maryland has taken extraordinary steps to hold such schools accountable for raising achievement, including “reconstituting,” or taking over, four schools (p. 8).
The document did not directly tackle the issue of teacher evaluations, and demonstrated instead a focus at the time on school accountability and assessments that had not yet become specific to individual teachers.

*Helping teachers help all students: The Imperative for High-Quality Professional Development (2004) data analysis.* This document was also analyzed to determine the state of Maryland's policies regarding teacher evaluation in the early 2000s. Again, it should be noted that key features of all documents reviewed in the historical analysis were represented in Table 5. With 897 word occurrences or mentions of professional development, Helping Teachers Help All Students was a document specifically tailored to improving teacher practice through rigorous professional growth and development procedures. Evaluations were directed toward assessing the quality of professional development activities and programs, not of teacher practice. This is similar to the Aiming Higher document published two years prior. However, some of the recommendations specifically called for the state to assist local school districts with developing better evaluation tools of teachers:

- As MSDE develops its own evaluation capacity, it could provide technical assistance to districts developing generic data collection tools such as surveys, observation protocols, and frameworks for examining student outcomes (p. 8).

- Further, there are almost no examples of rigorous evaluations of changes in teacher performance or improvements in student outcomes that can be attributed to professional development (p. 27).

*Achievement Matters Most (2002) data analysis.* This document was notable for its emphasis on teacher quality, teacher support, and a shared accountability of student
performance amongst the student, school, and individual teacher. This is perhaps the first policy-recommending document presented to the state which spoke to individual teacher accountability. Teacher quality was an area that required a "comprehensive performance-based teacher prep and certification system aligned with Pre-K through 12th grade achievement" (p. 12). In addition, the American Visionary Panel highlighted meaningful professional development and opportunities for teachers to promote student achievement (p. 11). Teacher support was another key component in the document. The Panel encouraged the state of Maryland and local school systems to assume greater responsibility for career-long support (p. 5) of its teachers.

Accountability was highly emphasized in the document, as well. The Panel opined that the first level of school accountability resided with teachers (p. 11), and advocated not merely for school accountability such as the structures already in place in Maryland, but also more effective engagement of all stakeholders in a shared accountability system. This included individual principals, teachers, and parents (p. 11). The Visionary Panel quite succinctly tailored its recommendations to focus state policy on the "most important beneficiaries of education reform – students and teachers" (p. 9), and expressed the need for teachers to become more involved in policymaking that related to student achievement.

*Maryland Instructional Leader Framework (2005) data analysis.* Adopted by the Maryland State Board of Education in 2005, this document was designed to describe outcomes expected of principals while they provided instructional leadership for their schools. It should be noted that the philosophical basis of this document were comprised of three texts, two of which have been analyzed during this research study: Every Child

The key features in this document were analyzed in comparison to the other historical texts in this study to determine the state of teacher evaluation policy in Maryland around the time the document was published. This historical analysis revealed a small number of significant changes. One of these changes was the inclusion of instructional leaders monitoring teacher practices “through the purposeful observation and evaluation of teachers” (Achievement Matters, 2002, p. 10). Evidence of such leadership was to provide regular evaluations of teacher performance based on continuous student progress. Unfortunately, the text does not describe in detail what these evaluations look like or what feedback they seek to provide the teacher being observed. It did, however, mention a key feature of the observation was using student data during the observation process to make recommendations for improved classroom instruction.

*Sondheim Report (1989) data analysis.* The Sondheim Report (1989) established a basic operating premise for Maryland schools, which included, for the first time, the ideology that all students were capable of learning and should be exposed to “equally rigorous content” (p. 3). For this reason, this report was seen as a landmark document in Maryland educational policymaking (Jennings & Amos, 2002). This document is also revolutionary in Maryland’s educational history due to its development of a major accountability system that held schools and principals responsible for student performance.

One key feature of the Sondheim Report (1989) was its emphasis on creating a systemic accountability structure in Maryland that went beyond the then-current model of
using one outdated achievement test which didn't provide relevant student data. Similar to commentary by the American Visionary Panel in its academic recommendations, the Sondheim Report highlighted better reporting measures for student achievement, as well as clarification on that criteria for which student achievement schools would be held responsible (p. 5).

Overall, teacher evaluation systems have changed subtly yet consistently within the last 10 years. The following are key distinctions that were in place in 2002:

- Schools, not teachers, were accountable for student test scores.
- Teacher evaluations were linked to certification rather than pay or student achievement.
- There was a great deal of focus on ensuring teacher quality through certification.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Key features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased reporting measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective school accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduation/high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement Matters Most (2002)</td>
<td>Teacher quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Teachers Help All Students (2004)</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher practice and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework (2005)</td>
<td>Teacher performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher evaluation; leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compensation and incentives. The historical analysis revealed that the state of Maryland had previously strongly linked compensation, incentives, and evaluations. Incentives were seen as a potential motivator to offset the teacher shortage the state faced in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Five local Maryland school systems (Anne Arundel County, Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, Queen Anne’s County, and Washington County) have piloted differentiated compensation systems within the last decade, yet as a whole school systems in Maryland have not sought to establish pay-for-performance measures. In order to explore the success of these varying systems, the state of Maryland collaborated with each district to discuss their individual models. Some school systems had to cease implementation of certain incentives due to budgetary constraints, while others dealt with issues of perceived unfairness based on how rewards were distributed. A table outlining each of the compensation models is detailed in Table 7.
# Table 7

## Compensation Models by School System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School system</th>
<th>Targeted employees</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Incentive</th>
<th>Key points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne Arundel County</td>
<td>Teachers and other certificated professionals</td>
<td>Recognize/reward those who work in &quot;particularly challenging schools&quot;</td>
<td>An annual stipend of $1500 for teachers in designated schools. Teachers in Title I schools paid an additional $1500 if school makes Adequate Yearly Progress</td>
<td>- The program has significant costs - Perceived unfairness - Under review to determine program's efficacy in light of scarce resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>All certificated classroom teachers</td>
<td>Recognize/reward master teachers who serve in leadership roles</td>
<td>Lead teachers will receive &quot;additional compensation&quot;</td>
<td>Has not been implemented due to budget cuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Anne's County</td>
<td>Instructional facilitators, assistant principals, deans, instructional supervisors, principals</td>
<td>Attract and retain qualified administrators -Directly link compensation to student achievement outcomes</td>
<td>13% additional compensation based on 10 identifiable objectives and student achievement factors</td>
<td>- No clear indication this positively impacted student achievement - No plans to reinstate this model due to lack of evidence and limited funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George's County</td>
<td>Teachers, administrators</td>
<td>Reward improved student achievement</td>
<td>Teachers: earn up to $10,000 per year Administrators: earn up to $12,000 per year</td>
<td>- Still in effect - 50% of the award incentives linked to student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington County</td>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td>Provide compensation for differentiated leadership duties</td>
<td>$100 pay differential per test type, per school year, for which a teacher prepares students (ex: HSA, MSA, Advanced Placement, etc.)</td>
<td>- Enables those who already do extra activities to earn extra money - Not clear that is encourages teacher to do more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite varying effects of these compensation efforts, it does not appear that linking student achievement with teacher salaries will subside. In Baltimore City, some schools have had as many as 60 percent of the staff receive unsatisfactory ratings in an effort teachers feel is an attempt to avoid paying raises associated with their performance (Green, 2012).

