Reform Support Network

Using Observations to Improve Teacher Practice

How States Can Build Meaningful Observation Systems

July 2015

Introduction

The ultimate goal of teacher evaluation systems is to improve the quality of instruction by clarifying expectations for effective teaching and helping teachers meet those expectations through high-quality feedback and support. Classroom observations – which make up the majority of a teacher's summative rating in most States and districts – give teachers the opportunity to receive meaningful and direct feedback about their practice. They can also inform the development of resources to help teachers address areas for improvement. But many observers still struggle to accurately assess teacher performance and give teachers high-quality feedback and tools to help them improve their instruction.

States face several common challenges that prevent observers from providing more meaningful feedback to teachers. First, many States use observation rubrics that are cumbersome in length and/or lack specificity. Observers struggle to assess teacher performance if they are unclear on expectations for teacher practice or are trying to assess too many indicators at once. Second, most observers do not have the ability to give grade level- or content-specific feedback to all of the teachers in their caseload. This diminishes the specificity of the feedback that teachers receive about how well their instruction is aligned with college- and career-ready standards in their content area. Finally, in States and districts where principals are the primary observers, they often lack the time and skill to conduct rigorous observations and deliver high-quality feedback to all of their teachers. Furthermore, observer training that is infrequent or does not include opportunities to practice feedback falls short of what observers need in order to develop their observation skills.

The good news is that strategies exist to address each of these challenges. States play an important role in improving the quality of observations and can employ a variety of mechanisms to make improvements, depending on their policy context. For example, States that have the authority to revise their observation frameworks can clarify vague content and eliminate redundancies or indicators that are not related to student outcomes. To support district observer training, States can create resources that guide observers in how to conduct observations and post-observation debriefs with teachers. Finally, States can seed innovation at the local level and elevate lessons and best practices from districts that develop their own observation tools, resources and policies.

This publication summarizes research, lessons and resources gathered from States, districts and supporting organizations about how States can make observations more meaningful for teachers and observers. The appendix contains guiding questions for States about the effectiveness of their observation frameworks, examples of State plans to communicate with and solicit feedback from stakeholders, and an overview of the different approaches that States might take to improve their observation frameworks and tools.

Overview of RSN Observation Frameworks

In September 2014, the Reform Support Network (RSN) brought together four States—Delaware, Louisiana, North Carolina and Ohio—that were in various stages of evaluation system implementation and expressed interest in improving the classroom observation component of their evaluation systems. The purpose of the project was to help this cohort assess challenges with their current observation frameworks; identify goals to address those challenges; and develop tools, resources and processes to help them achieve their goals. Each State team came to the project with a specific focus on how it wanted to improve its observation system, based on their own observations or anecdotal evidence from the field:

- Leaders from **North Carolina**'s Department of Public Instruction felt that their observation rubric – based on the Danielson Framework – overwhelmed observers with too many indicators. State leaders wanted to build a companion observation tool for the evaluation framework that would define the specific elements that observers should target when conducting classroom observations.

- In **Delaware**, most districts use a single observation model developed by the State. Leaders from the Delaware Department of Education sought to seed innovation by encouraging districts to develop, and submit to the State for approval, alternative models that reflect best practices in observation rubrics.

- In **Louisiana**, teachers and observers wanted greater specificity about instructional expectations for teachers of different grade levels and subject areas. In response, leaders from the Louisiana Department of Education sought to create content-specific instructional guides that provide details about what observers should look for in mathematics and English Language Arts classes for different grade bands.

- **Ohio** Department of Education leaders noted that observers sometimes find it challenging to differentiate among performance levels and give high-quality feedback to teachers. They plan to implement a co-observation model, where two observers observe the same teacher and compare ratings, in order to improve rater accuracy and enhance the quality of observer feedback.

Over the course of seven months, State leaders participated in webinars, an in-person convening, and one-on-one coaching from experts to help them meet these goals. Below are details about the strategies they chose to implement in order to improve their observation systems, as well as lessons learned by these States which may help other States that want to improve the quality of observations and support to teachers.

