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# 23 Illinois Administrative Code 50: Redefining the Formal Observation in Teacher Evaluation; A Policy Advocacy Document

Merryl B. Brownlow  
*National Louis University*

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23 ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE 50: REDEFINING THE FORMAL  
OBSERVATION IN TEACHER EVALUATION  
A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Merryl B. Brownlow

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

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National College of Education

National Louis University

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# Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## **ABSTRACT**

This document explores how a change in the definition of the formal observation may improve the teacher evaluation system in the state of Illinois. Currently, the formal observation must be conducted in person as defined by administrative code. In an effort to increase the value and impact of the formal observation as a tool for reflection and professional growth, this paper advocates for a videotaped alternative as an option in addition to the current in-person model. The intent of including a videotaped option is to empower the teacher in the process and increase ownership for building skills as a reflective practitioner. The videotaped model also promotes a more collaborative context for the post observation conference that may lead to a more direct impact on improving teaching and learning. The state of New York (2017) has already implemented a videotaped observation model as an alternative in the teacher evaluation process and the premise of advocating for such a policy was recently the subject of a study at The Center for Educational Policy Research at Harvard (Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, 2015a). This policy advocacy document discusses the context and conditions by which to operationalize a similar vision in the state of Illinois.

## **PREFACE: LESSONS LEARNED**

In advocating for policy change, there was realization of the complexity of such work in considering the various operational aspects to such a change. In the case of a large-scale change such as the one in this model, it is wise to consider an incremental approach to evaluate the success each of the elements along the way. While there is an assessment plan built into the advocacy for change, there are also recommended checks and balances related to the implementation steps.

In addition to scaffolding the implementation, I also recognized the complexity related to the impact on the various stakeholders in this process. In written policy, the tendency may be to think about the impact on the immediate stakeholders represented in the policy language; in this case teachers and administrators. However, as the implementation plan unfolded, it became obvious to me that the recommended policy change casts a much wider net in its relationship to the larger school community, particularly students and parents. In today's educational climate with the concerns around student privacy, it was evident that these potential barriers needed to be addressed in the planning. If ignored in the implementation phase, then those unforeseen obstacles may completely halt what, I believe, is a high stakes element of the teacher evaluation process.

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## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

Recent research (Archer et al., 2015; Aseltine, Faryniarz, & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2006; Danielson, 2011, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marshall, 2005; Myung & Martinez, 2013; Ness, 1980; Wood et al., 2014; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2012) on the impact of teacher evaluation on student learning has focused on improving professional practice, which has led to reforms in teacher evaluation systems across the nation. In recent years, Illinois shifted its teacher evaluation system to adopt a model that examines professional practice through a standards-based lens providing a consistent context for what good teaching looks like in classrooms (Smith, 2015). Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching was chosen as the default for standards of professional practice in Illinois. Outlined in the Framework for Teaching are standard expectations for what is described as "on stage" teacher behaviors. They are grouped in two domains labeled Classroom Environment and Instruction (Danielson, 2013). Teachers are typically evaluated in these two domain areas through formal and informal observations conducted by supervising administrators, with the formal observation process as the focus for the evidence collection.

In the re-visioning of the teacher evaluation system, the outcomes for improving professional practice may have been more fully realized if the policy makers examined the intended outcomes through the lenses of the stakeholders the policy was intended to impact. In the work of Smith and Miller-Kahn (2004), they examined what they refer to as the political spectacle surrounding educational policy. They refer to policy impacted by politics as disconnected from where the action happens. In the case of teacher evaluation, the formal observation is a central element of the process. Yet, as the

evaluation system was redesigned to incorporate standards for professional practice, there was no critical eye on how the formal observation supports the development of highly skilled reflective practitioners and its potential for promoting professional growth. While there were what Smith and Miller-Kahn (2004) might describe as intended consequences for improving the evaluation system's impact on improving teaching and learning, the absence of an examination of the formal observation's role in the process reduced the new system's potential for improving teaching and learning. The detachment between the new policies for teacher evaluation in Illinois and the existing evaluation components that remained unchanged created a missed opportunity for improving instructional practices that may lead to improved student achievement. This policy advocacy paper seeks to reconcile this missed opportunity.

### **Policy Issue Awareness**

As a principal, I often found the perceived high stakes of a formal observation to compromise its potential as a reflective process for promoting professional growth. Teachers often expressed anxiety or resorted to contrived instructional experiences with the mindset of scoring a high rating from a formal observation, rather than taking the opportunity to focus on reflection and continuous improvement with the coaching of an administrator. Having worked as a building administrator for 12 years, I constantly strove to find ways to make the formal observation process more meaningful for teachers to improve reflective practice and ultimately improve teaching and learning.

What I perceived as a missed opportunity with the current structure of the formal observation, drove the decision to research its value in Century School District. At the time of the program evaluation, Century School District was in the process of shifting its

evaluation practices. The formal observation process used in Century School District is a primary vehicle for gathering evidence with respect to teacher evaluation and is specifically relevant in three of the four domains on which teachers are evaluated (Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment and Instruction). The formal observation process is an opportunity to positively impact building climate and create a culture of continuous improvement. When building administrators can find the balance and connect supervision, evaluation and professional development in a systemic fashion, it can have significant impact on teaching and learning (Danielson, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2012). The formal observation process is a vehicle that may be able to be utilized to build relationships that foster trust, if it is viewed as a collaborative opportunity to develop teachers as reflective practitioners promoting professional growth.

My program evaluation (Brownlow, 2016) was focused on examining the formal observation process to determine its value as a tool for promoting reflective practice and professional growth. The results from that research validated what the literature review also indicated, that the formal observation in its traditional structure is not valued as a professional growth experience for teachers and is not perceived to have a significant impact on improving teaching and learning. Specifically, a recommendation from the program evaluation included the exploration of alternative models for structuring the formal observation process to promote a more authentic experience for teachers. In researching potential alternative models, it was suggested that videotaped instructional experiences could be a structure that generates more authentic opportunities for promoting reflective practice in the observation process.

## **Critical Issues**

As I explored the policies governing teacher evaluation (23 Illinois Administrative Code 50), I found that the stated definition of the formal observation is limiting with respect to creating an observation process that might promote a more collaborative, reflective process that supports professional growth. As stated in Illinois Administrative Code 50 (p. 7), the formal observation is defined as follows, “‘Formal observation’ means a specific window of time that is scheduled with the teacher, principal, or assistant principal for the qualified evaluator, at any point during that window of time, to directly observe professional practices in the classroom or in the school.” The words “directly observe” create limitations in the process for implementing alternative structures for observation that may support greater collaboration, reflection and professional growth for both teachers and evaluators. As identified in my program evaluation (Brownlow, 2016), the current model is not one that is meeting the needs of the system in promoting reflective practice and professional growth on the part of teachers.

There is a missed opportunity in the formal observation process as designed. Given the time allocated to the evaluation process and the collection of evidence related to standards of professional practice, it is critical that evaluators maximize the formal observation opportunities as vehicles for improving teaching and learning. The post conference component of the formal observation is a structure that can support collaborative coaching conversations that lead to greater reflection, improved practice and professional growth, but not in its current context where it is administrator driven and not valued by teachers (Brownlow, 2016, 2017). In Century School District, where

teacher collaborative time has not contractually been established, it is even more paramount that existing structures are utilized for capturing collaborative conversations promoting professional growth.

Another issue that drives the need for a policy revision that creates a more flexible definition of the formal observation stems from the time constraints related to the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system statewide. Administrators in Century School District reported a shift in administrative responsibilities related to the implementation of Illinois Performance Evaluation Review Act (2015) and the new teacher evaluation model. There has been an increase in paperwork and reporting that has resulted in less time in the classroom (Brownlow, 2017). The research from the change model found that the ability to watch videotaped observations outside of the school day created more time for administrators to be visible throughout the instructional day. Two thirds of administrators in the study from The Center for Educational Policy Research (2015a6) reported that they watched the videotaped segments outside of instructional hours and freed themselves from the paperwork that comes from traditional scripting of observations. For Century School District, and likely others, finding efficiencies that also improve processes is extremely timely and relevant.

