



2011

# RATING A TEACHER OBSERVATION TOOL

Five ways to ensure  
classroom observations are  
focused and rigorous



## **The Role of Observation Criteria and Tools**

Assessing Quality of Criteria and Tools: Five Questions

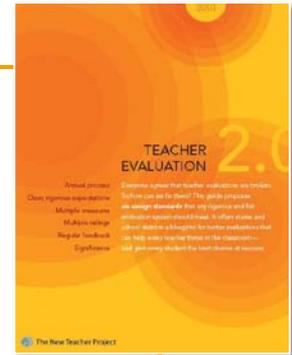
Scoring the Criteria



The New Teacher Project has proposed six design standards that any effective teacher evaluation system should meet.

## Teacher Evaluation 2.0: Six Design Standards

- 1 Annual Process:** All teachers should be evaluated at least annually.
- 2 Clear, Rigorous Expectations:** Evaluations should be based on clear standards of instructional excellence that prioritize student learning.
- 3 Multiple Measures:** Evaluations should consider multiple measures of performance, primarily the teacher's impact on student academic growth.
- 4 Multiple Ratings:** Evaluations should employ four to five rating levels to describe differences in teacher effectiveness.
- 5 Regular Feedback:** Evaluations should encourage frequent observations and constructive critical feedback.
- 6 Significance:** Evaluation outcomes must matter; evaluation data should be a major factor in key employment decisions about teachers.





Objective data on student learning are crucial, but subjective judgments by administrators will always play a significant role in evaluations.

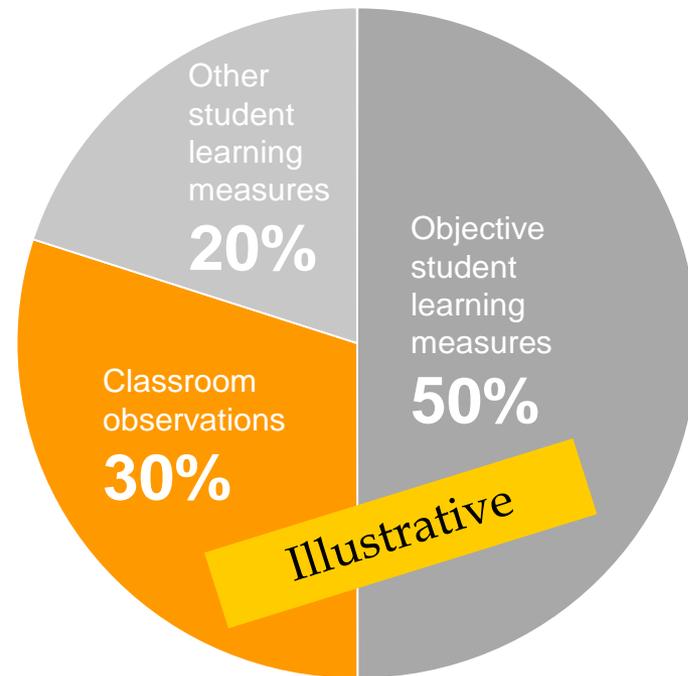
### 3 Multiple Measures

Classroom observations by administrators should be a factor in any evaluation system.



Choosing **criteria and tools that ensure rigorous observations based on evidence of student learning** is essential to the success of any evaluation system.

Sample Evaluation Weights





## Why are observation criteria and tools important?

Observations play a major role in any comprehensive teacher evaluation system. It's critical that they help paint a **fair and accurate picture of teachers' strengths and development areas** in the classroom.

Although the implementation of observation criteria and tools ultimately matters more than their design, a better design makes it more likely that they will achieve the desired results.

