



# *State* OF THE STATES **2015**

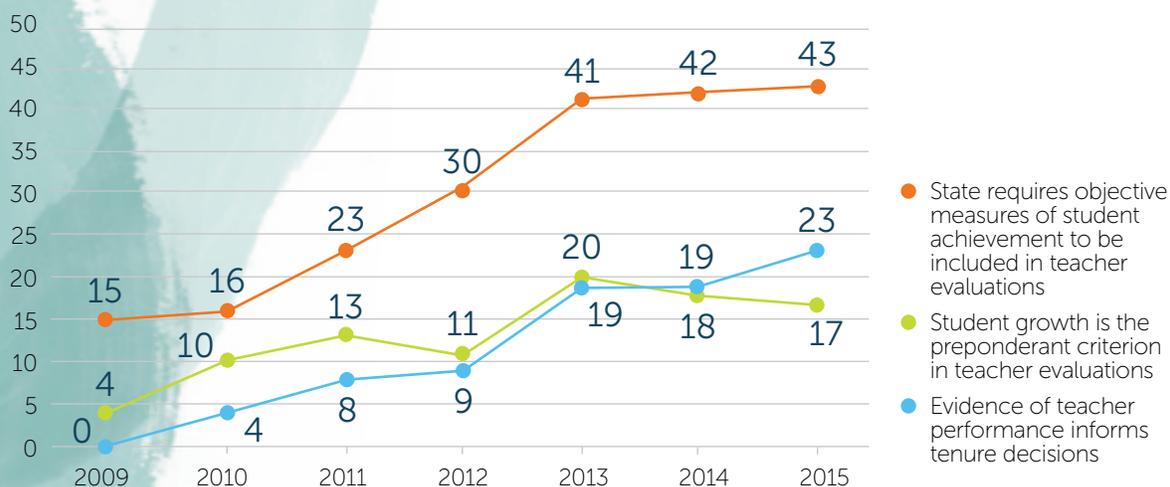
## *Evaluating* Teaching, Leading and Learning

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are at a crossroads in implementing measures of educator effectiveness in K-12 classrooms. While the vast majority of states require student growth and achievement to be factored into teacher and principal evaluations, most states and school districts are now grappling with the practical realities of implementing these policies.

In this report, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) presents the most comprehensive and up-to-date policy trends on how states are evaluating teachers. The report also breaks new ground by providing a look at the policy landscape on principal effectiveness. Finally, NCTQ continues to examine state efforts to connect the dots – that is, use the results of evaluations to better inform practice and make decisions of consequence for teachers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Figure A. Teacher effectiveness state policy trends (2009-2015)



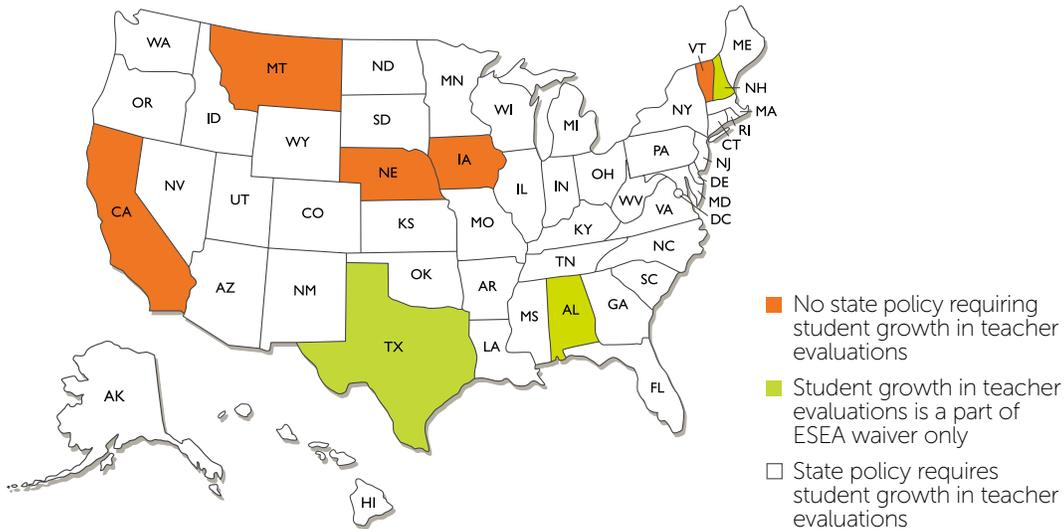
## Key Findings on Teacher Evaluation

### Performance-based teacher evaluations have a strong foothold in state policy.

Current sentiment seems to be that teacher evaluation is a fledgling enterprise. In many cases, states are transitioning to new student testing systems aligned with college- and career-readiness standards while at the same time diving deep into efforts to translate teacher effectiveness policy into practice. However, very few states are turning their backs on teacher effectiveness policy.

