Improving Teacher Appraisal in Houston ISD

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Introduction

The importance of teachers in student learning cannot be overstated. They are the boots-on-the-ground in education, charged with instructing students and helping them reach their full potential. They are responsible for developing and implementing lesson plans aligned with state and local learning objectives, while also ensuring the physical and social-emotional safety of their students. High-quality teachers make a substantial impact in students' lives and go a long way in addressing systematic disparities and social barriers in education.

Teacher evaluation plays a critical role in ensuring students receive quality instruction and teachers receive the support they need to provide it. Generally, teacher evaluation serves a couple of purposes: First, it highlights areas of improvement for teachers, so they can receive targeted supports. Second, it promotes and rewards quality through setting clear expectations and aligning personnel decisions.

Teacher evaluation is also necessary for providing equitable classroom environments, especially for students who face social barriers to high-quality education. An effective teacher appraisal system provides a clear distribution of teacher quality, so administration can ensure highly-effective teachers are being placed with students who need them the most. This is especially important in a district like the Houston Independent School District (HISD), where inequities in teacher quality persist across the district. As of 2019, the schools with highest need for quality instruction in the district, were more than three times as likely to have teachers rated "ineffective" and "needs improvement" compared to higher-performing, often more affluent, schools.[1] This contrast is even more stark considering how few teachers in HISD are ranked below effective with its current appraisal system.[2] Further, HISD's own research indicates

> **Campuses that received a rating of "A" had more than six times the proportion of teachers with a summative rating of Highly Effective [than] campuses that received a rating of "F". Campuses in the lowest poverty (most affluent) quintile had more than double the proportion of teachers rated as Highly Effective as compared to the poorest quintile group.[3]**

Having a robust system for appraising teachers is a necessity for school districts, especially large urban districts like HISD, with 280 campuses and nearly 12,000 teachers.[4] Ensuring quality feedback and evaluation across such a large district is daunting, and something HISD continues to struggle with. HISD's current evaluation system has been in place for almost a decade and has faced several revisions, a lawsuit, and mixed results for the students that need quality instruction the most. Students, teachers, and our community deserve a system that accurately evaluates and supports teachers, so they can do what they do best: teach our kids.

This paper seeks to clarify the need for effective evaluation in public education and, specifically, in Houston ISD. First, the paper outlines the foundational research for modern teacher evaluations. Next, it turns to the

different types of measures that are used for teacher appraisal. Then, it provides an overview of teacher evaluation requirements in Texas, before turning to examples from other districts in the state and beyond. Finally, the paper explores HISD's current evaluation system and provides recommendations for designing a robust teacher evaluation system in HISD.

The Need for Effective Evaluation

The release of a study called *The Widget Effect* sparked a national debate about evaluating teachers. The study found that across the United States, appraisal systems in school districts were failing to meet either purpose of appraisal by not adequately identifying effective teachers and providing little to no feedback for teacher improvement. Less than 1% of teacher were being rated as ineffective and 73% of teachers said their evaluations did not identify any areas for improvement, providing little help to teachers in need of professional development and allowing teacher quality to go effectively unmonitored for students.[5]

More than 50% of both teachers and administrators felt their district was not doing enough to identify and retain effective teachers and felt that there were tenured teachers on their campus who did not perform well. In fact, 68% of teachers believed poor performance was not being addressed by administrators.[6]

This bleak overview of teacher performance appraisal illustrated that districts were not doing enough for their teachers or, more importantly, for their students. Differences in instruction quality, and therefore teacher effectiveness, matter for students. Over the course of an academic year, students assigned to a high-performing teacher can gain up to an additional year's worth of academic growth when compared to students being taught by low-performing teachers. Because high-performing teachers are often inequitably clustered together at specific, often more affluent, schools in a district, the effect increases exponentially as some students continue to have access to higher-quality instruction. After being assigned to three highly-effective teachers consecutively, students can outperform their peers taught by ineffective teachers by 50 percentile points. The students who are less likely to have access to effective teachers are more likely to already face education disparities due to systematic racial and socio-economic barriers, increasing student outcome gaps and perpetuating cycles of inequity. This highlights the need for teacher appraisal systems that are able to parse teacher quality and determine if highly-effective teachers are placed where they are most needed to address gaps in student outcomes.[7]

In the decade since *The Widget Effect* was released, school districts across the country have worked to develop more robust evaluation systems with mixed results. A large-scale study found that across several school districts and charter organizations, after five years and implementing new evaluation systems, student outcomes did not dramatically change. There are a number of potential reasons for this dismal outcome. It is possible that not all of the sites implemented their evaluation systems with fidelity or did not consistently use them for appropriate personnel and professional development decisions. It is also possible that they did not wait long enough for clear effects to appear and for districts to overcome the learning curve or external factors like changes to state law affected the outcomes. Potentially, the theory of action was flawed. The study could not isolate and measure individual effects of evaluation systems, so it was unable to pinpoint the root cause.[8]

Further study has found that some of these results can be attributed to poorly designed evaluation systems. A study found that, even after substantial changes were made in school districts across the country, the majority of teachers were still being overrated by evaluation systems. However, there was significant variation between states and school districts when it came to correcting distribution of teacher performance, highlighting that some evaluation systems were more effective than others. The researchers found "the wide variability in teacher ratings across states suggests that system design features, as well as local norms and implementation practices play large roles in shaping ratings and distributions."[9]

All of these results illustrate that we still have a long way to go in developing effective appraisal tools for teachers. Despite setbacks, research remains focused on how to improve evaluation systems to better our schools for students. There are a multitude of ways that teacher evaluation can be structured, and a significant amount of research about ways to mitigate risks and maximize specific measures.

Types of Teacher Evaluation Measures

School districts appraise teacher performance in many ways, often using more than one type of measurement in the evaluation process. The most common types of measurements fall into distinct categories, each with their own advantages and drawbacks. This paper will focus on research on evaluation measures for core subjects, especially with available student growth measures.

Observation

The most common type of teacher evaluation measure is classroom observation. This is a relatively straightforward process by which an appraiser observes a teacher conducting a lesson and evaluates the teacher's performance based on set criteria. Variation exists in performance criteria, appraiser qualification or certification, frequency and duration of observation, and method of providing feedback.

One of the key benefits of observations is their ability to provide feedback that is directly attributable to teacher behavior, which allows teachers to correct specific areas of improvement through professional development. Additionally, research shows that, if conducted properly, teacher observation measures are associated with student outcome gains.[10]

Observation metrics present concerns about bias and instability, thus steps must be taken to increase accuracy and reliability. Research shows that the observation scores varied when the same observer scored different lessons or when different observers scored the same lesson. Because observations are just a snapshot of an entire year of academic instruction, more than one observation in a year can increase reliability of evaluation by reducing the likelihood of catching a teacher on a particularly good or bad day. Multiple observation scores should be averaged to mitigate reliability concerns. [11] At minimum, having at least two 45-minute formal observations per year greatly increases reliability.[12]

Observations are subjective and therefore have a great potential to vary based on the assigned appraiser. Variability in an accurate evaluation system should be attributed to teacher performance and not differences in appraisers. Research backs up the instinct that some appraisers are more strict or lenient than others,

making the use of multiple appraisers ideal to account for natural variation. Even having one additional appraiser significantly increases the reliability of an observation component. Some models also implement peer reviewers and shorter observations with at least three appraisers. [13]

Recent research conducted by DC Public Schools found concerning differences in teacher ratings between teachers of different races. Specifically, Black and Latino teachers received lower scores than their white counterparts. When delving deeper into the scoring mechanism, they found that observation metrics had the most significant racial gaps, while value-added assessments and student surveys had much smaller gaps. These results indicate that racial bias, especially in subjective observation appraisals, must be evaluated and addressed to combat the perpetuation of systemic of racism. [14]

Additionally, appraisers should be trained or certified to ensure that they are delivering accurate results and adhering to the evaluation criteria. [15] Certification requires appraisers to score lessons based on the locally chosen observation instrument, often using videos that have been master-coded, or pre-graded, to ensure consistent scoring. Even well-certified appraisers experience drift, or a shift in overall scores over time, which requires robust recalibration. In order to combat drift and other biases, districts should engage in calibration efforts through training for individual administrators and aggregate data collection to identify and address skew patterns across different groups of observers. Calibration should be an ongoing system of system of improvement and ideally, appraisers should be recertified annually. [16]

When used for high-stakes decisions, like dismissal or compensation, it is even more critical to ensure observation scores are comprised of multiple classroom observations conducted by multiple appraisers. [17] Even with these attempts to reduce bias and increase reliability, observation measures function better when paired with other measures, including student feedback and student growth on standardized tests often calculated through value-added measures. [18] Teachers perceived the observation component as particularly fair in assessing their performance, however, the research out of DC Public Schools indicates this could be an incorrect assessment. [19]

A multi-year study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation found some evidence that subjective observation measures might have inflated overall teacher scores, obscuring whether teachers were improving and growing in their ability to deliver quality instruction to students. This is presents concerns about the inability of observation data alone to provide an accurate and differentiated view of teacher quality in a school district. An accurate distribution of teacher quality is necessary to equitably serve students and, unlike value-added measures, teacher observations do not ensure a normal distribution of quality because teachers are compared to an absolute standard, but not to each other. [20]

Observation measures are an important tool in teacher evaluation but need to be structured to maximize reliability and reduce bias. By using multiple trained observers, with a clear set of criteria over multiple observations, the risks can be managed in teacher evaluation, especially when paired with other measures that are more reliable.

Value-Added Measures

There are two ways to evaluate student performance: static and growth measures. Standardized test scores are static measures of student performance, showing if a student has mastered learning objectives, but not

how well a student progressed with a particular teacher. Student growth measures illustrate how much a student has learned over a period of time. Some student growth measures, like student growth percentiles or pre- and post-course tests, strictly calculate growth based on improvement from a baseline score. Value-added measures (VAMs) go further by seeking to evaluate the impact that teachers have on student performance, controlling for variables outside of a teacher's control. Students come into a teacher's classroom at different levels due to a host of external factors, like the quality of previous instruction, access to early childhood education, support at home, socioeconomic status, and other entrenched societal barriers. VAMs attempt to isolate the amount of student gains that are attributable to an individual teacher's instruction using quantitative and qualitative metrics.