### **A Solution: Broadening the Definition**

The findings from the program evaluation and change model research suggest that the flexibility to videotape observations in place of direct observations by evaluators would create a more authentic opportunity for enhancing teachers' instructional practices. The videotaped alternative allows teachers to engage in more reflective practice, supports

continuous improvement through collaboration and increased ownership for teachers. The videotaped model can contribute to greater authenticity in analyzing instructional practices, while reducing the perceived high stakes in the process, leading to more opportunity for improved instruction and professional growth (Brownlow, 2016, 2017).

As an advocate for an improved model of evaluation and supervision, I am recommending that the State of Illinois consider a language change to the definition of the formal observation to mirror what the State of New York has developed as an alternative. In the New York model for teacher evaluation known as *Advance*, the option for formal observations is as follows: “All observations will be conducted in person. However, a teacher may consent to have his or her observations videotaped. The teacher and evaluator may mutually consent to evaluators not being present when videotaping,” (New York City Department of Education, 2017, p. 6). This change in definition will allow teachers to select videotaping as an option for the formal observation structure. Based on the research in the program evaluation and change model related to the structure of the formal observation (Brownlow, 2016, 2017), this would support a structure that will enhance the observation process promoting increased ownership for teachers, strengthening their skills as reflective practitioners leading to greater professional growth and improved instructional practices. The intent of the change is to ultimately improve student learning.

**Anticipated Results: Promoting Reflection, Professional Growth and Improved Practice**

Given that the primary purpose of teacher evaluation is to promote improved teaching and learning, a more flexible model for the formal observation improves the

process for fundamentally addressing that goal. The change model research investigating the potential impact of a videotaped observation model affirmed the perspective this alternative platform may provide the structure to enhance ownership for teachers, authentically build their skills as reflective practitioners, provide a common lens for examining and analyzing teaching and learning and ultimately support the development of relational trust between teacher and administrator. The balance between evaluator as coach is a delicate one. As noted in the change model research (Brownlow, 2017), by promoting reflective practices in the shift to a videotaped model of observation, the formal observation process can be a start to building a strong understanding of the impact of growth mindset and continuous improvement on student learning. The change in policy to provide the flexibility for videotaping will develop competencies that will serve to support the goal of improving teaching and learning across the system.

A learning system focused on continuous improvement for both teachers and administrators is critical as the conceptual framework for improved teaching and learning, inclusive of the teacher evaluation process (Darling-Hammond, 2013). The conclusions drawn by The Center for Educational Policy Research (2015a) also supported the anticipated positive impact a videotaped observation platform can have on a system. Their evidence suggested a system where both teachers and administrators reported post conference discussions that were more collaborative and less adversarial. There was also evidence that teachers were more self-reflective and more likely to identify specific changes they made to their practice based upon observation feedback. Lastly, the study also found that principals handled observational related work at times outside of the busy instructional day. The literature in the change plan discussed the

overarching need for a strong understanding of standards for performance, the need for the use of more supportive protocols to foster more collaborative dialogue focused on improving teaching and learning and the need to establish a growth mindset across the system inclusive of a district's evaluation system (Danielson, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2013). This can begin with a change in language around the definition of the formal observation as it stands in today's Illinois Administrative Code.



## **SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED**

Advocating for the change in definition of the formal observation as outlined in the Illinois Administrative Code 50 stems from needs identified through the program evaluation and change plan research conducted by Brownlow (2016, 2017). The conclusions drawn from that research suggested that a shift to a more flexible approach to the formal observations has the potential to improve instructional practices that may lead to improved student learning. In analyzing the benefits, there are implications for improving a school district's contextual landscape addressing educational, economic, social, political and ethical arenas related to the proposed change.

### **Educational Analysis**

The teacher evaluation system is intended to measure teacher performance against standards of professional practice that will enhance student learning. Embedded in the system are structures for analyzing teacher performance against those standards. In Illinois, one of those mechanisms is the formal observation process. The formal observation process is an opportunity for an evaluator and a teacher to examine instructional experiences together to identify areas of strength and areas for growth as they relate to teaching and learning. Since the formal observation experience is only required twice per year for probationary teachers and once every two years for tenured staff (Smith, 2015), the intent is to build the skills of teachers as reflective practitioners to analyze their own instruction in relationship to the standards on an ongoing basis to promote professional growth. Based upon my program evaluation conducted in 2016, the formal observation experience is not valued for the purposes of developing skills as a reflective practitioner or as a tool for promoting professional growth.

As the research indicated (Connally & Tooley, 2016; Danielson, 2011, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marshall, 2005; Myung & Martinez, 2013; Ness, 1980; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2012), the current process is perceived as high stakes, lacking authenticity, driven by evaluators with little ownership for teachers in the process. In order to develop a process that can support the changes that will lead to improved teaching and learning, the process needs to shift to one that is collaborative, provides ownership for teachers and operates under a construct of continuous improvement; without the perception that this high stakes experience must be one absent practitioner error or otherwise leading to a lower overall evaluation rating.

Revising the definition of the formal observation for the purposes of teacher evaluation supports a shift to a performance-based model of evaluation that empowers teachers to take ownership of the process. The literature reviewed for the change model (Brownlow, 2017) indicated that performance based models of evaluation increased teacher effectiveness as evidenced by improved student learning. Darling-Hammond (2013) specifically cited the videotaped lesson as a key component of the self-analysis for teachers in performance based models. The idea of a videotaped classroom observation improving the quality and effectiveness of teacher evaluation processes leading to improved instructional performance and student learning has also caught the attention of researchers at the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University (2015a). The team at Harvard has released the first part of a research study conducted across four states with over 300 teachers and 100 administrators. The findings suggested that videotaped observations do improve the classroom observation experience and were more likely to lead to changes in instructional practices, despite some of the practical

challenges of implementing the process. While part two of that study is yet to be released, there is the hypothesis that the improved observation experience will positively impact student achievement.

Brownlow (2017) studied the impact of a videotaped observation on the teacher evaluation as part of a proposed change model. A case study was done in Century School District, a small suburban school district with a student population of approximately a little less than 1,700 students. The district is comprised of four elementary buildings and one middle school. The district shifted to a new evaluation system grounded in standards for professional practice at the start of the 2016-2017 school year. In the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system in Century School District, there has been a shift that emphasizes the importance of gathering evidence with respect to teacher performance in relationship to the standards for professional practice against which they are being measured. The idea that a set of limited formal observation experiences captures the full picture of a teacher's instructional practice raises the perceived stakes for this process (Brownlow, 2016). The opportunity to observe informally, while required only twice per evaluation cycle in the district evaluation plan, plays an important role in gathering a more comprehensive assessment of performance levels for teachers. The current formal observation process requires that the direct observation be 45 minutes in length or a full class period (23 Illinois Administrative Code 50). In the same guiding document, it is stated that there is no limit on the number of informal observations that are to be conducted, indicating as Marshall (2005) and Danielson (personal communication, July 15, 2016) suggested, that those opportunities provide a more highly valued authentic context for collecting evidence of teachers' professional practices.

Instituting a policy that would allow for videotaped formal observations as an alternative to the direct in-person observation, create flexibility and time in the evaluator's schedule to informally visit classrooms. The videotaped formal observation can remove the time obligation required for direct observations that can dominate an administrator's time in a building, leaving less time for those very valuable informal observations. Videotapes can be viewed outside of the instructional day freeing the precious commodity of time to invest in informal observations. The informal visits not only contribute to a more comprehensive view of teacher practice, but they also support the development of the evaluator as instructional leader. The alternative structure of the formal observation can support value-added investment on how administrators allocate their time. By increasing visibility in relationship to teaching and learning and identifying strong instructional practices across classrooms, informal observations provide a platform that encourages sharing of observed best practices among staff through established collaborative teaching and learning structures.