- In 2015, there are just five states – **California, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska** and **Vermont** – that still have no formal state policy requiring that teacher evaluations take objective measures of student achievement into account in evaluating teacher effectiveness.
- Only three states – **Alabama, New Hampshire** and **Texas** – have evaluation policies that exist only in waiver requests to the federal government.
- Since NCTQ’s 2013 *Connect the Dots* report, only three states previously recognized for having developed teacher effectiveness policies (**South Carolina, Utah** and **Wisconsin**) no longer appear to require student growth and achievement to be significant factors in teacher ratings.

Figure B. Teacher effectiveness policies: Waivers and state law



### The dramatic proliferation of state teacher evaluation policy has slowed, but of course this is largely because the vast majority of states already have laws on the books.

The state of the states on teacher evaluations remains strong. Twenty-seven states require annual evaluations for all teachers in 2015, compared to just 15 states in 2009, and 45 states now require annual evaluations for all new, probationary teachers. States continue to hold steady on using student growth as a critical measure of teacher effectiveness and tying evaluations of effectiveness to tenure and dismissal policies:



- 17 states include growth as the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations, up from only four states in 2009. An additional 18 states include growth measures as a “significant” criterion in teacher evaluations.<sup>1</sup>
- 23 states require that evidence of teacher performance be used in tenure decisions. No state had such a policy in 2009. And the majority of states (28) now articulate that ineffectiveness is grounds for teacher dismissal.

**There is a troubling pattern emerging across states with a track record of implementing new performance-based teacher evaluation systems. The vast majority of teachers – almost all – are identified as effective or highly effective.**

The critique of old evaluation systems was that the performance of 99 percent of teachers was rated satisfactory, regardless of student achievement. Some policymakers and reformers have naively assumed that because states and districts have adopted new evaluations, evaluation results will inevitably look much different. But that assumption continues to be proven incorrect. We think there are several factors contributing to the lack of differentiation of performance:

- Few states use multiple observations or multiple observers. In 11 states, multiple annual observations are required as part of all teacher evaluations. Another 27 states require multiple observations as part of some teacher evaluations. However, just four states – **Iowa, New Jersey, North Carolina** and **South Carolina** – require multiple evaluators.
- The use of student learning objectives/outcomes (SLOs) isn’t helping differentiate teacher performance. In 2015, 22 states require or allow the use of SLOs as measures of student growth for teacher evaluations. Nearly half the states that require SLOs (six of 14) require just one SLO and only nine of the 22 states that require or allow SLOs also require that the learning objectives are reviewed and approved.

**The simultaneous implementation of new college- and career-readiness assessments and teacher evaluations has been a significant challenge for states, but it shouldn’t become a roadblock.**

Implementing policies to hold teachers more accountable for results with students is a political challenge even under the best of circumstances. Adding to the challenge is that the unfortunate collision in timing of Common Core and similar standards and teacher evaluation policy has made allies of teacher unions and anti-testing crusaders who may have very different motives for protesting new college- and career-readiness assessments.

States clearly need to be sensitive to changes in testing regimes as they implement teacher evaluations. But there’s also a real downside for states that indulge critics by delaying implementation, adopting hold harmless policies or reducing the weight of student achievement in evaluations. These short-term public relations solutions reinforce the idea that there are a lot of immediate punitive consequences coming for teachers when performance-based evaluations are fully implemented, which is simply not the case. And they undermine the real purpose of these new evaluation systems: to provide teachers with the feedback they need to continue to grow and develop as professionals.

1 At the time of publication, Michigan’s governor was presented with legislation that, if signed, will result in growth being a significant, rather than preponderant, criterion in teacher evaluations. The number of states requiring student growth as the preponderant criterion would then be 16, and the number requiring it as a significant criterion would be 19.

