

The right start

Creating a strong foundation for the teaching career

A quality system of teacher evaluation would be built on high-quality preparation and evaluated authentically through performance assessments that develop and measure beginning teacher effectiveness.

By **Linda Darling-Hammond**

Educators know — and research confirms — that every aspect of school reform depends for its success on highly skilled teachers and principals, especially when the expectations of schools and the diversity of the student body increase. This may be the most important lesson learned in more than two decades of varied reforms to improve schools. Regardless of the efforts or initiative, teachers tip the scale toward success or failure.

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Teacher evaluation is currently the primary tool being promoted to improve teaching. With its focus on teacher effectiveness, the federal Race to the Top initiative began the process of requiring participating states to develop more extensive evaluation systems, including more differentiation among teacher ratings and use of student learning evidence. That has been continued as a condition of state waivers under No Child Left Behind. As a consequence, most states are dramatically overhauling their evaluation systems for teachers and administrators.

While virtually everyone agrees that teacher evaluation in the United States needs changing, we must recognize that changing on-the-job evaluation will not by itself transform the quality of teaching. For all of the attention on identifying and removing poor teachers, we won't really improve the quality of the profession unless we also bring in an excellent supply of good teachers who are well-prepared and committed to ongoing learning. That will require building a strong professional development system that can help spread expertise.

In short, what we really need is the conception of teacher evaluation as part of a *teaching and learning system* that supports continuous improvement for individual teachers and the profession. Such a system should enhance teacher learning and skill, while also ensuring that teachers can effectively support student learning throughout their careers.

A highly skilled teaching force results from developing well-prepared teachers from recruitment through preparation and in-service professional development. Support for teacher learning and evaluation must be part of an integrated whole that enables effectiveness during every stage of a teacher's career. Such a system must ensure that teacher evaluation is connected to — not isolated from — preparation and induction programs, daily professional practice, and a productive instructional context.

Unlike most high-achieving nations, however, the United States has not yet developed a system of training and supports to ensure that all teachers are well-prepared and ready to teach all students effectively when they enter the profession. In this article,

I briefly outline what such a system would entail, and then focus in on the beginning of the process: high-quality preparation, evaluated authentically through performance assessments that both *develop* and *measure* beginning teacher effectiveness. On this foundation — and with aligned standards — a teaching career can be well-launched in a way that supports ongoing learning from thoughtful evaluation and development.

Creating a system for effective teaching

There is a growing realization that we need a more systemic approach to building teacher effectiveness. For example, in *Gearing Up: Creating a Systemic Approach to Teacher Effectiveness* (2011), a task force of the National Association of State Boards of Education emphasized creating a more aligned system, beginning with recruitment and preparation and continuing through evaluation and career development. In a recent report outlining how such a system should be constructed, I describe the key elements that should anchor a coherent approach:

- 1) **Common statewide standards** for teaching that are related to meaningful student learning and are shared across the profession;
- 2) **Performance-based assessments, based on these standards, guiding state functions** such as teacher preparation, licensure, and advanced certification;
- 3) **Local evaluation systems aligned to the same standards**, for evaluating on-the-job teaching based on multiple measures of teaching practice and student learning;
- 4) **Support structures** to ensure trained evaluators, mentoring for teachers who need additional assistance, and fair decisions about personnel actions; and
- 5) **Aligned professional learning opportunities** that support the improvement of teachers and teaching quality (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

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Each of these is an important link in the chain of successful systemic change. Without a well-articulated strategy, we have seen that criteria and methods for evaluating teachers vary substantially across schools and districts, and these are typically disconnected from the ways teachers are evaluated at key career milestones: upon completion of preservice teacher education, when they are first licensed, and when they are tenured and receive a longer-term professional license. Over careers, most teachers experience a cacophony of standards and directives — both in terms of *what* they're expected to teach and *how* they're expected to do so. This lack of coherence undermines teacher learning and makes it difficult to devise effective solutions to the problems of teaching practice.

Start with standards

“If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there,” observed the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. So it is in education. Without a clear understanding of what students should learn and how teaching can support them, it is easy to wander aimlessly. Developing consistent standards for teaching that extend across the career and embody a shared vision of educational goals and supportive instruction is the first step.

The Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics are one effort to achieve a more common vision of educational purpose. State standards in these and other subject areas also articulate agreement about learning goals for students.

Equally important is aligning teaching standards to these goals. Starting in 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards created benchmarks for how accomplished teachers can enact the kind of learning envisioned by student learning standards. Similarly, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium has revised its model licensing standards for beginning teachers, which has been adopted by over 40 states, to reflect the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to implement the Common Core and other standards for student learning.

These efforts to align learning standards with teaching standards are expressed in performance terms: what teachers should know and be able to do to support student learning, rather than merely how many hours they should sit in classes or workshops to gain credits. Such performance-based standards have begun to focus teacher preparation and development on effective practice.

Translate standards into performance

Standards are nothing but words on a piece of paper until they're translated into expectations and actions guiding what students and teachers actually

do on behalf of learning. Fortunately, we've made significant progress in translating teaching standards into performance-based assessments over the last two decades. Teacher performance assessments were first developed in the early 1990s for the National Board's certification of accomplished teachers and, later, for beginning teacher licensure in states like Connecticut and California.

It's high time for this change. For many decades, teachers' scores on traditional paper-and-pencil tests of basic skills and subject matter, while useful for establishing academic standards, haven't been significantly related to classroom effectiveness. However, in a significant breakthrough, well-designed performance-based assessments have been found to measure aspects of teaching related to effectiveness, as measured by student achievement gains.

For example, a number of studies have found that the National Board certification assessment process distinguishes teachers who are more effective in improving student achievement from others who don't achieve certification (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Cavaluzzo, 2004; Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004). Similarly, beginning teachers' ratings on the Connecticut BEST assessments were found to predict their students' achievement gains on state tests, while other measures — such as undergraduate college, GPA, and traditional subject matter tests — did not (Wilson & Hallum, 2006). The scores of entering teachers on the California Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) have also been found to predict their students' gains on state tests (Newton, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2012).

The power and potential of the shift to performance-based assessment is hard to underestimate. The value of such assessments is that they both document and help teachers develop greater effectiveness, as participation in these assessments supports learning both for teachers who are being evaluated and for educators trained to be evaluators. Furthermore, such assessment of entering teachers, when used for licensure and accreditation, can transform their teacher education programs.

Teacher education programs receive detailed, aggregated data on all candidates by program area and dimensions of teaching, and use the data to improve their curriculum, instruction, and program designs. Using these aggregated data for accreditation could ultimately provide a solid basis for deciding which program models should be approved and replicated and which should be discontinued if they can't improve enough to enable most of their candidates to demonstrate that they can teach. With the addition of the incentives for National Board certification, these assessments would provide a continuum of

measures that identify and help stimulate increasing effectiveness across the career.

Build a continuum

Ideally, states would create a tiered licensure system that licenses new teachers and recognizes accomplished teachers based on their demonstrated performance. The system would frame a career continuum for professional learning and advancement to which local evaluations are aligned.

State performance assessments of teaching would first be used for the initial teaching license that grants permission to practice (usually called the preliminary or probationary license) and again at Tier 2, as an indication that the induction period has been successfully completed, and the teacher has reached a professional level of competence associated with earning the professional license.

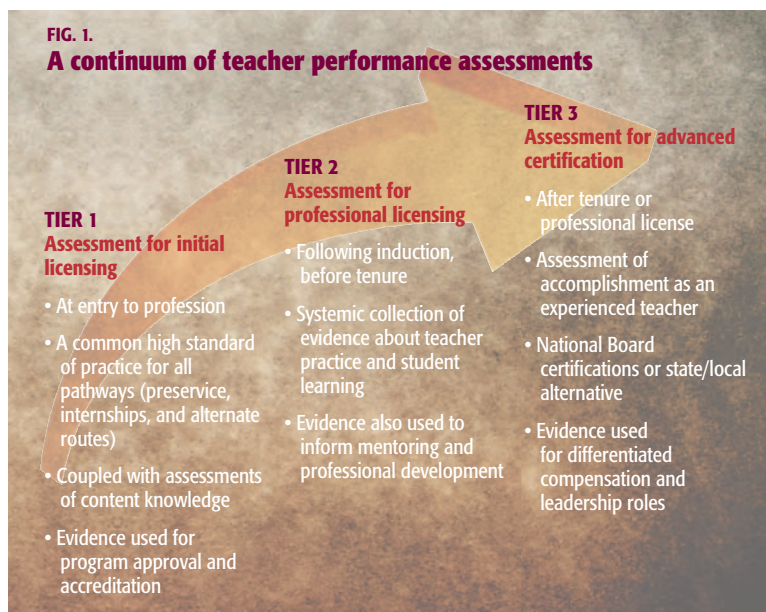
In a number of states, a continuum of teacher performance assessments is envisioned, as National Board certification (or a similar assessment) is used to evaluate teachers for mentor or lead teacher status or for earning greater compensation.

