

Report to the Partnership Table on a Revised Teacher Performance Appraisal System for Experienced Teachers

Recommendations of the Working Table on Teacher Development

October 23, 2006

The Working Table on Teacher Development has concluded its deliberations on a revised appraisal process (TPA) for experienced teachers as part of its Phase 2 discussions. The revised process builds on the Phase 1 work which addressed new teacher induction and TPA for new teachers. The revised TPA for experienced teachers would provide for meaningful appraisals that are supportive of professional learning, teaching practice, and improved student outcomes.

Background on Working Table on Teacher Development

On August 16, 2004 the government released a discussion paper, "Teacher Excellence - Unlocking Student Potential through Continuing Professional Development". The paper signalled the government's desire to review the broad topic of teacher professionalism with particular focus on the pre-service education of teachers, teacher appraisal, and the on-going professional development of practicing teachers. The spirit of the paper underscored the government's wish to develop a positive relationship with teachers which respected them as professionals. As part of this respect the government wanted to establish, through professional development, meaningful support mechanisms for teachers as they pursued their classroom activities.

In April 2005 the Working Table on Teacher Development was established to provide advice and recommendations to the Partnership Table on a number of issues related to teacher

professional development. The tasks of the Working Table were divided into two phases.

Recommendations following Phase 1 deliberations were brought forward to the Partnership Table on June 2, 2005. Since then, the Student Performance Act was passed by the legislature putting in place a New Teacher Induction Program based on the recommendations. Orientation, mentoring, professional development opportunities, as well as a revised appraisal process for new teachers replaced the entry-to-practice assessment with a more meaningful support and assessment process for beginning teachers.

Phase 2 of the Working Table began in September 2006. Deliberations to date have focussed on recommendations for a revised performance appraisal process for experienced teachers. The Working Table had four meetings in September and October to prepare its recommendations for the October 23rd Partnership Table meeting. At this time, the Working Table is prepared to put forward its recommendations.

The Working Table will continue its mandate to explore a professional development framework for experienced teachers and other issues related to ongoing teacher learning. Recommendations on the remaining Phase 2 items will come forward at the conclusion of the Working Table's Phase 2 deliberations.

Working Table Membership

The following organizations were invited to participate at the Working Table on Teacher Development:

- Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes
- Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
- Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario
- Council of Ontario Directors of Education
- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
- Ontario Association of Deans of Education
- Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education
- Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
- Ontario College of Teachers
- Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association
- Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations
- Ontario Principals' Council
- Ontario Public School Boards' Association
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
- Ontario Student Trustees' Association
- Ontario Teachers' Federation
- People for Education

Context for Working Table Recommendations

In the larger context of improving student outcomes, the performance appraisal process provides teachers and principals with processes and procedures that bring about improvements in teacher professional learning, teaching practice, and student achievement.

The appraisal can foster the collaboration and relationship building essential to creating and sustaining a professional learning community in schools. The Working Table acknowledged that professional learning communities may look different in every school in order to reflect unique school cultures. The recommendations of the Working Table emphasize the

expectation that professional dialogue and collaboration are a critical part of the appraisal process and an essential part of a healthy school culture. The Working Table recognizes that experienced teachers can benefit from a constructive appraisal process that reflects their needs for growth and development, and in which both the teacher and the principal take an active role.

Discussions were guided by relevant research on performance appraisal and teacher growth, interjurisdictional research, information collected from implementation (e.g. Council of Ontario Directors of Education Monitoring Report, 2004), as well as position papers from various stakeholder groups, including the consensus document from the Joint Task Force on Teacher Performance Appraisal, comprised of the teacher, principal, and supervisory officer organizations.

Implementation Challenges with Current Teacher Performance Appraisal System

Information collected from implementation of the current TPA process for experienced teachers has revealed that more time is being spent on the formal "paper" process than on meaningful discussions between teachers and principals about performance and opportunities for teacher learning. The current system meets most of the due process requirements for teacher evaluation but not the essential components of teacher professional growth. Rather, the effects of the current system are high levels of teacher stress and frustration, negative relations between teachers and their principals, and other unintended consequences which are not conducive to either improving or maintaining good teaching practice.

In particular, the three-year appraisal cycle (with two evaluations in each appraisal year) is unwieldy and prevents principals from spending valuable time with new teachers, teachers requiring additional support, and groups of teachers in the context of professional learning communities – focussed on student improvement objectives.

The rating scale is another example of frustration experienced by both teachers and principals. More time is spent debating the meaning of the various rating categories than on the discussion of the teacher's performance and areas for growth.

There is also inconsistent application of the annual parent and student surveys across the province. School boards have reported challenges in developing, distributing, collecting, analysing, and storing annual surveys. At the same time, many parents believe that it has not been a meaningful vehicle for providing input.

In many cases, school boards have already modified the TPA process, despite the existing regulations, to address their implementation challenges and to make the process more meaningful for their teachers. The modifications are in line with the recommendations provided in this paper.

In order to address the implementation challenges to the current TPA system, the Working Table is providing the following recommendations to the Minister's Partnership Table for consideration.

Working Table Recommendations to the Partnership Table for a Revised Appraisal Process for Experienced Teachers

1. FREQUENCY: One appraisal in an evaluation year.

The Working Table supports one appraisal in an evaluation year with a minimum of one classroom observation to inform the appraisal process. This approach would continue to provide the public with confidence that quality appraisals are taking place. There is recognition that the appraisal process is very comprehensive. One appraisal in an evaluation year would allow principals to spend more time working with new teachers, teachers requiring additional support, and groups of teachers in the context of professional learning communities focussed on specific school

improvement needs (e.g. improved student achievement in literacy).