## Key Findings on Principal Evaluation

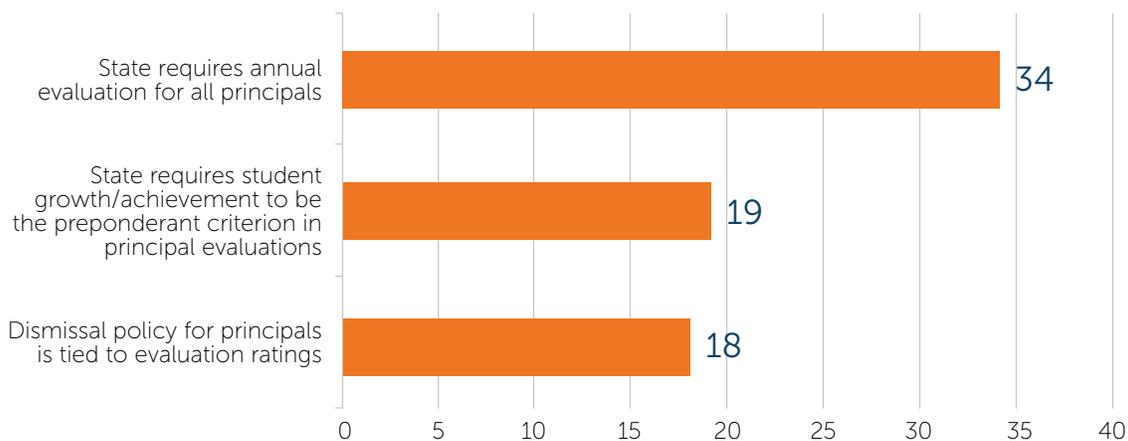
Over the last five years, almost every state that redesigned its teacher evaluations also put policy on the books to reform principal evaluations. It makes perfect sense. If classroom teachers are going to be held accountable for the performance of the students they teach, so too should school leaders be evaluated based on the academic growth of the students in their schools.

### In most states, principal evaluation is included under the same umbrella as teachers in evaluation law, regulations and policy.

This may be purposeful design to align policies but may also indicate that principal evaluation is an afterthought.

- 34 states require annual evaluations for all principals.
- 19 states require student achievement/growth to be the preponderant criterion in principal evaluations; 14 additional states require student growth to be significant in principal ratings.
- 11 states have evaluation systems for principals that are exactly the same as the requirements for teachers; 29 states have articulated principal evaluations that are discussed separately from teacher evaluations but the two policies appear to be virtually identical.

Figure C. State of the states: Principal evaluation policy



When it comes to state implementation of principal effectiveness policies, weaknesses become clearer. Almost no state in the nation clearly articulates that principals, who have primary responsibility for teacher evaluations, should be themselves evaluated on the quality and effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process in their schools. Only **New Jersey** stands out on this front, explicitly requiring that principals are rated on fulfilling their duties implementing teacher evaluations. Moreover:

- Principal evaluation policies in 22 states do not specify who is responsible for conducting evaluations of principal effectiveness.



