

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

About this report. In 2012–2013, 12 REACH schools participated in the pilot teacher appraisal system (Appendix A). Of the 12 schools, nine (Akins, Brown, Harris, Martin, Norman, Rodriguez, Sims, and Travis) were new to the pilot teacher appraisal system in 2012–2013 and three (Lanier, Sunset Valley, and Webb) participated for the second year in a row. This report summarizes data gathered from focus groups and a survey designed to assess teachers’ experiences with the pilot teacher appraisal system. Additional data are included regarding the timing of administrators’ classroom observations.

Focus group participants and methodology. Between April 18th and May 30th, 2013, 308 teachers were randomly selected to participate in 22 focus groups at the 12 pilot teacher appraisal schools (Figure 1). Because core and non-core area teachers described different experiences with the pilot teacher appraisal system in 2011–2012 (Lamb & Schmitt, 2012), teachers at larger campuses were divided into core and non-core area focus groups. In total, 74 teachers (22% of teachers invited) participated in 17 focus groups that each lasted for about an hour (the focus group protocol is included in Appendix B). When possible, at least two members of the Department of Research and Evaluation conducted the focus group: one member facilitated the discussion and the other took notes. Focus groups were recorded with the consent of participants, and notes along with general impressions (e.g., number of participants, themes) were collected.

Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) participants and methodology. In Spring 2013, 385 (38%) of teachers and 11 administrators from schools in the pilot teacher appraisal system answered questions on the Spring 2013 ECS regarding the implementation and perceptions of the pilot teacher appraisal system. An additional 318 teachers responded to items about various appraisal components.

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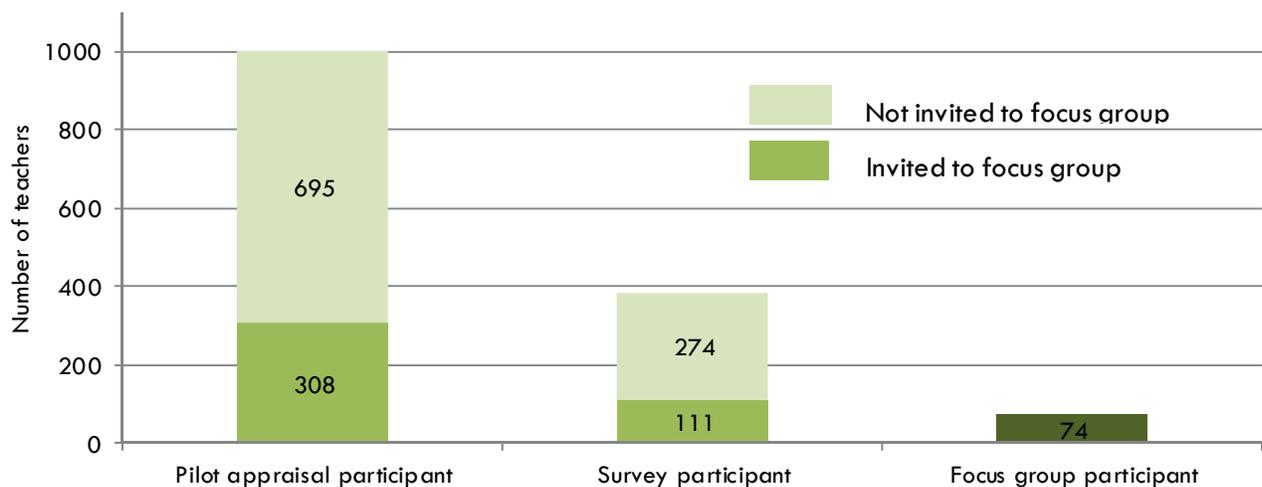
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KEY FINDINGS

Teachers generally expressed favorable attitudes towards including multiple measures in the pilot teacher appraisal, valued peer observation, found the observation rubric beneficial, and looked forward to receiving information from the Student Response Survey. However, many teachers had little knowledge about the appraisal components and were frustrated with the lack of training they had received on the pilot teacher appraisal system. Data indicate the appraisal was not implemented as intended at many schools; for example, a significant portion of administrative classroom visits were conducted within a short period of time near the end of the school year. In addition, many described concerns about using student learning objectives (SLOs) for appraisal and questioned the qualifications of their peer observers. Most suggestions for improvement pertained to the point allocations assigned to each component. Many teachers suggested reducing the allocation for student feedback and revising the distribution of points allocated for peers and administrator observation scores.