Strategies to Improve Observation Systems

The strategy a State chooses to improve the quality of classroom observations will depend on the specific outcome it hopes to achieve. It will also depend on the specific State context, including the State's relationship with districts and its resources, including time, money and staff. The strategies below reflect the diversity of goals and policy environments among the States in this cohort and can be adapted by other States to fit their particular context.

Create clear, streamlined rubrics

Research on classroom observations indicates that observation rubrics are most effective when:

- **Coherent**: They are aligned with State teaching standards.

- **Concise**: They are brief, condensed and easy for observers to use.

- **Clear**: They use precise language to describe teacher and student behavior.

- **Focused**: Indicators are directly related to student outcomes. (See Appendix A, "Questions to Identify High-Quality Observation Instruments.")[1]

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[1] Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project, *Foundations of Observation* (2013); TNTP, *Rating a Teacher Observation Tool* (2011); and TNTP, *Fixing Classroom Observations* (2013).

Delaware leaders received feedback from teachers and leaders about several ways in which its statewide evaluation rubric does not meet the best practices described above. Some of the challenges include a lack of clarity that makes it difficult to gather evidence for some indicators, it may not be appropriate for all environments (for example, kindergarten), and it could be more rigorous and directly related to student outcomes. The State also received feedback from the field that the rubric does not support high-quality feedback to teachers. In response to this feedback, it invited districts to submit alternative evaluation models that incorporate the best practices described above and better meet educators' needs.

Develop supplemental tools that help observers focus on the right areas for development

In some cases, States and districts will not have the flexibility to make significant changes to their observation rubrics without approval from State boards of education or State legislatures. This was true for North Carolina, where the evaluation system is based on the Danielson Framework. The team opted for a shorter-term solution: to develop a supplemental tool that observers could use when conducting classroom observations. This observation tool will contain a subset of the Danielson Framework indicators that are observable and aligned with student outcomes.

In an effort to support principals, Louisiana State leaders developed a guidebook for principals that will serve as the hub of instructional leadership best practices and resources. Of particular importance was the focus on providing meaningful feedback to teachers. Louisiana adapted the **instructional practice guides** from Student Achievement Partners to create their own content-specific guides based on Louisiana's State content standards.[2] These tools are meant to supplement the observation rubric that observers already use and to help guide post-observation debrief conversations with teachers. Additionally, the

tools established a basis for the teacher support case studies located in the **Louisiana Principals' Teaching & Learning Guidebook**.

Establish meaningful structures that encourage strong, effective feedback

Ohio is focused on ensuring that teachers receive meaningful feedback following observations. Because evaluators sometimes find it challenging to differentiate among performance levels on the evaluation rubric, they may need additional support to accurately assess teacher performance. They also theorized that if observers are not accurately assessing teacher performance, teachers are also likely not receiving high-quality feedback from the observers. Based on Tennessee's success with sending State coaches to co-observe with principals who struggled to assign accurate ratings and give high-quality feedback to teachers, Ohio plans to provide funding to a small group of districts to implement this strategy. Other benefits of co-observation include the opportunity for teachers to get content-specific feedback from peer teachers and for teacher leaders to develop their instructional leadership skills.

Tennessee also requires that observers demonstrate that they can deliver high-quality feedback before they are certified to observe teachers. Following observer training, candidates in Tennessee must pass a certification exam developed by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, which assesses the quality of their post-observation feedback. Delaware has instituted a similar observer certification exam.

Insights for Other States

In addition to these strategies, States learned important lessons about their role in the continuous improvement of statewide initiatives and how to work with districts and educators to achieve common goals. As the Race to the Top grants conclude, these insights will be particularly important as States consider how to sustain the work they have done and continue to refine the systems they have put in place.

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[2] Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project, *Foundations of Observation* (2013); TNTP, *Rating a Teacher Observation Tool* (2011); and TNTP, *Fixing Classroom Observations* (2013).