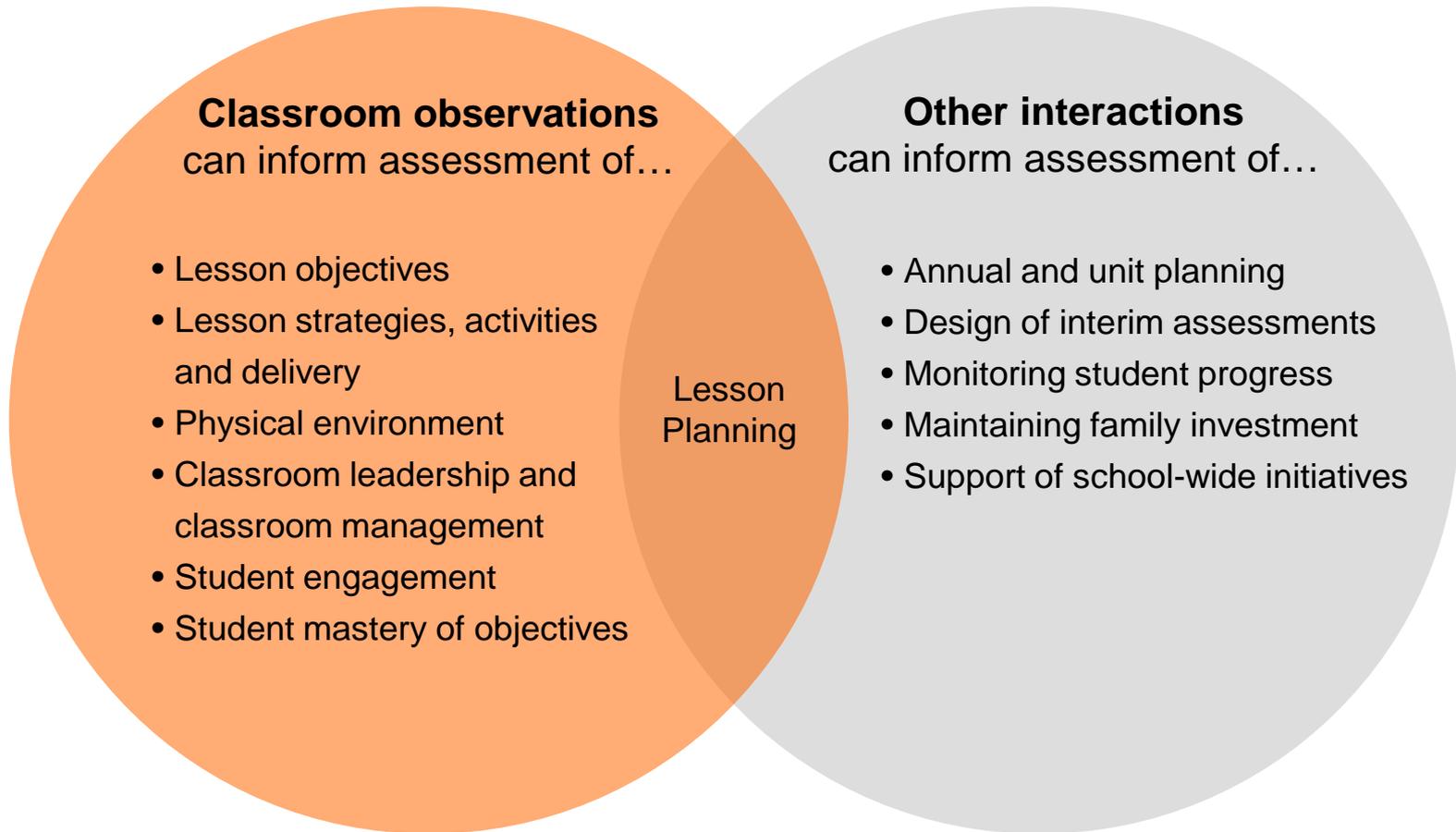
States and districts that are building teacher evaluation systems can choose from many observation criteria and tools – some widely used, some newer. **This presentation will help states and school districts identify frameworks that are likely to produce fair and accurate results.**

### The Role of Criteria and Tools

- ✓ **Communicate clear performance standards** to teachers and evaluators that are aligned to the district's instructional model and strategy (e.g., scripted curriculum)
- ✓ **Establish a common language on instructional practice** that helps district leaders develop more consistent and effective professional development
- ✓ Ensure that evaluations result in **accurate distributions of performance ratings**
- ✓ Help evaluators provide **high-quality developmental feedback** to their teachers.



