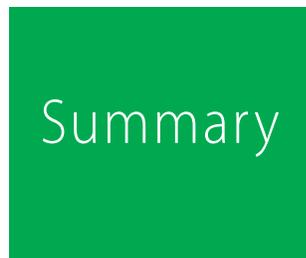




Examining district guidance to schools on teacher evaluation policies in the Midwest Region



Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

November 2007

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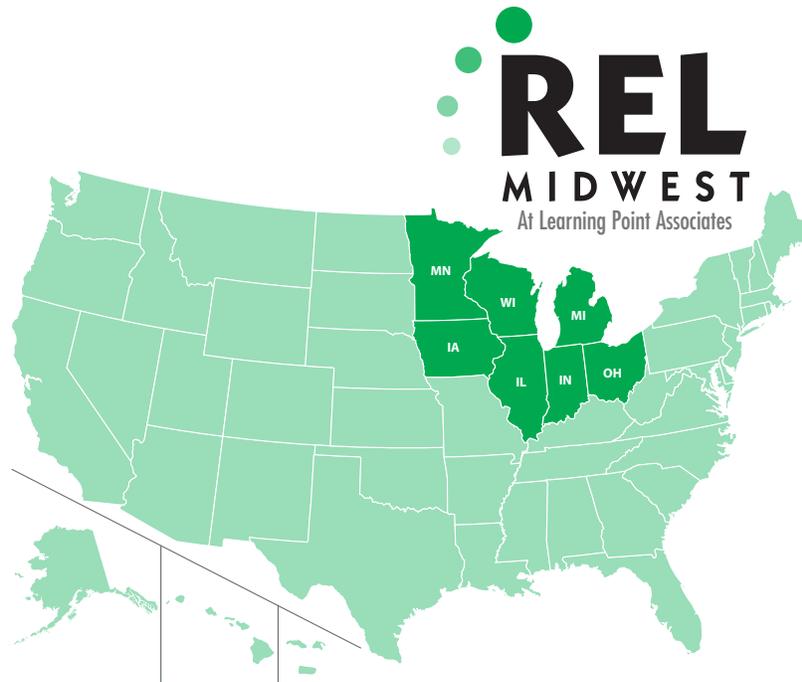
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Summary

Examining district guidance to schools on teacher evaluation policies in the Midwest Region

This descriptive study provides a snapshot of teacher evaluation policies across a demographically diverse sample of districts in the Midwest Region. It aims to lay the groundwork for further research and inform conversations about current policies at the local, district, and state levels.

Effective teaching is a cornerstone of education reform (Whitehurst, 2002) and is critical for student academic achievement. But teachers' abilities to promote student learning vary within and across schools (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2003; Nye, Konstantopolous, & Hedges, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Research finds that an important tool for improving teacher effectiveness is the teacher evaluation (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Howard & McColskey, 2001; Shinkfield & Stufflebean, 1995; Stronge, 1995). Federal highly qualified teacher requirements have led to a surge of state and local education agencies developing new systems to evaluate teachers.

But studies of evaluation policies and their influence on teacher practice are scarce

(Peterson, 2000), and the few that exist are usually descriptive, outdated, and leave many questions unanswered. For example,

- What does the landscape of teacher evaluation policy at the district level look like today?
- What can be learned about the policy process by examining district documents?

This study—which tries to answer these two questions—is the first systematic effort to describe evaluation policies across a demographically diverse sample of districts in the Midwest Region. School district policy for evaluating teachers varies widely across the region—both in the evaluation practices specified in the policy documents and in the details of the policy prescriptions.

This study examines district evaluation policy documents for evidence of 13 common teacher evaluation practices (Ellett & Garland, 1987; Loup, Garland, Ellett, & Rugutt, 1996). In general, district policy documents were more apt to specify the processes involved in teacher

evaluation (who conducts the evaluation, when, and how often) than they were to provide guidance for the content of the evaluation, the standards by which the evaluation would be conducted, or the use of the evaluation results. District policies also varied in how specific they were, though the tendency was to be less, rather than more, specific for the 13 evaluation practices examined. Two-thirds of the district teacher evaluation policy documents provided guidance for fewer than half of the 13 practices. No policies specified more than 10 evaluation practices, and nearly 16 percent reflected *none* of these practices. The most commonly referenced practice was how often evaluations are to be conducted (67 percent), followed by what evaluation tools are to be used (59 percent) and what methods are to be used (49 percent).

The study also finds that Midwest Region districts evaluate teachers primarily to help decide whether to retain or release new teachers. School principals and administrators do most of the evaluations and, at the district's direction, focus on beginning teachers. Beginning teachers are typically evaluated two or more times a year, and experienced teachers just once every two or three years. Several other patterns emerge from the findings:

- Many district policies distinguish between beginning and experienced teachers.
- Few policies spell out consequences for unsatisfactory evaluations.
- Few districts reference using resources or guidance to support evaluations.
- Most evaluations are summative reports used to support decisions about retaining teachers and granting tenure, rather than for professional development.
- Few district policies require evaluators to be trained.
- Vague terminology leaves evaluation policies open to interpretation.
- The specificity of policy and procedures varies across districts.

The report's findings lay the groundwork for additional research, identifying several questions that need further investigation:

- What is the role of state departments of education in the teacher evaluation process?
- How do policy variations affect teacher evaluation at the local level?
- What is the influence of district policy in evaluating beginning teachers, tenured teachers, and unsatisfactory teachers?
- What is the impact of different evaluation models and practices on teacher effectiveness?