VAMs have been the most intensely scrutinized teacher evaluation measure. Research on the impact of VAMs has been mixed, with many finding promising results and others noting areas of concern. Variations in results can potentially be attributed to individual VAM formulas and the fidelity by which they are implemented.

There are several benefits to using VAMs, the most prominent of which is their objectivity. While other teacher evaluation measures rely on subjective feedback from observers who vary across a school district or even a campus, VAMs focus on numerical data. Unlike teacher observation, they also provide a means of differentiating teachers rather than comparing them to an ideal norm, which creates a normal distribution/bell curve.[21] This makes VAMs particularly useful for evaluating uniformly across a large school district like HISD, promoting fairness and reliability. More importantly, the ability to differentiate teacher quality promotes equity in instruction and reduces achievement gaps by allowing administrators to identify and place higher-performing teachers with students who are experiencing disparities in education. Further, multiple studies have found VAMs to be unbiased predictors of average student growth.[22]

Another benefit is the clear relationship to student outcomes.[23] VAMs are the best measure for evaluating whether teachers are contributing to demonstrated student growth.[24] In Texas, students and schools are evaluated based on state test scores, which are designed to measure content mastery. The goal in education is to help students learn what they need to be successful, so it stands to reason that effective teachers accomplish this goal by helping students master instructional concepts. Teacher observations focus on teacher behavior without considering whether students are demonstrably learning the material being presented. While VAMs do not provide teachers direct feedback on their own behaviors, they do provide meaningful information for a teacher to evaluate their own contributions to student outcomes.[25]

VAMs correlate with scores on other measures. Studies comparing VAMs to classroom observations found that, if observations are done with fidelity (i.e., with well-trained appraiser who have demonstrated accuracy in scoring), the measures align well and VAMs add reliability to an evaluation.[26] VAMs also have been found to correlate with scores from student surveys. [27] Although VAMs are closely aligned with other measures, they were the only measure found to reliably differentiate among teachers.[28]

Some studies have challenged these notions, citing inconsistencies in ratings year over year and or from different VAM instruments. Other find in results biased based on demographic information about students in different classrooms.[29] One study singled out the Educational Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS), a VAM previously used by Houston ISD, questioning its precision and validity for these reasons.[30] These

concerns are certainly worth evaluating when considering using a VAM, but they can also be, at least partially, attributed to variation among VAM formulas.

If ratings are erratic for teachers in a district from year to year or vary along student demographic lines, it could be that the formula being used is not sufficiently controlling for individual student characteristics. Effective VAMs use statistical calculations to mitigate variance among student testers based on demographics and baseline data. Although, VAMs will not be able to control for every conceivable difference in student characteristics, they can mitigate error as much as possible. One method for addressing concerns about yearly variation is to consider multiple years of data when determining student baselines.[31] Similarly, variation between different VAM calculations is to be expected. Quality varies from formula to formula and some methods might better fit the needs of an individual district.[32] The formulas used for VAMs require a mastery of high-level statistics, and therefore statisticians should be consulted when reviewing formula options. [33]

Other potential deficiencies with VAM formulas are related to student growth. VAMs measure how much a teacher contributed to student growth, but there are also natural variations in student learning that VAMs need to account for. For example, student who are already doing well on standardized tests have less room to grow overall than their peers. If VAMs solely measure student growth and do not account for student differences, teachers with larger numbers of higher-performing students will receive lower evaluation scores even if they provide effective instruction.[34] The opposite can also true, with students who generally do not perform well showing slower measures of growth. Most VAMs seek to remedy both issues by controlling for variation in student characteristics. Growth has also been shown to vary by subject. Specifically, researchers have found some evidence that teachers have a comparatively lower impact on student performance on English and Language Arts tests than Math tests.[35] Formulas would need to account for these variations.

VAMs can be problematic for teachers in subjects or grades that are not assessed with standardized tests. School districts handle this dilemma in different ways, with some of them removing VAMs for these teachers, while others choose to use school averages or alternative measures of student performance.[36]

Teacher buy-in for VAMs has been rocky, with some professional organizations opposing the use of these measures. However, studies have found appraisal systems that included value-added measures were overall viewed to be valid by the teachers being evaluated. Importantly, teachers often do not oppose VAMs for statistical validity reasons, but rather a perceived lack of transparency or disagreement with the underlying testing instrument.[37] A survey of teachers conducted by American University in DC Public Schools showed that teachers felt VAMs were unfair because they were not sure what they were being evaluated on or if the formula was fair because it was proprietary.[38] These concerns can be addressed with better training on how VAMs are calculated and making sure the weight of the VAM score is balanced with other measures. Even harsh critics of VAMs find they can be used if combined with transparency and offset by other measures.[39]

The American Educational Research Association lays out eight technical requirements that VAMs must meet to be rigorous and fair. According to AERA, VAM scores must:

- **only be derived from students' scores on assessments that meet professional standards of reliability and validity for the purpose to be served;**

- **be accompanied by separate lines of evidence of reliability and validity that support each claim and interpretive argument;**
- **be based on multiple years of data from sufficient numbers of students;**
- **only be calculated from scores on tests that are comparable over time;**
- **not be calculated in grades or for subjects where there are not standardized assessments that are accompanied by evidence of their reliability and validity;**
- **never be used alone or in isolation in educator or program evaluation systems;**
- **include ongoing monitoring for technical quality and validity of use [in the evaluation system];**
- **and include statistical estimates of error associated with student growth measures and any ratings or measures derived from them [in evaluation reports and determinations].[40]**

The American Statistical Association echoes many of these recommendations.[41] If VAMs are to be used for administrative decisions, it is especially important give careful consideration to the rigor of the formula and the statistical margin of error.[42] Several suggestions have been made to increase the precision of VAMs, but one method to mitigate concerns of credibility is to use it as a two-step screening process, by which a low score would not automatically trigger a low performance rating, but rather an additional review based on other criteria.[43]

Most research shows that VAMs provide valuable information, even if they are not precise.[44] VAMs are one of the only objective measures, raising a legitimate reason to include them in an appraisal system. Additionally, they are a measure with not only a clear link to student outcomes, but also a means of separating the effect a teacher has on those outcomes. If efforts are taken to properly use Value-Added Measures, and steps are taken to fill in the gaps that they introduce, VAMs could be a valuable addition to a district appraisal system.

Student Learning Objectives

Student learning objectives (SLOs) are becoming a more prominent measure of teacher evaluation. While they are often used as an alternative to VAMs for teachers in subjects without standardized tests, they are increasingly being used as a standalone measure of performance. In broad terms, SLOs are measurable student growth goals set based on a specific assignment or group of students. SLOs are used in different contexts and can be demographic- classroom-, team-, or school-specific.

In the context of teacher appraisals, SLOs are student goals, generally set by the teacher and tailored to their classroom. Often these goals must meet specific district standards and/or be approved by an evaluator. Teacher performance is measured by progress toward the set goals.

Research has found rigorous SLOs correlated with higher student outcomes. Key elements of effective SLOs include a clearly-defined target population, a set deadline, evaluation of student progress, an aspirational (yet attainable) goal, reasoning for the expectation of student growth, and strategies the teacher will use to reach the goal.

Goals should be data-driven and student-focused. The process to develop SLOs should start with state and district standards of subject content, focusing on what information students need to learn. Next, the focus should shift to student data to best assess the baseline for students. This can take the form of previous end of year assessments, a pre-test, and more qualitative measures of student knowledge. Student targets should be set using baseline data, potentially separating students based on current mastery of subject content. The defined time period is usually the duration of a full course.[45] Teachers and/or evaluators must determine how they are going to measure and assess student growth. Districts use different means to measure SLOs, including state standardized tests, local assessments, and teacher-created assessments and assignments.[46] Finally, goals should be set based on the data available to be challenging, but also manageable, with clear rationale included for the choice.

SLOs serve a dual purpose of helping teachers plan for instruction and providing a means of evaluating teacher performance. A clear benefit to SLOs, as compared to other measures of student outcomes like VAMs, is they are adaptable to different classroom environments. Whereas VAMs are only available for subjects with standardized testing, SLOs can be used across the district. SLOs also allow for collaboration between teachers in setting goals.[47]

The adaptability of SLOs is also a cause for criticism. If teachers are able to set their own goals, even with the help of an evaluator or district approval, there is high variability in the quality of goals from teacher to teacher, making objective comparisons of performance impossible. Additionally, at least one study found that, when setting baselines, some teachers have underestimated student preparedness, while others overestimate final student competency, which can cause inflated evaluation scores.[48] Teachers have reported feeling that other instructors are gaming scores by setting less challenging goals.[49]

Districts like HISD have found SLOs might artificially inflate teacher performance scores, which could potentially disrupt administration's ability to make determinates of teacher quality and design equitable systems for teacher placement across the district.[50]

Some school districts address these issues by having a list of district approved or required SLOs. To further ensure accuracy, districts can align their list of SLOs with district-created or district-approved pre- and post-tests. Other options to mitigate concerns include holding school administration or evaluators accountable for the quality of student goals at their campus, setting clear standards for goals at the district level, and performing spot checks for random schools or classrooms.[51]

Student Surveys

Students are the most important stakeholders in our public school system, so direct feedback from them can help teachers and districts target areas of improvement to better deliver lessons and improve the relationship between instructors and students. Generally, students in grades 3-12 are eligible to take teacher evaluation surveys.