Observation criteria should focus on skills that can be directly observed in the classroom.



Activities that cannot be directly observed in classroom observations should be assessed using other methods.



# Contents

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The Role of Observation Criteria and Tools



**Assessing Quality of Criteria and Tools: Five Questions**

Scoring the Criteria



## How do we determine whether observation criteria and tools are likely to contribute to accurate evaluation results?

We recommend asking **five simple questions**:

- 1** Do the criteria and tools **cover the classroom performance areas most connected to student outcomes**?
- 2** Do the criteria and tools set **high performance expectations** for teachers, or do they settle for minimally acceptable performance?
- 3** Are the performance expectations for teachers **clear and precise**?
- 4** Are the criteria and tools **student-centered**, requiring evaluators to look for **direct evidence of student engagement and learning**?
- 5** Are the criteria and tools **concise enough** for teachers and evaluators to **understand thoroughly and use easily**?



States and school districts may wish to consider additional factors, but it's critical that they consider these five questions before they make final decisions about their observation criteria and tools.



## QUESTION #1: Do the criteria and tools cover the classroom performance areas most connected to student outcomes?

The accuracy of an observation depends first and foremost on what the criteria and tools require observers to look for. We propose that criteria should assess **six major areas of classroom performance**.

| Area   | What Should Be Assessed?   |
|--|--|
| <b>Lesson Objectives</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alignment to rigorous standards</li><li>• Clarity of lesson objectives</li><li>• Differentiation of lesson objectives</li></ul>  |
| <b>Lesson Strategies, Activities, and Delivery</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activation of students' prior knowledge</li><li>• Use of strategies that are appropriate for the lesson objectives</li><li>• Use of activities and student work that engage students as active learners</li><li>• Differentiation of strategies, activities, and student work to ensure that all students sufficiently benefit from the lesson</li><li>• Communication of accurate, relevant content, key concepts and understandings</li><li>• Pacing and use of class time</li><li>• Collaboration with co-teachers and aids</li></ul> |
| <b>Physical Environment</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acquisition of resources and supplies needed for the lesson</li><li>• Classroom organization that allows for planned teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions.</li><li>• Appropriate accommodations for special needs students</li></ul>   |



## Major Areas of Teacher Performance (con't)

| Area   | What Should Be Assessed?  |
|--|---|
| <b>Classroom Management and Leadership</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Classroom rules, expectations and procedures that minimize down time, maintain student discipline/behavior, and maximize student engagement in the material</li><li>• Reinforcement of positive behavior; redirection of off-task conversations; correction of disruptive behaviors</li><li>• Reinforcement of school-wide norms and use of school-wide routines</li><li>• Modeling of honesty, integrity and personal responsibility</li></ul>   |
| <b>Student Engagement and Real-Time Assessment</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students' active participation in the learning process</li><li>• Students' perseverance and persistence through material; students' resilience</li><li>• Students' timely completion of assignments (out of class and in class)</li><li>• Assessment of students' understanding using real-time techniques that align to lesson objectives (e.g., Checks for Understandings)</li><li>• Identification and correction of common misunderstandings</li><li>• Movement of students to the rigorous levels of understanding required by the lesson objectives</li></ul> |
| <b>End-of-Class Assessment and Student Mastery of Objectives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment of students' mastery at the end of the lesson (e.g., exit slips) to confirm mastery of lesson objectives</li><li>• Evidence that students have mastered the lesson objectives such that they remain on track for the unit plan</li></ul>   |



The areas identified here are suggestions; others may warrant consideration. The key is to **prioritize performance areas that have the greatest impact on student achievement.**



## QUESTION #2: Do the criteria and tools set high performance expectations for teachers?

Evaluations should set high expectations for classroom performance. We classify performance expectations into **three categories** based on their rigor:

### Excellence

Expectation reflects excellent performance – i.e., what teachers need to be able to do to **boost the learning of all students**.