Solicit feedback from the field on State-developed tools and strategies

To ensure that State-developed tools and processes are actually meeting the needs of educators, States should create opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback to inform the development and ongoing refinement of these resources. Louisiana asked educators to provide feedback on the content of its draft instructional guides. It then made revisions and will disseminate to principals broadly in summer 2015 as a resource included in the **Louisiana Principals' Teaching & Learning Guidebook**. Mindful of the value of feedback from the field, Louisiana leaders will work to strategically collect feedback on how both principals and teachers use the guides in their practice to help inform future iterations of the tools, as well as training on how to use them (see Appendix C). In 2015–2016, direct support initiatives for principals will take place across the State, including a 16-month **principal fellowship**. This initiative will bring together more than 100 principals in the first year with a focus on instructional leadership, including the use of these newly developed tools.

Pilot new strategies with districts

Districts are critical partners in the implementation of teacher evaluation systems. They have stronger connections to teachers and principals than State education agencies (SEAs), are able to closely monitor implementation and facilitate observer trainings, and often have more flexibility than the State to refine observation tools and systems. To the extent that States allow and even encourage it, districts can serve as centers of innovation to try new observation strategies; produce tools that benefit teachers and observers; and, in some cases, even create new observation frameworks.

After receiving substantial feedback from educators that the statewide evaluation model does not always meet their needs, Delaware developed a process by which local educational agencies (LEAs) could create their own educator evaluation systems and processes "in the spirit of increasing educator support,

accountability, and student achievement."[3] Districts then apply to the State for approval to implement these alternative models. The benefit of this strategy to the districts is clear: They can implement an evaluation model that better meets the needs of their teachers and observers. The benefit to the State is that it can collect evidence from multiple evaluation systems and continue to refine its statewide model to reflect best practices.

Create a communications strategy that incentivizes districts and builds trust

Delaware has long offered districts the opportunity to innovate and create their own observation rubrics if they determined that the statewide observation rubric was not meeting their needs. But to the surprise of State leaders, no district ever submitted an alternative model (although a few charter schools have done so). As they conducted outreach to district leaders, they discovered that district leaders assumed that the bar for approval would be too high and that it would not be worth the effort. There has also been some acknowledgment that the State system has been built over the past decade and that it is not easy to build one's own. Delaware is currently in the process of revising its communications to districts about the opportunity in order to encourage more districts to take advantage of it.

In Ohio, where State leaders want to encourage districts to use co-observation as a strategy to improve the quality of observations, they are developing an application process for districts so that they can apply to participate in a future co-observation pilot. While developing this application, they recognized the importance of communicating the benefits of co-observation to stakeholders (district leaders, teachers, principals, and these groups' professional associations) to inform them about the opportunity and inspire them to participate (see Appendix B).

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[3] http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/186/AlternativeEducatorEvalSystemApp_2015_FINAL.pdf

Produce and disseminate tools that support educators and improve implementation

One of the best ways for States to support districts and educators is by gathering feedback from the field about implementation challenges and then developing tools, resources and guidance to help address those challenges.

North Carolina and Louisiana both used feedback from educators to determine that they needed to create tools that would improve the implementation of observations. North Carolina found through its review of observation data, as well as feedback from principals, that they were struggling to apply the evaluation framework to classroom observations because it contained many more indicators than what a principal typically observes. Therefore, the State team determined that principals needed a shorter version of the framework that contained only the observable indicators, which would make observations more efficient to conduct and targeted feedback easier to give.

Similarly, Louisiana heard from teachers and principals that they wanted to receive and provide feedback specific to their grade and content area, and that all observers may not have the expertise to provide this feedback to teachers. In response, Louisiana State leaders created the content-specific guides described above.

Conclusion

The State efforts described above highlight the importance for States to continually monitor their evaluation systems to ensure that they are working as intended and are providing the right information to teachers about their practice. Data that indicate that systems are not working as they should can empower States to make improvements, whether through policy changes, the creation of tools and resources, professional development, or the dissemination of best practices.

Delaware, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Ohio each took a slightly different approach to improving the quality of observations in their State, demonstrating the diverse roles that States can play to support educators as they implement observations. These roles include engaging stakeholders in the development of tools and resources, collecting feedback through outreach and data analysis, creating tools that address implementation challenges, and communicating effectively with stakeholders (for example, district leaders and educators) about the purpose of State-developed tools and strategies.

Appendix A –
Questions to Identify High-Quality Observation Instruments

High-quality observation instruments are the foundation of high-quality observation systems. The following are sample questions States might ask to determine whether their observation rubric meets a high standard of quality.

1. **Does the instrument measure observable behaviors of teaching practice?**
   If not, modify to include only observable behaviors.

Observable indicator	Non-observable indicator
"Teacher checks for student understanding and responds to misunderstandings."	"Teacher uses and aligns resources strategically."

2. **Are the behaviors observable within a typical classroom observation?**
   They must be observable to be considered for use in observations.

Typically observed in one class	Not typically observed in one class
"Teacher presents content clearly."	"Teacher modifies instruction in response to data."

3. **Are the criteria student-centered, requiring evaluators to look for evidence of student engagement and learning?**
   If not, revise performance expectations to show the desired result instead of teacher actions.

Student-centered	Teacher-centered
"All or almost all hands are raised when reviewing taught material. More than half of hands are up on new material."	"Teacher routinely emphasizes completion of work and consistently encourages students to expend their best effort."

4. **Do the criteria for judgment require support materials (for example, lesson plans, student work)?**
   If so, these criteria would be better assessed through a different evaluation component.

Does not require support materials	Requires support materials
"Teacher implements routines to maximize instructional time."	"Teacher develops standards-based units and long-term plans."

5. **Do the criteria and tools set a high bar for performance, or do they settle for minimally acceptable performance?**
   If not, modify to reflect high expectations for teacher performance.

High expectations	Compliance-driven
"Teacher works to ensure that the needs of every student are met, providing extra support or enrichment as necessary."	"Teacher integrates a variety of technology tools and applications into instructional design and implementation."

6. Are the performance expectations for teachers clear and precise?
   If not, add specificity so that observers can collect and teachers can reflect on concrete evidence.

Clear and precise	Unclear and imprecise
"Teacher presents all information in a clear, well-organized, factually accurate manner without mistakes that would leave students with misunderstandings at the end of a lesson."	"Teacher displays extensive content knowledge of all the subjects that he or she teaches."

7. Are the criteria and tools concise enough for teachers and evaluators to understand thoroughly and use easily?
   If not, revise performance expectations to address only observable behaviors.

Concise	Not concise
Observation framework consists of 5–6 performance indicators that fit on a single page.	Framework consists of 6+ indicators and/or is longer than a single page.

8. Does the instrument clearly differentiate among performance levels?
   If not, revise the language so that teachers and observers know what it takes to get to the next level.

Developing	Proficient
"Teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies and questioning techniques to develop students' higher-level thinking skills, although some strategies may not be effective."	"Teacher consistently and effectively uses a variety of instructional strategies and questioning techniques to develop students' higher-level thinking skills."

9. Does the instrument assess lesson content in addition to how the lesson is being taught?
   If not, revise the indicators to include specific guidance on how to assess content.

Adequate	Not adequate
"The text(s) is at or above the complexity level expected for the grade and time in the school year."	"Teacher states an objective that conveys what students are learning and doing in a lesson."

Examples of High-Quality Observation Rubrics

TNTP Core Teaching Rubric: http://tntp.org/publications/view/tntp-core-teaching-rubric-a-tool-for-conducting-classroom-observations

Student Achievement Partners Instructional Practice Guides: http://achievethecore.org/dashboard/410/search/3/1/0/1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9/10/11/12/page/969/instructional-practice-guide-list-pg

Insight Core Framework: http://www.insighteducationgroup.com/insight-core-framework-landing-page

Examples of High-Quality Observation Rubrics

TNTP, Fixing Classroom Observations (2013): http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_FixingClassroomObservations_2013.pdf

TNTP, Rating a Teacher Observation Tool (2011): http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_RatingATeacherObservationTool_Feb2011.pdf

MET Project, Foundations of Observation (2013): http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET-ETS_Foundations_of_Observation.pdf

Appendix B

The Ohio Department of Education, in conjunction with the RSN, developed the following plan for future use to communicate with stakeholders about the opportunity to pilot co-observations. The plan identifies each stakeholder group, as well as high-level messages and specific text to use with each group. It also includes a work plan with discrete tasks, a timeline, and owners assigned to each task.