The push toward the evaluation systems currently used stems from the push for accountability standards for teachers. MSDE operated under the premise that evaluations and accountability should be closely aligned with educators' roles. Over the previous decade, successful performance on teacher evaluations was part of the certificate renewal process, and the state sought to implement an accountability system based on data reflecting the performance of individual students and groups of students from one assessment interval to the next. This is similar to today's evaluation practices. In fact, foreshadowing of the current evaluation movement in the state can be seen in the recommendations made by the reports analyzed. For instance, the Visionaiy Panel for Better Schools (2008) recommended that individual teachers' evaluations be based on the progress students make over time:

- Gains in student achievement must be one component among numerous indicators of an individual accountability system, not the sole component (p. 23).
- The state must be responsible for providing the overall framework for individual accountability systems (p. 24).
- Teachers and school leaders are the individuals who must be accountable for the value they add to the educational process (p. 53).
• Diagnostic and prescriptive skills could constitute a competency area assessed by principals during the evaluation process (p. 78).

Each of these recommendations has been interwoven in today’s new reform movement. This is represented in Table 8.

Over the past decade, Maryland shifted its focus from school accountability to individual teacher accountability. State documents reflected a high amount of concentration on improving schools as a whole, even taking over ownership of schools that were consistently underperforming. As the years progressed and as already mentioned in the historical analysis, this focus was transferred to holding both teachers and principals accountable for student achievement. This was evidenced through the progression of historical documents from a school-wide, principal-led accountability system, to a more specific set of evaluation protocol that principals were conducting on teachers. The *Maryland Instructional Leader Framework* (2002) speaks to this transferal, as discussed earlier in this chapter.
Table 8

Visionary Panel Recommendations and Corresponding MSDE Evaluation Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>MSDE evaluation requirements</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and school leaders are the individuals who must be accountable for the value they add to the educational process</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>COMAR Title 13A.07.09 requires observations of teachers’ practice be conducted by certificated individuals who have completed training that includes identification of teaching behaviors that result in student growth (p.4).</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gains in student achievement must be one component among numerous indicators of an individual accountability system, not the sole component</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>The State Teacher and Principal Evaluation Models reflect the mandatory 50/50 split between qualitative professional practice measures and quantitative student growth measures (p.5).</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The state must be responsible for providing the overall framework for individual accountability systems</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Maryland’s Teacher Principal Evaluation (TPE) initiative is a professional development strategy with the explicit aim to enhance and support the cadre of educators in the State who make college and career readiness a reality for Maryland students (p.3).</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic and prescriptive skills could constitute a competency area assessed by principals during the evaluation process.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>For teachers, four practice domains are required: 1) planning and preparation; 2) instructional delivery; 3) classroom management and environment; and 4) professional responsibilities. These domains are related to the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (p. 5).</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question 2. How do three of the largest school districts in Maryland compare and contrast in their evaluation procedures for teachers?

A different analytical approach was used with research questions two and three compared to the first research question, as the last two research topics required a comparative approach that analyzed the word and phrase occurrences instead of examining the documents from a historical perspective. The Teacher Professional Growth System Handbook by Montgomery County Public Schools, the Howard County School System Framework for Teacher Evaluation, and the Anne Arundel County Teacher Evaluation Model were separately analyzed using the previously discussed major and minor themes, the so-called “coding labels.” These words and phrases were searched for in the documents to identify the number of occurrences. The qualitative coding software NVivo10 was used to assist with identifying words and phrases; however, I also checked and re-checked the coding by hand five times. This was done to ensure that no themes were missed and that certain sentences where pronouns such as “it” were used were not overlooked. The numbers of occurrences identified were then considered as top indicators regarding research question #2. For emergent themes that developed in the data, a separate category was created in order to better reflect the themes of the evaluation texts. Consideration was given to indirect references to themes, and these too were counted and categorized accordingly. In order to examine the findings of each research question in detail, I begin with a description of the Howard County Public Schools’ Framework for Teacher Evaluation.

Howard County Public Schools (HCPS) results. Howard County’s evaluation process guide focused 50 percent of its model on Charlotte Danielson’s Professional
Practice framework criteria. The areas of Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities were each weighted as 12.5 percent of a teacher's evaluation score. Student growth accounted for the other 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation, with Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) being the key indicator of such growth.

In addition, Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) differentiated its evaluations for teachers based on whether a teacher's students were in a tested grade for the MSA and HSA, two academic tests that were being phased out and replaced by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. For teachers of Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4-8, the 50 percent of their evaluation was based on student growth, which was further divided into 30 percent based on SLOs and 20% on growth on the MSA. For teachers of HSA courses in grades 9-12, SLOs directly tied to the HSA accounted for 25 percent of the evaluation, teacher-selected objectives made up 15 percent, and student growth on the HSA made up 10 percent. The differences in the student growth evaluation criteria are represented in Table 9.
### Table 9

Howard County Public Schools Evaluation's Major and Minor Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major and minor themes</th>
<th>Coding label</th>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing professionally</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth measures</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning objectives or SLOs</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation ratings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HCPS developed its own system of using student growth measures tailored to fit MSDE requirements. Both tested and non-tested teachers are required to incorporate student growth measures into their evaluations, which can be seen in Figures 5 and 6. Student growth measures include student academic achievement data sources, particularly the MSA and HSA assessments, which will be phased out in the coming years. There is no mention in the policy of teachers of non-HSA secondary teachers incorporating student growth measures, a possible indication that all teachers must incorporate such measures into their evaluations or that all subjects are tested using these assessments.

The Howard County Public School System’s Framework for Teacher Evaluation emphasized the professional development of teachers in a continuous model of growth and determined an action plan process to maintain that growth for teachers rated ineffective. Even prior to a negative rating, the Comprehensive HCPSS Teacher Induction Program maintained a component supporting “ongoing, high quality professional development.” A Professional Development Plan also included a professional development course series based on Danielson’s Framework for Teaching domains of Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. In addition, each semester, the school system provides workshops and other courses specific to non-tenured teachers’ continuing professional development, provided through the system’s Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program. There is a high focus on student growth and professional practice. Only once did HCPSS explicitly refer to “student achievement;” instead it emphasized increased student growth through teachers’ professional practice on many occasions.
Figure 5

Howard County Public Schools Middle School Teacher Evaluation

- Required to write 1 SLO
- This SLO accounts for 30% of the student growth measure
- 20% of student growth measures come from MSA test scores
- The total of 50% is compliant with MSDE standards

- Required to write 2 SLOs, each worth 25% toward student growth
- Each SLO must be focused on updated student data, be aligned with curriculum standards, and be specific and measurable
- The total of 50% is compliant with MSDE standards
Howard County Public Schools High School Teacher Evaluation

- Required to write 2 SLOs (25% each)
- One SLO must be aligned to the relevant HSA
  - Student growth measures used: 10% student performance on the state assessment; 15% based on other teacher-selected data

- No mention of this group of teachers in the HCPSS evaluation handbook
Montgomery County Public Schools results. One of the major themes that emerged upon examination of the MCPS teacher evaluation protocol was its emphasis on professional development as a mechanism for teacher improvement. The document cited professional growth and development 33 times, the most out of the three local education agencies' documents. Often, the term professional growth was linked to a teacher's opportunity for reflection, as shown in statements such as:

- The professional growth cycle provides opportunities and resources for reflection on teaching practices (both individually and collegially) that lead to continuous improvement of teaching practices (p.4).
- ...a professional growth cycle that integrates the formal evaluation year into a multiyear process of professional growth, continual reflection on goals and progress meeting those goals, and collegial interaction (p.1).

