

## Teachers to get their own report cards

By Freda R. Savana Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, August 27, 2014 6:00 am

School districts across Bucks and Montgomery counties will get their first look at the results of a new teacher evaluation system this fall.

The state instituted the detailed program, which grades educators in four categories, in 2012. It went into effect last school year, with new provisions being added this year.

Modeled on the work of teaching effectiveness expert Charlotte Danielson, the evaluation system brings uniformity to districts across the state, say some educators.

“It provides a framework for teaching,” said Steve Yanni, assistant to the superintendent at New Hope-Solebury School District.

Under the new formula, administrators not only observe teachers in the classroom and then meet with them to discuss their performance, the teacher also has an opportunity to provide input.

“It’s a more collaborative approach,” said Yanni, “with face-to-face meetings.”

Other factors included in a teacher’s report card are graduation rates, education planning, students’ grades and a range of other data chosen by each district.

When complete, each teacher is rated either distinguished, proficient, needs improvement or failing. If there’s a failing grade, the teacher is placed on an improvement plan and regularly monitored. A second failing grade is grounds for firing, Yanni explained.

Souderton School District Superintendent Frank Gallagher finds the new approach helpful.

“It’s a very powerful tool,” he said. “It’s a good, reflective process for the teacher and the principal.”

Much like a student’s report card, a teacher’s rating is private. As part of their employment record, it will not be available to the public.

While most school districts have long relied on observing teachers in class, checking their preparation and more, they did not judge teachers on their students’ performance on state assessment tests.

During the past school year, 85 percent of a teacher’s grade was based on in-class observations and 15 percent was based on a school performance profile — a state measure of how the school performs



English teachers meet during a meeting for their department at New Hope-Solebury High School on Tuesday afternoon. Classes start the Tuesday following Labor Day.

overall.

The performance profile replaces the adequate yearly progress measure from No Child Left Behind, an education reform policy that began in 2001. The new profile includes students' performance on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment and Keystone exams, advanced placement scores, attendance and other measures.

However, beginning this school year, 15 percent of a teacher's grade will be linked to the entire school's performance on assessment testing and 15 percent on individual student's performance on statewide assessments.

Half of a teacher's grade will be based on in-class observations, according to the evaluation formula. The remaining 20 percent of the evaluation can be determined by district-selected data, which can include national standardized testing such as SAT scores, or local assessments and projects, such as an art portfolio.

At the Centennial School District, human resources director Andrea DiDio, said the district has already provided extensive professional development to ensure teachers proficiency in all the areas of evaluation.

"This year, Centennial implemented a differentiated supervision model, where teachers rotate through a series of activities to evaluate their teaching performance and professional learning," said DiDio in an email.

"In many instances, we have already been using Common Core assessments across the district to determine if students have mastered skills and content, so this portion of the evaluation system is not a far departure from the practice already in place," said DiDio.

Palisades School District Superintendent Bridget O'Connell said her district too has been preparing for the new evaluation rubric.

"Our administrators and teachers are ready to implement the new system, as we are required by law," O'Connell said in an email.

Linking teachers' evaluations to statewide assessments has some educators concerned that it may lead to "teaching to the test."

Although Central Bucks Superintendent David Weitzel said he supports the model of more teacher involvement in the evaluation process, he expressed concern about linking teachers' performance to standardized test scores.

"I don't think it's the best way to evaluate teachers," said the superintendent. "It's putting too much emphasis on standardized tests — for teachers and students."

Weitzel said he worries too that the new measurement has "the potential to narrow curriculum."

"There's much more to a child's education than what's on a standardized test," he added.

“It’s a whole different way to evaluate teachers,” agreed Souderton’s Gallagher.