New Mexico has already created a three-tiered licensure system at the state level, with locally aligned on-the-job evaluations. Based on a portfolio modeled on the National Board process, providing evidence of performance in three areas — instruction, student learning, and professional learning — teachers must demonstrate increasing competence in order to progress from Provisional Teacher (first three years) to Professional Teacher to Master Teacher. Each level is accompanied by increased compensation and responsibilities (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

This has created an aligned system that focuses teachers on what their students learn as a result of their teaching decisions and on how they can learn to improve their effectiveness. Teachers feel they are learning as they both develop their own portfolios and score those of other teachers when they are part of the state scoring team. They also learn as they get feedback on their work from colleagues, made more useful by the common language teachers are developing around their practice. And because yearly district evaluations are based on the same standards as the licensing assessments, teachers can continue to work on their practice in a coherent way throughout their careers.

Assess new teacher effectiveness

Teachers who have experienced the power of performance assessments have consistently insisted that this approach to evaluation is most useful to them. Because of this commitment, teachers have continued to pursue National Board certification, even when subsidies for their fees and stipends to recognize success have been cut.



So it has been with California's PACT, which was built by teacher educators and teachers from what are now more than 30 traditional and alternative programs. The assessment allows Californians to put aside tired arguments about which pathways to teaching are better by, instead, evaluating candidates on whether they can meet a common standard of effective practice. Coordinated by a team of researchers and teacher educators at Stanford University, PACT is scored in a consistent fashion by faculty members, supervisors, cooperating teachers, and principals, providing clear evidence of what beginning teachers can do as well as useful information for guiding their own learning and that of the programs themselves.

California programs have found the assessment so helpful in guiding and improving their practice — and that of their candidates — that they have continued the work on their own dime, even when promised state funds disappeared. PACT has spread as committed members of the group have moved about the country. First, a teacher educator from UC Santa Barbara moved to the University of Washington and took PACT with him. Faculty at the University of Washington liked the assessment so much they adopted it and talked about it to others in the state, who also got engaged. Ultimately, the state of Washington proposed adapting the model to use for beginning licensure.

Teacher educators from other states asked to be part of the project and urged the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education as well as their own state agencies to look at the assessment for accreditation and licensing, because they believe it measures their work more accurately than other regulations.

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The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) coordinated information sessions and conversations. Ultimately, a group of teacher educators, working with teachers from across the country, decided to create a national version. They created the Teacher Performance Assessment Consortium (TPAC) and designed a new version of the assessment to use nationwide.

The new Teacher Performance Assessment (recently named the edTPA) is designed to examine whether prospective teachers are ready to teach by reviewing candidates' plans, videotapes of instruction, evidence of student work and learning, and commentary on student work. The assessment focuses on whether teachers can organize instruction to promote learning for all students, including new English learners and students with disabilities, what kind of learning outcomes they can enable, and how they analyze these outcomes to create greater student success. In addition, in line with new Common Core standards, the assessment also examines teachers' ability to develop academic language.

With Stanford and AACTE, the Consortium recruited Pearson, an education services company, as an administrative partner to manage the large and growing number of interested participants. The field test in spring 2012 included 22 states, more than 160 institutions of higher education, and 7,000 teaching candidates.

Test their assessment: Teacher educators step up

The field test has engendered excitement at participating universities, where conversations about how to prepare teachers have deepened. Amee Adkins, teacher educator at Illinois State University, said, "If there's one positive outcome from the current aggressive rhetoric aimed at teachers and teacher preparation, it is the Teacher Performance Assessment. It offers an opportunity to shift the paradigm from a license as an entitlement for completing a curriculum to an obligation to demonstrate the proficiency the curriculum intends.