Themes throughout the text included professional development, reflection, teacher support, and organizational culture. The document stated explicitly that professional growth was a continuous, ongoing occurrence, and the phrase professional growth cycle appeared 20 times. The MCPS evaluation procedure placed high value on teachers' professional development (there were 66 occurrences of the phrase) and the County offered such development opportunities as peer assistance, a review panel, professional development plans, and opportunities for professional growth and learning. Montgomery County's evaluation system placed a preponderance of emphasis on teacher training and the use of feedback from both evaluators and teacher leaders to guide the practice of teachers. Multiple examples throughout the text made reference to the local education agencies' commitment to providing professional development through multiple means. A
breakdown of the major and minor themes identified in the school system’s evaluation procedures can be seen in Table 10.

Montgomery County Public Schools indicates that teachers may be evaluated from a plethora of student growth material. Teachers are encouraged to create a portfolio displaying the growth accomplished by students for use in their final evaluation reports at the end of the year. MCPS details a variety of data sources that indicate student growth that evaluators may use, including:

- samples of student work, tests, assignments, feedback to students;
- student results: countywide and state test scores; countywide and department final exams, tests, quizzes, papers and project grades, checklists of skills mastered; attendance; discipline referrals; numbers/percentages of students who move on from a teacher’s class to the next grade or to a higher level of a subject;
- other measures of progress or success such as Advanced Placement or Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores; Gifted and Talented or Honors enrollment; and customized data reports that document student results over a number of years as part of the system shared accountability;
- student and parent surveys.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major and minor themes</th>
<th>Coding label</th>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing professionally</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth measures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Student learning objectives or SLOs</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation ratings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis of student results is deemed an integral part of the teacher’s final evaluation report, yet the use of aforementioned data sources of student growth are incorporated to provide a diverse reflection of student achievement outside of standardized testing. The MCPS document reported that:

Standardized test scores provide one important source of data, but they cannot constitute a judgment, in and of themselves, about the performance of a teacher or the success of a school. The most important use of student results is to contribute to analysis and problem solving for school, teacher, or individual student improvement (p. 7).

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) results. The AACPS Teacher Evaluation Model based 50 percent of its evaluation determinations for teachers on professional practice, 25 percent on student learning Objectives, and 25 percent on what the school system called a “school-wide index.” Each of these three domains was broken down into subcategories further detailing what evaluators look for during observations and conferences. The AACPS teacher evaluation document utilized the term professional practice a large number of times, particularly in discussions related to the topic of planning and preparation for learning. A breakdown of the number of occurrences of professional practice and other phrases is represented in Table 11.
Table 11

Anne Arundel County Schools Evaluation’s Major and Minor Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major and minor themes</th>
<th>Coding label</th>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth measures</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning objectives or SLOs</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing professionally</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Ratings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the Anne Arundel County Public Schools document, student growth measures encompassed the monitoring of alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Growth measures account for 50% of a teachers’ evaluation, with 25% coming from student achievement on SLOs and the other 25% from data sources regarding standardized testing achievement, gap reduction of student scores on such tests, and attendance. Outside of the sample evaluation documents, there is no discussion of what other factors, if any, constitute student growth measures.

**Comparison.** Each school district involved in the study utilized the flexibility provided by the state to vary the data sources for collecting student growth measures. None of the districts decided to follow the State Teacher Evaluation Model (Figure 1). The findings indicate that while some districts relied on student learning objectives created by teachers or standardized test scores, other districts attempted to be more varied in their data sources. Montgomery County Public Schools was the most diverse in this regard, using a wealth of sources of information. An examination of similarities and discrepancies among the three school systems’ approach to measuring student growth is represented in Table 12. A summary of major theme findings from each of the local school systems is displayed in Table 13.
### Table 12

**School District Student Growth Measure Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School district</th>
<th>Student growth measure data sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Howard County          | • One or two SLOs accounting for 30% of the student growth measure  
                         | • 20% of student growth measures come from MSA and HSA standardized test scores |
| Montgomery County      | • Samples of student work, tests, assignments, feedback to students  
                         | • Student results: countywide and state test scores; countywide and department final exams, tests, quizzes, papers and project grades, checklists of skills mastered; attendance; discipline referrals; numbers/percentages of students who move on from a teacher's class to the next grade or to a higher level of a subject  
                         | • Advanced Placement or Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores; Gifted and Talented or Honors enrollment;  
                         | • Student and parent surveys |
| Anne Arundel County    | • 25% SLOs  
<pre><code>                     | • 25% MSA and HSA standardized test scores and attendance records |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Howard County Public Schools</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student growth measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County Public Schools</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing professionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Arundel County Public Schools</td>
<td>Professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning and preparation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent themes. Emergent themes were determined following a review of the document. These are themes that were not suitably classified under any of the pre-determined themes listed above yet were displayed with frequency in the evaluation documents. Of the three school systems' documents, two presented emergent themes.

Emergent themes: Howard County Public School system. Emergent themes in the HCPSS document included: classroom observations (11 occurrences), goal setting and goal setting conferences (9), and teacher support (17 occurrences). Teacher support seemed to be an emphasis of the document with the use of conferencing, goal setting, and other reflective practices as the means to improve teaching.

Emergent Themes: Montgomery County Public Schools. Emergent themes in the MCPS document included teacher support and assistance, which accounted for 18 occurrences in the text. The MCPS went into explicit detail outlining the levels of support and assistance that teachers of all levels, both experienced and struggling, experienced yet new to the system, and effective or ineffective, can receive to develop professionally.
Table 14

Howard County Schools Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Howard County Public Schools</td>
<td>Classroom observations (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goal setting/goal setting conferences (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher support (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 15

**Montgomery County Schools Emergent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County Public Schools</td>
<td>Teacher support and assistance (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consulting teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer assistance and review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another emergent theme that the data revealed was an emphasis on organizational culture; though there were only three explicit occurrences, there was an embedded emphasis on the theme throughout many parts of the evaluation model. For instance, the MCPS handbook was the only one out of the three school districts' publications studied that had a statement regarding an organizational culture of respect in the introduction. The preamble also stated that, as all employees are contributors to a learning community, the school system expects staff to collaborate for continuous improvement, effective communication, and meaningful involvement in the decision-making process. The MCPS highlighted collaboration to a high degree (13 occurrences), employing the use of both consulting teachers (15 occurrences) and a Peer Assistance and Review panel (seven occurrences) to provide support for teachers who are not performing to Montgomery County standards. Both the consulting teachers and the Peer Assistance panel were components of the organizational culture of collaborative partnership that MCPS sought to facilitate in the document.

