

September 2015

Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR)

Frequently Asked Questions & Glossary of Terms



What is APPR?

APPR stands for Annual Professional Performance Review and it is the process by which teachers and principals are evaluated in New York State. The intent of APPR is to assist educators to improve the quality of instruction in schools and, in turn, to improve students' performance and readiness for colleges and careers. District APPR plans must meet strict state guidelines and be negotiated with local unions. Under state guidelines, APPR takes into account classroom observations and student performance. Teachers and principals across New York ultimately receive an overall effectiveness rating every year.

Have teachers and principals always been evaluated?

Yes. Teachers and principals have always been evaluated and held to specific standards. The APPR system was revamped in 2010, 2012 and, 2013 as a result of the federal Race to the Top education reform initiative, and again in 2015 as part of the 2015-16 New York State budget, which included an ambitious education reform agenda. Under the APPR system, evaluation plans must adhere to more stringent guidelines set by the state. A portion of the evaluations is directly tied to student performance on state exams or other state-approved learning measures. District plans must be submitted to and approved by the NYS Education Department.

What is the goal of APPR?

The evaluation system was one pillar of the larger federal Race to the Top education reform initiative that aims to improve the quality of instruction in our schools and, in turn, improve student performance and college and career readiness. The APPR requirements aim to provide standardized, objective evaluation results that can be used to better focus professional development for teachers and principals. According to the State Education Department, "The purpose of the evaluation system is to ensure that there is an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective leader in every school."

Why is APPR changing again in the 2015-16 school year?

As part of the 2015-16 New York state budget, lawmakers approved the Education Transformation Act of 2015, which includes Section 3012-d of Education Law and Subpart 30-3 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. Under the new legislation, school districts and boards of cooperative educational services (BOCES) are expected to submit new APPR plans for teachers and building principals, and gain the NYS Education Department's approval for such plans, by Nov. 15, 2015 in order to receive their scheduled increases in state aid for the 2015-16 school year and future school years until a new plan is in place. The newly redesigned teacher evaluation system is one part of an ambitious education reform agenda that addresses other key areas, such as teacher preparation, certification and tenure.

What is the timeframe for implementation of new APPR plans?

School districts across the state are in various stages of negotiating new APPR plans that meet the requirements set forth in Education Law 3012-d. Districts and BOCES with hardships that affect their ability to meet the Nov. 15, 2015 deadline for implementing the new APPR plan during the 2015-16 school year are required to submit hardship waiver applications to the NYS Education Department in order to extend this deadline without risk of losing their eligibility for a state aid increase.

All districts and BOCES granted hardship waivers must continue to implement their previously approved APPR plans until a new plan is agreed to by the district and local bargaining unit.

New APPR plans approved prior to March 1, 2016 will apply to the 2015-16 school year. New plans approved after March 1, 2016 will apply to the 2016-17 school year.

How is the new evaluation system different? How are principals and teachers evaluated?

Just as they did under the previous APPR system, under the system approved by the state in 2015 teachers and principals will earn one of four final ratings: highly effective, effective, developing or ineffective (HEDI). However, the new APPR framework does away with the three-component system (20 percent for student growth, 20 percent for student achievement, and 60 percent for observations) and replaces it with a system where student performance and observation scores are each weighted and combined in a state-designed matrix to determine a final overall ranking. Each component has mandatory and optional subcomponents, some of which will be locally negotiated in accordance with state guidelines. Details can be found at engageny.org.

Are APPR scores available to the public?

No, schools are prohibited by law from releasing APPR scores to the public. Under the 2015 state law, the following individual teacher and principal data may be released to parents: student performance score, teacher observation score and overall rating. By law, scores can only be released to parents who specifically request them and they can only be released for a student's current teacher(s) and principal. Parents who wish to request these scores should contact their child's school.

Is teacher/principal experience taken into account in each APPR evaluation?

Guidance from the NYS Education Department has been that districts are not expected to consider educator experience as part of the APPR process.

Who evaluates teachers and principals?

Teachers and principals are observed by trained evaluators selected by the district. All lead evaluators, independent observers and peer observers must complete training.

What if a teacher/principal receives a rating of developing or ineffective?

Any teacher/principal rated as developing or ineffective will receive a negotiated Teacher Improvement Plan (TIP) or Principal Improvement Plan (PIP). These plans identify areas in need of improvement and include a timeline for achieving improvement, the manner in which the improvement will be assessed and, where appropriate, activities to support improvement in those areas. A pattern of ineffective performance could lead to an expedited hearing process for termination. Teachers/principals who receive a rating of developing or ineffective may file an appeal.