Teachers who participated in focus groups ($n = 74$) expressed less favorable perceptions regarding the appraisal system than did those from appraisal schools who participated in the ECS ($n = 385$, Figure 1). Although a random sample of all eligible teachers¹ was invited to participate in the focus groups, those who attended may have been those with the most negative attitudes toward the pilot teacher appraisal system. Because focus groups participants remained anonymous, we were unable to determine who participated in a focus group and also answered questions on the ECS. Thus, it was not possible to determine whether focus group participants were among the most negative survey participants and whether opinions changed after focus group participation. The ECS was administered during the same time span as the focus groups, and some teachers may have responded more favorably to the ECS after participating in a focus group and becoming more familiar with each component of the pilot teacher appraisal system.

Figure 1. Number of Teachers who Participated in the Pilot Teacher Appraisal System, the Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS), and Focus Groups



Source. Spring 2013 ECS, and focus group data

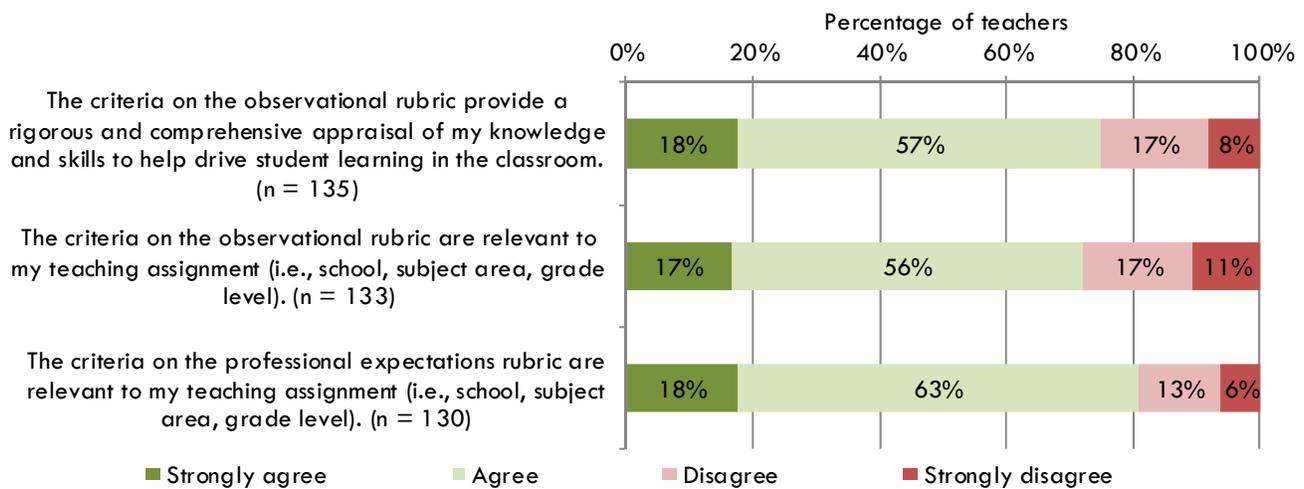
¹ Novice teachers and teachers with probationary contracts were excluded from the pilot teacher appraisal system.

THEMES FROM FOCUS GROUPS, SURVEYS, AND OTHER DATA

Teachers valued using multiple measures for appraisal. Although teachers had questions and concerns about the appraisal components and their weighting in the system, many appreciated that the pilot teacher appraisal system included multiple measures (compared with the district’s Professional Development and Appraisal System [PDAS], which only uses administrators’ observations). Teachers noted that the pilot teacher appraisal system was “more inclusive” than PDAS and was “a step in the right direction.” Most discussed the value of receiving feedback about their teaching from multiple perspectives, and many felt that a more well-rounded system reduced bias in teacher appraisal scores. Many also felt that the pilot teacher appraisal system accurately captured their work. Interestingly, some teachers who initially stated that they favored PDAS over the pilot teacher appraisal system changed their responses after discussing their opinions for a little while in the focus group because they were convinced that including multiple measures was a more fair way to appraise teachers. A majority of the teachers surveyed felt that the observational rubrics were rigorous and helped them drive student learning in the classroom, and that the criteria on the observational rubric were relevant to their teaching assignment (Figure 2).

