

## How Are Early Childhood Teachers Faring in State Teacher Evaluation Systems?



Lori Connors-Tadros & Michelle Horowitz

### Why did CEELO conduct this study?

The purpose of this [study](#) is to provide state leaders with information about the opportunities and challenges 11 states are experiencing in implementing teacher evaluation systems with early childhood teachers (infant through grade three). We focus on the role of student learning objectives (SLOs) as one component of assessing teacher effectiveness, because of the technical challenges of implementing SLOs in early childhood classrooms.

#### *What We Know*

**A great teacher can have a significant impact on children's learning.** Research demonstrates that the quality of teachers working with children from birth through third grade affects early outcomes ranging from numeracy and literacy to social and emotional development.

**Federal and state policymakers are promoting an early childhood agenda to bring greater attention to the impact of early childhood learning on college and career readiness of students.** These policies have resulted in greater accountability for early childhood teachers.

**The public school workforce is responding to increased requirements for accountability.** Since 2009, states have designed new and more rigorous teacher evaluation systems, driven by state legislation and federal policies propelling these efforts forward.

### What are CEELO's policy recommendations?

Based on the findings of this study we recommend the following:

***Ensure inter-departmental coordination*** across teacher evaluation and early childhood offices so that policy guidance and decision-making is coordinated and implemented coherently.

***Involve early childhood experts and personnel early and often*** in the design, ongoing development, and implementation of the system.

***Keep student achievement attributions low*** for early childhood teachers, within legal or regulatory requirements.

**Develop sustained professional development** for early childhood teachers that is based on early childhood pedagogy, with a particular focus on identifying and using assessment tools appropriately.

**Provide evidence documents for** principals or other evaluators, aligned with the state's professional practice framework, on effective teaching practices in infant through third grade classrooms.

**Systematically examine** how early childhood teachers are implementing the teacher evaluation system at the district level and share lessons widely.

**Set realistic timelines for implementing** multiple policy reforms (e.g. common core, comprehensive assessments, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading initiatives) and provide training on how multiple policy reforms align to achieve goals for students.

## What did CEELO find?

**Most profiled states had fully implemented new statewide teacher evaluation systems in School Year 2014.** All profiled states are implementing a statewide teacher evaluation system, but most states grant some flexibility to districts in implementing certain requirements.

**All states include Kindergarten through grade three teachers in their teacher evaluation system but whether pre-K teachers are included varies.** Preschool special education teachers who are licensed by the state are included, but States vary on whether they require prekindergarten teachers to be licensed by the state department of education.

**Attribution of student achievement to teachers varies by state.** Teacher effectiveness ratings are commonly derived from qualitative measures of professional practice and quantitative measures of student learning. Five states adjust the weighting of student learning for early childhood teachers.

**Most use State Standards of professional practice to rate teaching practice.** Ten states reported supporting the use of a framework aligned to state standards of teacher practice. Nine states reported supporting use of the Framework for Teaching (the Danielson Framework) to assess practice. Five states use the Marzano framework and four states use the CLASS.

**States report challenges in using SLOs to fairly attribute student learning to early childhood teachers.** These include: a) the lack of appropriate assessments of young children's learning; b) difficulty creating appropriate growth targets that are rigorous, but realistic, given the variability in development in this age span; and c) the significant amount of training and implementation support that is needed.

*We are having success with SLOs in preschool settings as well as other non-tested settings...this can be done well, but for many teachers...it is definitely an ongoing learning process.*

*State informant*

**Professional Development is a top priority for states.** Some states are supporting an online platform and professional development marketplace for teachers and administrators to access professional development, track certifications for required training, and engage with other teachers around strategies to set and achieve student learning objectives. Regional education networks and private technical assistance intermediaries are charged by some states with developing training, providing coaches, and disseminating implementation resources to districts.

### What additional research is needed?

More research is needed to ensure that the teacher evaluation systems are relevant, valid, and fair for early childhood teachers. Additional research is needed to understand the following:

- What are the characteristics of early childhood teachers who are using evaluation ratings to improve practice?
- What are the types of training and professional development that are most effective for early childhood teachers to improve scores and implement the system effectively?
- In what ways do the specific working conditions of early childhood teachers--such as compensation, education, class size, school day--affect the usefulness of the teacher evaluation systems to improve practice?
- What supports are needed for principals and evaluators of early childhood teachers? What specific knowledge of early childhood pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practice is needed for evaluators to be effective raters of early childhood teachers?
- Are the commonly used measures of professional practice effectively recognizing and differentiating early childhood teachers?

For more information on the findings of this study, read the [full report](#).

Suggested citation: Connors-Tadros, L., & Horowitz, M. (2014). *How Are Early Childhood Teachers Faring in State Teacher Evaluation Systems? Executive summary*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

The Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) is a partnership of the following organizations:

