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The Development of a Systematic Approach to
Evaluating Early Childhood Educators Using the
North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

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Executive Summary

This technical report serves as a guide to the systematic approach to early childhood teacher evaluation process that is implemented by the Early Educator Support Offices at University of North Carolina at Charlotte and East Carolina University. The report provides an explanation of the teacher evaluation process in the state of North Carolina and provides literature on teacher evaluation efforts and describes the need for a systematic approach to evaluation. The report also provides a description of the NCTEP rubric and the phased Quality Improvement model. Finally, an overview of the next steps for the Early Educator Support Office research which include gathering data for the next groups of evaluators and conducting a Many Facets Rasch Model with all evaluators that took part in the interrater reliability certification process with the aim to determine specific supports for evaluators and educators.

Introduction

The North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process (NC TEP) serves over 100,000 teachers per year throughout the state (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This process includes formative observations, summative assessments, and formal mentoring to ensure high quality educators. In an attempt to ensure a high-quality evaluation process, hubs at both the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and East Carolina University were developed in 2007 to serve early childhood educators that have a Birth to Kindergarten (B-K) license (de Kort-Young et al., 2016). Both universities house an Early Educator Support Office to provide mentorship and support. The purpose of this report is to provide a description of how the Early Educator Support Office has systematically planned and orchestrated evaluation training to provide valid and reliable teacher evaluations for B-K licensure educators. The report provides an explanation of the educator evaluation process in the state of North Carolina as well as background literature to comprehensively describe the need for a high-quality evaluation process. The report also provides a brief description of the NCTEP rubric and the phased Quality Improvement model. Finally, an overview of the next steps for the Early Educator Support Office research at the end of this report.

Literature Review

Systems of teacher performance evaluation play important parts in professional development and educational reform. These systems provide information used to make high-stakes retention and promotion decisions as well as other determinants in a teacher's growth and training pathway. In teacher evaluation systems there are often unclear or missing elements related to the validity and reliability of ratings from teacher evaluations (Herlihy et al., 2014). It is well documented that the largest source of error in researched evaluation systems comes from

the rater (Casabianca et al., 2013; Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016; Hill et al., 2012). The studies mentioning the error due to the rater exclusively used principals and assistant principals as the evaluator. Herlihy et al. (2014) studied the practices of 17 state's teacher evaluation systems and found that the use of an external evaluator was only required for probationary teachers or teachers rated as ineffective. District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) used a combination of school administrators and master raters as part of their teacher evaluation process (Adnot et al., 2017). However, in North Carolina, all non-public B-K licensed educators are evaluated with an external evaluator. The implementation of evaluation in the state of North Carolina for early childhood teachers has gone through various means to ensure fairness. The literature presented describes this process.

The NC Teacher Evaluation Process

In North Carolina, there exists a long-standing interest in and pursuit of high-quality early childhood education. The field of ECE has sought information about what effective programs look like and how best to achieve them, including strategies for evaluating and mentoring early childhood educators (Shue et al., 2012). The framework of the Early Educator Support Offices has been thoughtfully and intentionally designed to ensure the tenets of a high-quality evaluation system are in place for North Carolina's licensed early childhood educators.

In January 2007, the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) approved the state's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to design and implement a statewide system of support for the nonpublic sector, to include licensure, mentoring, evaluation, and professional development services for B-K licensed early childhood educators serving as lead teacher in the state's More at Four Program (de Kort-Young et al., 2016). More at Four, a statewide pre-kindergarten initiative for at-risk 4-year old children, was initially administered through the

Teacher Licensure Unit (TLU), a unit of the DPI's Office of Early Learning (OEL). At the time of the program's inception in 2007, the Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument (PKKTPAI) was used as a measure to meet performance evaluation requirements for the state's licensed educators of young children. Beginning in 2010, nonpublic More at Four lead teachers were included in the NC Teacher Evaluation Process and began being evaluated using the NC TEP Rubric, linked to the NC Professional Teaching Standards, just as their public-school counterparts, pre-K -12th grade. In 2011, the NC General Assembly resituated the More at Four Program into the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE), where it was renamed the NC Prekindergarten Program (NC Pre-K). Therefore, all support services to eligible early childhood educators were continued under the Early Educator Support, Licensure, and Professional Development (EESLPD) Unit. During the 2014-2015 program year, regional hubs at two institutions of higher education, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and East Carolina University, were created in order to administer the field-based services of mentoring, evaluation, and professional development support to all eligible teachers of the program. Collectively, the DCDEE, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and East Carolina University serve as the statewide education agency for all nonpublic early childhood educators who are required to hold or be eligible for NC BK licensure (i.e., NC Pre-K, MECK Pre-K, and NC Developmental Day lead teachers). All mandated support services are implemented as outlined in applicable SBE policies, NC General Statutes, and NC Child Care Rules.