Draft Ohio Co-Observation Communications Plan

Reference Documents

RSN Framework for Communication and Engagement

RSN Social Media Tip Sheets

RSN Memo: Using Co-Observation to Impact Teacher Practice

RSN Memo: Summary of Findings: Co-Observations in Teacher Evaluation

Top Messages

	Message
Inquire	
Teachers	Are you interested in opportunities for teacher leadership? Are you a master teacher in your district hoping to influence other teachers?
Principals	Are you confident in your ability to provide useful feedback to teachers from classroom observations? Is that feedback leading to improvement?
Districts	What will it take for teacher evaluation to be a transformative tool for improving practice in your district?
Associations	Can you help the Ohio Department of Education connect your members with opportunities for leadership and resources?
Inform	
All	Co-observation is a strategy that is validated by research and the experience of other States.
All	Co-observation develops teacher leaders and school leaders into stronger instructional coaches.
All	Co-observation yields more useable feedback for teachers as they work to improve their practice.
Inspire	
Principals	This is an opportunity for job-embedded, continual support to improve your observation practice in your school. It is not external, add-on training.
All	The Ohio Department of Education is making resources available to districts that want to use co-observation to increase the benefits of classroom observation for improving instructional practice.
Districts with Master Teachers/Teacher Leader Endorsement	Co-observation is an opportunity to build collaborative leadership with Master Teachers and Endorsed Teacher Leaders in your district to facilitate professional dialogue and collegial learning with other teachers.

Text for Communicating

Associations

- Can you help the Ohio Department of Education connect your members with opportunities for leadership and resources?
- The Ohio Department of Education is making resources, including funding and training, available to districts that want to use co-observation to increase the benefits of classroom observation for improving instructional practice.
- Co-observation is a strategy that is validated by research and the experience of other States. During co-observation, a teacher is observed and gets feedback from the school leader and a teacher leader. Teachers receive more comprehensive feedback, and instructional leaders develop confidence and coaching skills.
- The co-observation process is a potential way to engage Master Teachers and Endorsed Teacher Leaders in providing useful feedback to other teachers to improve instruction.

District Leaders – No Master Teachers/Endorsed Teacher Leaders

- What would it take for teacher evaluation to be a transformative tool for improving practice in your district?
- Co-observation is a strategy that is validated by research and the experience of other States. During co-observation, a teacher is observed and gets feedback from the school leader and a teacher leader. Teachers receive more comprehensive feedback, and instructional leaders develop confidence and coaching skills.
- The Ohio Department of Education is making resources available to districts that want to use co-observation to increase the benefits of classroom observation for improving instructional practice.

District Leaders – Have Master Teachers/Endorsed Teacher Leaders

- What would it take for teacher evaluation to be a transformative tool for improving practice in your district?
- The co-observation grant is an opportunity to build collaborative leadership with Master Teachers and Endorsed Teacher Leaders in your district to facilitate professional dialogue and collegial learning with other teachers.
- Co-observation is a strategy that is validated by research and the experience of other States. During co-observation, a teacher is observed and gets feedback from the school leader and a teacher leader. Teachers receive more comprehensive feedback, and instructional leaders develop confidence and coaching skills.
- The Ohio Department of Education is making resources available to districts that want to use co-observation to increase the benefits of classroom observation for improving instructional practice.

School Leaders

- Are you confident in your ability to provide useful feedback to teachers from classroom observations? Is that feedback leading to improvement?
- Co-observation is a strategy that is validated by research and the experience of other States. During co-observation, a teacher is observed and gets feedback from the school leader and a teacher leader. Teachers receive more comprehensive feedback, the school leader gains confidence as an observer, and teacher leaders develop as instructional coaches.
- The Ohio Department of Education is making resources available to districts that want to use co-observation to increase the benefits of classroom observation for improving instructional practice.

Teachers

- Are you interested in opportunities for teacher leadership?