Research on student surveys is limited, however, like all surveys, it is important to ensure that the questions are carefully designed and the surveys are properly administered, ensuring confidentiality. A poorly designed or administered survey will not produce accurate results. The focus of student surveys should not be on

whether students like their teacher, but rather on learning environment and academic instruction. A Rand brief recommends student surveys used for teacher evaluation:

1. **focus on aspects of the classroom environment and instructional practices that teachers can influence**
2. **ask questions about the specific teacher or classroom rather than the school as a whole, and**
3. **be administered to a sufficiently large number of stakeholders (students, parents, or, in some cases, teachers' peers) to provide reasonably accurate and reliable data.[52]**

Student surveys, when taken in the aggregate, align well with other measures; however, individual student opinions of the same teacher vary substantially. A deeper look at variations by student demographics can provide important feedback on equity for teachers.[53]

The leading study on student surveys, focusing on the Tripod survey, found they were more consistent than both teacher observations and VAMs.[54] While students are not trained in instructional best practices, they see the teacher all year round, not just for an observational snapshot. Additionally, there are more students than appraisers, averaging the feedback to increase reliability. Student surveys also include feedback that can't be obtained from other sources, like whether students are enjoying the class or feel like they are being challenged.[55]

One initial drawback to student surveys is teacher buy-in. Teachers have reported thinking student surveys were akin to popularity contests when the surveys were first added to an evaluation system. States like Georgia and Connecticut backed down statue survey requirements after backlash from teachers. However, interviews conducted by researchers have found that teacher perceptions change positively over time.[56]

A note of caution comes from reviewing survey responses in higher education. Researchers have found student surveys to be biased in favor of male instructors, specifically white male instructors. Care needs to be taken to ensure that there are no issues of bias in terms of teacher sex, race, or other identity markers.[57]

As with other teacher evaluation measures, high-stakes decisions can cause a shift in survey accuracy due to changes in behavior. If surveys are going to be used for this purpose, additional caution needs to be taken with survey design and administration.[58] Using a well-researched national survey vendor, like Panorama or Tripod, is ideal because they have been field-tested and analyzed for alignment with other evaluation measures.

While comparatively little scrutiny has been devoted to student surveys than other teacher appraisal measures, the research is promising. Student perceptions do provide valuable feedback for instructors, making them a viable metric for evaluation, if they meet quality standards.

Other Measures

Many other measures exist for teacher appraisal, but they are less common, and therefore studied less frequently. While these are options for evaluation systems, many should be approached with caution. The most researched measures have stark flaws, but by identifying areas of concern, they can be mitigated. With little research available on some evaluation methods, there is no opportunity to address underlying issues.

Student portfolios have been brought up as an option for a student outcome measure. Portfolios highlight student work throughout the year to show tangible growth. While this type of measure might be useful in certain subjects, like English or art courses, not all subjects have student work that can easily be compared to highlight growth. Additionally, portfolios have no means of filtering how much growth is attributable to a teacher compared to external factors.

Some districts have implemented measures for teacher contribution to campuses in order to include teacher behavior that falls outside of normal classroom instruction. Many duties that teachers perform contribute to campus culture, function, and safety, but are not covered by other measures. While this can be valuable insight into teacher performance, it is another measure that requires subjective scoring, with an overall objective that is far less clear than classroom instruction. A way to approach this could be to include it in an observation rubric, so it is only one part of a larger measure.

Combining Measures

The consensus among researchers is that evaluation methods are flawed (although some might be preferable to others), but combining measures helps to increase reliability of appraisal systems. While not all measures have been studied together to find statistical alignment, observation, VAMs and student surveys have been found to correlate and are more reliable together than any single measure alone. Researchers have also called for student learning objectives to be paired with other measures.

Multiple measures have the ability to compensate for flaws of individual components, while maximizing benefits. If all measures point in the same direction, evaluators can be confident of the results. If measures diverge, there might be cause to examine the individual circumstances of the scores further.

Little research has been devoted to how much each measure should be weighed in a comprehensive evaluation system. One study did find that different evaluation measures were positively correlated, demonstrating a common factor of effective teaching between them, but distinct enough to offer differing feedback on performance. This led the researchers to conclude that weights among different measures are, at least partially, a policy decision in which districts can focus on measures that best align with district values and weight them accordingly.[59]

Overview of Applicable Law

By law, school districts in Texas have two choices for a teacher evaluation framework: the framework designed and recommended by the Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) or a locally-designed system. If districts choose to implement their own system, it must be established by district and campus committees and approved by the school board. Local evaluation systems, like the state recommended framework, must be "based on observable, job-related behavior" and must include implementation of discipline management procedures and student performance.[60] These components are further clarified in regulations from the TEA. Discipline management is defined as "the teacher's pedagogical practices that produce student engagement and establish the learning environment."[61] The performance of teacher's students is defined as "how the individual teacher's students progress academically in response to the

teacher's pedagogical practice as measured at the individual teacher level by one or more student growth measures."[62]

Texas requires teachers to be evaluated annually, unless a teacher's last evaluation was at least proficient (or the local district equivalent) with no areas of deficiency noted and the teacher agrees in writing to forgo appraisal. A district can choose to exercise this option but is not required to. Individual appraisal components, like observation, are required to occur as frequently as necessary for adequate evaluation, prioritizing more frequent opportunities for inexperienced teachers and teachers with identified areas of improvement. Districts may not designate teachers as deficient solely due to student disciplinary referrals.[63] Regulations by the TEA add that local district systems must include a conference between each teacher and their appraiser to discuss performance and potential areas of improvement.[64]

The statutory requirements in Texas represent a minimum standard that school districts must meet to be compliant. These requirements do not provide clear guidance for effective teacher evaluation. The recommended framework designed by the TEA, the Texas Teacher Evaluation & Support System, offers a more robust view of the state's recommendations.

The Texas Teacher Evaluation & Support System (T-TESS) includes a goal-setting and professional development plan, an evaluation cycle, and a student growth measure.[65] The goal-setting and professional development plan is developed at the end of the school year by the teacher and their appraiser for use in the next year. The evaluation cycle of T-TESS focuses on an observation rubric and includes a pre-conference, formal observation, post-conference, and additional informal observations.[66] T-TESS includes an extensive library of materials developed in partnership with the National Institute of Excellence in Teaching to help districts with training, certifying, and calibrating observers for appraisal.[67] Because T-TESS is a state developed system, it is highly coordinated with the evaluation process for Teacher Incentive Allotment funding eligibility, which helps reduce the amount of legwork districts must do to meet state criteria for the opportunity to put more toward teachers' salaries.

The final component of T-TESS is a student growth measure. Although the TEA has not required a specific measure for districts using T-TESS, it does offer guidance in choosing a measure that fits a district's needs. The guide covers options for process-based student growth measures like SLOs and portfolios and assessment-based measures like VAM and pre-/post- tests.[68] The guide recommends using SLOs for student growth, although it also offers suggestions for districts that choose a different path. The TEA put together a rubric for evaluating teachers based on SLOs, which is cross-aligned to the T-TESS rubric and goal-setting plan.[69]

When providing teachers with final ratings under T-TESS, districts can decide if they want to keep the scores disaggregated or provide an overall rating. Districts that choose to keep the disaggregated scores can treat the student growth component as a 17th dimension of the T-TESS rubric. For district that choose to aggregate scores, the four domains covered by T-TESS represent 80% of a teacher's overall performance rating and the student growth measure 20%. A full overview of T-TESS is available in Appendix B.

Appraisal Systems in Action

The types of evaluation measures previously discussed are being combined and customized in a multitude of ways in different school district appraisals systems. This paper turns to examples from around the country to determine best practices. Links to rubrics and guide books for teacher evaluation in other school districts are available in Appendix C.

Evaluating Teachers Across Texas

Working within the guidelines set by Texas law, there are a variety of approaches for teacher evaluation in Texas. Some districts have chosen to adopt T-TESS, while others have customized their own appraisal system.

Large districts that have adopted T-TESS include San Antonio ISD and Fort Worth ISD. Even amongst these districts, there is variation. For example, FWISD has chosen to keep teacher ratings disaggregated rather than giving an overall score, meaning teachers receive ratings for all 16 rubric components and the student growth component. While leaving individual teacher scores disaggregated helps emphasize the importance of all components, it also makes it more difficult to track trends in performance and compare with other similarly situated educators. Importantly, the student growth measure, which is evaluated using SLOs, acts as a separate dimension, but does not technically have a weight. The other dimensions are observation based, with through one formal interview and additional unscheduled walkthroughs. [70] This approach seems to greatly prioritize observation over student outcomes, creating an unbalanced system that focuses on teacher behavior, but not results for students. However, T-TESS does offer an extensive library of calibration videos developed by the state, which has been updated during the COVID-19 pandemic to include resources for virtual instruction. Districts that choose to use the T-TESS observation rubric can save time and money through these training tools. [71] Another benefit of T-TESS is easier access to Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) funding because the rubric is already developed to align with the state requirements for eligibility. Fort Worth ISD's TIA application has already been accepted and it is well on Its way to full approval.[72]

Austin ISD (AISD), on the other hand, chose to create its own appraisal system, which it calls Professional Pathways for Teachers (PPfT). It rates teachers based on three components: instructional practice, professional growth and responsibility, and student growth. Instructional practice (50% of the overall rating) is an observation component with two announced observations with two different appraisers and two classroom visits. Professional growth and responsibilities (25%) a rubric-based measure completed by the appraiser at the end of the year. The student growth component is comprised of SLOs (15%) and a school-wide value-added measure (10%) measured using EVAAS, a system that HISD has been sued over in the past.[73] The PPfT system in AISD is integrated into a strategic compensation plan, which was introduced as a multi-year scale-up. Originally, teachers were able to opt into incentive pay. The number of teachers opting in to the compensation plan rose 18% between 2017 and 2019, with 58% of all teachers opting in in 2019-2020. As of 2020-2021, all teachers must participate in the compensation plan.[74]

A notable feature of AISD's evaluation system is regular quality control. While some districts only review their evaluation system after several years, PPft is reviewed annually, emphasizing different areas each year. The reviews include validity, reliability, teacher and school administrator perceptions, and participation in

program components, including professional development. This routine practice helps ensure that the system is meeting the needs of the district, and allows AISD to make adjustments, if necessary. It also emphasizes teacher and evaluator feedback, which benefits not only the employees, who have a more prominent voice in the evaluation system, but also the district, which can use the feedback to make revise the system or provide additional guidance to teachers and evaluators to better explain features. A regular feedback and data cycle for evaluation might be additional work for the district, but it makes sure everything is on track and everyone's concerns are being addressed.