2. CYCLE: Appraisal every five years.

The Working Table recommends a five year appraisal cycle with the exception of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association that recommend a four-year appraisal cycle. There was consistent concern about the "unworkability" of a three-year appraisal cycle given the desire by principals and teachers to ensure that every appraisal is meaningful. This is especially true in large and growing boards. The ability of teachers to request additional appraisals and the right of principals to conduct appraisals at any time in addition to those required are maintained.

Members articulated the need for a meaningful growth plan in the intervening years between appraisals to support ongoing teacher learning, reflective practice, and improved student outcomes.

3. SUMMATIVE STATEMENT: Two-point rating scale (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) with further articulation of strengths and areas for growth in the summative report.

The Working Table recommends a two-point rating scale with the exception of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations that advocated for a multi-point scale. The disadvantages of a multi-point scale outweighed its advantages in the opinion of the majority of Working Table members. Members felt that the principal's ability to differentiate and recognize levels of performance and growth, through the comments on the summative report, offers the most appropriate vehicle for feedback.

Members agreed that a two-point rating scale would accomplish the need for accountability while supporting teacher growth and development. A two-point scale supported by the principal's comments would increase teacher confidence, promote principal objectivity in the appraisal process, and provide

more consistency in implementation across the province.

It would also ensure the focus of the appraisal is on the discussion between the teacher and principal about the teacher's performance and opportunities for growth rather than on the performance rating itself.

The principal's comments in the summative report may include comments on strengths and recommendations to support areas for the teacher's further growth.

4. TEACHER GROWTH PLAN: Adapt the current Annual Learning Plan (ALP) to provide a more meaningful vehicle for the teacher's professional learning in the intervening years between appraisals.

The Working Table agreed that the teacher, as a professional, should make decisions about their professional learning, taking into account the principal's recommendations from the appraisal. The teacher in collaboration with the principal would review the plan annually. A preamble would be provided in the modified ALP to clarify that the plan is teacher authored and directed. In addition, the process should be consultative and collaborative. The preamble would highlight the importance of professional dialogue between the teacher and principal in developing the ALP. The preamble would also encourage teachers to consider student/parent input as an important part of their professional growth.

Other additions to the current ALP include the teacher's self-evaluation of their ALP and growth from previous years. The revised TPA manual would provide examples of how to develop and use the ALP most effectively, emphasizing the importance of positive working relationships and professional dialogue to encourage teacher learning. Examples of learning opportunities teachers may choose to identify in their ALP would be provided (e.g. opportunities to collaborate with other colleagues in connection with improved student achievement initiatives within the school).

5. PARENT/STUDENT INPUT: Encourage teachers to include parent and student input in the development and review of their Annual Learning Plan (ALP) to inform their professional learning and teaching practice.

The Working Table agreed that parent engagement in student learning and partnerships between teachers and parents are essential in achieving student success. However, the current parent and student annual surveys are not providing teachers, schools, or school boards with the information they need to improve professional practice in a meaningful way. Under the current TPA system, annual surveys are mandatory and yet, parents do not believe they have a meaningful vehicle for providing feedback. Instead, the Working Table recommends that teachers be encouraged to invite parent and student input to inform their practice in a manner that is non-evaluative and growth-focussed.

A more effective process for seeking parent and student input would facilitate greater impact on teacher and student learning. A preamble in the modified ALP would encourage teachers to seek parent and student input to inform their professional learning and teaching practice. In addition, the revised TPA manual would provide teachers with sample processes, considerations from whom to seek feedback, and some guiding principles when considering gathering parent and student input.

6. COMPETENCIES AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Review the competencies every five years to reconfirm relevancy, meaning, and common understanding. Revise the manner in which principals report on the competencies in the summative report. Reinforce the "look-fors" as a resource and establish a working group to revise and streamline the list of "look-fors" to make the examples of good teaching practice more meaningful and appropriate.

The competencies provide clear, transparent and evidence-based criteria against which teacher performance can be assessed and areas of growth can be identified. The Working Table agreed that the summative report should be modified to allow principals to report on those

competencies identified in discussions with the teacher as most relevant to the teacher's appraisal.

The comment boxes would group the competencies based on the five domains of the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* and the principal would comment on the selected appropriate competencies within those groupings.

7. FORMS: Reduce the number of appraisal forms from three to one summative report. The summative report would capture the date(s) and time(s) set for the classroom observation(s) and would record what will be observed. The same form would be used again to record the principal's post-observation commentary.

The pre-observation and post-observation forms are considered redundant and time-consuming. The pre-observation and post-observation appraisal meetings, however, would be maintained as valued opportunities for professional dialogue between the teacher and principal about performance and growth.

8. IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT: Provide training and support for effective implementation of the revised appraisal process.

It is the joint responsibility of school boards, teacher federations, and the Ministry of Education at local/regional and provincial levels to ensure effective implementation of a revised appraisal process. In particular, supports should focus on encouraging positive and collaborative working relationships between teachers and principals. Training should include joint opportunities for teachers and principals. Ongoing training should be provided.

This concludes the Working Table's recommendations as related to the TPA process for experienced teachers.

Other Considerations for the Partnership Table: Need for Positive Working Relationships

In the Working Table's discussions, the importance of positive working relationships was a reoccurring theme. Whatever the initiative, the success of its implementation is dependent upon healthy relationships between stakeholders. As such, the Working Table feels that the Ministry should encourage and promote these positive relationships wherever possible.

In particular, the Working Table reflected on the importance of parent engagement at the school and system level to support student success. The Working Table requested that this comment be forwarded to the Parent Engagement Office in support of its mandate.

Submitted to the Minister's Partnership Table on October 23, 2006.

Your feedback is welcome and solicited. It should be directed to:

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