### **Economic Analysis**

In addition to educational implications, there are also potential economic benefits to a more flexible approach to classroom observations. Using videotape as a tool for observations creates a job embedded professional development opportunity. There is research that suggests that structures designed for analyzing student work where teachers can collaborate result in improved teacher performance and student learning (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). By videotaping observations, teachers have an additional opportunity to view instructional experiences with peers for the purposes of analyzing student learning. Through reflective conversations with evaluators and/or

peers, areas for professional growth can be more easily identified and targeted. From an economical perspective, administrators can more strategically allocate resources for professional development that align with the identified needs for improving instructional practices.

In addition to focused professional development opportunities, districts may also be able to establish a library of videotaped lessons that can be utilized on a larger scale for lesson studies by groups of teachers. While this may involve setting up guidelines and procedures for obtaining permission for use beyond the observation process, the concept of lesson studies in this manner can provide authentic collaborative professional learning opportunities at a low cost. The use of protocols for studying student learning could be applied to the videotaped lessons as a way for groups of teachers to collaborate to improve student learning. This is a practice already established in Illinois as a part of the teacher licensure process (Bradley, 2017). This customization of professional development increases the relevance and value related to the training and will be more likely to improve teacher performance (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

In addition to an increased value related to professional development planning, a shift to a videotaped observation model also implies a more efficient and effective use of administrator time as the instructional leaders. The Center for Education Policy Research (2016) indicated that evaluators reported shifts in observation-related duties that led to more productive use of their time. Administrators spent less time on paperwork no longer needing to generate scripted notes for teacher review and the ability to view videotapes during quieter times outside of the instructional day.

## **Political Analysis**

The political implications for the current formal observation structure were thoroughly discussed in the program evaluation from Century School District (Brownlow, 2016). The nature of the positional power of the administrator in the context of a formal observation structure that is perceived as a focal point of a summative evaluation rating has led to perceptions of high stakes and anxiety for teachers that diminish the value of the experience as one that promotes professional growth. According to Danielson (2016), the inherent hierarchy in the relationship between teacher and principal is incompatible with the characteristics of an inquiry-based, reflective process that leads to continuous improvement. Danielson (2011) also discussed the intent of the Framework for Teaching that provides the levels of performance related to professional practice as one that was to support the development of reflective practitioners and serve as a continuum by which teachers and administrators could work together to set goals for professional growth.

The idea of shifting the formal observation to a structure that promotes ownership for teachers and collaboration focused on continuous improvement supports the intent of the development of standards for professional practice for teachers. Danielson's Framework for Teaching was first published in 1996, long before it became a focus of evaluative practices. Initially, the intended primary use and what she describes on her website as its most important was for teacher self-assessment and reflection (Danielson, n.d.). Danielson goes on to share that in recent years, with the new emphasis on teaching evaluation, she prefers that the framework be utilized versus the alternative of a not well researched platform. She also states that she does

not necessarily approve of every evaluation system developed using the framework, particularly if it is perceived as being done to teachers, rather than in collaboration with them. A videotaped formal observation experience could provide a more collaborative platform that supports use of the framework for evaluation purposes. Essentially, a videotaped experience levels the playing field and reduces the power hierarchy that exists in the current structure where the administrator drives the process (Brownlow, 2016, 2017).

### **Social Analysis**

The perceived stakes of the formal observation in the teacher evaluation process often results in high levels of anxiety for teachers (Brownlow, 2016). Additionally, it was noted in the program evaluation conducted by Brownlow (2016) that trust plays a large role in whether or not the experience will be perceived as authentic. Climate and culture can greatly impact the effectiveness of the observation process given the need for a high degree of trust of the process to be valued. Since videotaping the formal observation removes the subjectivity of the observer in the process, this more objective approach may have a larger impact on improving teaching and learning. The formal observation process becomes more valuable when it can be viewed objectively in the absence of established trust between

teacher and administrator. As addressed in the change model (Brownlow, 2017), videotaping can in fact lead to greater trust and improved culture and climate in schools. There is a body of research that indicates that positive school climate and greater trust in schools leads to improved teaching and learning outcomes for students. In her work, Drago-Severson (2009) commented on the environmental support required to develop a culture and climate of professional growth embedded in reflection. The argument is that this type of culture will decrease isolation, improve leadership, facilitate learning and growth, and enhance student learning.

### **Moral/Ethical Analysis**

Given that much of the evidence for teacher evaluation comes from observation of professional practice, the structures and processes by which evidence is collected have moral and ethical implications when assigning an overall rating to a teacher. The standards for professional practice that have been adopted in the state of Illinois took one step towards creating a more ethical process that identifies more objective standards for professional practice against which teacher performance can be measured. However, the implementation of those standards still gives pause to the process by which evaluators are documenting evidence to determine evaluation ratings. Given the only record of a formal observation are the notes an evaluator takes for



the purposes of gathering evidence, it could be argued that the process is biased based on a lack of trust depending on the nature of the perceived relationship between the teacher and evaluator. Creating a more collaborative framework with the teacher driving the reflections related to the formal observation experience will reduce the perceived positional power of the administrator and help foster the trust between teacher and supervisor (Danielson, 2016; Marshall, 2005; Mercado & Baecher, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013; Ness, 1980). This may result in minimizing challenges to the overall evaluation ratings evaluators assign to teachers supporting an overall more ethical approach to the process.

An unbiased approach to teacher evaluation is critical in increasing the value placed on the formal observation process, particularly with its potential impact on improving teaching and learning. Going beyond the simple premise that the videotaped experience provides that unbiased lens through which to examine teacher practice, it has been argued that teacher effectiveness is one of the most important factors in improving student achievement (Weisberg et al., 2009). To develop and support high quality teachers, it requires a district commitment to continuous improvement through ongoing, high quality, authentic professional learning experiences for teachers (Danielson, 2016). A videotaped model for the formal

observation supports the development of high quality teachers by its impact on improving teacher practice. It accomplishes this through a more valued evaluation experience that supports better allocation of resources, contributes to developing a more positive school culture and climate and helps to build trusting relationships among all staff. Successful school districts are built on these moral and ethical principles as their foundation.

## **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

### **Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the recommended change to Illinois Administrative Code 50 (2015) is to provide flexibility in the structure of the formal observation process within the teacher evaluation system. As a profession, our teachers deserve a high quality approach to evaluation and feedback that ultimately supports improved professional practice and student learning. The current definition of the formal observation limits the system in creating a platform that promotes teacher ownership in support of developing reflective practitioners, which ultimately may lead to improved performance across the system (Brownlow, 2016, 2017). If this goal were realized, the approach to formal observations will allow for methods of examining practice that are meaningful to the practitioner. An immediate consideration would be to allow for a videotaped experience in place of an in-person observation as dictated in the current code language. In the broader scheme of teacher evaluation practices, reflecting on structures that lead to improved teacher and student performance may lead to other opportunities for reflecting on the components of the system to be sure the emphasis is on areas that lead to improved student learning.

One objective related to the goal of providing a higher quality observation experience for teachers includes improved effectiveness of administrators as instructional leaders in the teacher evaluation process. In examining literature reviewed (Connally & Tooley, 2016; Danielson, 2011, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marshall, 2005; Myung & Martinez, 2013; Ness, 1980; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2012) and the data collected on teacher perceptions of the teacher evaluation system from my research (Brownlow,

2016), it was evident that teachers do not value the current experience as a vehicle for supporting professional growth. The stress and anxiety related to the current administrator-driven process leaves teachers feeling vulnerable and not willing to take risks in discussing areas for improving practice. Rather, the formal observation experience becomes something of an event where there is judgment being passed on a teacher's value to the system that is complicated by the bias the observer brings to the experience (Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindenhurst, 2014).