The EESLPD Offices were renamed to the Early Educator Support Offices during the 2019-20 program year to emphasize the broad statewide system of support provided by mentors and evaluators to early childhood teachers. This change also delineates the field-based support

services from the enrollment and licensure services that remain at the DCDEE under the EESLPD Unit. All required services provided by the Early Educator Support Offices, mirror that of a public Local Education Agency (LEA), specifically the role of the Principal, or designee, who is responsible for teacher performance and evaluation. However, the service delivery is unique in that the mentors and evaluators of the Early Educator Support Offices hold specific early childhood content knowledge, expertise, and extensive experience in early childhood education settings. The mentors and evaluators are solely focused on the development of high-quality educators and optimal instructional practices for young children. This unique service delivery model has proven to be an advantage in implementing the NCTEP as the developers intended, by way of an individualized, iterative, growth process driven by the state's professional educators.

Teacher Performance Appraisal Process Policy

Across the state of North Carolina, each Local Education Agency (LEA) must provide an integrated system of support to include mentoring, formal observation, and summative evaluation as part of the NCTEP. The NCTEP is implemented according to the requirements outlined by the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) under General Statute (NC GS) § 115C-335 and is prescribed for all teachers who are required to attain and maintain NC professional educator's licensure. NC GS § 115C-333 specifies the process for the evaluation of teachers according to the number of years of experience, licensure type, and school performance level. This statute further specifies how many and how often evaluations have to take place according to the teacher's licensure classification. NC GS § 115C-333.1.c.1 defines a "qualified observer" as:

any administrator or teacher who is licensed by the State Board of Education and working in North Carolina; any employee of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction who is trained in evaluating licensed employees; or any instructor or professor who teaches in an accredited North Carolina school of education and holds an educator's license.

The specific components of such a system have been outlined by the NCDPI and include the following: (a) initial evaluation training, (b) annual orientation, (c) teacher self-assessment, (d) professional development plan, (e) mentor support, (f) pre-observation conference, (g) formal and informal observation, (h) post-observation conference, and (i) summary evaluation conference. The NCTEP components are conducted in phases according to the licensure level of the teacher and the assigned type of Professional Development Plan (i.e., Individual, Monitored, or Directed Growth Plan). Early childhood educators entering the field with provisional or initial licensure engage in the Beginning Teacher Support Program which provides three years of mentoring and evaluation support with the goal of meeting performance criteria necessary to clear the teaching license. Once necessary coursework is completed and the teaching license is cleared, educators who have also met the state standards for performance have the opportunity to be recommended for the Continuing license. Once converted to a Continuing license, the educator is then evaluated on a five-year cycle with the opportunity to renew the license at the end of the five-year cycle, based upon meeting the state standards for performance.

The NC Teacher Evaluation Process Rubric

The NC TEP Rubric is used throughout the state for all educators, meaning B-K teachers to secondary education teachers to special subject (art, music etc.) teachers (DPI, 2021). The NC TEP Rubric is composed of five NC Professional Teaching Standards (see Appendix A). When

used for summative evaluations it comprises the five overall standard ratings and 25 element ratings, for a total of 30 scored items (see Appendix B). Each of the 30 items are rated on the following scale: (1) Developing, (2) Proficient, (3) Accomplished, (4) Distinguished and (5) Not Present.

Teachers in North Carolina have two options for licensures, Initial or Continuing Licensure. An initial licensure refers to a new teacher with no more than two years' experience in the classroom and is valid for three years. A continuing licensure refers to teachers with three or more years of experience in the classroom and is valid for five years. In order for educators to convert from an initial to a continuing licensure, they must meet the state standard which requires summative ratings of proficient or higher, overall, on all five NC Professional Teaching Standards. Furthermore, in order to renew a Continuing license at the end of each five-year renewal cycle, the educator must also meet the state standard which requires summative ratings of proficient or higher on three of the five NC Professional Teaching Standards. One of the three proficient standards must include Standard 4.