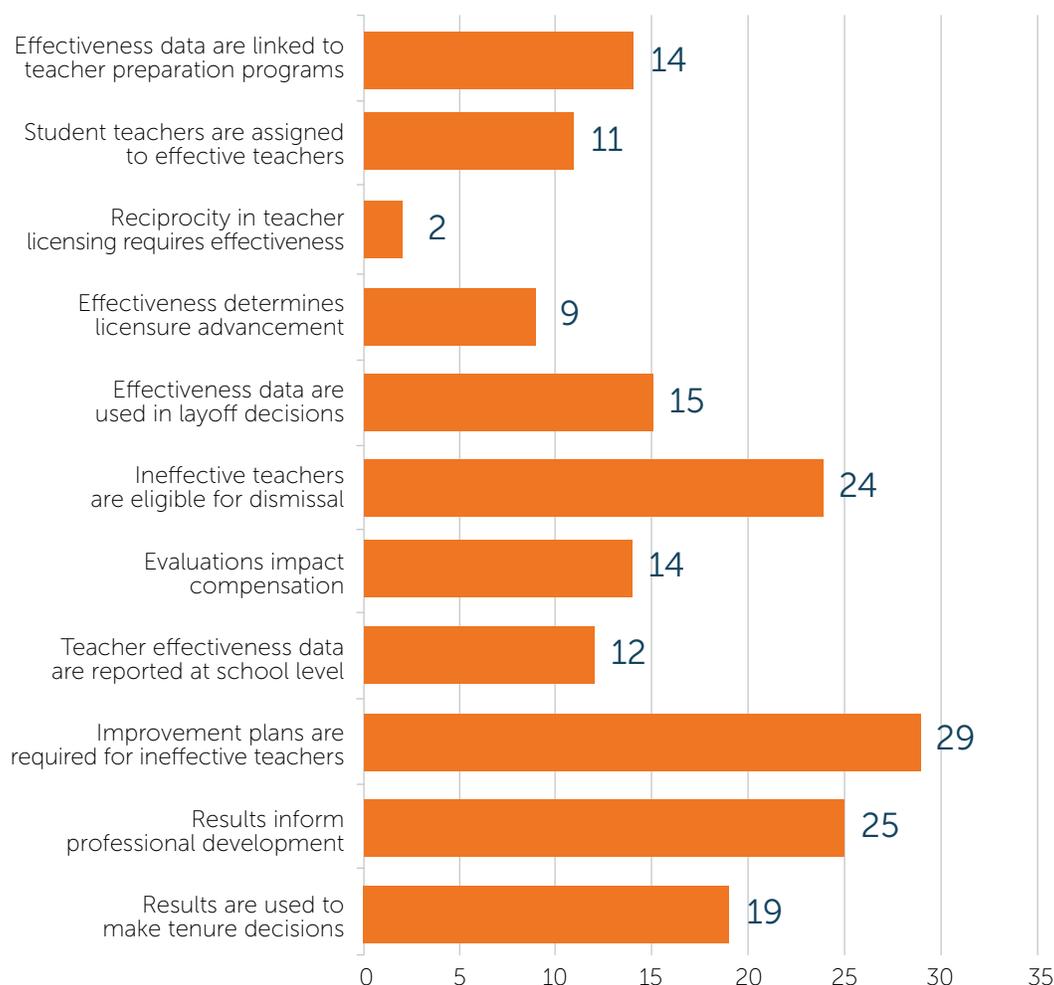
- Observations, which are a staple of teacher evaluations (required in 48 states), are explicitly required for principal evaluation in just 27 states. Among those states, only **Illinois, Indiana** and **Louisiana** specify that principals must have multiple observations.
- While 43 states require evaluators to receive training to conduct teacher evaluations, only 27 states require principal evaluators to receive training, and only nine states require principal evaluators to be certified (compared to 17 states for teacher evaluation).

## Connecting the Dots

**The real power in performance-based evaluations lies in using teacher ratings to recognize and encourage effective instruction as well as prepare and value highly effective teachers.**

**Delaware, Florida** and **Louisiana** lead the nation when it comes to connecting the dots. Each state uses evaluations of teacher effectiveness in policies of consequence for teacher training, professional development, improvement planning, compensation and accountability.

Figure D. Connecting the dots:  
Among the 35 states with evaluations of teacher effectiveness in place:



**While there has been some good progress on connecting the dots in the states, unless pay scales change, evaluation is only going to be a feedback tool when it could be so much more.**

Too few states are willing to take on the issue of teacher pay and lift the teaching profession by rewarding excellence. In 2015, just seven states – **Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Nevada** and **Utah** – directly tie teacher compensation to teacher evaluation results. These states now require that districts build performance into salary schedules, moving away from bonus structures that teachers know may be subject to budget constraints and competing priorities.

## Looking Ahead

NCTQ has been tracking teacher policy for a decade. Over that time, no policy has seen such dramatic transformation as teacher evaluation. It hasn't been an easy road for states – but it is a critically important path for the teaching profession. States and districts will need to continue to improve and refine their teacher evaluation systems. There will be tradeoffs in evaluation design at every fork in the road. As we look ahead, NCTQ shares some recommendations on the road before us.

- *Not all policy created under the guise of “effectiveness” is good policy.* Some states seem to have gone too far in the name of effectiveness and in the end have simply made policy that does not support teachers or students.
- *States must align principal and teacher evaluations.* Our review of the principal evaluation landscape makes it clear that these systems are often an afterthought to state efforts to build and implement a teacher evaluation process.
- *It is important to accentuate the positive.* Much of state action towards putting the brakes on evaluation consequences heightens the perception that teacher evaluation is an ominous enterprise aimed at punishing teachers when in fact there is a great deal to be gained from performance-based evaluation if used to raise the profession and the skills of all teachers.
- *Don't forget why student assessment is so important.* In an atmosphere where there is little to no appetite for standardized testing, we've forgotten that it wasn't long ago that parents had little information on how their children performed and schools had no accountability for ensuring that students learned.
- *Incentives are a stronger lever for change than force when it comes to teacher effectiveness policy.* There is little question, looking at the evaluation policy landscape today, that incentives are a better strategy than force. The field has achieved much more by providing resources to states willing, able and ready to engage in teacher effectiveness reforms than by twisting the arms of unwilling states to adopt effectiveness policies.