In a study by The Brookings Institute (Whitehurst et al., 2014), it was concluded that teacher observation scores were heavily influenced by the evaluator's preconceived perceptions about a teacher's effectiveness. The familiarity and dispositions administrators had towards teachers impacted observation scores, raising questions of validity and reliability of those scores as a reflection of performance observed. In order to minimize the this relationship bias, one recommendation from the study is to develop a system where there are multiple observations with at least one of those observations to be conducted by someone from outside the school organization who was trained in observation techniques. While this is one way to level the playing field, the teacher still must rely on the notes and ability of the observer to capture a comprehensive view of the instructional experience to identify opportunities for improving instruction. The videotaped observation is a model that directly addressed the issue of bias, minimizing the subjectivity that may play a role in the notes and comments from an in-person observation. Since teacher and evaluator both have access to the videotape, evidence related to suggestions for improvement can be viewed together at the time of the post conference. Having the added value of the video provides concrete evidence for teachers

and administrators to reference in support of the reflections shared at a post conference. By reviewing the video together, bias by any observer within or outside of the system is minimized. The use of the videotape as the basis for the observation conference conversation also allows the administrator to take on a coaching role in that process. This shifts the conversation from one of judgment to one of continuous improvement (Brownlow, 2017). The observation experience now has value for the educator and is viewed as effective in supporting professional growth.

In addition to improving instructional leadership for administrators, the goal of a more flexible observation model is to promote a higher level of professional growth for teachers through a lens of developing them into reflective practitioners. Research (Archer et al., 2015; Aseltine et al., 2006; Danielson, 2016; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2012) finds evidence pointing to the impact of teachers as reflective practitioners on improving student learning. The notion of videotapes as a tool for building reflective skills is not new. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has been utilizing videotaped instructional experiences to improve teaching and learning since 1987. There are several research briefs and reports that can be found on the NBPTS website that discuss the impact videotaping has on improving instruction. The evidence from the studies has demonstrated that National Board Certified Teachers are more effective in improving student learning (NBPTS, n.d.). Several additional researchers identify videotaped experiences used for teacher reflection as a valuable tool for improving teacher practice. (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Orlova, 2009; Pellegrino & Gerber, 2012; Rich & Hannafin, 2009).

As a twice-National Board Certified Teacher (1999, 2009), I experienced the power of analyzing videotaped instructional experiences in my own classrooms. Knowing that the opportunities for teachers to be observed and receive feedback or coaching related to instruction are few, creating a culture where videotaped experiences become the norm may open up the opportunity for ongoing, authentic reflective experiences for teachers, even beyond the context of a formal observation. The advocacy for the flexibility of the formal observation model has great potential for achieving multiple objectives related to the improvement of teaching and learning.

### **Stakeholder Needs, Values, Preferences and Benefits**

The primary stakeholders impacted by this policy advocacy are teachers, administrators and students. In addition to the primary stakeholders, there is benefit to the wider school community, including parents and community members since the ultimate goal of this policy change is improved teaching and learning. In the report out of Harvard University (2015a), the outcomes from videotaped observations resulted in many benefits to teachers and administrators. The treatment group of teachers engaging in the videotaped observation experience reported that it led to greater awareness of the impact of their own instruction by teachers, perceptions of higher levels of support for improving performance and less bias in feedback from administrators. Administrators in the treatment group reported the positive impact on the increased time they had to spend out in classrooms and the reduced time spent on paperwork. It was also noted the flexibility the videotaping allowed for viewing it during quieter times when they were able to fully focus on watching it. As teachers became more aware of their instruction, it was also

reported that they became more self-critical. These reflective behaviors support improved instructional practices that ultimately benefit students.

In any teacher evaluation system, the intent is for the process to improve instruction, which ultimately improves student achievement. The literature review for my program evaluation (Brownlow, 2016) heavily emphasized the role of teacher evaluation in improving instruction. The Performance Evaluation Review Act (2010) that redefined the teacher evaluation process in Illinois emphasized the addition of student growth measures as a component in measuring teacher performance. This addition was intended to link teacher performance with student achievement to determine a teacher's performance rating. In Illinois, it is common for the success of a school district to be measured by its student achievement. Schools receive published rankings in the media based on the student performance reflected on their school report cards. While there are indicators for school environment, educator and student demographics and highlights of schools, the first listed indicator and the one most often reported in the media is that of academic performance. In examining websites on school rankings including [www.niche.com](http://www.niche.com), [www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com) and [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org), all emphasized student test scores as the major component of the rating ranging from 47 to 100 percent of the overall score. Thus, if a policy change in the formal observation will result in improved teaching and learning leading to greater student success, then ultimately the entire system benefits.

Given the potential impact to the system, the idea of restructuring the definition of the formal observation from its current construct in Illinois Administrative Code 50 (2015) is policy change worth pursuing. The benefits to a school system including

improved context, culture, conditions and competencies outlined in my change plan (Brownlow, 2017) are evidence of validity in this policy advocacy proposal. These changes support the idea of advocating for a system that has the best interest of the students it serves at the heart of its work.



## **SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT**

### **Pros**

This policy advocacy has identified several pros in support of the recommended changes in the discussion of stakeholder benefits. In addition to those stated benefits, there are additional pros to reconstructing the definition of the formal observation. The idea of creating a teacher evaluation model that increases its value and impact on improving teaching and learning is a benefit that is not to be underestimated. The new evidence based funding model in the state of Illinois includes adequacy targets that support the success of its systems. These targets come largely from the work of Odden and Picus (2014) and their work on policy as it relates to school finance. As part of that model, high leverage strategies for schools are identified based on the work of Odden (2012) on improving student learning when budgets are tight. One of those recommendations identifies the employment of instructional specialists (or what can be described as coaches) as a key factor for supporting student success. Given this recommendation, if our system of teacher evaluation can become one where the observation process will be perceived as a valuable mechanism for promoting professional growth, we can capitalize on that opportunity in systems where the cost of added personnel for coaching is not a priority.

An additional argument in support of redefining the definition of the formal observation is the opportunity to develop a structure for increased collaboration around improving practice. In Odden's (2012) model, teacher collaboration was another factor identified as having a high correlation to improved student learning. The videotaped observation not only serves as a mechanism for the formal observation process, but it

may also provide a natural opportunity as a mechanism for teachers to collaborate and engage in discussions focused on improving student learning. These pros coupled with the benefits addressed with respect to the stakeholder impact provide some compelling reasons to consider the change in current policy around the formal observation process.

### **Cons**

With any potential change in policy, it is important to consider barriers or unintended consequences that may result from the change. With respect to the change in structure of the formal observation, a potential barrier that arose in the research was the issue of permanency of a videotaped observation. In the Harvard Center for Educational Policy study (2015a), it was noted that videotaping may create insecurities for teachers related to who might view the tape, how it will be stored and their own apprehensions related to never having watched themselves on videotape. In response to this potential barrier, there should be some attention given to creating a safe environment for teachers in the implementation of this approach.

Another con related to videotaped observations is the issue of student privacy. Parents may have concerns about the use of videotaping in relationship to the privacy of their children. The Harvard (2015a) report recommended that student participation be voluntary and dependent on parent consent. Even with clear communication and additional measure to protect student privacy (i.e. the blurring of faces), there is a chance that lack of parental consent could be an obstacle to the videotaped alternative. Thus, the need to remain flexible in the definition of the formal observation to still allow for the in-person alternative.

One other potential barrier raised by administrators when sharing the idea of a videotaped observation experience is the perceived limitations administrators may have about the videotape being able to capture all of the student interactions and behaviors across the classroom. While this perspective is understood, there are ways to minimize this concern. The idea that administrators will have more opportunities to informally visit classrooms will allow them to observe more ongoing interactions between teachers and students. Anything not captured in a videotaped lesson may still be observable in informal observation visits. Another consideration for capturing a broader view of the lesson is the investment in new video technology that provides a more comprehensive view of the instruction. There are systems that utilize several microphones placed strategically throughout the room to capture student engagement and responses during the lesson. In viewing the videotaped lesson the observer has the ability to raise and lower different tracks to listen to the interactions teacher to student and student to student. While this technology provides this capability and may address the barrier as outlined, it also may create an additional con based upon the cost of such technology and a district's fiscal constraints.

These barriers or challenges are real with respect to the shift in the formal observation model. However, based on the benefits and the improvements this model implies, the cost-benefit analysis may be worth what it might take to overcome the related challenges.

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The realization of change as a result of new policy is only as effective as its implementation plan and process. Often times, policy reform is initiated in the absence of a well-constructed plan for implementation which can lead to unintended consequences and a lack of support for the proposed changes, particularly when there are historical perceptions of disconnect between entities responsible for policy development and those responsible for implementation. This is a classic concern in the educational arena as noted by Odden (1991). Teacher evaluation has gone through major revisions in the last five years in the state of Illinois. As such, even a minor change to the current structure has the potential to cause consternation and raise anxiety, even if intended as a mechanism to improve the process. An implementation plan that outlines the educational needs, professional development recommendations and on going monitoring of its success must be clearly communicated in the context of time and money, two parameters that are often barriers in operationalizing new initiatives (Odden, 1991, 2012).

### **Educational Needs and Implications**

In advocating for a change in the definition of the formal observation as a component of teacher evaluation, it will be important to establish that the suggested policy change is being recommended as an enhancement to the current process that will provide more flexibility, rather than a completely divergent approach to what already exists. For the purposes of this policy advocacy document, the recommended change is to broaden the current definition of the formal observation that exists in Illinois Administrative Code (2015) language. It will be important to note that this recommendation is not to replace the current language, but to broaden it and allow more

flexibility for professionals to pursue a meaningful experience that will result in improved teaching and learning for teachers and students. In addition to addressing the needs of the educators, this policy will require educating parent and student stakeholders to address privacy concerns that may arise from the use of videotape in the classroom setting. There are governance implications for implementation of such a policy change at the state level and operational implications for implementation at the district level. Before implementation, a district will need to consider the educational needs related to the following: Building understanding of the rationale for the proposed change; the capacity of staff to engage in reflective practice through the use of videotapes; and the safeguards to be established in relationship to protecting student privacy when conducting videotaped observations.

As part of educating stakeholders on the significance of such a change, it will be important at a state level to share the research regarding perceptions of teachers and administrators with respect to the traditional nature of the current formal observation (Brownlow, 2016) with districts to provide a rationale for a more flexible definition within the evaluation model. In addition to educating stakeholders on the need for improving the current structure, it will also be pertinent for state level administrators to share potential benefits that may be realized by the expansion of the definition to include the option for a videotaped observation experience in place of an in-person formal observation (Brownlow, 2017). In the case of teacher evaluations, the state might consider the development of a policy governance document that provides the background and rationale for broadening the definition of the formal observation. A context for the

research and the benefits of the use of videotaped observation can be provided as background information related to the policy change in such a document.

Once the understanding is built for the recommended change, the Illinois State Board of Education needs to evaluate the readiness of school districts to embrace this change. Harvard University's Center for Educational Policy Research (2015b) developed a toolkit for the implementation of using videotape for the purposes of classroom observations. The recommendations from this research are helpful in outlining the educational needs and professional development plans necessary for a successful implementation of policy change.

The transition to a model that allows for a videotaped alternative requires a level of readiness by districts to embrace the change. It is necessary for schools to have the knowledge and expertise to execute a videotaped observation experience and that teachers and administrators understand how to engage in reflective protocols in analyzing the instruction through the use of videotape. This model also requires a safe school environment built on trust, where teachers are encouraged to take risks. It also requires the administrators' understanding that allowing the teachers to choose the videotaped experience for the purposes of instructional analysis does not compromise the authenticity of the process (Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, 2015a).

In conjunction with educating teachers and evaluators in this process, attention also needs to be given to parents and students as stakeholders. Parent communication will be key in the implementation of video observations. Districts will need to have a clear plan of communication with respect to the topic of protecting student privacy by

addressing the purpose of the videotaping, how the video observations will be used and being sure that there is an understanding that student participation in the videotaped observation experiences is voluntary. Taking into consideration an individual district's context will be of primary importance in determining what other considerations may be necessary to provide assurances around meeting the expectations of district stakeholders relative to the student privacy concerns (Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, 2015a).

Given the student privacy issues, the state and districts need to consider how the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974) plays a role in the use of videotaped observations. FERPA governs the protections of student records and classroom observations are deemed student records. If students can be identified in the context of the videotaped observations, then FERPA applies and consent forms will be necessary. Those consent forms should outline the security measures taken to protect the privacy of students (Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, 2015a). For the sake of consistency, it is recommended that the state consider developing a consent form template that can be personalized for use by individual districts. A consistent form at the state level will provide a level of assurance that districts are accountable for considering the legal implications for the policy change.

There is a second governing act known as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) that is a regulation set forth by the Federal Trade Commission (2013). This act is intended to prevent outside web based operators from collecting personal information from children under thirteen years of age. It also provides guidance for web site owners on how to protect the privacy of children and promote safety. While

classroom observations are uploaded by teachers and not specifically under the governance of COPPA, the regulations should not be ignored with respect to the storage of videotaped observations, particularly if a district is going to elect a cloud based platform. Since the technology platform is determined at the district level, this will be an important district consideration and something that should be reviewed with the legal team providing guidance to the district.

As districts consider the student privacy needs, these will play a role in the technology platform they select for the purposes of videotaped observations. Districts need to be mindful that the technology platform identified will not add stress to the system, but will be a tool to support the process. The video system a district selects must be compatible with its personnel, fiscal and technological structures and readiness for implementation (Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, 2015b). The state has the potential to play a role in supporting districts with the fiscal implications related to acquiring technology for the purposes of classroom observations. There are a variety of options in the scope of video technology and a range of costs associated with those options. At a state level, there is a recommendation that the use of federal grant dollars be considered as an option for districts with fiscal limitations. Title IIA grant dollars are specifically dedicated to preparing, training and recruiting high quality teachers and principals (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). Given the research on the way videotaped observations can improve teaching and learning (Brownlow 2017), this funding structure appears relevant. Districts will need a technology solution that can support a videotaped observation model and allowing Title IIA funds to be dedicated to supporting this initiative is recommended for consideration.



## **Professional Development for Successful Implementation**

Once the educational context is established, the plan for a successful implementation requires support and training for all stakeholders in the process including teachers, evaluators, parents and students. Considerations for specific plans will be dependent on each district's context. However, there are general guidelines that can be established from the research that came out of the 2015 *Best Foot Forward* toolkit for video classroom observations.

Teachers will be asked to self-reflect in the context of a videotaped observation to empower them in taking ownership of the post observation conference. As part of that ownership, teachers will lead the discussion supporting their development as reflective practitioners. While videotaped lessons remove various challenges that come with in-person observations including challenges that are often presented without context, being able to diagnose the underlying cause for student actions or reactions in a lesson and the reliance on memory in recalling the details of a lesson, without a structure to focus the reflection, teachers may default to less productive responses when watching their own lessons on tape (Kane et al., 2015).

The *Best Foot Forward* toolkit (Kane et al., 2015) cautions against responses that may compromise implementation of a videotaped observation model in the absence of appropriate support for teachers. Without a structured protocol for viewing the tape, teachers may feel overwhelmed and have difficulty focusing in on the more significant instructional exchanges within a lesson. Teachers striving to be their best are often harder on themselves in their reflections than any outside evaluator observing. Thus, in watching themselves on tape, teachers may tend to focus on the minutia, rather than taking a step

back to examine the bigger implications of the instructional experience. Teachers new to videotaping may also tend to focus on their own behaviors rather than the responses and reactions of the students, which needs to be the lens through which the teacher is reflecting. As a result, teachers need training in the use of a structured protocol (analysis tool or rubric) to help funnel the focus of the reflection to key student and teacher interactions. One way to build capacity prior to implementing the videotapes for observation and evaluation is to provide a professional development platform that allows for the analysis of video as a collaborative professional learning experience for improving instruction.

With respect to administrators, replacing in-person observations with a videotaped experience does not negate the need for ongoing administrative training and support in evaluating high quality instruction. Illinois currently has mechanisms in place for training administrators in the collection of evidence as it pertains to formal and informal observations. These protocols remain an important component in helping administrators to also focus on the key interactions between teachers and students in a classroom observation. Administrators would be advised to view the videotape through the same structured protocol lens that the teacher applies to the reflective process. This will provide a common framework for the post conference when the teacher shares reflections of the instruction and its impact on the students. In order to generate these common understandings, the recommendation is that teachers and evaluators are trained together so to maximize the effectiveness and opportunities for continuous improvement for all stakeholders involved. Identifying lead practitioners within the system to establish a train the trainer model will also support a sustainable implementation (Kane et al., 2015).

In conjunction with training current administrators in the use of videotape as a tool for promoting reflective practice and professional growth, current principal preparation programs should consider the addition of this type of professional development as part of the university coursework requirements. The use of Darling-Hammond's (2013) work on performance based assessment, coupled with the work of Charlotte Danielson (2016) around how to talk about teaching can provide a framework for principal candidates in the use of videotaped observations as a catalyst for collaborative, coaching conversations that shifts the ownership for learning to teachers, just as we ask teachers to shift ownership for learning to students as a standard of professional practice (Danielson, 2011).

In addition to the training in reflection and analysis, the toolkit (Kane et al., 2015) also highlighted the need for support in the technical aspects of videotaping observations. For this phase of the professional development, additional technology support personnel will also become a part of the training. Districts will need to identify the personnel that may best be suited for managing the technical logistics related to videotaping observations. The personnel identified for these roles should build knowledge and capacity to manage any of the components affiliated with hardware, software and infrastructure that will support a smooth videotape experience for the practitioners. This will require technical training from vendors to create in-house experts on the use of equipment. The staff trained in this capacity may also facilitate training and create process cheat sheets for the users of the technology to support them when viewing the recordings on their own.

While parents and students do not require formal technical training with respect to the use of the videotaping, they still need to be educated and informed. As mentioned previously, parents need to receive a general overview of the rationale and purpose for videotaping in the classroom as a tool for improving instruction. Student data privacy policies need to govern the approach that each district takes with the use of videotaping. The precautions taken to protect the privacy of students must be addressed in the communication with parents. It is also recommended that communication with parents is transparent and emphasizes parental consent as a part of the process. For students, there is always the initial distraction that comes with the novelty of video cameras in the classroom. So, it is worthy of some conversation about the nature and purpose of the videotaped lessons. As noted in a 2010 study by World Bank, students that were distracted at the onset of the lesson soon took no notice of it as the lesson continued. In a series of consecutively videotaped lessons the effect of a camera in the classroom became unnoticeable.

The advocacy for a change in the definition of the formal observation does not suggest that in-person observations should not remain an option. Therefore, if the policy were to allow for the option of videotaping, districts might consider phases of implementation after all of the recommended training is completed. One option would be to implement the peer collaboration model with the use of videotaped lessons as an initial phase of implementation. This provides time for teachers to become comfortable with the logistical aspects of videotaping and the use of a structured protocol of analyzing instruction through self-reflection. Another way to phase in implementation is to begin with only a small number of teacher volunteers to serve as the pilot group for videotaped

observation experiences as a coaching experience, rather than for evaluative purposes. This model provides the opportunity to work out any unforeseen challenges in the implementation of a videotaped experience prior to implementation in the higher stakes evaluation process. Whatever route a district takes, careful planning for training and support are imperative to the policy's implementation.

### **Timeline for Implementation**

As models for implementation were discussed in the context of the professional development, a timeline for implementation will need to be considered based on the steps for implementation. Once the policy is in place, the rollout needs to be methodical and thoughtful to lead to a successful implementation. At the state level, guiding documents can be developed that provide the structure for implementation. As with other initiatives related to curriculum and instruction, the state can take the approach of creating training modules that support the shift to a more flexible model for the formal observation process. The modules should address building background knowledge around the research and rationale for videotaped observations, the structures for analysis and reflection with a menu of various protocols and guiding parameters for the technical aspects and considerations related to the videotaping of classroom observations. With the state providing the umbrella with an implementation guide, districts can plan locally for their next steps in making the transition.

Initially, districts will need to determine a schedule for training on the process elements of using videotaped observations for reflection and on the logistics related to the technical aspects of videotaping. In the first phase of implementation, districts should establish a timeline for identifying and selecting the technology that is best matched to

their context. This includes examination of hardware and software packages, as well as the capability of the infrastructure to support the platform. Once the district identifies the technology best suited to their needs, there should be a plan to pilot the use of that technology to address any unexpected glitches or barriers that need to be addressed prior to implementation (Kane et al., 2015).

In Century School District, we prefer to roll out new processes at the start of the school year. Once the school year begins, the distractions of the complexity of school environments complicate the ability to focus on anything new. Districts with this mindset are advised to vet the technology well in advance of the start of a new school year, possibly even in the second half of the year prior to the planned implementation. Once the technology is vetted and determined, the timeline for staff training can be developed. In Century School District, any new initiative or process is typically piloted or tested with a group of volunteers. Since the policy in this case leaves flexibility for in-person observations with videotaped observations as an additional option, once trained the district could look to volunteers to begin implementation on a small scale. Another possibility for rolling out the process is to pilot the experience with a small group of teachers. For those volunteers, the district could enter into an agreement that no formal evidence from the videotaped observation will be included in the evaluation documentation for that pilot group of teachers. In any scenario, the training for the use of protocols and the logistics of videotaping should be embedded in a professional development plan over the course of a school year. Given the limited time districts may have for large scale training, it is important to allocate the time for teachers to learn how the various components of the process work together to support their professional growth.

This kind of implementation may be best supported with a yearlong professional development plan prior to formal implementation. Training over the course of a school year also allows time for checks and balances in monitoring progress towards implementation.

### **Program Budgets**

The shift in the definition of the formal observation model has budget implications at the district level in the areas of professional development, policy development and technology. There is a training component that will be necessary with respect to the use of videotape for reflection and the structured protocols outlined in the implementation plan. The training involves personnel costs and will have the largest impact on budget planning. Since there are privacy related issues, there will likely be an initial cost for school district attorneys to review the policy language related to the protection of student privacy and appropriate use policies. In addition to training and policy development, districts will need to identify a technology platform that will support the videotape model and cost out the various functions related to that platform to budget appropriately.

New initiatives require appropriate training and support for successful implementation. Without proper professional development, shifts in the system that directly impact teachers and students can lead to failure. In the professional development plan, the teacher and administrator training recommendation have cost implications. Time needs to be set aside for training on the reflection protocols and post conference conversation framework, as well as time for training on the technical aspects of videotaping a lesson. The training on reflective protocols can be reasonable accomplished

in one full day for teachers and administrators. It will be important that teachers and administrators are present together for that training. When questions arise, it is important that when addressed everyone hears the same message at the same time. This can minimize inconsistencies in implementation by teachers and administrator in different buildings across the district. Since this policy has high stakes implications as it relates to teacher evaluation, the importance of a consistent application of the model is critical with respect to the district's evaluation of teachers. Depending on the district structure, the number of days might vary.

Using Century School District as a model, the district is comprised of four early childhood or kindergarten through fifth grade buildings and one middle school, housing grades six through eight. Training the entire district at once would encompass more than 150 certified staff members and eight administrators. The group size may present limitations for addressing the potential questions that may arise with the depth that may be necessary. To keep the training manageable and still preserve the integrity of the message, it is reasonable to divide the training by certified staff with similar roles and those evaluators assigned to them. In Century School District, that implies that all of the elementary buildings and those evaluators train on one day and the middle school staff and their evaluators train on a second day. When dividing trainings in this way, the district will create a shared document that captures all questions and answers for review across levels. After the trainings occur, the administrative team reviews the questions and answers to be sure that all highlights are captured and consistent across the levels. In this model, for the purposes of formal observations, any evaluators that are responsible for observing teachers at elementary and middle school would be asked to attend both



trainings. In the case of Century School District, this includes the Director of Student Services and the Instructional Technology Coordinator.

In the implementation plan, it was suggested that the training happen at the start of a school year. Century School District has the ability to deliver this training on an existing Institute Day at the start of the school year. In districts where this time is not available, there may be the added cost of per diem pay to train on a summer day or after instructional hours during the start of the school year. Since this training is necessary and cannot be presented as optional, it may require a negotiated addendum to the teacher contract for additional professional day in the year of implementation. In Century School District, we had a similar training need to close some gaps in standards implementation and added two professional development days to the contract for a three-year period. It was agreed that those days are compensated as per-diem days. The cost for an additional day of additional training for elementary is estimated at \$41,364.00 and the cost for an additional day of training at the middle school is estimated at \$19,533.00. The total personnel costs are estimated at \$60,897.00. Part of this cost could be offset by grant dollars as mentioned in the implementation planning, since Century School District is eligible for Title II funds.

A recommended text for all teachers and evaluators in the developing reflective protocols is *Focus on Teaching* by Jim Knight (2014). The reflective protocol guidelines developed for videotaped observations can be adapted from this work to meet a district's needs. In Century School District, it is our practice to provide each stakeholder a copy of the text from which protocols like this are developed. In estimating the cost of supplying each certified staff member and evaluator with a copy of this work as background for the

training, Century School District would require approximately 160 copies of the text at an estimated \$24.00 per copy. The total budget implication for this element of the implementation is \$3,840.00. In addition to the cost of face-to-face training, it is recommended that administrators have additional training in leading professional conversations. For this training, Charlotte Danielson's text entitled *Talk About Teaching* (2016) is recommended as a facilitated book study for all evaluators prior to model implementation. In Century School District, the cost of the text for the entire administrative team is estimated at \$406.00 at an estimated \$29.00 per text. This brings the total estimate for supplies and materials for training on the protocols for reflection to \$4,246.00.

The training in the use of the technology involves the technology support team and the teachers being videotaped regarding the operation of the equipment and the web-based or software platform involved. As part of my research during a program evaluation of the formal observation process (Brownlow, 2016), Century School District engaged in a pilot from Swivl, a company that manufactures video observation technology. The training related to the use of the equipment was completed on an individual basis upon implementation of a videotaped observation. The technology support staff and teachers were able to meet during existing planning time for the purposes of this training. Therefore, no additional cost was incurred for training teachers with the equipment. The vendor trained the technology staff on the use of the equipment also at no cost to the district. Depending on a district's structure for collaboration and planning and the negotiated contracts for certified staff, there may be budget implications for other districts related to the training for the operation of equipment.

In addition to professional development costs, a district has to anticipate the cost of legal review of the policy and procedures developed for this alternative model of formal observation. In Century School District, the cost of a review around policy and procedures is typically billable at \$250.00 per hour. For the purposes of this policy development and review, the cost estimate is based on a previous policy development and review related to student privacy. It is estimated that the district plan for eight billable hours to complete the work. The total cost to the district in estimated attorney fees is \$2,000.00.

The final budget implications are related to cost of the equipment to establish the capacity of the district to implement videotaped observations. There are a variety of options that can be explored. The *Best Foot Forward Observation Toolkit* (2015) provides guidance on selecting the best option for meeting a district's needs. It contains information related to components with recommended vendors and resources and gives guidance on how to evaluate alignment with the existing infrastructure in a district. Depending on the size of the district, the number of kits needed for effective implementation will vary.

Using Century School District as an example, the costs for the video equipment kits needed are outlined. Swivl (2017) offers a variety of packages for video kits. Each package includes the following components: A per user account fee for the video sharing platform; the Swivl robot for audio and video recording; and a floor stand for optimum positioning. It should be noted that Swivl assumes a district has access to devices with cameras that are compatible. Swivl currently has the capability to support Apple devices, Google devices (Chromebooks) and android devices. A single basic package with three

independent audio tracks costs out at an estimated \$948.00 without shipping and handling. In Century School District, the teachers and evaluators wanted to experiment with a more sophisticated package to capture a broader range of interactions between students and teacher to students. Century chose a more sophisticated package that captures five independent audio tracks and a wide-angle lens for broader views of the classroom. The estimated cost for the package with five audio tracks is \$1,277.00 per kit. If the district were to implement a district-wide videotape observation model, the administrative team determined the need for two kits for each of the two multi-section elementary schools, one kit each for the two single section elementary schools and three kits for the middle school. Since the district already owns devices compatible for camera access, there is only a cost associated with kits. The estimated total for the kits is \$11,493.00. In addition to the cost of the kits, there are user account fees to take into consideration. By purchasing a team administrator license for each building at \$250.00, the schools are able to manage other accounts and share robots for the cost of \$50.00 per user. For the purposes of Century School District, six team administrator licenses and a ten pro user licenses are required. The user account fees are annual and are estimated at \$2,000.00 per year for full implementation in Century School District. If budgets become more restrictive, the district might reduce the number of licenses per year and share the equipment among more staff or the district can investigate lower cost options for videotaping.

Once a district completes the training of existing personnel and establishes the technology platform, future budgeting will only need to encompass operation and maintenance of equipment based on any future repairs or replacement needed. Training

of new staff can be embedded in an induction program for teachers or completed as part of an orientation for new evaluators. The process the district establishes for monitoring the progress and effectiveness of the system will guide the efforts around sustainability of the model into the future.

### **Progress Monitoring**

The primary responsibility for monitoring the progress of the implementation plan falls locally at the district level. In Century School District, it will be the District Leadership Team that shares the accountability for monitoring the successful transition to a shift in the observation model. The building principals will have to monitor the shift in each of their respective schools. The district level administrators will be responsible for working collectively with the teacher leadership to solicit ongoing feedback related to the implementation to address any identified challenges that may occur along the way. The district is also responsible for monitoring the training mechanisms to be sure all staff are adequately prepared for the shift and supported should a teacher choose the option of videotaping an observation.

Principals will need to create a plan for identifying staff that wish to exercise a videotaped observation option for the formal observation and then develop an outline of how and when the videotaping will occur in each of the buildings. The principals will also need to work with the technology support staff to test the technical aspects of the implementation prior to teachers implementing the system for a formal observation that is intended to contribute to the teacher's overall summative evaluation. As part of the progress monitoring, principals will need to create a system for feedback mechanisms from staff engaging in the videotaped model to address any technical or operational

concerns that may emerge as the system is implemented. In the initial stages of implementation, the monitoring system should include mechanisms for substituting in-person observations for the videotaped experience if there are unexpected circumstances that compromise the integrity of the formal observation.