Past reports find that overall, the PPfT system is a valid measure of teacher performance with teacher quality and student growth increasing. Race and economic disadvantage of students were correlated with teacher quality, which underscores issues of inequity and quality distribution across the district. Replacing the school-wide value-added measure with a teacher value-added measure could improve internal consistency. Although the system is providing a distribution of teachers along a curve, over half of instructors were rated highly effective.[75] In terms of teacher perception, 74% either agreed or strongly agreed that their evaluation reflected their overall effectiveness, but fewer agreed that the student growth component reflected their overall contribution (61% for the SLO component and 71% for the school-wide VAM), though still well over half.[76]

Dallas ISD has also created its own teacher evaluation system, Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) comprised of three components: teacher performance, student achievement, and student experience. TEI is integrated into a strategic compensation model. Teacher performance is measured through an observational rubric, student achievement through one status metric and two relative growth metrics, and student experience through student surveys available in grades 3-12.[77] Student growth metrics include STAAR scores for teacher and schools, Assessment of Course Performance (ACP), Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and SLOs.[78] Dallas faced litigation from a professional organization due to the use of test scores in TEI, but the Texas Supreme Court did not rule on the legality of the appraisal system. Rather, it settled a procedural issue, allowing the commissioner of the TEA to review the DISD employee grievances.[79]

Importantly, Dallas recognizes the need to integrate teacher evaluation with other decision-making. The district's Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) program ensures that its highest-need campuses have the best educators instructing students to equitably address disparities. The program is integrated with TEI, providing ACE campus principals data on teacher effectiveness with specific student populations to help them make decisions about which teachers work on their campus. Dallas has found this approach to be an effective turnaround model for campuses and student who need more support.[80]

This system separates teachers into four categories, A-D, based on grade level and subject area. Each category has a different breakdown of component weights depending on student achievement data and surveys available for each category. The largest weighted component is teacher performance. Further guidance for which measures are used for the student achievement component is available through extensive subcategories of teachers.[81] Final scores are guided by target distributions to ensure scores adhere to a normal curve.[82]

Teacher Evaluation in Other States

Moving outside of Texas, greater variation can be seen in teacher evaluation models, partially due to differing state policies.

Denver Public Schools uses Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP), which includes measures for student growth, student voice, classroom observation, and professionalism. Student growth, the largest component, makes up 50% of a teacher's overall score, which is mandated by the state of Colorado, and includes SLOs, school performance growth, and individual state test results, when available. Student voice is measured through student perception surveys in grades 3-12. Classroom observations are conducted by school leaders and peer observers, with a goal of 4-6 scored observations throughout the year. The professionalism component seeks to measure teacher impact outside the classroom (a measure that is not used often in teacher evaluations) and is evaluated by school leaders using set indicators at mid-year and end-of-year conferences.[83]

District of Columbia Public Schools evaluates teachers using IMPACT. The IMPACT framework has four components: instructional practice, student achievement, instructional culture, and collaboration.[84] This evaluation framework is integrated with the district's Leadership Initiative for Teachers (LIFT), which creates a career ladder for teachers based upon their performance ratings. As teachers move up the LIFT ladder, they have additional opportunities, responsibility, and compensation.[85]

For IMPACT, Instructional practice is an Essential Practices observational rubric with between one and three observations depending on the teacher's LIFT stage. The student achievement component makes up 50% of the overall score and is comprised of SLOs and VAMs (as measured by the PARCC assessment). Instructional culture is a student-survey measure. Like Denver, D.C. has integrated a more general school culture component with their collaboration measure. Similar to DISD, IMPACT separates teachers into distinct groups based on the availability of VAMs and student survey data.[86]

DC has recently done several evaluations of IMPACT, including a teacher feedback review with American University and an internal implicit bias evaluation. The AU findings indicate that overall teachers and school leaders viewed IMPACT more negatively than positively, but there was significant variation amongst responses. Significantly, the feedback indicated that the negative response was mostly due to the lack of alignment with professional development, a lack of transparency with the VAM formula, and increased stress and competitive environment. The survey did however highlight that respondents found value in IMPACT's ability to transition teachers who are lower-performing and retain higher-performing teachers through incentives.[87] The implicit bias review indicated significant disparities in scores between white educators and educators of color. Counter to the fairness concerns indicated in the AU survey, racial bias seemed to be highest in observation metrics of professionalism and instruction. The gaps for VAMs and student surveys were much smaller, indicating that these measures were able to mitigate the racial bias.[88]

DC and Denver both put significant weight on student growth. Half of the overall rating for teachers in these districts is determined by student outcomes. Adding in the student survey components, student experience is by far the largest focus of these evaluations systems. Both districts look at outcomes in multiple ways, providing a more wholistic view of student growth. This emphasis is admirable and keeps the attention of

both the district and its employees on how well students are mastering course material. However, this must be balanced with the need to provide teachers clear feedback for professional development, which requires observation data.

The New York Department of Education's teacher evaluation system, Advance, has two components: measures of teacher practice and measures of student learning. The measures of teacher practice are a feedback cycle of multiple observations conducted by school leadership. Observations are scored using a limited version of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The measures of student learning are a variation of growth-oriented SLOs. The SLOs are set by principals and school-based committees, with one measure selected for each grade and subject in a school. Assessments for SLOs are either a state standardized test, local performance assessment or third party assessment.[89]

Chicago Public Schools' version of teacher appraisal is called Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's Students (REACH). Chicago's system is similar to New York's. It also has only two components: professional practice and student growth. Reach utilizes the Danielson Framework for Teaching in its professional practice observation component. Differences arise with the student growth component. REACH utilizes a VAM, measured by the CPS Value-Added Model, and student performance tasks, which are comparable to pre- and post-tests for assessing student growth. The student performance tasks are developed by teams of CPS teachers.[90]

Both New York and Chicago allow local committees or teacher groups to make decisions about student growth measures rather than having them set by the district. These systems are more collaborative for employees but can potentially lead to too much variation from year to year or from campus to campus. Reliability is important for both teachers and the district. In an unreliable system, teachers face uncertainty about their performance and how to make adjustments, while the district struggles to set professional development and make staffing decisions.

A final example is from Los Angeles Unified School District's Educator Development and Support: Teachers (EDST). It includes observation of practice, contribution to student outcomes, progress toward initial planning sheet objectives, and additional professional responsibilities. The system also includes two elements for teacher self-reflection that are not included in evaluation scores: a stakeholder feedback survey and artifact collection. The observational component is assessed using the district's Teaching & Learning Framework (TLF), a rubric. Teachers are only graded on 7 of the 15 rubric elements, 3 are selected by the district, 3 by the teacher and 1 selected collaboratively. Initial planning sheet objects are SLO measures, which include a professional growth objective and a student date objective.[91] The flexibility that EDST offers teachers in selecting the means by which they will be evaluated provides them greater ownership of the evaluation process and could help customize evaluation across different courses, especially non-core subjects. On the other hand, the system suffers from the same issues highlighted in FWISD, where the number of components plus the customization affect the ability of the district to track trends in performance and align ratings on a normal curve.

Teacher Appraisal in HISD: Teacher Appraisal Development System

Houston ISD's (HISD) current teacher evaluation structure, the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS), was launched in the 2011-2012 school year. HISD has announced that it plans to change its evaluation system as early as the 2022-2023 school year and currently plans to adopt the T-TESS rubric.[92] It is still worth a look at TADs structure and results to help provide context for this change and lessons for improvement as HISD implements a new system. TADS, was designed to evaluate teachers based on three overall criteria: instructional practice (IP), student performance (SP), and professional expectation (PE). IP and PE are primarily evaluated through classroom observations and documentation.[93] Overall scores are calculated on a percentage basis, where the SP portion makes up 30% of the overall score, while IP and PE made up 50% and 20%, respectively.[94] The TADs rubric is available in Appendix A.
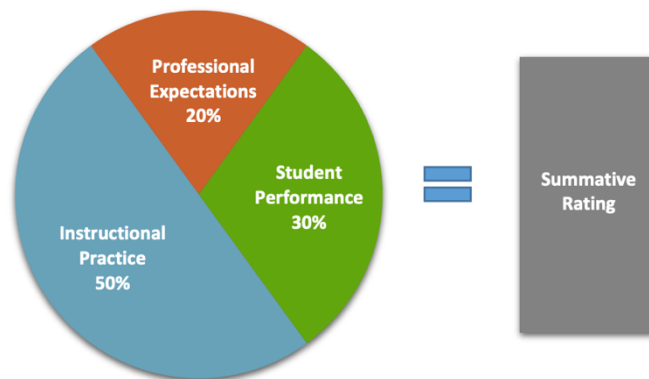
The SP component is intended to measure the effect that teacher performance has on student outcomes and growth. HISD measures SP through multiple components:

1. **Comparative growth on local assessments**
2. **Student Progress on district-wide or appraiser-approved end-of-course assessments**
3. **Student Progress on district-wide or appraiser-approved end-of-course performance tasks**
4. **Student Attainment on district-wide or appraiser-approved end-of-course assessments**
5. **(Formerly) Value-Added growth using EVVAS, a proprietary formula**

The SP component has changed substantially over time. In particular, the value-added measure, EVAAS, was removed from the SP component in 2015-2016 due to litigation, and eventual settlement, with the Houston Federation of Teachers (HFT). HFT sued HISD over the use of EVAAS because the formula to calculate teacher scores was proprietary and teachers could not see how they were being appraised. HISD agreed not to use the third-party formula, leading to the waiver of the SP component for some teachers in 2016-2017 and all teachers in 2017-2018.[95] The SP measures returned in 2018-2019 without a value-added measure.