- The Ohio Department of Education is making resources available to districts that want to use co-observation to increase the benefits of classroom observation for improving instructional practice.

- During co-observation, a teacher is observed and gets feedback from the school leader and a teacher leader. The process improves the feedback teachers get on their instruction and helps the observers develop as instructional leaders.

Ohio Communications Plan – Work Plan

Communication Effort	Objectives	Audience(s)	Person Responsible	Tentative Timeline
Informal discussion with pilot population	Lay the groundwork.	Superintendents	ODE Staff	Summer
Communicate to the pilot districts via email	Encourage superintendents to apply.	Superintendents	ODE Staff	Late summer/early fall
Personal outreach to district superintendents	Encourage superintendents to apply.	Superintendents	ODE Staff	Phone outreach +1 week, +2 weeks, +3 weeks
Send targeted email to associations for forwarding	Inspire teachers, principals and district staff to learn more and encourage superintendents to apply.	Teachers, principals and district staff	ODE Director	Timed with pilot population outreach
State organization conferences	Inspire teachers, principals and district staff to learn more and encourage superintendents to apply.	Teachers, principals and district staff	ODE Director	Timed with pilot population outreach
Webpage	Inspire teachers, principals and district staff to learn more and encourage superintendents to apply.	Teachers, principals and district staff	ODE Staff	Timed with pilot population outreach
Teacher toolkit	Inspire teachers, principals and district staff to learn more and encourage superintendents to apply.	Teachers, principals and district staff	ODE Staff	One month before pilot population outreach
Superintendents' newsletter	Encourage superintendents to apply.	Superintendents	ODE Staff	One month before pilot population outreach target, Monday after pilot population outreach

Appendix C

In partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education, the RSN developed the following plan to solicit feedback from educators about the State-developed instructional guides for **Mathematics** and **English Language Arts**. States can adapt these questions to generate feedback from stakeholders about State-developed tools or strategies.

Instructional Guide Feedback Loops Plan Summary

The RSN is providing individualized assistance to four States that want to improve their teacher observation processes and tools. Louisiana has created instructional guides to support the use of classroom observation to improve practice in the classroom so that observers can identify effective teaching practices and provide useful feedback. The RSN is supporting the development of a plan for gathering feedback on the guides from the field.

Following are approaches for how Louisiana can build its feedback plan, including a list of potential survey questions and a plan for facilitating focus groups.

Determine Research Objectives

Louisiana has already identified several research questions:

- Who is using the guides?
- Why do certain groups use it more than others?
- How are they using it? At what point during the observations is it used? What's the experience like? How does it translate to feedback?
- Did the tool result in a change in practice? For whom?
- It may be helpful to generate additional research questions.

Gather Evidence Via Survey

The first phase of gathering evidence may begin with an online questionnaire. Surveys diverge from the truth because of four sources of error:

- Sampling – if the sample is too small or not representative of the population
- Coverage – if some members of the population have a zero-percent chance of being sampled
- Measurement – if a respondent's answer is inaccurate or imprecise
- Non-Response – if respondents differ from non-respondents

Louisiana should consider each source of error in determining a methodology for the survey. The survey sampling plan depends on the available frame, which is likely to be a list of email addresses. How complete is the email list? This will determine the extent of potential coverage error. Does the list include any other information about the address, such as the school where the person is employed or his/her role? The sampling plan should also consider the level of granularity with which the department would like to make estimates. For example, if estimates are desired at the district level, the sampling plan will need to accommodate an appropriate sample size within each district.

Because there is no cost to send additional online questionnaires, the department might consider sending the questionnaire to the entire list. This eliminates sampling error, but it does not eliminate the other sources of error, and it may contribute to "survey fatigue" in the field.

It is preferable to send a unique link to each email address. This can be done via survey software such as SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics. This prevents one person from submitting multiple responses, helps ensure respondents are the original recipients, and enables reminder emails to be sent only to those who have not yet responded.

Remember, there is no magic response rate at which we can be sure of our estimates. What matters is whether and how the non-respondents differ from the respondents. This can be difficult to estimate, and the department should consider how to prioritize the management of non-response error. One option is to compare the non-respondents to the respondents on other known parameters (such as additional information contained in the original frame). Another is to seek out and interview a sample of non-respondents.