In Ohio, 32 institutions piloted all or part of the TPAC in 2010-11 and studied the outcomes. When teaching candidates who took the assessment were surveyed, 96% had positive comments about the experience, with 53% observing that they acquired new learning and became more self-aware during the assessment and another 37% expressing approval for the focus on student learning. While 6% appreciated the time they had to complete the assessment, most of the small number of negative comments (2%) were because some candidates in this first time around felt rushed (Hanby, 2011).

Teacher educators also felt the process was educative. Vanderbilt University's Marcy Singer Gabella notes that faculty at the eight Tennessee universities

piloting the assessment say that working with the TPA has led to more productive conversations about teaching practices. For example, early work with the TPA revealed that candidates were having difficulty analyzing student work and giving students usable feedback. In response, Vanderbilt teacher education faculty revised coursework and field assignments to provide more opportunities for such practice.

Vanderbilt student teacher Nicole Renner said the TPA really changed her capacity to teach by refocusing her from herself — where most beginners start and end — to the students. "The main lesson of the TPA is exactly what new and preservice teachers need to learn: It's about the students, dummy. . . . (T)he TPA process shape(s) the candidate's field experience in meaningful ways that specifically address changing the candidate's focus to be entirely on students."

Renner's graphic summary of how the TPA changes the typical student teaching experience is shown in Figure 2. It illustrates vividly how a well-constructed performance assessment can be a critical gift in helping novices become professional teachers.

Launch every teacher with a solid foundation

By 2013, the edTPA will be nationally available for use in initial licensing or for programs that want to develop useful outcome data for accreditation, and a companion assessment will be under development for use at the transition from probationary to professional teaching license (usually after three years).

Along with the National Board certification portfolio, this set of assessments can be used not only for personnel decision making over a teacher's career, but also for guiding teacher development and for evaluating and improving teacher education, mentoring, and professional development programs. This could greatly improve teacher effectiveness by allowing them to experience assessments that are truly educative and by improving the quality of teachers' preparation for and induction into the classroom.

This may be the first time that the teacher education community has come together to hold itself accountable for the quality of teachers who are being prepared and to develop tools its members believe are truly valid measures of teaching knowledge and skill. Unlike other professionals, teachers have historically had little control over the tests by which they are evaluated. This rigorous, authentic measure represents a responsible professionalization of teacher preparation.

The critical importance of this move for the teaching profession is that it has the potential to dramatically improve how teachers are prepared and to ensure that beginners enter the classroom truly ready

FIG. 2.
How the TPA changes the typical student-teaching experience

"Typical" student teaching	TPA experience
Day-to-day focus, sometimes with no accountability for extended planning, especially if the cooperating teacher is a "fly by the seat of her pants" type	Emphasis on long-term planning with mid-course corrections and daily adjustments
Observation of isolated lessons	Records an arc of instruction
About teacher behaviors	About student work
Evaluation of teaching led by outside observers (cooperating teacher, university supervisor, etc.)	Self-led evaluation of teaching (with appropriate guidance and feedback)
Difficult to focus on individual students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know students well • Cooperating teachers may not do it 	Required focus on individual students at different performance levels
More about rehearsal of teaching practices than assessment of teaching readiness	High stakes – just like solo teaching!
Multitude of inputs regarding "good" teaching practice from coursework and field interactions	Unified vision of core competencies for effective teaching, encountered during actual teaching practice

Source: Nicole Renner (2012).

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to succeed. If this were to happen, it could change the entire equation for teaching and learning in this country. The task for teacher evaluation and development would be to strengthen already good practice, rather than filling in huge gaps and firing weak practitioners. Indeed, creating universally strong teacher education for all candidates was the basis on which high-performing Finland transformed its education system more than 20 years ago. We cannot fire our way to Finland. We need to arm teachers with the knowledge and skills they need so they can teach students in the way that they deserve.

In the context of the current debates about teacher evaluation and education quality, it is inspiring to see educators step up and accept the challenge to create something better, rather than complaining about narrow measures that do not reflect their highest aspirations. The best hope for significantly improving education at all levels of the system is for educators to take charge of accountability and make it useful for learning and improvement. **K**

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