While HISD has conducted at least two teacher surveys on perceptions of the system, this does not appear to be a regular practice. HISD's research and accountability team is responsible for reviewing data from TADS each year and providing a summary of findings and recommendations to the district. The latest report covers

the 2018-2019 school year. These reports help evaluate the validity, fairness, and reliability of TADS. Some key takeaways illustrate areas of needed improvement for the system.

First and foremost, the summative teacher ratings in HISD skew toward the high end of effectiveness. The vast majority of teachers in HISD are rated effective or highly effective and this measure is on an upward trajectory. In 2013-2014, 80% of teachers were rated effective or highly effective and this percentage has grown steadily to 90.7% in 2019-2020.[96] The research and accountability team has expressed concern about the lack of variation in scores.[97] **Only 42% of students were reading on grade level by 3rd grade and less than 55% of students graduated ready for college in 2018-2019, the last year the district had reliable data, indicating that teacher evaluation scores are not correlating with student outcome measures.[98]**

Another critical issue is the distribution of teachers between high-performing, and often more affluent campuses, and lower-performing campuses in need of effective instruction. In 2015-2016, teachers at campuses that met state standards were twice as likely to be rated highly effective or effective. Conversely, teachers at improvement required campuses were twice as likely to be rated ineffective or needs improvement.[99] In 2016-2017, campuses that were more than 50% economically disadvantaged had 25% fewer teachers rated highly effective than more affluent campuses.[100] In 2018-2019, not only did the most affluent campuses have more than double the proportion of teachers rated highly effective, the research showed a clear correlation between accountability ratings and teacher effectiveness. Campuses that received an A rating from the state had six times the proportion of teachers rated highly effective than campuses that received an F rating.[101] In addition to the trends illustrated in past years, the 2019-2020 school year showed that the campuses experiencing the highest levels of poverty were five times as many teachers rated ineffective and needs improvement than the most affluent schools.[102] These numbers illustrate that campuses that need effective teachers most are less likely to have them.

Finally, all of the alterations to TADS over the years have affected teacher evaluation. Most clearly, the Student Performance changes have caused a shift to less reliable methods of evaluation. The value-added measure component, EVAAS, was originally found to correlate well with scores given in both Instructional Practice and Professional Expectations. However, when EVAAS was removed and the system relied more heavily on teacher-determined student progress measures, teachers with SP ratings had inflated summative scores compared to their peers without SP measures. In 2015-2016, there were 11% more teachers whose evaluations included an SP component rated highly effective than their peers without an SP component.[103] In 2016-2017, there were 11% more SP teachers rated highly effective than non-SP teachers, and no SP teachers received an ineffective rating.[104] This trend continued in 2018-2019 and, even more concerning, the research shows that SP scores are only weakly correlated with IP scores, with only 42% of teachers receiving the same performance level in both categories.[105] The SP component was waived in 2019-2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[106] HISD's research and accountability department continues to recommend that the SP component be reevaluated. Based on these findings, the removal of a value-added measure has significantly affected the validity and fairness of HISD's teacher evaluations.

HISD through its Teacher Appraisal Working Committee was in the process of implementing aspects of T-TESS into TADS. HISD held five feedback sessions in 2018 to discuss the differences between the two sessions and receive input from key stakeholders. M-TADS was the first step in this process, but the long-term goal as of spring 2019 was to include more pieces of T-TESS.[107] This process was altered in light of

changes made by the Texas Legislature later in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Superintendent transition. Specifically, the addition of the Local Optional Designation System and Teacher Incentive Allotment at the state level changed the district's calculation of how to improve the teacher appraisal system. HISD plans to seek TIA funding and is currently working on revamping the evaluation system with the help of a professional outside vendor, whose services were donated to the district. Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, two committees, one for teachers and one for administrators, were formed and met to provide feedback on a new appraisal system. In January 2022, the district announced that it planned to forgo the revamping TADS and instead adopt the state-created T-TESS for the 2022-2023 school year. The district has planned focus groups for additional educator and community input.[108]

Teacher Incentive Allotment

In 2019, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3, overhauling the state's school finance system and introducing the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA). TIA allows school districts the option of creating a state approved teacher appraisal system, so that they may receive funding for teacher salaries based on state recognized performance designations. A more comprehensive overview of TIA is available in Appendix D.

Districts who have a qualifying appraisal system are eligible for TIA funding. District appraisal systems are evaluated by the TEA and Texas Tech University for validity and reliability to ensure fairness and quality across the state. The amount of funding a district receives under TIA is determined by multiple factors. First, a set range of funding is available per teacher for each state-recognized designation. Districts receive $3,000 - $9,000 for each Recognized teacher, $6,000 - $18,000 for each Exemplary teacher, and $12,000 - $32,000 for each Master teacher. The rest of the funding formula is determined by how many economically disadvantaged students are served and whether the school is in a rural area.

Districts must use 90% of TIA funds for teacher compensation on the campus where the designated teacher works. The full amount of the funding does not have to go to the designated teacher but can be shared with other teachers on the same campus. The district has discretion in determining how to allocate the funding.

The TEA has compiled a list of districts that have expressed interest in participating in LODS and TIA, which is sorted into cohorts. Cohorts are self-determined by how far along districts are in the timeline for their appraisal systems. HISD originally expressed interest in cohort D, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic is now on track for Cohort F, which would allow it to design an appraisal system to capture evaluation data in the 2023-2024 school year. HISD is on track to receive TIA funding in 2025 or 2026, if it commits to implementing a new teacher evaluation system within the next school year.[109] Moving forward with a version of T-TESS, as recently proposed by the Superintendent, would allow the district to capitalize on the system's close relation to the TIA eligibility criteria, making it more likely to meet requirements than if the district developed its own system.

HISD does not need to pursue TIA funding to implement an effective system for teacher evaluation and feedback, but additional revenue for the district has its benefits. HISD struggles to remain competitive with other area school districts in terms of teacher salaries. Last year, HISD began the year with over 200 teaching

positions vacant, some of which were in core subject areas. TIA funding would allow HISD to allocate more money to teacher salaries, which would help attract and retain effective teachers. Additionally, if HISD does not pursue TIA funding, it risks falling further behind other districts. Other districts in the area like Klein ISD and Spring ISD have already expressed interest in earlier TIA cohorts than HISD.[110] The TEA is planning to implement a website that will highlight teacher incentive funding in each district in Texas, making it easy for teachers to make career decisions based on the best compensation package.

Our Recommendations for HISD

Based the research outlined in this paper and best practices from other school districts, Houston GPS believes that HISD should update its current teacher appraisal system or consider implementing a new system like the proposed T-TESS based on the following recommendations. These recommendations do not provide specific formulas or rubrics for measuring each component but do outline overall structure and methods for ensuring stakeholder needs are addressed in the process of designing a robust evaluation system.

Recommendation 1: Structure the Appraisal System

This paper has covered a number of ways districts might choose to structure their evaluation system, but common threads emerge, backed by research. **Houston GPS recommends combining (1) observation, (2) student outcome, and (3) student survey measures.** These components, outlined below, were chosen because they help compensate for each other's shortcomings and, based on research, have correlating results, if implemented properly.

Teacher evaluation systems must have an observation component. This measure would combine HISD's current Instructional Practice and Professional Expectations components. Every appraisal system evaluated included at least formal observations and with good reason. Observations have great potential to provide teachers clear feedback on their performance, so they can continuously make improvements to better serve students. However, HISD must take care to avoid the pitfalls of scoring observations. All appraisers should be certified using a locally developed certification assessment tied to the observation rubric and should be recertified each year. Ongoing calibration support must be provided to appraisers and data should be reviewed, ideally multiple times per year, to identify trends in scoring to prevent skew. While HISD can choose to use its own locally-developed system, using at least the observation rubric for T-Tess would allow HISD to use the state's library of calibration videos. HISD already trains observers, but this training should be audited to ensure it is effectively instructing participants on not only the rubric, but also providing meaningful feedback to teachers and scoring to more accurately reflect the distribution of teacher performance in the district. To increase the reliability of observation scores, Houston GPS recommends observations be conducted by at least two certified appraisers for at least an aggregate of 90 minutes annually. While HISD currently requires multiple observations, it has limited observations for high-performing teachers in its newly modified version of TADS, M-TADS. We recommend offering the option of additional informal observations solely for the purpose of teacher feedback. Additionally, HISD could consider offering peer feedback as part of its observation rubric.

The student outcome component should focus on student growth, rather than static measures, which only measure student performance. We recommend combining multiple measures to promote greater reliability. HISD already uses multiple measures, but importantly, it no longer includes a Value Added-Measure (VAM) despite evidence that scores are erratic without this component. If HISD chooses to use an outside vendor again, it needs to ensure the scoring process is transparent so teachers know how they are being assessed. If HISD develops its own formula, it should consult experts to ensure it is as statistically sound as possible. HISD could choose to implement only a teacher VAM, or both teacher and campus-wide VAMs. A campus-wide VAM could be useful for non-core subject teachers. If a campus-wide VAM is utilized, it should account for no more than 5% of the overall evaluation score because they do not accurately reflect individual teachers' contributions to student growth. In addition to VAMs, HISD needs to scrutinize its SLO measures, which the district found to be inflating teacher scores. To promote greater consistency in quality of SLOs, rigorous district guidance should be available to teachers and evaluators as part of professional development and training. HISD should also consider creating a list of approved SLOs, clearly aligned to pre-and post-tests. When combining student growth measures, teachers should receive a score for each sub-measure.