Standard 1 of the NC Professional Teaching Standards describes the importance of teachers being leaders in their classroom and in their profession. It states that, "Teachers demonstrate leadership" with supporting elements that describe leading in the classroom, leading in the school building, leading in the profession, being advocates for students, and holding high ethical standards.

Standard 2 explores the learning environment, covering the social-emotional well-being and individual academic strengths and needs of the children. It states that, "Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students" with supporting elements which describe the need for a positive and nurturing environment that recognizes the value of diversity,

treats students as individuals, teachers who adapt their teaching for students with special needs, and work collaboratively with specialists and families.

Standard 3 looks for the teacher's knowledge of content appropriate to his or her area of teaching. It states "Teachers know the content they teach" with supporting elements that describe their understanding and use of the NC Standard Course of Study, the content appropriate for their teaching specialty, and their ability to recognize the interconnectedness of early childhood content and use it to make instruction relevant to the children.

Standard 4 examines the learning experiences that educators facilitate for the students in his or her classroom. This standard is dense with requirements as it covers the teacher's ability to instruct the students. It states, "Teachers facilitate learning for their students" with supporting elements such as understanding developmental milestones for children, showing evidence of planning instruction and using a variety of instructional techniques and methods to assess student growth and learning. This standard also explores the use of technology within instructional planning, supporting the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as precursory skills that support effective communication and collaboration.

Finally, Standard 5 describes a reflective practice that ensures teachers critically evaluate, on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of instructional strategies that are used to meet the needs of his or her students. This standard states that, "Teachers reflect on their practice" with supporting elements that examine how the educator analyzes student learning, link their professional growth to professional goals, and their ability to function within the ever-changing dynamics of an early childhood classroom environment.

The most critical component of the NCTEP is the translation of the NC Professional Teaching Standards into practical indicators of high-quality teaching within early childhood

settings. It is essential for early childhood educators to be able to integrate standards with curriculum in order to design, implement, evaluate, and adapt optimal growth and learning for the children they teach. The NCTEP serves as a measurement of performance for individual teachers and as a guide for improving their effectiveness as they reflect upon their teaching through an iterative process or professional growth.

Phase Quality Improvement Model

The Early Educator Support Office leadership team developed a phased plan to evaluate the inter-rater reliability of the evaluator staff (see Appendix C). This plan was designed to equip and support evaluators so they would be prepared to pass a rigorous standard of agreement with an expert panel of evaluators. The plan included eight phases, beginning with Phase I, the development of evaluator training. During Phase II, the team developed and subsequently revised a detailed resource manual that outlined evaluation procedures and teacher practices an observer may see in an NC Pre-K classroom (de Kort-Young et al., 2016). Early Educator Support Office evaluators rely on their training, the resource manual, and their own professional judgment to observe in classrooms, interview teachers, collect teacher and child evidence and artifacts, gather qualitative information, and make inferences about teacher quality. The resource manual provides example evidence, artifacts, teacher behaviors, child behaviors, and classroom conditions that correspond to each performance level and every element and standard contained in the rubric.

During Phase III, the team developed an additional manual that described the overall conceptual framework used to undergird all of the Early Educator Support Office in their teacher support work including both evaluation and mentoring. The Early Educator Support Office's conceptual framework (Taylor et al., 2019) is a prospective model of coaching that supports

teachers through the performance evaluation and professional growth process. This framework includes six guiding principles that help ensure adequate teacher support. First, teachers are respected as adult learners who are self-directed and goal-orientated, bring knowledge and experience to their working environment, and value relevance and practicality throughout the process of support. Second, teachers progress through developmental stages in their professional growth. Therefore, Early Educator Support staff strive to provide professional development and growth opportunities that match the needs of each teacher throughout each stage of their career, while recognizing that a teacher's professional growth will progress and regress in response to external and internal factors. Third, individualized strengths-based coaching supports professional growth and encourages the use of effective high-quality practices. Fourth, trusting relationships are fundamental to building an effective team that consists of teacher, site administrator, mentor and evaluator. Fifth, fostering reflective practice is essential to effective teaching. Finally, research indicates that the teacher is the most crucial factor in the classroom for predicting child success (Opper, 2019). Therefore, in order to increase children's learning it is important to improve teacher effectiveness.