### Competence

Expectation reflects adequate performance – i.e., what teachers do to **boost the learning of some but not necessarily all students**.

### Compliance

Expectation has **little or no connection to effectiveness** – i.e., even teachers who are failing to boost the learning of most students could meet the criteria.



# What's the difference between excellence and compliance?

## Sample Criteria: Lesson Strategies, Activities, and Delivery

| Excellence: Helping All Students Learn   | Compliance: Bare Minimums   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Delivers a well-planned and efficient mini-lesson; captures mini-lesson so students can reference it during independent practice”</li><li>• “Leads students through guided practice with declining scaffolding so students provide both the answers and the thought process”</li><li>• “Uses independent practice so that students have ample successful opportunities to practice the objective (at least 50% of each lesson)”</li><li>• “Moves around the classroom constantly during independent practice to assess mastery and provide individual help”</li><li>• “Works to ensure that the needs of every student are met, providing extra support or enrichment as necessary”</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Teaches the curriculum for his/her grade level(s) and subject(s) as defined by [state] curriculum standards”</li><li>• “Uses a variety of sources of information within his/her subject(s)”</li><li>• “Integrates a variety of technology tools and applications into instructional design and implementation”</li><li>• “Uses instructional materials that reflect diversity and emphasize the commonality of all people”</li></ul> |



These criteria require **excellent performance, not just effort**. Teachers are expected to deliver each part of a lesson effectively and ensure that all students are learning



These criteria require teachers to **complete certain actions, but not necessarily complete them successfully**. A teacher could meet these criteria simply by covering the required material, even if students don't learn.



## Performance Expectations: Additional Examples

| Area   | Examples of Excellence  | Examples of Compliance   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Lesson Objectives</b>   | “Consistently uses rigorous, bite-sized, measurable, standards-based objectives to drive instruction; writes objectives on the board and reviews them with students”                                    | “Plans for the year, semester, marking period, unit, and day”  |
| <b>Physical Environment</b>  | “The classroom is well organized and free of clutter. Teacher uses bulletin boards and visual displays to support student learning, and includes the necessary displays (i.e., HW, agenda, objectives)” | “The classroom displays student work that frequently changes”  |
| <b>Classroom Management and Leadership</b>                         | “If a student moves off task, teacher immediately addresses the student without major adjustments to the pace of instruction”   | “Teacher acts to maintain a safe environment”  |
| <b>Student Engagement and Real-Time Assessment</b>                 | “There is a high ratio of student work to teacher talk with students doing most of the ‘heavy lifting’ of work and explaining their thinking”   | “Teacher pursues the active engagement of all students”  |
| <b>End-of-Class Assessment and Student’s Mastery of Objectives</b> | “Systematically assesses every student’s mastery of the objectives(s) at the end of each lesson and diagnoses areas of student misunderstanding (usually exit ticket)”                                  | “Assesses student progress before, during, and after instruction; maintains clear and accurate records of student performance” |



### QUESTION #3: Are performance expectations clear and precise?

Clear, precise, specific performance expectations ensure that teachers and observers have a **common understanding** of what it means to meet observation criteria. Clarity and precision also **minimize the need for observers to make inferences** and make observations **easier to complete**.

#### Sample Criteria: End-of-Class Assessment and Student Mastery of Objectives

| Clear and Precise  | Unclear and Imprecise   |
|--|---|
| “Checks for understanding and exit slips prove that nearly all students at all knowledge and skill levels mastered their objectives such that they remained on track for the unit (i.e., the time required to re-teach and correct misunderstandings will not force cuts to the unit scope and sequence” | “There is evidence that most students demonstrate mastery of the objective” |



This expectation **leaves little room for interpretation** and tells observers exactly what to look for.