Finally, HISD should include a student survey component, ideally using a recognized national survey vendor. When HISD recently reached out to students as part of its community outreach for its student outcome goals, a common theme amongst was that students wanted more voice in the district. A student teacher evaluation survey is one means of allowing students a greater say in their schooling. Student surveys should be available for grades 3-12, but HISD should consider offering different versions of the survey based on age. The surveys should focus teacher performance and not broader concerns with the campus or district.

We believe that combining these three components offers the best available option for teacher appraisal in HISD. At the end-of-year conference, teachers and evaluators should carefully review all scores from the different components. If scores diverge significantly for an individual teacher, HISD should trigger an automatic review process. If teacher component scores diverge in large numbers, the appraisal system should be revisited and revised.

The district could consider adding a component for teacher duties outside of the classroom or collaboration like Denver and D.C., but we recommend making this part of the observation rubric, rather than an additional component. Additionally, the district could consider implementing parent/family surveys, but it would need to ensure that the process is equitable. If the district plans to go this route, we would suggest using these surveys just for teacher feedback and not for scoring.

Recommendation 2: Understand That Weights Reflect Values

Very little research is available concerning how districts should weigh various components in the overall evaluation system, leaving weight-setting largely up to district discretion. When making these determinations, HISD must understand that all components are important and provide valuable information to teachers and the administration, but weights given to different components should reflect district values and goals because they set expectations for teachers. **The goals developed by the HISD Board of Education should focus on student outcomes, making clear that a student-focus should be the districts priority with all of its work, including teacher evaluations.**

Most districts reviewed give more weight to teacher observation than other measures, which HISD can choose to follow. However, Houston GPS recommends that, even if observation receives the most weight, the student outcome measure, combining all VAMs, SLOs or other student growth measures, receives a substantial portion of the overall score. For this reason, we recommend against the full adoption of T-TESS, which at most allots student growth 20% of the overall score, without revisiting the component weights. At the moment, the combined weight of HISD's observation components is 70% of the total score. **We suggest limiting the observation component to 50% or less of the final score. A potential option for the new system would be 45% observation, 40% student outcomes, and 15% student surveys.** While this paper generally focuses on core subject evaluation, for teachers who would not have a student survey component, the weights could be 55% observation and 45% student outcomes. Additionally, In order to maintain the focus on student outcomes, Houston GPS recommends that the combined student outcome measure remain at 40% for teachers whose subjects would not allow for a VAM to be used, with the understanding that the SLO process would be more robust per our previous recommendation. See **Appendix E** for charts of these weights.

Recommendation 3: Plan with TIA in Mind

HISD has expressed interest in pursuing TIA funding in the future. Although HISD is not on track for funding for several years, it needs to be inspecting and modifying its evaluation system with TIA in mind. TIA already requires many of the best practices outlined in this paper to be implemented before approval. **Because TIA is a compensation system designed to reward high-quality instructors, HISD needs to pay special attention to ensure that its evaluation system can effectively distinguish teacher performance.**

Currently, HISD's system is skewed, with the vast majority of teachers being rated effective or highly effective, which would not be approved for TIA funding. In order to qualify for TIA, must be taken to construct an appraisal system that demonstrates a normal distribution, with only exceptional teachers being awarded the highest rating. As mentioned above, a VAM component will help with reliability when it comes to distribution of ratings, but it is a small component of a much larger system. All components need to be examined to see what improvements can be made to better distinguish teachers to reward high performance, and also support teachers who need help. Using a system, like T-TESS, that has already been tested and implemented in other districts with success takes some of the guesswork out of the process, however, each district is different and adjustments may need to be made.

Houston GPS recommends that HISD work diligently to meet the TIA deadline, so that the district may offer compensation benefits to teachers as soon as possible.

Recommendation 4: Seek Community Input

Teachers are not the only stakeholders in teacher appraisal. The community, especially parents, other educators, and family members of HISD children, cares about teacher quality and student instruction. **HISD must engage community stakeholders for feedback throughout the process of building its teacher appraisal system.**

In 2018, Houston GPS engaged portions of the HISD community with a canvassing campaign and survey. As part of this effort, Houston GPS asked parents and other community members about their concerns with HISD. Teacher quality was the second most frequently listed concern at 19%, with only funding ahead of it (24%). It is worth noting that parent engagement was listed by 8% of respondents. This illustrates that at least one in five community members are concerned about teacher quality and at least one in ten parents would like to be engaged more by the district. In recent interviews conducted with parents, their concerns included issues like teacher quality, parent communication, discipline, and listening to students. As one parent put it, schools would function better if "parents and teachers have better communication. Students can only be helped if parents are always kept aware of any issues [schools] may have."[111]

As HISD reviews its teacher appraisal system, it should engage community members, but it must make efforts to do so equitably to ensure that all portions of the community have the opportunity to weigh in.

Recommendation 5: Seek Teacher Input

HISD and other districts experienced substantial backlash from some professional organizations for their appraisal systems, in particular, measures that rely on student testing, like VAMs. Districts like DC have received feedback from teachers that indicated the concern with the VAMs was fairness and lack of transparency. Because VAMs are an important component for adding objectivity and ensuring scoring distribution among teachers, we recommend they be included. However, **HISD needs to take affirmative steps to gain teacher input for an updated evaluation system.**

Teachers deserve a voice in the appraisal development process and transparency in evaluation. A fair system is one that secures input from teachers in developing the evaluation system and continues to consider feedback from teachers as it makes adjustments. HISD did engage teachers in developing its system 10 years ago, but teachers were not able to provide continuous feedback because the EVAAS formula was proprietary. To increase the transparency of the process, HISD should consider a formula that can be made publicly available. In reaching out to educators, HISD should ensure that many voices are represented in the conversation and that professional organizations selected for discussion are representative and not just members of one particular organization. Further, HISD currently trains teachers in its appraisal system, TADS, but considering the complicated nature of VAMs and the difficulty of developing quality SLOs, it should provide additional training for just the student growth component.

Recommendation 6: Integrate Evaluation into District Decisions

A teacher evaluation system should not exist in a bubble but should be integrated into the operations of the district. This goes back to the two purposes of evaluation: teacher feedback for improvement and information for personnel decisions. **Evaluations should be used to inform professional development opportunities, develop mentorships, allocate responsibility and promotions, and make personnel decisions.**

As a specific example, HISD could look to the ACE model in Dallas and focus on integrating its teacher evaluation system with its system for incentivizing teacher placement at the highest need campuses in the district. Although HISD has attempted incentives in the past, the system was not well integrated with teacher evaluation, allowing the district to replace teachers at Achieve 180 campuses with teachers of similar, rather than higher, effectiveness.[112] A more robust and integrated appraisal system could be the key to success in

addressing the clear inequities in teacher quality in HISD, which in turn would help reduce achievement gaps for our students experience social and economic disparities.

Currently, HISD does try to integrate TADS into areas like professional development, but considering most teachers are rated effective and receive little feedback, the systems are not well aligned. **Having a well-designed evaluation system that works in tandem with professional development allows the district to better support teachers, especially early career educators.**

Recommendation 7: Ensure Quality Control

A district's work is not complete when the evaluation system is designed. **Effective evaluation is a continuous process, with quality control checks to determine that the system is working as it should.** Ideally, HISD would evaluate its current system for teacher perceptions, racial bias, validity, and reliability to establish baselines. Once a new evaluation system is in place, HISD should conduct, at minimum, yearly quality reviews. Ideally, data for calibration of observation scores should be collected and analyzed multiple times per year to mitigate skew at the appraiser, campus, and district levels across grade levels and content areas. The district currently reviews TADS annually for things like rating distribution and teacher quality across campuses. However, it lacks important components: teacher feedback and equity. Houston GPS recommends that HISD integrate teacher feedback into the appraisal quality control process to ensure teacher voice continues to be heard and the system remains fair. Additionally, HISD should conduct regular equity and implicit bias evaluations to ensure that the overall system and individual components are not racially biased. Any changes or adjustments should be thoroughly outlined for teachers and publicly available for community input.

Conclusion

Teacher evaluation is a complex process that requires careful thought from the district and all stakeholders. Houston GPS has evaluated research on effective evaluation, policy requirements in Texas, and real-world examples from other districts, and offers these recommendations as a starting point for developing an effective teacher appraisal system in HISD. We provide these suggestions not just as a reference for HISD, but for the community as we all strive to better support our teachers, who are the foundation of public education and, most importantly, provide the best opportunities for our students. Together, we can ensure that HISD's teacher evaluation system is a multi-faceted approach to ensuring student success and equity across the district.

Appendix A: HISD

Houston ISD's (HISD) current teacher evaluation structure, the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS), was launched in the 2011-2012 school year. Previously, HISD used Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS), a system that was in place for at least 20 years.[113] PDAS was based solely on the results of a single classroom observation.[114] HISD recognized the need to develop a more comprehensive teacher evaluation system when the results of a district survey of teachers and principals revealed that only 44% of teachers felt they were accurately being assessed and 28% of principals felt that the system allowed them to accurately evaluate teacher performance.[115] TADS has gone through several revisions and changes over the decade that it has been in place.