**Emergent themes: Anne Arundel County Public Schools.** There were no emergent themes revealed in Anne Arundel County's evaluation documents. All of the themes found within Anne Arundel's documents were easily categorized according to the researcher's pre-determined categories detailed in the previous chapter. A comparison of each district's emergent themes is reported in Table 16. It should be noted that both Howard County and Montgomery County had emergent themes related to supporting teachers in the classroom and providing feedback in order for teachers to improve their craft.
### Table 16

**Comparison of Each District's Emergent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Howard County Public Schools | Classroom observations  
                                | Goal setting/goal setting conferences  
                                | Teacher support                 |
| Montgomery County Public Schools | Teacher support and assistance  
                                | Organizational culture  
                                | Collaboration                   |
|                              | Consulting teachers  
                                | Peer assistance and review       |
| Anne Arundel County Public Schools | None                      |
Research question 3. How closely aligned are the three selected local school districts’ evaluation plans with the state’s evaluation criteria?

The Maryland Teacher and Principal Evaluation Guidebook by MSDE, the Teacher Professional Growth System Handbook by MCPS, and the Anne Arundel County Teacher Evaluation Model were all separately analyzed in order to determine the exact specifications of the teacher evaluation requirements used in each. Each document provided a breakdown of teacher evaluation measures into two groups: professional practice and student growth measures. According to the state, these components must be included in all local evaluation procedures, yet there is some slight flexibility in the weighted percentages that local districts can use toward each area. However, professional practice must total 50 percent, as much the student growth measures.

Comparison of local and state evaluation documents. In order to determine the alignment of local district evaluation documents with the requirements stipulated by the state, a rigorous analysis of the state requirements had to first be conducted. The state evaluation document provided the research study with the specific, quantifiable measures that are used to assess teachers. Likewise, the local school districts’ measures were tabulated in order to better compare them with the state. The state of Maryland’s evaluation requirements are detailed in Table 15, along with the evaluation requirements from each of the three districts examined in this research study.
Table 17
State and Local Evaluation Measures Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional practice qualitative measures</th>
<th>Student growth quantitative measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State teacher evaluation model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Preparation – 12.5%</td>
<td>20% SLO Lag Measure based on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction – 12.5%</td>
<td>Achievement, Gap Reduction, Growth,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment – 12.5%</td>
<td>College and Career Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Responsibilities – 12.5%</td>
<td>15% SLO Measure #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15% SLO Measure #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAPCS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for Learning – 16.7%</td>
<td>25% SLO Measures based on Achievement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Delivery – 16.7%</td>
<td>Gap Reduction, and Attendance, College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning Behaviors – 16.7%</td>
<td>and Career Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment for Learning – 16.7%</td>
<td>25% School-wide Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Learning Environment – 16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Behaviors – 16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Preparation – 12.5%</td>
<td>20% SLO Lag Measure based on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction – 12.5%</td>
<td>Achievement, Gap Reduction, Growth,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment – 12.5%</td>
<td>College and Career Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Responsibilities – 12.5%</td>
<td>15% SLO Measure #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15% SLO Measure #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCPSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Preparation – 12.5%</td>
<td>25% SLO Measure #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment – 12.5%</td>
<td>25% SLO Measure #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction – 12.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Responsibilities – 12.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences between the State Evaluation Model and approved local evaluation models were minor. All models approved by the state had to feature the 50/50 split, the four Danielson domains, a 20 percentage point presence of the Middle School Assessment, and the High School Assessment included as a data point within a Student Learning Objective (SLO) as appropriate. One noted difference was AACPS’ use of a “school-wide index” to be included in a teacher’s evaluation. This data source accounted for 25% of the overall rating for elementary and middle school teachers, and was composed of three major parts: MSA testing achievement, MSA gap reduction, and attendance. An explanation of the components involved in an elementary or middle school school-wide index is displayed in Figure 7.

These components collectively accounted for 25% of a teacher’s overall evaluation rating in Anne Arundel County. The school system stated in the text that “we believe it is important to identify those areas for which the entire school staff have a responsibility, can be accountable for improvement, and can be appropriately measured on a year-to-year basis” (p. 3). These components of overall staff responsibilities were described as follows:

- **Student achievement**: Measured using Middle School Assessment (MSA) scores for all student groups in the areas of reading, science, and mathematics
- **Gap reduction**: Measured using MSA scores for the disaggregated student groups in reading, science, and mathematics
- **Attendance**: Measured using state annual targets for staff attendance, divided into the actual attendance rate for the school and multiplied by 10%
Figure 7

AACPS School-Wide Index Components, Elementary and Middle
Figure 8

AACPS School-Wide Index Components, High School
At the high school level, the school-wide index took on a different form in the AACPS document, while still accounting for 25% of the overall rating for high school teachers and principals. Yet at the high school level, four components are used for the index, as opposed to three.

At the high school level, these components were determined based on the following data:

- **Student Achievement**: Measured using High School Assessment (HSA) scores for all student groups in the subjects Algebra I, Biology, and English 10
- **Gap Reduction**: Measured using HSA scores for disaggregated student groups in Algebra I, Biology, and English 10
- **College and Career Readiness**: Measured using the graduation rate of each high school using state-directed annual targets.

As noted earlier, none of the other LEAs involved in this research study chose to incorporate a school-wide index in its evaluation of individual teachers; AACPS is the outlier in this regard. While there is no information to determine why this is the case, one may speculate that the school-wide index could assist in boosting or lowering individual teachers’ scores according to the general disposition of the school. Since, however, the school-wide index accounts for 25% of a teacher’s rating, any such boost or decline in scores would not be notably impactful in an evaluation overall.

A comparison of the evaluation protocols in this research study as illustrated in Table 15 confirms that the local state agencies were in full compliance with the state’s requirements. Following an analysis of the documents, it was determined that each of the local school system evaluation tools were closely aligned with the Danielson model and
used this model's four major Components of Professional Practice (Figure 1) to determine teacher ratings.

The degree of alignment between the evaluation stipulations of the state and local school systems was high, with each system complying with MSDE requirements to incorporate learning outcomes with teacher evaluations. A breakdown of MSDE occurrences is identified in Table 1. A comparison of all the documents is presented in Table 18.

As seen in Table 19, there are major differences in emphasis between the state and local levels. The evaluation stipulations dictated by the State mainly focused on student achievement and professional practice. With 101 occurrences of “student learning objectives”, it is evident that this was the major focus of the state evaluation model and its requirements. Some examples of the occurrences found within the text include:

- “SLOs serve as a student growth component in the Maryland State Model for Educator Effectiveness” (p. 15).
- “Briefly stated, an SLO is a specific, rigorous, long-term goal for groups of students that educators distinguish to guide instructional and administrative efforts” (p. 15).
- “SLO targets may reflect either mastery or growth targets. LEAs establish the expected level of attainment and how SLO is scored” (p. 16).
Table 18

Major and Minor Themes in MSDE Evaluation Stipulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major and minor themes</th>
<th>Coding label</th>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Preparation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Professionally</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Ratings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Growth Measures</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning Objectives</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 19

**Breakdown of State and Local School Systems’ Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
<th>Total no. of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing professionally</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Growth</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning objectives</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning/preparation</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation ratings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the MSDE document, there was much discussion of the SLOs and their importance for students, teachers, and stakeholders, and definitive steps for the development and implementation of SLOs was provided on how to create these objective measures, the majority of which are a teacher’s responsibility. Following professional development on the objectives and measures and a review of existing student growth data, the practitioner (teacher or principal) must draft SLOs with the following components:

- Objective Summary Statement
- Data Review and Baseline Evidence
- Student Population
- Learning Content
- Instructional Interval
- Target
- Evidence of Growth
- Strategies
- Professional Development and Support

To aide in the creation of SLOs, the MSDE document provided outside tools for reference for teachers and principals, including a template and guiding questions on how to write appropriate learning objectives.

The state required teachers in tested and non-tested areas alike to incorporated student growth measures into their evaluations. The state document provided percentage requirements for weighting SLOs for local models:
• Two SLOs for all teachers valued at 15% each
  – One for which the priority identification is determined at the district or school level
  – One for which the priority identification is determined at the classroom level
• A third SLO valued at 20% for HSA tested area teachers, or
• A third SLO that is a lag measure and valued at 20% for non-tested area teachers

In the state document, there was an abundance of emphasis on having schools prepare students to successfully complete SLOs through the means of structured and persistent learning mechanisms. Indeed, with 101 occurrences and detailed protocol that local school staff must follow to be in compliance, the MSDE document placed a high value on appropriate SLOs. At the local level, however, this was not the case. The MCPS document, for example, made no reference—either explicit or implicit—to SLOs, with 0 occurrences found in the text. The AACPS document referenced SLOs 4 times.

Meanwhile, the local education agencies were found to have targeted mainly professional development, professional practice, and student achievement. It was determined that the MCPS evaluation procedure places high value on the professional development of its teachers mainly through reflection.

Meanwhile, the AACPS document provided more focus on the professional practice of its teachers through the use of opportunities to collaborate with other staff members. Similarly, the HCPSS evaluation procedures were designed with both teacher
reflection and collaboration as tools to make teachers more accountable and better developed in their practice.

Summary

The three local school districts in this research study designed their systems in compliance with MSDE's evaluation guidelines. While there were slight variations in the precise amounts that some districts attribute to certain measures, each local district maintained adherence to the rigorous standards of the state, as well as Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT) model. The results that were discovered by conducting a content and comparative analysis described the current content of teacher evaluations in Maryland at three select school systems, as well as how these evaluations were implemented by different public education agencies. The study revealed that in the last 10 years, the state-mandated policy in Maryland changed in terms of the aspects being evaluated, mainly through a shift in focus to individual teacher accountability versus merely examining school performance as a whole. The professional practice of the teachers in Maryland has also been given much more attention in the last 10 years. Meanwhile, a comparison of teacher evaluation procedures of three of the largest school districts in Maryland revealed two primary distinctions: the MCPS evaluation procedure placed high value on the professional development of its teachers mainly through reflection, while the AACPS and HCPSS evaluation models focus more on the professional practice of their teachers as it related to instruction. Lastly, it was also determined in the study that the degree of alignment between the evaluation stipulations of the state and local schools systems was high. The next chapter will further expound on the interpretation of the study results.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Teacher evaluation is a mandatory practice in schools that seeks to gather information regarding teaching and learning. Many school districts have revamped their evaluation measures to reflect this emphasis on “value added” components. In Maryland, the State Department of Education (MSDE) has adopted a teacher evaluation system based on Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. In order for local school systems to receive portions of federal funding, they, too, were required to either create teacher evaluation systems, which used certain criteria from MSDE, or use the state’s model as its own. One of the purposes of this study was to determine the consistency between Maryland’s teacher evaluation procedures with that of three select local school districts. In order to do this, research methods were taken to identify thematic patterns within and between school system evaluation systems. Upon completion, a collection of findings were determined. They are best summarized in the below Summary of Findings.

Summary of Findings

The findings to answer the study’s three research questions can be summarized as such:

1. How has state mandated policy in Maryland changed regarding teacher evaluation in the last 10 years?

Scope, approach, and focus. Teacher evaluation systems have altered significantly in their scope, approach, and focus within the last 10 years. In the early 2000s, state policy required that teachers be evaluated through a process of two
observations throughout the school year. Observation checklists were tailored more on behavior management and lesson pacing, as opposed to instruction and professional practice. There has been a shift in the behaviors that administrators are looking for when evaluating teachers in the classroom, with specific behavioral targets detailed in observation protocol.

**More weighted consideration of professional practices.** Requirements for teachers to develop professionally have been a major shift in state mandated policy. Administrators are now tasked with evaluating content and pedagogy knowledge of teachers in addition to professional responsibilities such as communicating with families, showing professionalism, and reflecting on teaching.

**Increased emphasis on student achievement at the state level.** MSDE’s document was clear in its emphasis on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as a means of enhancing student achievement. The term was mentioned over 100 times, the most out of any of the documents reviewed in this study. While SLOs were certainly a point of focus at the state level, there was not much discussion regarding the actual development of such objectives; for instance, there was no mention of professional development or trainings for teachers in writing SLOs.

2. How do three of the largest school districts in Maryland compare and contrast in their evaluation procedures for teachers?

**Districts each displayed persistent homogeneity.** Each of the sampled school district evaluation tools similarly emphasized increasing teacher effectiveness through the evaluation process. The evaluation process was seen by all districts as a mechanism for enhancing the learning process and developing a more effective, capable teacher pool.
There was varying focus on professional development. While the overall goal of each of the documents was to assess teachers through a variety of sources, some school systems highlighted professional development either greatly or moderately. For instance, MCPS provided substantial opportunities for teacher development, whereas the other two districts coupled this with other factors, such as planning and preparation.

Evidence of student growth varied among districts. One of the major findings of this study was the assortment of materials that districts used to establish evidence of student growth. Anne Arundel County and Howard County kept their collection of student growth data fairly mundane by only seeking data from standardized testing. Montgomery County Public Schools was the most diverse in this regard, collecting a wealth of documentation from teachers in order to support student learning: Samples of student work, tests, assignments, countywide and state test scores; countywide and department final exams, tests, quizzes, papers and project grades.

3. What is the degree of alignment between the evaluation stipulations dictated by the State and the evaluation methods used by three of the largest Local Education Agencies?

Consistency with state standards. Each of the evaluation tools aligned with the requirements of MSDE with little deviation. At the same time that local districts complied with the state, they also used the state’s flexibility in order to shift the emphasis from student achievement measures to more weighted consideration of professional development.

Major differences between state and local evaluation documents. Each of the local districts focused their documents on the areas of professional development and
student achievement. The districts also employed certain procedures and safeguards to ensure teachers had access to professional growth opportunities, as evidenced by peer review panels, professional development trainings, or tools to stimulate reflective practices about teachers' work. In contrast, the MSDE document emphasized Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as a major factor in teacher evaluation designs, and did not mention reflection as a means of growth for teachers.

Discussion

The new emphasis on teaching practices goes beyond what the teacher is doing and explores teacher thinking from the perspective of teachers themselves (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 459). The findings of this research study demonstrate that both Maryland and the three local education agencies examined in the study are seeking to explore teacher practices by modifying the evaluation techniques used in previous decades. Montgomery County, for instance, has chosen to focus a great deal of the evaluation process on teacher support. This type of support includes assisting new and struggling teachers with developing the skills outlined in Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT), such as improving the classroom climate and engaging in reflective practices. Similarly, Howard County utilized a peer assistance review panel to aide teachers in being successful and to equip them with additional training to improve their practice. Each of these are findings revealed in this study, which highlight Maryland's evaluation system not merely as punitive to get ineffective teachers out, but also supportive in nature, to grow and strengthen good teacher practices. Traditional evaluations of teachers are currently giving way to evaluation frameworks that attempt to pinpoint certain behaviors when determining the value a teacher adds to student
Table 18

Major and Minor Themes in MSDE Evaluation Stipulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major and minor themes</th>
<th>Coding label</th>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Professionally</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Ratings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Growth Measures</td>
<td></td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning Objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19

Breakdown of State and Local School Systems' Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>MCPS</th>
<th>HCPSS</th>
<th>AACPS</th>
<th>3 of the largest districts</th>
<th>MSDE (state)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing professionally</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Growth measures</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning objectives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning/ preparation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation ratings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the MSDE document, there was much discussion of the SLOs and their importance for students, teachers, and stakeholders, and definitive steps for the development and implementation of SLOs was provided on how to create these objective measures, the majority of which are a teacher's responsibility. Following professional development on the objectives and measures and a review of existing student growth data, the practitioner (teacher or principal) must draft SLOs with the following components:

- Objective Summary Statement
- Data Review and Baseline Evidence
- Student Population
- Learning Content
- Instructional Interval
- Target
- Evidence of Growth
- Strategies
- Professional Development and Support

To aide in the creation of SLOs, the MSDE document provided outside tools for reference for teachers and principals, including a template and guiding questions on how to write appropriate learning objectives.

The state required teachers in tested and non-tested areas alike to incorporated student growth measures into their evaluations. The state document provided percentage requirements for weighting SLOs for local models:
• Two SLOs for all teachers valued at 15% each
  - One for which the priority identification is determined at the district or school level
  - One for which the priority identification is determined at the classroom level
• A third SLO valued at 20% for HSA tested area teachers, or
• A third SLO that is a lag measure and valued at 20% for non-tested area teachers

In the state document, there was an abundance of emphasis on having schools prepare students to successfully complete SLOs through the means of structured and persistent learning mechanisms. Indeed, with 101 occurrences and detailed protocol that local school staff must follow to be in compliance, the MSDE document placed a high value on appropriate SLOs. At the local level, however, this was not the case. The MCPS document, for example, made no reference—either explicit or implicit—to SLOs, with 0 occurrences found in the text. The AACPS document referenced SLOs 4 times. Meanwhile, the local education agencies were found to have targeted mainly professional development, professional practice, and student achievement. It was determined that the MCPS evaluation procedure places high value on the professional development of its teachers mainly through reflection.

Meanwhile, the AACPS document provided more focus on the professional practice of its teachers through the use of opportunities to collaborate with other staff members. Similarly, the HCPSS evaluation procedures were designed with both teacher
reflection and collaboration as tools to make teachers more accountable and better
developed in their practice.

**Summary**

The three local school districts in this research study designed their systems in compliance with MSDE’s evaluation guidelines. While there were slight variations in the precise amounts that some districts attribute to certain measures, each local district maintained adherence to the rigorous standards of the state, as well as Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (FFT) model. The results that were discovered by conducting a content and comparative analysis described the current content of teacher evaluations in Maryland at three select school systems, as well as how these evaluations were implemented by different public education agencies. The study revealed that in the last 10 years, the state-mandated policy in Maryland changed in terms of the aspects being evaluated, mainly through a shift in focus to individual teacher accountability versus merely examining school performance as a whole. The professional practice of the teachers in Maryland has also been given much more attention in the last 10 years. Meanwhile, a comparison of teacher evaluation procedures of three of the largest school districts in Maryland revealed two primary distinctions: the MCPS evaluation procedure placed high value on the professional development of its teachers mainly through reflection, while the AACPS and HCPSS evaluation models focus more on the professional practice of their teachers as it related to instruction. Lastly, it was also determined in the study that the degree of alignment between the evaluation stipulations of the state and local schools systems was high. The next chapter will further expound on the interpretation of the study results.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Teacher evaluation is a mandatory practice in schools that seeks to gather information regarding teaching and learning. Many school districts have revamped their evaluation measures to reflect this emphasis on “value added” components. In Maryland, the State Department of Education (MSDE) has adopted a teacher evaluation system based on Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. In order for local school systems to receive portions of federal funding, they, too, were required to either create teacher evaluation systems, which used certain criteria from MSDE, or use the state’s model as its own. One of the purposes of this study was to determine the consistency between Maryland’s teacher evaluation procedures with that of three select local school districts. In order to do this, research methods were taken to identify thematic patterns within and between school system evaluation systems. Upon completion, a collection of findings were determined. They are best summarized in the below Summary of Findings.

Summary of Findings

The findings to answer the study’s three research questions can be summarized as such:

1. How has state mandated policy in Maryland changed regarding teacher evaluation in the last 10 years?

Scope, approach, and focus. Teacher evaluation systems have altered significantly in their scope, approach, and focus within the last 10 years. In the early 2000s, state policy required that teachers be evaluated through a process of two
observations throughout the school year. Observation checklists were tailored more on behavior management and lesson pacing, as opposed to instruction and professional practice. There has been a shift in the behaviors that administrators are looking for when evaluating teachers in the classroom, with specific behavioral targets detailed in observation protocol.

**More weighted consideration of professional practices.** Requirements for teachers to develop professionally have been a major shift in state mandated policy. Administrators are now tasked with evaluating content and pedagogy knowledge of teachers in addition to professional responsibilities such as communicating with families, showing professionalism, and reflecting on teaching.

**Increased emphasis on student achievement at the state level.** MSDE’s document was clear in its emphasis on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as a means of enhancing student achievement. The term was mentioned over 100 times, the most out of any of the documents reviewed in this study. While SLOs were certainly a point of focus at the state level, there was not much discussion regarding the actual development of such objectives; for instance, there was no mention of professional development or trainings for teachers in writing SLOs.

2. How do three of the largest school districts in Maryland compare and contrast in their evaluation procedures for teachers?

**Districts each displayed persistent homogeneity.** Each of the sampled school district evaluation tools similarly emphasized increasing teacher effectiveness through the evaluation process. The evaluation process was seen by all districts as a mechanism for enhancing the learning process and developing a more effective, capable teacher pool.
There was varying focus on professional development. While the overall goal of each of the documents was to assess teachers through a variety of sources, some school systems highlighted professional development either greatly or moderately. For instance, MCPS provided substantial opportunities for teacher development, whereas the other two districts coupled this with other factors, such as planning and preparation.

Evidence of student growth varied among districts. One of the major findings of this study was the assortment of materials that districts used to establish evidence of student growth. Anne Arundel County and Howard County kept their collection of student growth data fairly mundane by only seeking data from standardized testing. Montgomery County Public Schools was the most diverse in this regard, collecting a wealth of documentation from teachers in order to support student learning: Samples of student work, tests, assignments, countywide and state test scores; countywide and department final exams, tests, quizzes, papers and project grades.

3. What is the degree of alignment between the evaluation stipulations dictated by the State and the evaluation methods used by three of the largest Local Education Agencies?

Consistency with state standards. Each of the evaluation tools aligned with the requirements of MSDE with little deviation. At the same time that local districts complied with the state, they also used the state's flexibility in order to shift the emphasis from student achievement measures to more weighted consideration of professional development.

Major differences between state and local evaluation documents. Each of the local districts focused their documents on the areas of professional development and
student achievement. The districts also employed certain procedures and safeguards to ensure teachers had access to professional growth opportunities, as evidenced by peer review panels, professional development trainings, or tools to stimulate reflective practices about teachers’ work. In contrast, the MSDE document emphasized Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as a major factor in teacher evaluation designs, and did not mention reflection as a means of growth for teachers.

Discussion

The new emphasis on teaching practices goes beyond what the teacher is doing and explores teacher thinking from the perspective of teachers themselves (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 459). The findings of this research study demonstrate that both Maryland and the three local education agencies examined in the study are seeking to explore teacher practices by modifying the evaluation techniques used in previous decades. Montgomery County, for instance, has chosen to focus a great deal of the evaluation process on teacher support. This type of support includes assisting new and struggling teachers with developing the skills outlined in Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (FFT), such as improving the classroom climate and engaging in reflective practices. Similarly, Howard County utilized a peer assistance review panel to aide teachers in being successful and to equip them with additional training to improve their practice. Each of these are findings revealed in this study, which highlight Maryland’s evaluation system not merely as punitive to get ineffective teachers out, but also supportive in nature, to grow and strengthen good teacher practices. Traditional evaluations of teachers are currently giving way to evaluation frameworks that attempt to pinpoint certain behaviors when determining the value a teacher adds to student
achievement, as seen in the state's 50/50 split, which included an evaluation of teacher's professional behaviors and practices. Each of the three examined local school districts rigorously subscribed to this split between professional practices and student achievement in their evaluation systems.

This trend of developing and implementing more rigorous teacher evaluation systems is being echoed in many states in order to fully capture a teacher's impact, yet the trend also has the possibility to create confusion, additional stress, and incorrect analyses of a teacher's performance, as many standards-based critics purport (Strauss, 2012).

Many questions still remain regarding evaluation implementation, such as the qualifications of administrators and other staff to correctly assess a teacher. What sort of training does this person receive, and how, if at all, do evaluators prove that they have mastered the skill to evaluate others? From there, a truly slippery slope may emerge, yielding a struggle between teachers and evaluators.

There were a number of noteworthy findings stemming from the data analysis conducted in this research. For instance, while there was an overwhelming support for improving the professional practice of teachers, varying school systems approached the means of doing so differently. Anne Arundel County and Howard County sought to incorporate teachers' self-reflection on their practice into the evaluative process as a way to improve professional practice, whereas Montgomery County developed an entire program surrounding a panel of teaching professionals to determine the professional needs and practices of teachers undergoing an evaluation. This difference echoes what educational researchers have found regarding the trend of administrators emphasizing
effectiveness with professional development and conducting credible evaluations

Another finding that displayed itself was the Sondheim Report’s extensive and
long-lasting influence in shaping reforms that would echo for decades beyond its 1989
publication date. The power of this report on Maryland’s educational landscape cannot be
understated. In several of the documents analyzed, this report was brought up time and
again as a catalyst for changing the way the entire Maryland school system approached
teaching and learning. Prior to this paper, MSDE was still using the outdated California
Achievement Test (CAT) to measure students on standards that were not even fully
embedded into the curriculum. The governor’s commission report pointed out not only
that the accountability program used at the time reported performance in relation to
national norms but not in terms of curriculum and did not require schools to take action to
improve achievement, but the report also provided a blueprint for reforms with school
accountability as the focus (Cizek, 1999). Cizek further outlines the major elements of
the changes that the Maryland state board of education implemented following
Sondheim’s report:

• Indicators of student participation and achievement in school, called data-
based areas, and standards for satisfactory and excellent school performance
in each data-based area.

• Public accounting of school performance through annual publication of school
report cards.
• Development of school improvement plans in schools whose performance was low or declining, with reconstitution as a potential option for schools that did not begin to improve.

• Sanctions for schools that were performing poorly or declining in the data-based areas and rewards for schools that improve in the data-based areas for two or more years (p. 107).

All of these improvements upon existing measures changed the trajectory of Maryland schools. The historical analysis conducted as part of this research revealed a high level of respect for the changes the Sondheim Report brought about and attribute it to later reform accountability measures.

Still another major finding of this study was the amount of supports established by individual school systems to provide teachers opportunities to achieve standards set by the state. There was a clear indication that professional development was emphasized by each of the districts in order to support teachers through the evaluation process. Montgomery County employed consulting teachers and a peer review panel to assist teachers in receiving feedback before, during, and after the evaluation process. Howard County’s school system provided workshops and other courses specific to non-tenured teachers’ continuing professional development, provided through the system’s Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program. Anne Arundel County’s teacher evaluation procedures incorporated multiple observation opportunities and professional training to assist teachers in meeting standards. It was evident that when the MSDE policies were translated at the local level, the evaluation models became more balanced between accountability and professional development. School districts brought more
balance to the state's model by incorporating diverse means of collecting student data, establishing protocols for teachers who were in danger of not meeting standards, and utilizing professional development while at the same time holding teachers to the standards required by MSDE. Districts did not seek to negate the accountability measures put in place by the state, but rather took an additional step to ensure professional support was available for those being evaluated. It is quite possible that these mechanisms were put in place by local districts in order to assist teachers in making the transition from the evaluation procedures of the past to the current endeavors in place today. This finding also speaks to the possible need for local districts to massage the rigor and pressure to use student growth measures as a means to evaluate teachers. It is at the local school system, after all, that state edicts have a tangible impact, in recruitment, retention, and morale. While MSDE may have the leisure to pass down new requirements, local districts must deal with the human impact that comes with such measures. It is only reasonable to make the bitter pill of new teacher evaluation methods more palatable by putting in place supports that teachers can turn to for assistance.

Research regarding teacher evaluations often highlights its lack of popularity among teachers. Overall, researchers have found that teachers do not see evaluation as instrumental in improving their teaching (Ryan, 2008). Unsurprisingly, administrators often do not have a positive view of evaluation systems. Some educational researchers maintain that they cannot distinguish between “good” and “poor” or “effective” and “ineffective” teachers, that no one knows for sure or agrees on what the competent teacher is, that few authorities can “define, prepare for, or measure teacher competence” with ease (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 447). Maryland’s use of the Danielson model
is a clear attempt to alleviate some, if not all, of these concerns, and provide a more positive and meaningful experience for both teachers and administrators that ultimately improves student achievement. Danielson (2011) herself noted that typical classroom observation frameworks lack credibility, which is a major problem inherent in traditional evaluation systems.

The findings of this study gave credence to prior research showing assistance from supervisors and appropriately-trained evaluators is necessary in enacting positive teacher evaluation practices (Curtis & Wiener, 2012; Donaldson, 2009; Henry, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, Slater, & Boston, 2008). The Aspen Institute (2011) profiled school systems that overhauled their teacher evaluation systems much in the same way Maryland has, and found that there is a critical need to provide ongoing support and feedback for teachers, as well as increase the capacity of the integral role of the evaluator through training. There also remains a need for administrators to be adequately trained on the new evaluation systems that they are being tasked with overseeing. In one study, central office respondents reported that evaluators received too little training and guidance for their current responsibilities in evaluation (Ryan, 2008, p. 219). Maryland school districts, regardless of which evaluation system they utilize, must be able to equip educational leaders with enough training so that the evaluations are both reliable and credible. This requires time and money, two commodities that are often in short supply for schools. A detailed analysis of the MSDE evaluation task using actual local district data indicated that the typical school administrator needs to devote approximately one quarter of the years’ time schedule to teacher evaluations (MSDE, 2013). This presupposes that the work of evaluating, providing feedback, and opportunities for improvement continues
steadily throughout the ten-month school year. If a building administrator is constantly moving through the outer ring of this model, the teacher evaluation task will be manageable. Moreover, evaluation ceases to be a threatening once-a-year event, but becomes a continuous professional development exercise leading to improved conversation, reflection, practice, and outcomes (MSDE, 2013). Bell, Little, Croft, and Gitomer (2009) support this idea, including the notion of retraining administrative observers and conducting multiple observations for an evaluation as opposed to just one. Although the notions of teacher competencies or teacher effectiveness are often identified as something new in research efforts to identify good teaching, they are nothing more than a combination of teaching principles and methods that good teachers have been using for many years prior to this recent wave of research (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 458).

Today's climate of education reform has caused many teachers and administrators to adapt to an ever-changing environment. Many teachers do not agree with using student performance as a means to determine a teacher's effectiveness, often using the argument that there are many factors outside a teacher’s control that play an active role in achievement. Home life, economic status, and even race have all been shown to contribute to student success. Some teachers state that because these factors are not considered in the evaluation process, teachers are unfairly being held responsible for forces they do not control. This is a valid argument, similar to the adage, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” However, this has not deterred proponents of teacher accountability measures being tied to student test scores. The implications from
this research study can be analyzed from the wider education environment that is constantly being redefined, crafted, and honed.

A major complaint regarding teacher evaluations has always been that the process is used to unfairly criticize teachers, and offers little meaningful assistance for improvement. However, based on the findings of this study, it would appear that at least three school systems in Maryland have embraced evaluations as a method for supporting teacher performance. Each of the school systems employed some sort of assistance to teachers, whether that was in the form of a review panel, a mentoring teacher, or other increased supports. This reflects a shift in thinking of evaluations as solely a punitive measure, but rather an opportunity for growth. The phrase "professional growth" was used throughout each of the documents, perhaps for the very reason of casting the evaluations in a more positive, supportive light. Have school systems started the full-fledged transition away from the typical classroom observation-intensive evaluation structure? Based on this study, the answer would appear to affirm this shift. However, this does not mean that the transition has been smooth; even currently in Maryland, the state, teacher unions, and some local school districts are still bargaining over new teacher evaluation deals and the state-mandated percentages regarding student achievement as a factor in teacher performance ("Are Maryland's New Teacher-Evaluation Deals a Hoax?", 2013).

The implications of this research study abound, particularly in the area of utilizing standards-based models such as Danielson’s Framework for Teaching when conducting teacher evaluations. Previous studies suggest that, although standardized test scores of students are one piece of information for school leaders to use to make judgments about
teacher effectiveness, such scores should be only a part of an overall comprehensive evaluation (Economic Policy Institute, 2010).

**Suggestions for Future Research**

It would be interesting to examine the opinions of educators both during the initial implementation of these new evaluation measures, and after a period of time has passed. This is suggested for two important reasons: First, prior research has shown that teacher’s attitudes and opinions regarding teaching interventions has a major impact on the intervention’s success or failure, and secondly, it is likely that teacher attitudes will change once they become more familiar with the new evaluation protocol. Each of these things has the potential to inform future research and be useful when implementing a new procedure.

Future researchers may even want to investigate attitudes regarding new evaluation protocol based on the teacher’s background or teaching subject. This is suggested due to the findings of this study that some school systems weigh teachers of certain tested subjects differently than other subjects. It could very well likely be that teachers whose students are not tested in that subject or grade have a more favorable view of the new evaluation procedures than a teacher whose student’s scores will reflect on their evaluation scorecard.

Whenever a new intervention or strategy is implemented, concerns regarding the transition from one form of system to another can surface. This leads to a wealth of potential research questions to be studied in the future. How much training will school administrators receive on conducting these new observations and evaluative measures, for instance? Will the “train the trainer” model be employed by the school system, in
which outside entities train principals and others, and they, in turn, are expected to train
other future evaluators at the school? How will schools ensure that they are accurately
complying with the evaluator's tools and rubrics for sizing up a teacher? Will teacher
retention and induction be impacted by the use of new evaluation protocol? These and a
host of other questions are ripe for studying in Maryland as the new evaluations are put
into practice. It is my hope that future students of educational research explore these
issues, as they may have widespread implications for teaching and learning not just in
Maryland, but nationwide.
References


Vita

Serene N. Peterson

Birthdate: July 16, 1981

Birthplace: Baltimore, Maryland

Education:

2011-2014 The College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia
Doctor of Education

2006-2009 Coppin State University
Baltimore, Maryland
Master of Education

1999-2003 Morgan State University
Baltimore, Maryland
Bachelor of Science

Professional Experience:

2013-Current Family Support Specialist
Maryland State Dept. of Education
Baltimore, Maryland

2011-2013 Special Education Consultant
Equity Education Consultants
Baltimore, Maryland

2013 Extended Day Lead Teacher
Glenelg Country School
Ellicott City, Maryland

2012-2013 Psychoeducator II
Villa Maria School
Timonium, Maryland

2011 Adjunct Faculty Member
Baltimore City Community College
Baltimore, Maryland
2011–2012  Special Education Teacher
           Woodbourne Center
           Baltimore, Maryland

2009–2011  Special Education Advocate
           James E. Brown & Associates
           Washington, D.C.

2006–2009  Special Education Teacher
           Baltimore County Public Schools
           Baltimore, Maryland

2003–2004  Natural Resource Management Volunteer
           United States Peace Corps
           Niger, West Africa