Thoughtful questionnaire design can help mitigate measurement error. Questionnaire designers should also consider the likely concerns of respondents regarding confidentiality and potentially undesirable answers. Other strategies for improving the quality of questionnaires include:

- Review by content experts
- Cognitive interviews with respondents
- A field test of limited scope before the primary collection

RSN Deliverables

- The RSN will provide a bank of draft questionnaire items, guided by best practices in questionnaire design, as a resource for survey development (see Appendix C.1).

Gather Evidence Via Focus Group

The department may wish to use the survey results to invite participants to a focus group. In this case, it will be extremely important to provide accurate confidentiality information to respondents before they respond to the survey. A focus group can be used to delve into remaining research questions and to gather stories of implementation.

RSN Deliverables

- The RSN will deliver a preliminary focus group guide geared toward the research objectives (see Appendix C.2).

Use Findings to Inform Adjustments to Guides and Outreach

The most important step will be to use the evidence gathered from the field to inform action steps for the design and use of the guides. The department should plan for the resources required to analyze and synthesize the findings of the survey and focus groups for decision makers, and create a facilitated meeting to determine appropriate actions.

Appendix C.1: Draft Questionnaire Items

Best practices in survey methodology suggest that all questionnaires should begin with an introduction that includes the following:

- A description of the purpose of the survey and why responses are important
- An accurate estimate of the time needed to complete the questionnaire
- Accurate information about confidentiality and the use of responses
- The name and contact information of a person to contact with regard to any questions
- A closing message thanking the respondent for his/her time

Demographics

If you do not have information associated with email addresses in your survey frame, you may wish to collect information through the questionnaire. Consider that some respondents may be reluctant to provide such information if they think that their responses may be used in a manner that will reflect negatively on them. You can make these items optional, but you will complicate your ability to sort the responses. These questions do not need to be presented at the beginning of the survey.

Depending on the answers to these questions, you may use skip logic to avoid unnecessary questions. For example, if a respondent has not used the guides, they should not be asked to answer questions about the use of the guides.

1. Please select your roles during this school year. [Provide a list of roles.]

2. During the past school year, have you conducted any classroom observations of teachers? (Yes/No/Don't Know)

3. [If yes to question 2] About how many classroom observations do you conduct in a typical month? [Provide a dropdown menu of single numbers with a reasonable range, such as 1–10.]

4. Please select your school district this school year. [Provide a dropdown menu of school districts.]

Questions about Instructional Guides

5. Are you aware of the Instructional Guides to Observation & Feedback provided by the State Department of Education? [Consider including a screenshot of the guide with this question.] (Yes/No/Don't Know)

6. Have you reviewed the instructional guides? (Yes/No/Don't Know)

7. [if yes to question 6] Did you use the instructional guides in any of the following ways? Select "yes," "no," or "don't know" for each option:

   a. To gather evidence during a full lesson observation.

   b. To gather evidence during a focused classroom observation.

   c. To help prepare written or oral feedback to teachers.

   d. To inform my own understanding of instructional practices.

   e. To find resources related to standards-based instruction.

8. Are there any other ways in which you used the instructional guides this year? Please describe. [Provide text box.]

9. Did you find the instructional guides helpful for [insert options from question 7, according to skip logic, for respondents who indicated that they had used the item in each way]? Please describe how the guides were helpful or not helpful for this purpose. [Provide text box.]

10. Has your practice or the practice of teachers in your school changed as a result of these guides? (Yes/No/Don't Know) [If yes] Please describe the changes in practice. [Provide text box.]

11. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group about the instructional guides? [If possible, include information about timing and location.]

Appendix C.2: Draft Focus Group Guide

A focus group is a useful tool for gathering evidence related to research questions. You can use focus groups to accomplish the following:

- Explore the range of possible answers.

- Find out what you don't know you don't know.

- Gather information from the participants' interactions with each other.

- Record specific anecdotes.