In 2010, HISD embarked on developing a new appraisal system, it did outreach to schools, staff and the community. School-based Shared Decision Making Committees (SDMCs), working groups of teachers and principals, the District Advisory Committee (DAC), and community stakeholders were given opportunities to provide feedback through surveys, public meetings, focus groups, and a website. In the end, HISD received feedback from over 2,600 teachers, 500 administrators, 500 parents, and 500 additional community members.[116]

TADS Rubric

TADS, was designed to evaluate teachers based on three overall criteria: instructional practice (IP), student performance (SP), and professional expectation (PE). IP is evaluated based on classroom observations, daily interaction, planning documents, lesson and classroom management plans, gradebooks, and other documents. PE is evaluated using similar criteria, including classroom observations, daily interactions, planning documents, parent communication logs, minutes from team meetings, and teacher attendance records.[117] Both IP and PE have changed slightly since TADS' inception. HISD updated the language in the rubric in the 2015-2016 school year to focus more on teacher development, changing district priorities, and use of technology in the classroom.[118]

The SP component is intended to measure the effect that teacher performance has on student outcomes and growth. HISD measures SP through multiple components:

1. **Comparative growth on local assessments**
2. **Student Progress on district-wide or appraiser-approved end-of-year/end-of-course assessments**
3. **Student Progress on district-wide or appraiser-approved end-of-year/end-of-course performance tasks or work products**
4. **Student Attainment on district-wide or appraiser-approved end-of-year/end-of-course assessments**
5. **(Formerly) Value-Added growth using EVVAS, a proprietary formula**

Teachers must have at least two components for SP to be included in the summative appraisal score. Since implementing TADS, there has not been a single year in which HISD has rated 100% of teachers using an SP

measure since it was phased into the evaluation system in the 2012-2013 school year. Between 0% - 43% of teachers received an SP evaluation from 2012 to the end of the school year in 2018.[119] The Full TADs rubric follows this overview.

In addition to the changes HISD has made to the individual SP component over the years, the summative score for teacher evaluations has changed since the evaluation system began. SP scores were not being used as part of evaluation in 2011-2012, so scores were based solely on IP and PE. SP scores were included in 2012-2013 overall appraisals using a matrix system.[120] To determine final ratings, the measures for IP and PE were combined into one score and then compared to the score given for SP, making student performance a larger portion of teachers' overall performance score. Based on the final score, a teacher would receive a rating of Ineffective, Needs Improvement, Effective, or Highly Effective. This system was initially deemed to be more transparent and accessible than using percentage weights.[121]

		Student Performance			
		1	2	3	4
Instructional Practice X Professional Expectations	1	I	I	NI	NI
	2	I	NI	E	E
	3	NI	NI	E	HE
	4	NI	E	E	HE

The matrix was replaced with a percentage system in 2014-2015, which reduced the SP portion to 30% of the overall score, while IP and PE made up 50% and 20%, respectively.[122]
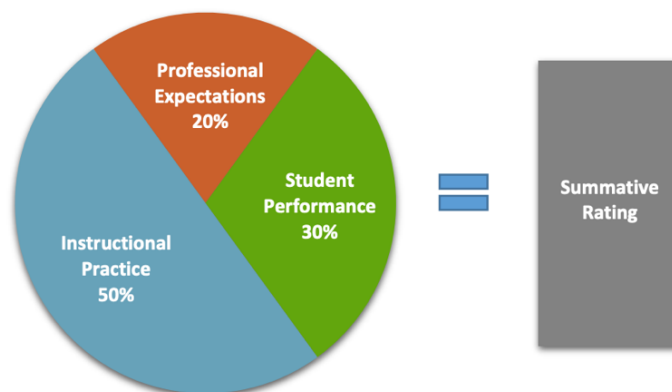
Additional TADS Components

Overall, the entire appraisal system is just one part of a strategy to ensure effective instruction in HISD classrooms, along with recruitment, retention, and professional development. Through this, HISD aims to "put an effective teacher in every classroom."[123]

The rollout of TADS introduced new opportunities for professional development. Teacher Development Specialists (TDSs), who were experienced educators with content-area expertise, provided feedback and coaching to teachers. Teachers had access to individual development activities like peer coaching and workshops. Teachers also engaged in self-reflection exercises and implemented development plans with the help of appraisers. For teachers who were meeting performance criteria, appraisers would work with them to craft an Individual Professional Development Plan to target areas of growth and track progress. For teachers in need of intervention, appraisers would direct a Prescriptive Plan for Assistance (PPA) to identify areas for improvement.

TADS was designed to include a feedback cycle for teachers to help with professional development. Teachers have three conferences each year for performance feedback: a goal setting conference at the beginning of the year, a progress conference in the middle, and an end-of-year conference before the school year closes. Each teacher receives at least two classroom evaluations and two walkthrough evaluations with written feedback. Each appraiser is trained and held accountable for helping teachers reach professional goals. In 2019, the board of education approved a modified version of TADS (M-TADS) based on recommendations from the Teacher Appraisal Working Committee, a group put together to provide input for TADS and consider changes related to the implementation of T-TESS at the state level. Under M-TADS, teachers will only receive one observation and walkthrough per year and only be required to meet with an appraiser for two conferences instead of three.[124]

HISD through its Teacher Appraisal Working Committee was in the process of implementing aspects of T-TESS into TADS. HISD held five feedback sessions in 2018 to discuss the differences between the two sessions and receive input from key stakeholders. M-TADS was the first step in this process, but the long-term goal as of spring 2019 was to include more pieces of T-TESS.[125] This process was altered in light of changes made by the Texas Legislature later in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Superintendent transition. Specifically, the addition of the Local Optional Designation System and Teacher Incentive Allotment at the state level changed the district's calculation of how to improve the teacher appraisal system. HISD plans to seek TIA funding and is currently working on revamping the evaluation system with the help of a professional outside vendor, whose services were donated to the district. Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, two committees, one for teachers and one for administrators, were formed and met to provide feedback on a new appraisal system. In January 2022, the district announced that it planned to forgo the revamping TADS and instead adopt the state-created T-TESS for the 2022-2023 school year. The district has planned focus groups for additional educator and community input.[126] More details should be forthcoming in the next several months as the Superintendent releases the strategic plan for the district. As of right now, it is unclear how closely the district is planning to follow T-TESS and what alterations might be considered.

Appendix B: T-TESS

The Commissioner of the TEA was tasked with developing a state recommended teacher evaluation framework, putting together a steering committee of teachers, principals, education organizations, and higher education members to lead the effort. The Texas Teacher Evaluation & Support System (T-TESS) is based on Texas Teacher Standards and was designed to support teachers in professional development for continuous improvement and promote a feedback loop. It includes a goal-setting and professional development plan, an evaluation cycle, and a student growth measure.[127]

The T-TESS rubric, which is used to appraise the goal-setting and evaluation cycle components is divided into four domains and further divided into 16 dimensions:

1. **Planning**
    - A. Standards and Alignment
    - B. Data and Assessment
    - C. Knowledge of Students
    - D. Activities
2. **Instruction**
    - A. Achieving Expectations
    - B. Content Knowledge and Expertise
    - C. Communication
    - D. Differentiation
    - E. Monitor and Adjust
3. **Learning Environment**
    - A. Classroom Environment, Routines and Procedures
    - B. Managing Student Behavior
    - C. Classroom Culture
4. **Professional Practices and Responsibilities**
    - A. Professional Demeanor and Ethics
    - B. Goal Setting
    - C. Professional Development
    - D. School Community Involvement[128]

The goal-setting component of T-TESS begins with a goal-setting and professional development plan, which is developed at the end of the school year by the teacher and their appraiser for use in the next year. The goals should be based on the feedback and evaluation from the current year and cumulative data over previous years. At the beginning of each school year, teachers and appraisers meet to review the goal plan, or develop a plan in the case of new teachers. The plan is reviewed by the teacher and appraiser throughout the year to monitor progress towards goals and revise, if necessary.[129]

The evaluation cycle of T-TESS focuses on observation and includes a pre-conference, formal observation, post-conference, and additional informal observations. Formal observations are conducted by an appraiser, who evaluates Domains I-III of the rubric. Informal observations can be conducted by other observers, who

are not responsible for assigning final evaluation scores. Observations should be preceded by a pre-conference, where the observer/appraiser meets with the teacher to mutually discuss outcomes and deliverables, and background on the class, like student challenges, routines, and expectations.[130]

Shortly after a formal observation, teachers and appraisers meet for a post-conference. During this time, the appraiser helps guide the teacher through self-reflection and provides additional feedback, including areas for improvement. Here, the teacher is presented with the scores for Domains I-III, which are based on the observation and documented evidence.[131]

Documents and records are gathered and considered as part of the rubric. These can include lesson plans, student work, and other instructional materials. All of this evidence is gathered and reviewed throughout the year by the teacher and appraiser.[132]

At the end of the year, the teacher and appraiser meet again for an end-of-year conference where the teacher is able to present information of their performance in relation to Domain IV of the rubric, which includes progress toward goals and professional development. Domain IV is scored by the appraiser based on this meeting. This meeting is also used to review the rest of the rubric and set goals for the next year based on feedback and dialogue between the teacher and appraiser.[133]

Evaluation based on this rubric places each teacher into one of five performance levels: Distinguished, Accomplished, Proficient, Developing, and Improvement Needed. Generally, teachers move up the performance levels by focusing on more student-centered actions. A full rubric with standards divided by dimension and performance level is available on the T-TESS website.[134]

The final component of T-TESS is a student growth measure. Although the TEA has not outlined a specific measure that districts using T-TESS must use, it does offer guidance in choosing a measure that fits a district's needs. The guide covers options for process-based student growth measures like SLOs and portfolios and assessment-based measures like VAM and pre-/post- tests.[135] This paper's previous section on evaluation types incorporates the TEA recommendations for these measures.