Along with the guiding principles, the coaching framework includes specific practices provided by Early Educator Support Office mentors and evaluators. These practices comprise a cycle of coaching heavily rooted in forming relationships and providing supports that are relationship-based, holistic, individualized, knowledge-based, adaptable, and strengths-based. The Early Educator Support Office mentors and evaluators use the NCTEP protocol and rubric as the foundation of their support for teachers. This guidance is intended to support ECE teachers through the licensure process and positively influence teaching practices used in NC PRE-K classrooms to promote optimal child growth and development.

During Phase IV, the team conducted surveys of the ECE teachers served throughout NC to obtain their feedback regarding the helpfulness of Early Educator Support Office services. This strategy provided valuable feedback for program improvement and has become an annual activity. During Phase V, the team conducted an extensive analysis of the ratings given to teachers throughout NC by Early Educator Support Office evaluators. The researchers sought to determine if the beliefs and expectations of those who developed the training materials and conducted the evaluator trainings differed from the actual performance ratings given by evaluators currently implementing the evaluation protocol with actual classroom teachers. The researchers used a variety of research methods to prompt a systematic and critical reflection and examination of the training process as part of this larger effort to develop an inter-rater reliability system for evaluators. The researchers sought to gather information about the beliefs and expectations of the trainers regarding the difficulty level of each element and standard contained in the NCTEP rubric. Next, the researchers analyzed empirically derived difficulty levels of each element and standard using data from evaluators working with teachers in the field (Lambert et al., 2021). The results of this analysis were shared with the trainers. The overall goal was to prompt the trainers to reflect about their own expectations and experiences in light of the empirical findings, and to prompt them to revise and enhance the training and support for mentors and evaluators. Training evaluators thoroughly and monitoring the reliability, validity, fairness, and cultural sensitivity of their ratings are essential strategies to ensure the validity of the conclusions generated by the performance evaluation process. Therefore, in response to the results of Phase V analyses, the training process was enhanced and updated during Phase VI.

Ten fictitious teacher profiles were created during Phase VII. These profiles contained narratives, video, and artifacts from real classrooms. The profiles were created to represent the

ethnic and racial diversity of the teachers and children served by the Early Educator Support office and to represent the range of teacher quality typically encountered by evaluators and mentors. Phase VIII consisted of the inter-rater reliability certification process. All Early Educator Support Office evaluators with at least one year of NC evaluation experience were required to rate all ten profiles using the NCTEP rubric.

Conclusion

This report aimed to provide general background knowledge and literature on teacher evaluation processes and to explain how the Early Educator Support Offices specifically implements the NC TEP Rubric for early childhood teachers. The report also made clear the need for systematic approaches to teacher evaluation throughout the country. It serves as a guide to the strategic steps that have been implemented within the Early Educator Support Office mentor and evaluation process to ensure fidelity.

The Phased Quality Improvement model indicates that Phase VIII is complete. Based on those findings, the Early Educator Support Office has used the fictitious profiles with another set of evaluators as part of their inter-rater reliability certification. These data will be analyzed and used to determine supports for these evaluators and the teachers they serve.

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Appendix A

Table 1

NC Professional Teaching Standards

Standard	Description
I	Teachers Demonstrate Leadership
II	Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students
III	Teachers Know the Content They Teach
IV	Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students
V	Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

Appendix B

Table 2
NC TEP Performance Rating Scale

Rating	Description
Developing	Teacher demonstrated adequate growth toward achieving standard(s) during the period of performance, but did not demonstrate competence on standard(s) of performance.
Proficient	Teacher demonstrated basic competence on standard(s) of performance
Accomplished	Teacher exceeded basic competence on standard(s) of performance most of the time.
Distinguished	Teacher consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence on standard(s) of performance.
Not Demonstrated	Teacher did not demonstrate competence on or adequate growth toward achieving standard(s) of performance. (If selected the evaluator must comment why it was used.)

Appendix C

Table 3

Phased quality improvement model

Phase	Activity	References
I	Developed the Initial Evaluator Training Process	
II	Created a Resource Manuals for Evaluators	de Kort-Young et al., 2016
III	Developed a Conceptual Framework	Taylor, 2019
IV	Collected Feedback from Teachers	
V	Analyzed Evaluator Ratings Updated and Expanded Training	
VI	Professional Development for Evaluators	
VII	Developed Electronic Teacher Profiles	Lambert et al., 2019
VIII	Conducted an Inter-Rater Reliability Study	<i>Expected May 2022</i>