Focus Group Principles

- Aim for your focus group to include 6–8 people. Consider beginning with role-alike groups (for example, principals) to avoid confusion among participants and to remove barriers to candid feedback. Make sure that your feedback group participants represent the range of school characteristics in the State (for example, urban and rural, high-need).

- The moderator should aim to put participants at ease and remain neutral.

- The moderator should ask probing questions and balance letting the group explore the topic with staying focused on the main questions.

- The moderator should not be responsible for taking notes. If you can, it is helpful to record the session. Whatever method you decide to use, inform the participants of how their input will be captured.

- A typical focus group lasts 1.5–2 hours.

- Snacks are always a good idea.

Process

Opening/Ice Breaker

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the focus group.
- Provide information about confidentiality, including how the State will use notes/recording from the meeting.
- Establish ground rules, such as:
- One person talks at a time.
  - Be aware of your air time so that everyone has an opportunity to speak.
  - Provide evidence and examples whenever possible.
  - Speak clearly so everyone in the group can hear.
  - Do not criticize other members' opinions, but feel free to ask follow-up questions.
- Open the discussion by having each participant state his/her name and position.

Building Rapport

- Start with a low-anxiety question.
- Consider a round-robin for the first question – have everyone answer in turn. This ensures that everyone has a chance to speak and helps the moderator get a sense of the room. For example, "Can you provide a brief example of how you have used the instructional guide in your work?"

In-Depth Investigation

- Interaction among the group becomes more prominent.
- Consider the following research questions:
  - Who is using the guides?
  - Why do certain groups use it more than others?
  - How are they using it? At what point in observations is it used? What's the experience like? How does it translate to feedback?
  - Did the tool result in a change in practice? For whom?
- If the participants don't volunteer information about their use of the instructional guides in specific situations, be sure to ask.
- Encourage discussion but keep the pace moving to ensure you cover priority areas.
- If you begin to run out of time, provide an option for participants to give additional feedback, either by email or on a Post-It note.

Closure

- Generally summarize what you heard without recounting everything point by point.
- Repeat what actions will be taken as a result of their feedback, and how this will be communicated.
- Thank them for their participation.

Appendix D

This chart describes the project goals and objectives for each State that participated in the cohort, as well as key lessons that each State learned about effective observation systems (content) and how State leaders can best cultivate these systems (process).

State	Goal	Objective	Key Lessons – Content	Key Lessons – Process
DE	• Make observations more meaningful for observers and educators.	Support DDOE as they work with districts to develop and submit for approval alternative evaluation models in a way that seeds innovation and develops stronger models.	• High-quality observation rubrics are clear, concise, coherent and focused.	• Provide districts with the ability to propose alternative models and innovate within the system. • Need to create a communications strategy that incentivizes districts and builds trust.
LA	• Improve quality of feedback on content.	Refine instructional guides and develop a "use case" to share as a model with LEAs prior to start of 2015–2016 school year.	• Teachers need meaningful feedback (for example, content-specific, actionable). • Observers are not always confident when providing content-specific feedback. • Annotating rubrics to give specific guidance on content can build confidence among observers as they provide this feedback.	• Role of SEA is to produce and disseminate tools • Important to ensure quality and usability in the field • This is accomplished by soliciting stakeholder feedback throughout the development and upon implementation in the field.
NC	• Make observations more efficient and targeted.	Develop and pilot a companion tool, which is made up of indicators that are observable and correlated with positive student outcomes, for the current evaluation framework.	• Rubrics are too burdensome for observers. • They need more clarity, conciseness, connections to student outcomes.	• Pilot new strategy with small set of districts. • Create a shared definition of high-quality instruction and feedback, as well as shared outcomes for student achievement.
OH	• Improve accuracy of observation ratings • Improve quality of feedback to teachers.	Increase district use of co-observation as a strategy to help observers increase the quality of feedback for teachers and rating calibration among observers.	• Co-observation can be an effective way to improve inter-rater reliability and quality of feedback. • Co-observation also gives teachers a leadership opportunity.	• State needs a strong theory of action. • Pilot a new strategy with a small set of districts. • Use requests for proposals (RFPs) to encourage district innovation.