The guide recommends using SLOs for the student growth component, although it also offers suggestions for districts that choose a different path. The TEA has put together a rubric for evaluating teachers based on SLOs, which is cross-aligned to the T-TESS rubric previously outlined.[136] The SLO rubric focuses on a teacher's ability to implement the cycle of setting objectives, monitoring student progress, and reflecting on outcomes to make adjustments. Information and guidance for SLOs are available on the TEA's SLO website.[137]

When providing teachers with final ratings under T-TESS, districts can decide if they want to keep the scores disaggregated or provide an overall rating. Districts that choose to keep the disaggregated scores can treat the student growth component as a 17th dimension of the T-TESS rubric. For district that choose to aggregate scores, the four domains covered by the T-TESS rubric represent 80% of a teacher's overall performance rating and the student growth measure 20%.[138]

Appendix C: Other School Districts

School District	Rubric	Guidebook
Fort Worth	https://www.fwisd.org/cms/lib/TX01918778/Centricity/domain/762/t-tess/T-TESS%20Rubric%20-%20Stylized%20Version.pdf	https://www.fwisd.org/cms/lib/TX01918778/Centricity/domain/762/t-tess/T-TESS%20Manual%202019-2020.pdf
Austin	Not available without login.	Overview: https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dept/tad/docs/PPfT_Appraisal_Flyer.pdf
Dallas	Available under Teacher Performance: https://tei.dallasisd.org/home/resources/	Available under TEI System Resources: https://tei.dallasisd.org/home/resources/
Denver	http://thecommons.dpsk12.org/cms/lib/CO01900837/Centricity/Domain/103/2019-2020%20LEAP%20Framework.pdf	http://thecommons.dpsk12.org/cms/lib/CO01900837/Centricity/Domain/103/19-20%20Handbook%20FINAL%20VERSION%20July%201%202019.pdf
D.C.	By employee classification: https://dcps.dc.gov/publication/2019-2020-impact-guidebooks	https://dcps.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dcps/publication/attachments/IMPACT-Annual-Reference-Guide-19-20.pdf
New York	Not available without login.	https://www.uft.org/sites/default/files/attachments/advance-educator-guide.pdf
Chicago	Not available without login.	Overview: https://cps.edu/ReachStudents/Pages/StudentGrowth.aspx
Los Angeles	Not available without login.	https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/433/EDS%20Planning%20and%20Preparation%20Teacher%20Handbook.pdf

Appendix D: Teacher Incentive Allotment

In 2019, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3, overhauling the state's school finance system and introducing the Local Optional Designation System (LODS) and Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA). Together, these two systems allow school districts the option of creating a state approved teacher appraisal system, so that they may receive funding for teacher salaries based on state recognized performance designations.

With LODS, school districts have the opportunity to design a robust teacher appraisal system. Appraisals must include at least teacher observation and student performance components, but districts can choose how to structure these components and to add additional criteria. Each system must provide at least three teacher designations based on the appraisal criteria to align with the state's designations: Recognized, Exemplary, and Master. Board certified teachers automatically earn a Recognized designation. When developing the teacher appraisal system, the state recommends districts engage all stakeholders for input throughout the process.[139] The TEA is available for technical assistance with designing the appraisal system, setting student growth measures, and managing the transition to the new system. [140]

Districts who have a qualifying appraisal system are eligible for TIA funding. District appraisal systems are evaluated by the TEA and Texas Tech University for validity and reliability to ensure fairness and quality across the state. Criteria for the three state designations are forthcoming, along with a website for additional resources. Some systems of evaluation, like the state's T-TESS and common third-party evaluation models, are likely to be pre-approved by the TEA, but districts can opt to fully design their own system. There is a fee for districts to apply for funding, but it is reimbursable upon approval.[141]

The timeline for approval extends over a few years. A district must implement its teacher appraisal system for a full school year and then pay teachers based on appraisal designations the following year before they can apply for TIA funding. If the appraisal system is approved, designations are noted in the certificates of teachers for up to five years and the districts receives TIA funds.[142]

Districts have discretion to determine which teachers are included in their TIA designation system. Districts may choose to have different subjects phased into the process at different times or only use the system on high needs campuses.[143]

The amount of funding a district receives under TIA is determined by multiple factors. First, a set range of funding is available per teacher for each designation. Districts receive $3,000 - $9,000 for each Recognized teacher, $6,000 - $18,000 for each Exemplary teacher, and $12,000 - $32,000 for each Master teacher. The rest of the funding formula is determined by how many economically disadvantaged students are served and whether the school is in a rural area. Weights are given based on economic disadvantage status using the same tiers as the compensatory allotment. Rural students automatically move up two tiers in the weights. A full overview of the tiered weights and funding formula is available through the TEA website.[144]

Designation	Base	Multiplier	Tier	Non Eco-Dis	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5
			Student Point Value	X 0	X 0.5	X 1.0	X 2.0	X 3.0	X 4.0
Recognized	$3,000	$1,500	Non-rural	$ 3,000	$ 3,750	$ 4,500	$ 6,000	$ 7,500	$ 9,000
			Rural	$ 4,500	$ 6,000	$ 7,500	$ 9,000	$ 9,000	$ 9,000
Exemplary	$6,000	$3,000	Non-rural	$ 6,000	$ 7,500	$ 9,000	$ 12,000	$ 15,000	$ 18,000
			Rural	$ 9,000	$ 12,000	$ 15,000	$ 18,000	$ 18,000	$ 18,000
Master	$12,000	$5,000	Non-rural	$ 12,000	$ 14,500	$ 17,000	$ 22,000	$ 27,000	$ 32,000
			Rural	$ 17,000	$ 22,000	$ 27,000	$ 32,000	$ 32,000	$ 32,000

Districts must use 90% of TIA funds for teacher compensation on the campus where the designated teacher works. The full amount of the funding does not have to go to the designated teacher but can be shared with other teachers on the same campus. The district has discretion in determining how to allocate the funding. The remaining 10% of TIA funding can be used for costs associated with implementing the appraisal system, which can include support for helping teachers earn designations.[145]

The TEA has compiled a list of districts that have expressed interest in participating in LODS and TIA, which is sorted into cohorts. Cohorts are self-determined by how far along districts are in the timeline for their appraisal systems. For example, Klein ISD has expressed interest in being part of cohort A, which would mean that KISD had already implemented its appraisal system to capture data by the 2018-2019 school year and paid teachers based on their evaluations in the 2019-2020 school year. This would make KISD eligible to apply for approval and TIA funding this year. On the other hand, HISD originally expressed interest in cohort D, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic is now on track for Cohort F, which would allow it to design an appraisal system to capture evaluation data in the 2023-2024 school year. HISD is on track to receive TIA funding in 2025 or 2026, if it commits to implementing its teacher evaluation system within the next school year.[146] Moving forward with a version of T-TESS, as recently proposed by the Superintendent, would allow the district to capitalize on the system's close relation to the TIA eligibility criteria, making it more likely to meet requirements than if the district developed its own system.

HISD does not need to pursue TIA funding to implement an effective system for teacher evaluation and feedback, but additional revenue for the district has its benefits. HISD struggles to remain competitive with other districts in the area in terms of teacher salaries. Last year, HISD began the year with over 200 teaching positions vacant, some of which were in core subject areas. TIA funding would allow HISD to allocate more money to teacher salaries, which would help attract and retain effective teachers. Additionally, if HISD does not pursue TIA funding, it risks falling further behind other districts. Other districts in the area like Klein ISD and Spring ISD have already expressed interest in earlier TIA cohorts than HISD.[147] The TEA is planning to implement a website that will highlight teacher incentive funding in each district in Texas, making it easy for teachers to make career decisions based on the best compensation package.

Appendix E: Recommended Weights

Very little research is available concerning how districts should weigh various components in the overall evaluation system, leaving weight-setting largely up to district discretion. When making these determinations, HISD must understand that all components are important and provide valuable information to teachers and the administration, but weights given to different components should reflect district values and goals because they set expectations for teachers. **The goals developed by the HISD Board of Education should focus on student outcomes, making clear that a student-focus should be the districts priority with all of its work, including teacher evaluations.**

Most districts reviewed give more weight to teacher observation than other measures, which HISD can choose to follow. However, Houston GPS recommends that, even if observation receives the most weight, the student outcome measure, combining all VAMs, SLOs or other student growth measures, receives a substantial portion of the overall score. For this reason, we recommend against the full adoption of T-TESS, which at most allots student growth 20% of the overall score, without revisiting the component weights. At the moment, the combined weight of HISD's observation components is 70% of the total score. **We suggest limiting the observation component to 50% or less of the final score. A potential option for the new system would be 45% observation, 40% student outcomes, and 15% student surveys.** While this paper generally focuses on core subject evaluation, for teachers who would not have a student survey component, the weights could be 55% observation and 45% student outcomes. Additionally, In order to maintain the focus on student outcomes, Houston GPS recommends that the combined student outcome measure remain at 40% for teachers whose subjects would not allow for a VAM to be used, with the understanding that the SLO process would be more robust per our previous recommendation.
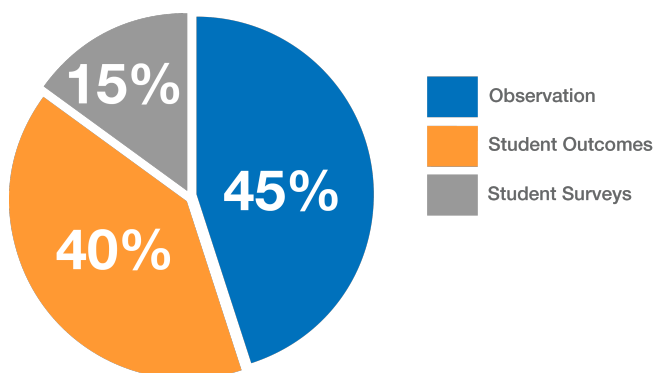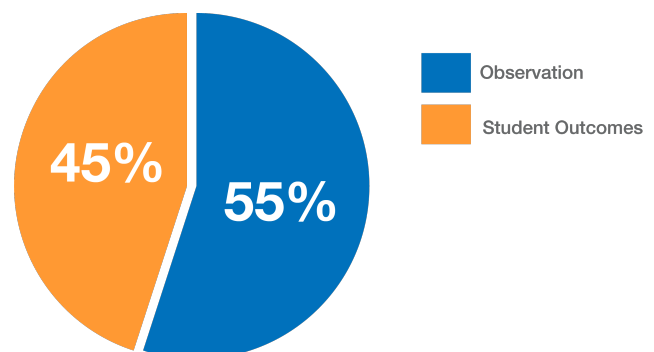
Figure 1. Core Subject Weights

- Observation
- Student Outcomes
- Student Surveys

Figure 2. Other Subject Weights

- Observation
- Student Outcomes

Appendix F: Acknowledgement and Thanks

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