If every district has a locally negotiated APPR plan, how do the effectiveness ratings of teachers and principals in my district compare to those in other districts?

Put simply, they don't compare. While all districts must follow a certain set of guidelines when developing APPR plans, and then those plans must be approved by the State Education Department, many of the standards within these plans vary by district. This includes, but is not limited to, the observation rubrics districts decide to use, the student growth measures and assessments used in areas other than state standardized exams, and the way in which points are assigned within the different components. Similarly, districts routinely renegotiate their APPR plans with local unions, so it may be difficult to compare effectiveness ratings even within the same district from year to year.

Besides principals, are any other school administrators evaluated?

The state's APPR law requires that building principals be evaluated based on the state guidelines. Other administrators within the district must be evaluated based on the district's procedures outlined in collective bargaining agreements. Under state law, superintendents are required to be evaluated each year by the district's governing body (typically the Board of Education).

How can I learn more about APPR in my school district?

Call the district's superintendent's office at 993-4000 to learn more about APPR in Fort Plain Central School District. Online, you'll find a copy of the district's state-approved APPR plan and information on how to request the effectiveness rating(s) for your children's teacher(s) and/or principal(s).

For more information on the federal Race to the Top education initiative and NYS Regents Reform agenda, please visit the following websites:

- Engage NY: www.engageny.org/
- Common Core Learning Standards: usny.nysed.gov/rttt/standards-assessments/ccls.html
- Common Core State Standards Initiative: www.corestandards.org/

Glossary of Terms

APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review): A state-governed process for evaluating New York's teachers and principals. Teachers and principals are given a score for the student performance category and the observation category along with an overall effectiveness rating at the end of each school year. A portion of that rating is directly tied to student performance on state exams or other state-approved learning measures. District APPR plans must be submitted to and approved by the New York State Education Department.

Appeals process: A process required by education law and negotiated locally by which teachers or principals can contest their HEDI ratings.

Benchmark or formative assessment: Tests administered throughout the school year that give teachers immediate feedback on how students are meeting academic standards. Benchmark or formative assessments can be used as a tool to measure individual student progress toward academic goals and to help teachers identify content areas that need further attention or students who need extra help.

Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS): The state learning standards, which are essentially a series of learning goals and expectations that guide curriculum development and teaching practices across the state. The standards, adopted by New York in 2011, are comprised of the Common Core State Standards – national academic standards developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers – along with a small set of additional standards. The Common Core State Standards were developed by a group of key stakeholders – teachers, business representatives, school administrators, governors, state education leaders, and content experts – from 46 states, including New York.

Conversion: The process by which observation and student performance measures are translated into numerical scores and by which those numerical scores are then translated into associated HEDI ratings using a state-designed matrix system.

Growth model: The NYS Education Department’s system for comparing the progress (i.e., academic growth) of similar students and by which those numerical scores are converted into associated effectiveness ratings using a consistent scale.

Growth score: State-provided growth scores measure student performance in the current year compared to that of similar students statewide. They are provided to teachers whose courses end in a state-created or administered test for which there is a state-provided growth model and at least 50 percent of a teacher's students are covered under the state-provided measure.

Hardship Waiver: The means through which districts/BOCES that are unable to complete and receive state approval on a new APPR plan – consistent with regulations set forth in the Education Transformation Act of 2015 – by the Nov. 15, 2015 deadline can maintain their eligibility for a state aid increase and extend the deadline for approval of their new APPR plans.

HEDI rating: An effectiveness rating of highly effective, effective, developing or ineffective given to all teachers and principals in the state, as determined by state law.

Rubric: A set of consistent criteria and standards used to outline expectations of quality performance and measure success in achieving those expectations. Districts must choose from a list of state-approved rubrics to guide evaluation and scoring of classroom observations.

SLO (Student Learning Objective): An academic goal for the school year set by teachers and administrators for a group of students that is specific, measurable, based on prior student learning data, and aligned to state curriculum standards. Assessment of student progress toward SLOs is used to determine a student growth score for teachers who are not provided a growth score by the state. The process by which the SLOs are set, reviewed and assessed is determined at the local level. Under the 2015 APPR regulations, all teachers who receive a state-provided growth score must have a back-up SLO for comparable growth measures in case there are not enough students, not enough scores, or unforeseen issues with the data used to generate such a score.

TIP/PIP (Teacher/Principal Improvement Plan): A professional development plan provided to teachers/principals rated as developing or ineffective. A TIP/PIP identifies areas in need of improvement and includes a timeline for achieving improvement, the manner in which the improvement will be assessed, and, where appropriate, activities to support a teacher’s/principal’s improvement in those areas.

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