This expectation is vague and **leaves room for interpretation**.



## Additional Examples: Clear and Precise Expectations

| Area   | Clear and Precise Expectation  | Unclear and Imprecise Expectation  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Lesson Objectives</b>                           | “Lesson objectives articulate what exactly students should be able to do by the end of class and are: 1) Specific and bite-sized; 2) Aligned with the unit; 3) Require the right level thinking of (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Students mastery of the objective is measurable via items on exit tickets and quizzes”   | “Lesson demonstrates a focus on specific mastery”                                    |
| <b>Lesson Strategies, Activities, and Delivery</b> | “Demonstrates strong content knowledge: 1) Presents all information in a clear, well-organized, factually accurate manner without mistakes that would leave students with any misunderstanding at the end of the lesson; 2) Regularly highlights and emphasizes key concepts and understandings, and connects them to other important, previously mastered understandings” | “Teacher displays extensive content knowledge of all the subjects she or he teaches” |
| <b>Physical Environment</b>                        | “Ensures that the supplies, equipment, and resources for lessons are readily accessible”   | “Teacher’s knowledge of resources for students is extensive”                         |



## Additional Examples: Clear and Precise Expectations (cont'd)

| Area   | Clear and Precise Expectation  | Unclear and Imprecise Expectation  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Classroom Management and Leadership</b>         | "Students follow efficient procedures and procedures with few reminders from teacher or classmates and transition smoothly between lesson activities (minimal down time, loss of concentration, disruptions)"  | "Leads the effort to create a culture that sustains the collective energy through a combination of strategies"   |
| <b>Student Engagement and Real-Time Assessment</b> | "Checks for understanding of all students:<br>1) Uses open-ended questions to assess student understanding of material and surface common misunderstandings<br>2) Accepts only high quality student responses<br>3) Doesn't allow students to "opt-out"; cycles back to students who didn't answer;<br>4) Immediately identifies misunderstandings when they arise<br>5) Leads students to the correct answer by asking pertinent, scaffolded follow-up questions that activate background knowledge, helping students to think aloud, and modeling" | "Teaches students to reflect on and to apply standards and criteria to their work"<br><br>"The teacher consistently uses feedback that focuses the students' attention on the process of learning" |

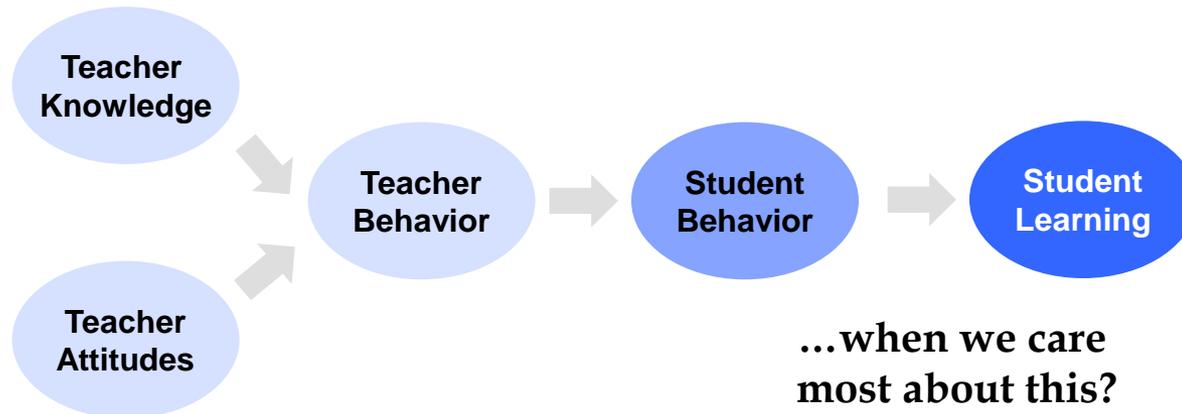


## QUESTION #4: Are the criteria and tools student-centered, requiring direct evidence of student engagement and learning?