In order to create a plan for success, it is recommended that the buildings monitor the transition with voluntary observations that are not for the purposes teacher evaluation. By identifying staff that may be willing to videotape as a professional development experience, the technical aspects of the system can be tested prior to implementing for the purposes of high stakes teacher evaluation. Beyond the professional development volunteers, it is also prudent to identify teachers willing to pilot the system prior to full implementation (Kane et al., 2015). Executing the plan with a small group with reflection tools for evaluating the experience for teachers and administrators, the state and districts can set the system up for stronger success. For any new system to be successful, there must be avenues for monitoring the various aspects of the implementation process.

## SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

The formal observation is a component of a prescriptive teacher evaluation plan in the state of Illinois. To measure the effectiveness of the implementation of a videotaped formal observation model data collection tools will need to be identified that will support all stakeholders in maximizing the value of the videotaped observation model. Evaluating the implementation will help to determine if the system is enhancing professional growth and contributing to the development of more reflective practitioners. The *Best Foot Forward Toolkit* (2015) suggested three areas for assessing the success of the policy implementation. It will be important to assess professional growth for teachers, overall teacher and administrator satisfaction and the ease of use of the technology system selected. In Illinois, each school district is required to form a Joint Committee (23 Illinois Administrative Code 50) that oversees the teacher evaluation process and is a decision-making body that guides the processes at the local level. This group can evaluate formal and informal feedback related to the implementation of the videotaped model to evaluate its effectiveness.

A combination of survey data from teachers and administrators coupled with student growth data can provide indicators of success of the system over time. As teachers identify specific student behaviors or learning outcomes they are planning to address as a result of a videotaped observation, there is the opportunity to track improved student behavior or student learning in response to the planned improvements in instruction. This evidence can illustrate the impact of the videotaped observation on improving student learning. Evaluators can also assess the impact of the videotaped observation on professional growth by documenting evidence for specific elements of

professional practice that are identified as a focus for the teacher as a result of the videotaped observation.

In Century School District, the use of The Framework for Teaching rubric (Danielson, 2011) provides a concrete tool for documenting the growth of teachers based on reflective feedback discussed in the observation post conference. Specific elements from the framework captured on video and identified as areas for improving instructional practices can be tracked by teachers and administrators to provide evidence of growth on the part of teachers and students. Survey questions can also serve as mechanism for evaluating the videotaped process in comparison with the in-person observation. Questions can address the process as it relates to professional growth and learning for the teachers and overall satisfaction with the model from teachers and administrators. For the purposes of Century School District, a subset of teacher and administrator questions from my program evaluation (Brownlow, 2015) and my change model (Brownlow 2016) research can be reformatted as survey questions for the purposes of measuring teacher and administrator perceptions about the effectiveness of the videotaped model (Appendix A). The combination of data from surveys and anecdotal mechanisms such as the use of the framework in Century School District can support districts in assessing the success of the model implementation.

In addition to assessing the intended positive impact on improvement to instructional practices and student learning, the system needs to also assess the technical aspects of the model. Teachers and administrators may find value and improved instruction through the model, but if the technical and operational aspects of implementing the model are too cumbersome, it may be quickly abandoned. A proactive



assessment of the ease of use of the technology platform, the technical support available and needed for execution and the time involved in the operational aspects of videotaping will support a successful implementation of the model. If it is discovered that the system identified to execute the videotaping is not meeting the needs because of the complexities of operation, the district can respond by examining alternative technology platforms that may better support the process.

Any policy implementation plan requires an intentional assessment of its success. Often times, policy initiatives are not successful because they are implemented in a linear fashion, rather than in a cyclical framework, eliminating the assessment phase that may lead to refinement for sustained success (Haddad, 1995). The UNESCO framework for education policy planning outlines the importance of assessing policy as part of a cycle of to determine its effectiveness. If the assessment of the policy demonstrates that it is not achieving the desired results, it is important to determine whether adjustments are necessary to the policy itself or if it is the implementation process that resulted in the unexpected outcomes. If there are no identified obstacles with respect to implementation, then the policy itself must be examined to determine what adjustments might be considered to improve the outcomes. Haddad (1995) pointed out that the nature of change in the educational system is a constant given its link to societal influences and suggests that even a successful policy may require adjustments over time given those circumstances. In the absence of this cyclical approach to policy, educational history can often repeat itself. Haddad (1995) suggested policy analysis needs to be ongoing to affirm that results continue to support best practices.

## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY AND IMPACT STATEMENT**

In this work, I am advocating for a policy allowing a videotaped formal observation to be an identified alternative to the in-person observation component of the teacher evaluation plan in the state of Illinois. The purpose of this policy is to provide teachers and administrators with an observation platform that can provide a more meaningful professional growth experience for teachers contributing to the development of their skills as reflective practitioners leading to a greater impact on improved teaching and learning. Videotaped observations are demonstrated to positively impact teacher effectiveness and promote teacher ownership for improving instructional practices, ultimately leading to improved student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Bradley, 2017; Kane et al., 2015; Knight, 2014; NBPTS, n.d.; Orlova, 2009; Pellegrino & Gerber, 2012; Rich & Hannafin, 2009).

Videotaped observations are intended as an option for teachers in conjunction with the existing option for in-person observations as part of the teacher evaluation process in Illinois. Revising the definition as stated in Illinois Administrative Code 50 (p. 7) to allow for the videotaped alternative provides an opportunity for those teachers seeking a shared ownership and collaborative approach to improving their practices. It is acknowledged that not all teachers may feel comfortable with the concept of videotaping instruction, and therefore it is not recommended that the videotaped option replace the current in-person model for the formal observation. Rather, it is suggested that the policy language reflect the addition of a videotaped alternative to the formal observation as an option.

The impact of this shift in the language of the administrative code for teacher evaluation will yield positive benefits for teachers, administrators and students as outlined in this advocacy document. The research from the *Best Foot Forward Project Toolkit* (Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, 2015b) found that the videotaped observation process provided teachers with a more comprehensive look inside the classroom and led to greater perceived fairness and higher levels of satisfaction with the overall process and feedback.

The benefits of videotaping have the potential to exceed that of its role in an individual teacher's evaluation process. There is the potential for videotaped observations to become formal or informal component of a system's professional development platform once the capability exists and teachers see the value of sharing videotaped lesson for collaborative feedback or self-reflection as a way to improve instruction.

The Illinois State Board of Education has identified a Quality Framework for Illinois School Districts (2016) as a measure of school success and continuous improvement to be implemented as an assessment for school improvement in 2018. The framework is based on seven standards. Standard V in the framework is entitled *Educator and Employee Quality*. The outcome for this standard is stated as follows (p. 3), "In successful districts and schools, all personnel participate in processes of self-reflection, collaboration and evaluation that lead to professional growth and development in order to create and maintain a high-quality learning community." Considering the specific language implying the importance of self-reflection and collaboration for professional growth, this policy advocacy directly aligns with the mission to improve educator and employee quality as identified in the framework. If successfully implemented with

attention to the impact on all stakeholders and with the necessary planning and communication to be successful, the videotaped observation protocol has the potential to open many doors for improved teaching and learning across the state of Illinois.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Sample Teacher Survey Questions*

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation process is highly valuable in informing my instruction for professional growth.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation process provides feedback that improves my instructional practices.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation serves as a tool for promoting reflective practice.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
4. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation improves the quality of the post conference conversations regarding improved instruction.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
5. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation serves as a valuable tool for measuring my effectiveness.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree

### *Sample Administrator Survey Questions*

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation process is highly valuable in measuring effectiveness of instruction.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation process provides teachers with targeted support for improving instruction.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation promotes the development of teachers as reflective practitioners.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
4. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation improves the quality of the post conference conversations regarding improved instruction.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
5. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The videotaped observation supports professional growth for teachers.				
Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree