

Connecticut Law Tribune

August 6, 2012

An **ALM** Publication

Municipal & Educational Law



State Adopts Model Educator Evaluation Guidelines

TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR RATING TOOLS AIMED AT BRIDGING ACHIEVEMENT GAP



Carolyn Mazanec Dugas

By **CAROLYN MAZANEC DUGAS**

Pick up a newspaper, turn on the television, listen to the radio, or surf the Web, news about the state of public education in America is inescapable. Providing quality public education to America's young has become a national

priority, often sparking heated discussion and debate at local, state and national levels regarding how to accomplish this goal.

Connecticut is no exception. The state's educational system has undergone intensive scrutiny in the past few years, resulting in new and revised education legislation aimed at closing the achievement gap. The goal is to create educational parity between students in less affluent school districts and those in wealthier ones, and to improve the overall quality of education in Connecticut for students in all of its public schools, with particular emphasis on the lowest achieving ones.

Senate Bill 458/P.A. 12-116, "An Act Concerning Education Reform," signed into law by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy on May 15, 2012, promises to

shake up the status quo and change public education in Connecticut. P.A. 12-116 has many and varied components aimed at improving education statewide, including mandates for changes to Connecticut's educator evaluation system. Public debate in Connecticut surrounding proposed changes to the educator evaluation system has at times been politically charged, with various groups expressing differing opinions about how to effectively, fairly and consistently evaluate the state's educators. Certain proposed changes, such as tying teacher evaluations to students' standardized test scores, invited particular criticism.

On June 27, 2012, the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBOE) ended the debate for now, when it approved model educator evaluation guidelines setting forth a blueprint for educator evaluations.

Model Guidelines Generally

Sections 51 through 56 of P.A. 12-116, amended by sections 23 and 24 of P.A. 12-2 during a June legislative special session, required that the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), establish by July 1, 2012, comprehensive guidelines for a teacher and administrator evaluation and support program. The guidelines have set up performance evaluation designators — "exemplary," "proficient," "developing" and "below standard" — and scoring systems for determining those ratings.

In addition, the guidelines include multiple indicators and methods for assessment of academic

student growth and development; consideration of control factors influencing teacher performance ratings; educator training and support; targeted professional development; and teacher improvement and remediation plans.

For the 2012-2013 school year, the newly adopted State Board of Education guidelines will inform implementation of model teacher and administrator evaluation and support systems in the following pilot districts selected by the Commissioner of Education: Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge, Branford, Bridgeport, Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), Columbia, Eastford, Franklin, Sterling, Litchfield, Region 6, Norwalk, Waterford, Windham and Windsor.

The Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut will analyze the model evaluation and support program and its implementation in the pilot districts and report back to the State Board of Education and to the General Assembly. Based upon the study results, the board will validate the guidelines incorporating Neag's recommendations. The model teacher and administrator evaluation and support program guidelines are designed to help with the implementation of a new evaluation and support program statewide beginning in the 2013-2014 school year.

The goal of the new evaluation and support program is to enhance educator quality and, in turn, student performance. The State Board of Education credits the guidelines with establishing a system that utilizes evaluations to provide improved support for educators, links receipt of teacher tenure to positive annual evaluations, and

Carolyn Mazanec Dugas is an associate in the Milford office of Berchem, Moses & Devlin P.C. She focuses her practice on education law.

also allows for removal of ineffective educators.

The Connecticut Council for Education Reform applauds the new system for providing, for the first time in the state's history, a process that links professional development and growth opportunities with teachers' identified strengths and areas for improvement in relation to student learning needs, as identified through the evaluation process. The Council also commends the process for developing individualized improvement plans for teachers who receive a rating of "developing" or below.

Some Specifics

The Performance Evaluation Advisory Council has renamed the guidelines "Core Requirements." The premise of the Core Requirements for Educator Evaluation is that the evaluation serves to strengthen individual and collective practices in order to improve student academic growth.

Teachers will receive an annual summative rating based upon a combination of these indicators: student academic growth (45 percent), with 22.5 percent based upon standardized tests and the other 22.5 percent based upon a maximum of one standardized test and a minimum of one measure that is not a standardized test; teacher observation by an administrator (40 percent); parent or peer feedback, including surveys (10 percent); whole-school student learning indicators or student feedback (5 percent).

Administrators will be evaluated based upon four factors: multiple student learning indicators (45 percent), which includes 22.5 percent for student performance on standardized tests including the School Performance Index and 22.5 percent for two local indicators of student learning including graduation rates for high schools; observation of administrator performance and practice (40 percent); stakeholder feedback including that of teachers and parents (10 percent); and teacher effectiveness outcomes (5 percent).

The evaluations will result in the teacher or administrator being assigned one of the four ratings levels of exemplary, proficient, developing or below standard.

The annual teacher and administrator evaluation process will include at least three conferences: a goal-setting conference at the beginning of the school year between teacher and principal or designee, or administrator and superintendent or designee; mid-year check-ins; and end-of-year summative review, including self-assessment and end-of-year conference. Other components of the Core Requirements include evaluation-based professional learning, individual teacher improvement and remediation plans for teachers and administrators whose performance is devel-

oping or below standard, career development and growth, and annual orientation programs regarding the evaluation and support system.

Districts will be afforded flexibility in applying the Core Requirements to evaluate student and educator support specialists in light of their unique roles and circumstances.

Nothing in the law or the Core Requirements precludes superintendents from conducting additional formative evaluations toward producing an annual summative evaluation of their districts' educators.

New Standards

Section 51 of Public Act 12-116, which repealed and replaced subsection (a) of C.G.S. 10-151b, requires that superintendents conduct or direct that an annual performance evaluation be conducted of principals, administrators and teachers based upon a new standard of "effective

State law requires that superintendents report on the status of teacher evaluations to the local board before June 1 of each school year, and report to the Commissioner of Education no later than June 13 of each year on the status of implementation of teacher evaluations, including the frequency of evaluations, aggregate evaluation ratings, number of teachers who have not been evaluated, and other requirements as determined by the state Education Department.

Not later than July 1, 2014, local and regional boards of education are required to conduct training programs for all evaluators and teachers employed by the board relating to the new teacher evaluation and support program developed by such boards. The evaluator must receive instruction on how to conduct proper performance evaluations prior to conducting an evaluation under the new program. The teacher orientation programs must acquaint teachers with the

The Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut will analyze the model evaluation and support program and its implementation in the pilot districts and report back to the state Board of Education and to the General Assembly.

practice" and that such evaluations be conducted in accordance with evaluation guidelines established by the State Board of Education. "Teachers" includes all personnel in positions requiring certification, not just classroom teachers.

Each district is responsible for defining effectiveness and ineffectiveness in relation to the indicators and ratings index mandated by state law. A demonstration of effective practice will serve as the basis for granting teachers tenure, and ineffectiveness can serve as grounds for dismissal.

Not later than Sept. 1, 2013, each local and regional board of education shall develop and implement teacher evaluation programs consistent with the guidelines adopted by the State Board of Education. School districts may opt to use pre-approved evaluation systems or develop their own so long as the chosen model is consistent with the Connecticut Core Requirements for Educator Evaluation, including the process for dispute resolution between a teacher and an evaluator who cannot agree on objectives, evaluation period, feedback or the professional development plan. School districts must submit their educator evaluation and support system plans annually to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDOE) for approval prior to district implementation.

evaluation and support program prior to their first evaluations under the new program. Additionally, on July 1, 2014, and annually thereafter, the Connecticut Commissioner of Education will randomly select at least 10 teacher evaluation and support programs for audit.

Only time will tell if the new evaluation requirements will improve overall student performance and close the achievement gap, but it appears to be an improvement over the current teacher evaluation and support system in Connecticut. ■