- First and foremost, an effective teacher helps students make academic progress.
- Yet most observation criteria focus only on the teacher's skills or behaviors, not student response or impact.
- If we want accurate, reliable assessments of whether teachers are helping students learn, **observations need to focus on students.**

Evaluators should judge whether teachers have met each performance expectation based on student behaviors and evidence of student learning.

Why would we focus only on this...





## Example: Student-Centered Criteria vs. Teacher-Centered Criteria

### Sample Criteria: Student Engagement and Real-Time Assessment

| Student-Centered Criteria  | Teacher-Centered Criteria  |
|--|--|
| “All or almost all hands are raised when reviewing taught material. More than half of hands are up on new material.” | “Teacher routinely emphasizes completion of work and consistently encourages students to expend their best effort. Teacher pursues the active engagement of all students.” |



This criteria requires an evaluator to directly assess student behaviors and learning. It looks beyond a teacher's effort and **focuses on the results** of that effort.



This criteria requires an evaluator to assess a teacher's actions, but **not whether those actions produced the desired result** (actually engaging students and boosting student learning).



## Additional Examples: Student-Centered Criteria

| Area   | Student-Centered Criteria   | Teacher-Centered Criteria  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Lesson Objectives</b>                           | “Students are fully aware of the criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated”                              | “Teacher writes lesson plans with clear and measurable standards-based instructional objectives and with benchmarks and/or grade level indicators identified”  |
| <b>Lesson Strategies, Activities, and Delivery</b> | “Incorporates independent practice so that students have ample, successful “at bats” to practice the AIM (at least 50% of each lesson)” | “Teacher actively seeks and implements new instructional strategies. The teacher consistently develops learning experiences where inquiry, curiosity and exploration are valued”   |
| <b>Physical Environment</b>                        | “Special needs and ELL students have the appropriate accommodations such that they can actively participate in class”                   | “Teacher’s knowledge of resources to enhance content and pedagogical knowledge is extensive, including those available through the school or district, in the community, through professional organizations and universities, and on the Internet” |



## Additional Examples: Student-Centered Criteria (cont'd)

| Area   | Student-Centered Criterion  | Teacher-Centered Criterion   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Classroom Management and Leadership</b>                         | “Students do not demonstrate negative behaviors such as teasing, name calling, bullying, aggression, exclusionary behavior, or the use of profane language in their interactions with peers or teachers”  | “Demonstrates/models sensitivity to all students; treats all students respectfully and equitably.”   |
| <b>End-of-Class Assessment and Student’s Mastery of Objectives</b> | “Checks for Understandings and Exit Slips prove that nearly all students at all knowledge and skill levels mastered their objectives such that they remained on track for the unit (i.e., the time required to re-teach and correct misunderstandings will not force cuts to the scope/sequence of the unit)” | “The teacher’s assessment of student performance is focused on students’ ability to apply knowledge, explain procedures and understand concepts” |



## QUESTION #5: Are the criteria and tools concise enough for teachers and evaluators to read and understand thoroughly and use easily?

Given the demands on teachers' and principals' time, it is unrealistic to expect them to focus on a long list of teacher performance expectations. So, as states and districts focus on establishing clear performance expectations, they must also be mindful of creating tools that are **easy to use and digest**, and that help **focus teachers and evaluators** on the most essential characteristics of excellent teaching.

There are many elements of great teaching, and it may be useful to catalog these in a document that can guide professional development. But the list of **performance expectations in an observation tool should fit on a single page** if at all possible. With a longer list, evaluators will struggle to offer teachers useful, focused feedback – one of the primary goals of any evaluation system.

To help strike a balance between clarity and ease of use, policymakers should:

- Ensure that the observation tool addresses only **elements of effective teaching that can actually be observed**
- **Ask evaluators and teachers for feedback on usability** during the pilot phase of the observation tool



# Contents

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Assessing Quality of Criteria and Tools: Five Questions



**Scoring the Criteria and Tools**



The five questions discussed here can form the basis of a simple scorecard to assess the quality of any observation rubric.

| <b>Evaluation Rubric Scorecard:<br/>Anytown Public School District</b>  |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Covers major performance areas (3 pts)</b><br>3=Complete Coverage, 2=Partial Coverage, 1=Incomplete Coverage                                     |  |
| <b>High expectations (3 pts)</b><br>3=Excellence, 2=Competence, 1=Compliance  |  |
| <b>Clear, precise language (3 pts)</b><br>3=Very precise and clearly worded, 2=Mostly precise and clearly worded, 1=Insufficiently precise; Unclear |  |
| <b>Evidence of student learning (3 pts)</b><br>3=Student Centered, 2=Somewhat Student Centered, 1 = Teacher Centered                                |  |
| <b>Concise and easy to use (2 pts)</b><br>2=Concise and easy to use, 1=Too unwieldy to use effectively  |  |
| <b>Overall score (of 14)</b>  |  |

**12-14 Points: Acceptable** for use in evaluations and performance management

**0-11 Points: Requires refinements** before using in evaluations and performance management



## Scoring Guide: Covers Major Performance Areas

The overall score for this section of the scorecard is the average of the scores for each of the five major performance areas.

**3**

### **Complete Coverage**

The tools cover all of the elements in this area.

**2**

### **Partial Coverage**

The tools do not include some of the elements, but still assess most of them.

**1**

### **Inadequate Coverage**

The tools assess less than half of the elements in this area.

### **Example: Rating Assessment of Performance Areas**

| <b>Lesson Objectives</b> | <b>Lesson Strategies, Activities, and Delivery</b> | <b>Physical Environment</b> | <b>Classroom Management and Leadership</b> | <b>Student Engagement and Real-Time Assessment</b> | <b>End-of-Class Assessment and Student Mastery of Objectives</b> | <b>Overall</b> |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|--|--|----------------|
| 2                        | 3  | 3                           | 2  | 3  | 1  | <b>2.3</b>     |



## Scoring Guide: High Expectations

This is a holistic score based on a review of all the expectations in the rubric, using the guidelines below.

### Excellence

3

All or nearly all of the expectations reflect the level of performance that is necessary for a teacher to help **all students make substantial academic progress**. None of the expectations reflect “bare minimum” performance. Most describe truly exemplary (top 10%) performance.

### Competence

2

In general, expectations reflect the level of performance that is necessary for a teacher to help **some – but not necessarily all – students make substantial academic progress**. Some of the expectations may be sufficiently rigorous, but several are not. A few may reflect compliance.

### Compliance

1

Many of the expectations could be met even by teachers who **do not help most of their students make substantial academic progress**. Many are not sufficiently rigorous; they reflect bare minimums or compliance requirements. Many expectations do not affect student learning.



## Scoring Guide: Clear, Precise Language

This a holistic score based on a review of all the criteria in all the tools, using the guidelines below.

- 3** **Very precise and clearly worded**  
The language in the vast majority of the expectations is clear, concrete and specific such that **different observers would likely interpret it similarly**. The language minimizes the need for inference on the part of observers and describes a clear picture of what the observer should hope to see.
- 2** **Mostly precise and clearly worded**  
The language in most of the expectations is clear, concrete and specific such that different observers would likely interpret it similarly. **Some expectations require some subjective interpretation**, but not enough to make it difficult for observers to apply the criteria consistently.
- 1** **Insufficiently precise; unclear**  
Enough expectations are unclear, vague, and open to significant interpretation that it is **difficult for observers to apply the criteria consistently**.



## Scoring Guide: Evidence of Student Learning

This a holistic score based on a review of all the criteria in all the tools, using the guidelines below.

- 3 Student-Centered**  
Wherever possible, all criteria are student-centered and require observers to look for **evidence of student engagement and learning**.
- 2 Somewhat Student-Centered**  
Wherever possible, many criteria require observers to look for evidence of student behavior, engagement, and learning. But **some criteria rely on teacher actions even when student centered criteria could have been used** to ensure accuracy. Some important student-centered criteria are missing.
- 1 Teacher-Centered**  
Observers are **rarely asked to look for evidence of student engagement and learning**. Many criteria rely on teacher actions even when student centered criteria could have been used to ensure accuracy. Many important student-centered criteria are missing.



## Scoring Guide: Concise and Easy to Use

This a holistic score based on a review of all the criteria in all the tools, using the guidelines below.

### Concise and Easy to Use

2

Feedback from teachers and evaluators indicates that the observation criteria and tools are easy enough to read and digest in a reasonable amount of time. Some teachers and evaluators report using the criteria and tools as a reference that guides their day-to-day work. The tools identify no more than **five or six broad teacher performance expectations**, and these expectations can be described in no more than one page.

### Too Unwieldy to Use Effectively

1

Many teachers and evaluators report that the observation criteria and tools are **too long and too detailed to read and digest in a reasonable amount of time**. The tools identify more than five or six broad teacher performance standards and require more than one page to describe them.



The completed scorecard provides an easy-to-understand glimpse at the strengths and weaknesses of the observation rubric.

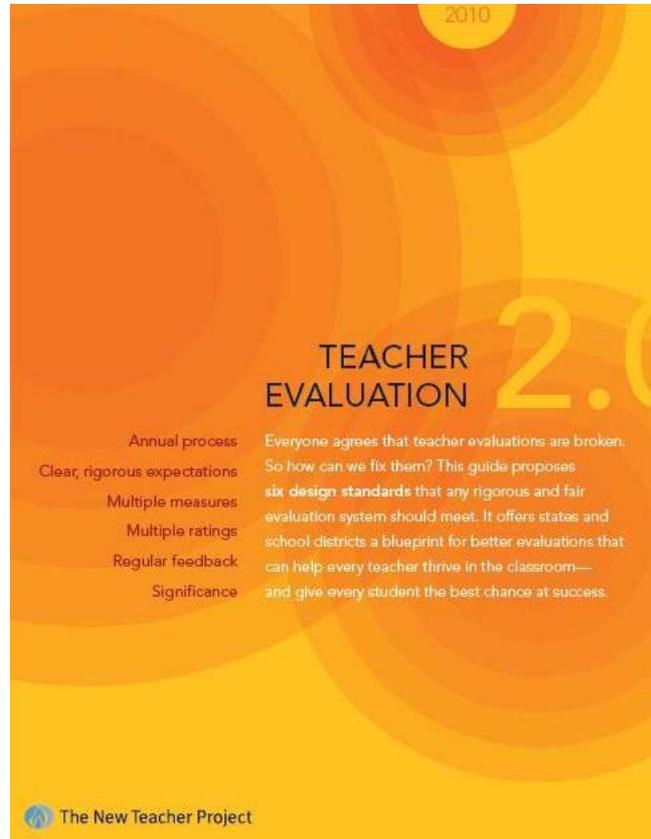
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| <b>High expectations (3 pts)</b><br>3=Excellence, 2=Competence, 1=Compliance  | 2         |
| <b>Clear, precise language (3 pts)</b><br>3=Very precise and clearly worded, 2=Mostly precise and clearly worded, 1=Insufficiently precise; Unclear | 3         |
| <b>Evidence of student learning (3 pts)</b><br>3=Student Centered, 2=Somewhat Student Centered, 1 = Teacher Centered                                | 3         |
| <b>Concise and easy to use (2 pts)</b><br>2=Concise and easy to use, 1=Too unwieldy to use effectively  | 2         |
| <b>Overall score (of 14)</b>  | <b>12</b> |

**12-14 Points: Acceptable** for use in evaluations and performance management

**0-12 Points: Requires refinements** before using in evaluations and performance management



## Questions?



[www.tntp.org/eval2.0](http://www.tntp.org/eval2.0)