“We may not agree on the components [of the pilot teacher appraisal system], but we are glad that there are so many components.”

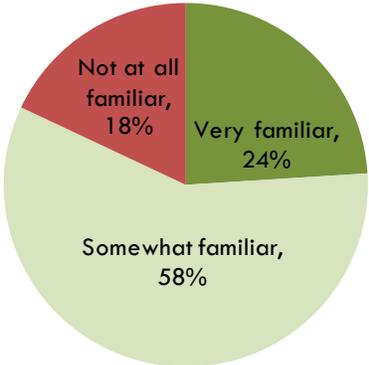
Figure 2. Teachers’ Agreement With Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) Items Related to the Observational and Professional Expectations Rubrics for the Pilot Teacher Appraisal System



Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Many teachers were confused about and frustrated with the appraisal system, though some felt it was very clear. Although 82% of teachers surveyed reported they were somewhat or very familiar with the components used to compute final teacher appraisal scores (Figure 3), focus groups revealed widespread frustration with and confusion regarding the new pilot teacher appraisal system, particularly for teachers at seven of the nine new schools participating in the pilot teacher appraisal system.

Figure 3. Teachers’ Familiarity With the Various Components Used to Compute Final Teacher Appraisal Scores

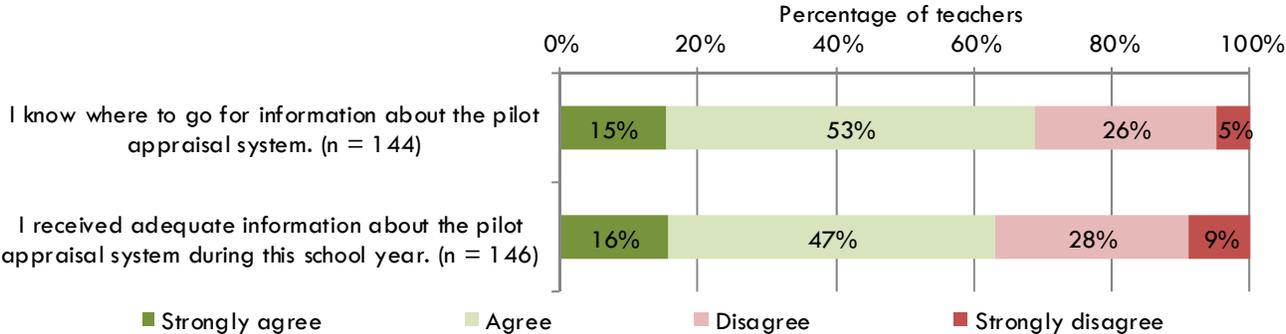


Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Although many remembered attending training about the pilot teacher appraisal system at the beginning of the school year, teachers reported frustration with the lack of follow-up support provided to them throughout the school year. One wished that “before the school year began [someone] had actually sat down with us and... gone into the details of the appraisal program.” Although each campus faculty member had been briefed during a faculty meeting about the appraisal system, and a detailed appraisal manual had been posted on the district’s pilot teacher appraisal website, many teachers still were unfamiliar with the resources and materials available to them and were confused about the components of the appraisal. Although teachers generally agreed they received adequate information and knew where to go for information about the pilot appraisal system, 37% of teachers surveyed believed they did not receive adequate information regarding the appraisal system this year (Figure 4).

“We don’t know what the parts are [and] don’t remember what [we’ve] been trained on.”

Figure 4. Teachers’ Agreement With Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) Items Related to the Information They Received About the Pilot Teacher Appraisal System.



Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Familiarity with the components of the pilot teacher appraisal system varied widely across campuses. Teachers from five schools (the three original appraisal pilot schools and two schools new to the pilot) were knowledgeable about the appraisal system and required only minor clarifications from focus

group facilitators. However, at seven new pilot schools, focus group facilitators spent a significant portion of the time describing the appraisal system and clarifying misconceptions among participants about the components and their computations. At many schools, teachers were unsure what was included in the pilot teacher appraisal system (e.g., several thought that the AISD REACH “basket of measures” was the school-wide measure for the appraisal); how non-core area teachers (particularly special education and bilingual teachers) were appraised; and how the components were weighted when computing total appraisal scores. In addition, special education teachers, whose students did not necessarily complete the Student Response Survey, did not know how their appraisal score would account for excluding the Student Response Survey from their appraisal score. Unfortunately, most teachers attending focus groups at the new pilot teacher appraisal schools and 31% of survey respondents did not know where to go to with these questions, leaving many teachers frustrated and confused (Figure 4). Additionally, some teachers were upset that they, in the words of one teacher, “were being [evaluated] based on something that no one can explain to us,” and some described feeling like “guinea pigs.”

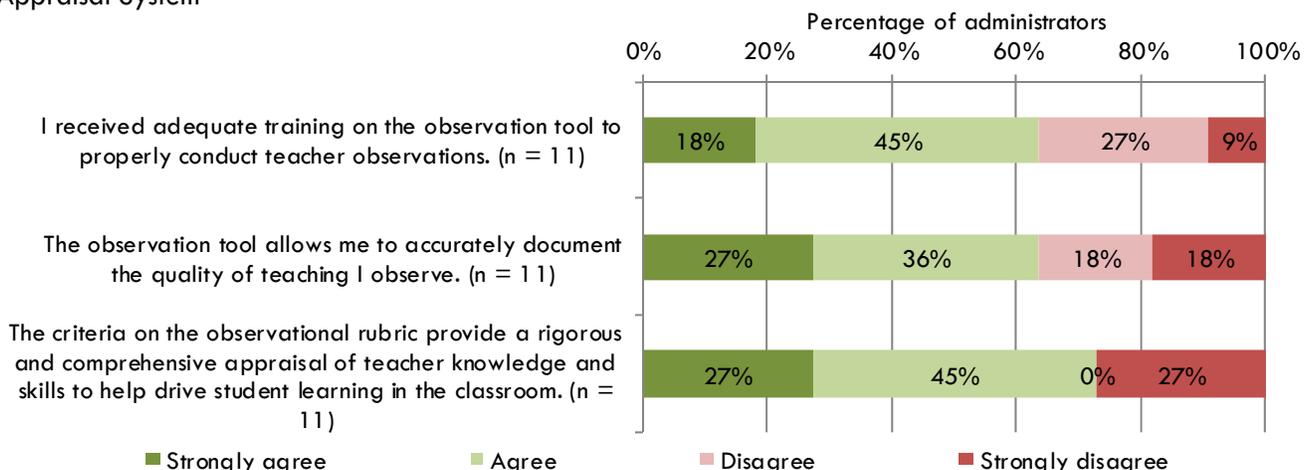
Teachers from the three original pilot teacher appraisal schools and two of the nine new schools, however, had a greater understanding of the appraisal system and were much less confused about the components than were teachers from the newer appraisal schools. Teachers from one campus described the system as clear, and those from a different campus reported that the pilot appraisal system was “pretty self-explanatory.”

“[The system] is very clear, and we knew what we were expected to do.”

Unfortunately, this level of comfort and familiarity with the pilot teacher appraisal system was less common than were feelings of frustration and confusion.

When administrators were asked to rate their experiences with the pilot teacher appraisal system, most were positive (Figure 5). Administrators generally felt that they received adequate training, found the observation tool easy to use, and valued the observation rubric. However, similar to teachers, 36% of administrators (4 of 11 respondents) did not believe they received adequate training.

Figure 5. Administrators’ Agreement with Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) Items Related to the Pilot Teacher Appraisal System



Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Teachers at several schools were concerned that they would not receive their final appraisal scores until the following school year. They felt this would make it difficult for them to set goals and use the data in an informative way. However, teachers at pilot appraisal schools from the original cohort reported significantly greater satisfaction with the “school’s system for rewarding and recognizing outstanding teachers” than did teachers from non-pilot appraisal schools or schools in the 2nd appraisal pilot cohort. These data suggest teachers may feel more positively after having received their appraisal scores (Figure 6).

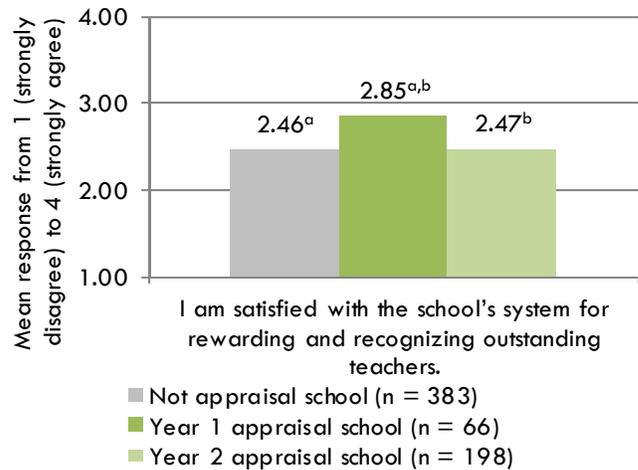
Teachers described benefits and drawbacks to each component of the 2012–2013 pilot teacher appraisal system. Although most teachers who

participated in focus groups, responded to the ECS, or did both were generally favorable toward including multiple measures in their appraisal, they sometimes disagreed about which components should be included and about the appropriate point allocation for each.

Student Response Survey. Teachers from both new and veteran pilot teacher appraisal schools initially were vocal in their concerns about including Student Response Surveys in their final appraisal scores. Student Response Surveys were piloted at the three pilot appraisal schools in 2011–2012, but were not included in teachers’ appraisal scores until 2012–2013. Teachers from those three schools who attended focus groups did not recall seeing the results of their students’ surveys from the previous year, which could have been due to the summer email distribution of reports (i.e., teachers may not have noticed their reports among the many emails they saw upon returning to school). However, survey data suggest many teachers did receive their reports and found them useful as they planned for the 2012–2013 school year (Figure 7).

In focus groups, teachers at only three of the 12 schools initially reported favorable attitudes toward adding students’ responses into teachers’ appraisal scores. Teachers from 10 schools expressed concern about the validity of students’ responses to the survey, arguing that some students (e.g., younger students and special education students) may not have understood the survey, may not have taken the survey seriously due to test or survey burnout, or may have used the survey as an opportunity to retaliate against teachers they disliked due to disciplinary issues or popularity. Many teachers were concerned that students would be responsible for 10% of their evaluation score.

Figure 6. Mean Ratings for Satisfaction with the School’s System for Rewarding and Recognizing Outstanding Teachers

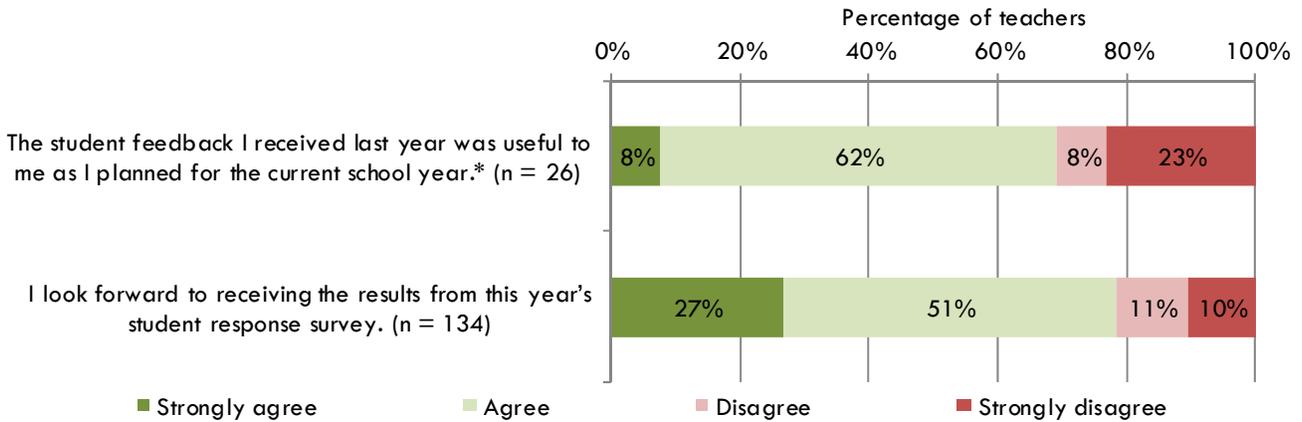


Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Note. Means sharing the same superscript were significantly different from each other.

“You’ve got kids that can’t...make good choices during the school day [influencing] 10% of our evaluation.”

Figure 7. Teachers’ Agreement With Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) items Related to the Observational and Professional Expectations Rubrics for the Pilot Teacher Appraisal System



Source. Spring 2013 ECS

*This item was distributed only to teachers who had participated in the pilot student feedback survey in 2011–2012.

During the focus groups, the Student Response Survey instrument was distributed to teachers so they could review the items and rating scale to better understand how students would evaluate them. After teachers had the opportunity to review the survey and see how it aligned with the observation rubric used by administrators and peer observers (e.g., how often teachers use specific instructional and behavioral management strategies), many of the negative reactions towards using the survey in the appraisal began to change. Discussions then typically shifted to more favorable statements about incorporating student feedback (e.g., “Nobody knows what happens in a classroom better than the students”), while also questioning the point allocation attributed to the student survey. Many suggested that the survey should be worth only 5%, as opposed to 10%, of their appraisals. After the instrument had been reviewed and discussed, many teachers voiced curiosity and eagerness to receive their own students’ feedback. Indeed, most teachers surveyed (78%) indicated they looked forward to reviewing this component of their appraisal (Figure 7).

SLOs. Some teachers valued including SLOs in the pilot teacher appraisal system and described how SLOs have helped teachers, particularly new teachers, analyze student data. They noted that SLOs provide a beneficial framework for addressing student needs, and promote goal setting. Others expressed favorable opinions about team SLOs, in particular, describing how team SLOs promote teamwork and collaboration in ways that might not otherwise exist. At a school new to the pilot teacher appraisal system, some teachers favored including the team SLO rather than the individual SLO, and stated that their campus works together to help improve the academic performance of students who are

“I like [the SLOs]. I think it gives us a common method... [to] look at the data, set a goal, and gives people a common place to address an issue or problem [for their students].”

English language learners, and that this work should be recognized. In fact, one of these teachers stated she was “confused as to why the team [SLO] would be 10% and the individual [SLO] is 20 [%]. To me, working with a team and being part of a team should have more weight.” This teacher concluded that

the team and the individual SLOs should each be worth 15% of the final appraisal score. However, teachers from all schools expressed some apprehension about including SLO results in their appraisal scores.

Concerns with evaluating teachers based on their SLOs generally pertained to a perceived lack of control teachers have over the SLO process (e.g., students’ potentially poor performance on SLO assessments due to burnout from over-testing, unequal SLO standards across campuses, inequity of standards for different student groups and teacher types, and a difficult testing window). For example, one teacher felt that including individual SLOs was unfair because it placed teachers who taught a higher percentage of challenging student populations (e.g., special education students, English language learners) at a disadvantage because she believed these student groups were less likely than were other students to make their SLO targets. This issue was compounded for teachers from campuses where administrators mandated more rigorous SLO targets and/or mandated uniform SLO targets regardless of specific student needs. Teachers at these schools were worried because, as one teacher stated, “someone else’s hands are in the SLO and teachers have less say on what they choose to include or to differentiate based on specific needs and abilities of their students.” In addition to the concerns raised about the equity and fairness of using individual SLOs, many teachers expressed concerns about including the team SLO in their appraisal scores. Teachers reported apprehension about allowing their own appraisal score to incorporate the performance of their peers and their peers’ students. One teacher asked, “Why should I be evaluated based on whether or not [my teammates] meet their SLO targets?”

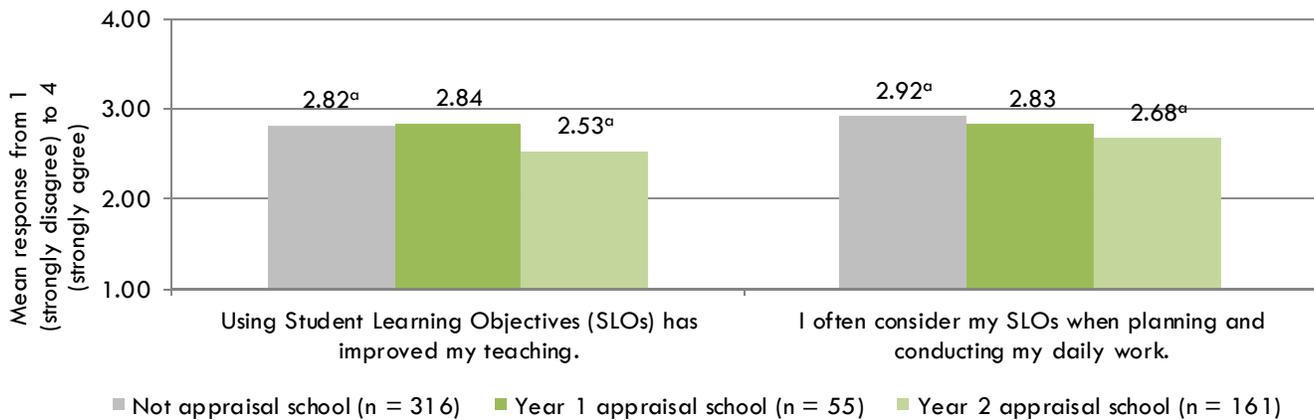
Some concerns teachers expressed about using SLOs for appraisal were philosophical in nature. Most notably, teachers from several schools felt that although SLOs originally were designed to be a teacher-driven method to formalize goal-setting and demonstrate students’ growth, including SLOs in the teacher appraisal system has changed them into something punitive. Some teachers who had set rigorous SLO targets felt they were at a disadvantage because their students were less likely to meet their SLO than they would be if the SLO targets were less rigorous. Some pondered whether they should establish easier SLOs to avoid receiving a low appraisal

“If you want to incentivize people [to establish challenging goals for all students], give them bonuses, but don’t punish them for not making SLOs.”

score; however, they said they would not do that if meeting SLO targets were simply tied to money. Several teachers expressed concerns that low scores on the pilot teacher appraisal system might have a negative impact on their future career opportunities. This appeared to raise the stakes for SLOs in a way that was uncomfortable for some teachers.

Survey results suggest some differences between the way pilot appraisal and other REACH teachers felt about SLOs. In general, survey responses indicate teachers had more favorable than unfavorable opinions about SLOs, with mean ratings above 2.5 on a scale from 1 to 4 (Figure 8). However, responses differed by pilot appraisal status. Teachers from REACH non-appraisal schools were

Figure 8. Mean Rating for Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) Items Regarding the Impact of SLOs, by Pilot Appraisal School Status



Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Note. Means sharing the same superscript were significantly different from each other.

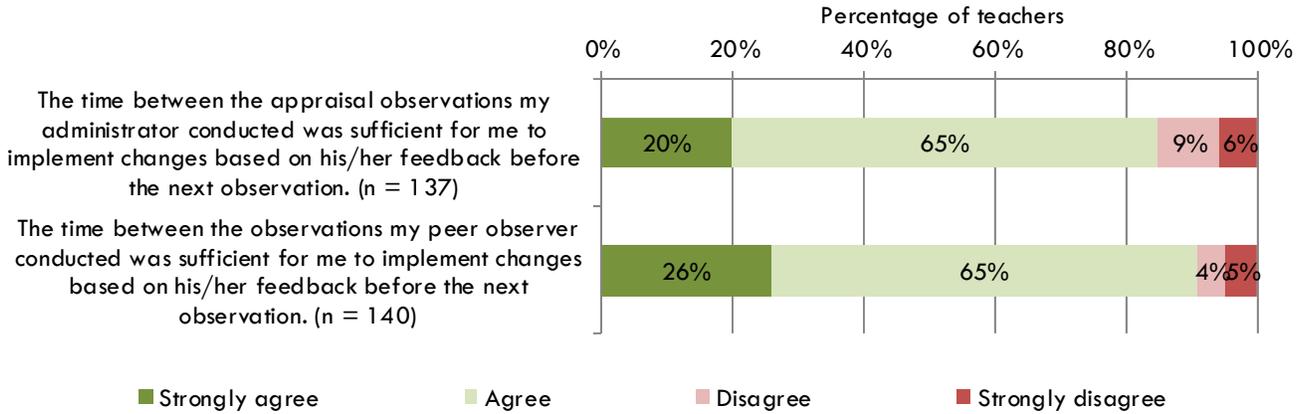
significantly more favorable about the impact of SLOs on their work than were those from the year 2 pilot appraisal cohort.²

Interestingly, some core teachers in focus groups argued in favor of using student growth on the state’s State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which was removed from the appraisal after the 2011–2012 pilot year, instead of measuring growth with SLOs. They described the concern that by including SLOs in their appraisal scores, teachers who set easy SLO targets appeared to be better teachers than those who set more rigorous targets, taught more rigorous courses, or taught more challenging students. As one teacher put it, “Teaching algebra is different than teaching students how to hit a baseball.” However, others recognized the need for components that apply to as many teachers as possible. One teacher stated, “There isn’t one appraisal [system] that is going to work for every teacher in every situation, but there should be something that works for most teachers.” Thus, most teachers concluded SLOs were the most appropriate method of measuring student growth.

Administrator observations. At two elementary schools, teachers preferred PDAS to the pilot teacher appraisal system and suggested that teacher appraisals should be based solely on administrators’ observation scores. As one teacher stated, “The administrator observations were more beneficial than the peer observations... [administrators] know the kids and help keep [teachers] on track.” However, the preference for PDAS was not widespread. Despite generally positive responses to the survey item addressing the timing of administrators’ observations (Figure 9), focus group participants from five schools expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of administrators’ observations, including the timing of their administrators’ observations (i.e., all observations were conducted during the spring semester, with little time between); length of the observation rubric; and the quality of feedback they received, or in some cases did not receive, from administrators.

² The results of significance tests are influenced by sample sizes and variance of data. Although the difference between means for Year 1 and Year 2 appraisal school teachers appeared similar to or even greater than that between non-pilot school and Year 2 appraisal school teachers, the results of significance tests on the differences between Year 1 and Year 2 responses were not significant.

Figure 9. Teachers’ Agreement With Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) items Related to the Time Between Observations for the Pilot Teacher Appraisal System



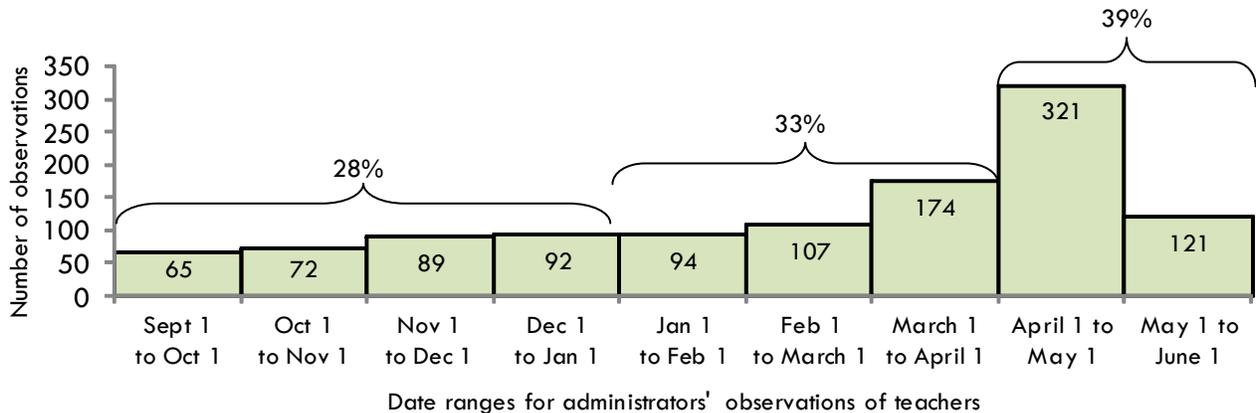
Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Additionally, teachers expressed concerns about the 15-minute administrator walkthroughs. At five schools, teachers voiced concern that a 15-minute walkthrough was not enough time to rate everything on the observation rubric. Some teachers were concerned that some administrators conducted a formal observation while other administrators did their walkthroughs (e.g., the principal versus the literacy coach); they noted that some administrators conducting the observations may not have been adequately trained on the new system.

“Ideally, [the administrators’ observations] would be conducted across the school year.”

Although 85% of survey respondents agreed the time between administrators’ observations was sufficient for them to implement changes before the next observation (Figure 9), focus group participants from seven schools described their administrators’ feedback as limited or nonexistent. One teacher stated her administrator’s observations occurred “all in one month,”

Figure 10. Distribution of Administrators’ Classroom Observation Dates in the 2012–2013 School Year



Source. 2012–2013 administrator observation database

Note. Administrators entered observational data, including the date of their observation, into the observation database. Data from teachers who had data for all three required observations are included.

and several stated they had not received any feedback from their administrator. Additional evidence suggested many administrative classroom visits were not distributed throughout the school year, but were conducted in brief succession. Only 64% of teachers were observed for the first time (of three) before January 1st (Figure 10), allowing little time for administrators to complete all three observations during the school year. More than a third of administrative classroom visits were completed after April 1st, and 11% were completed after May 1st. Additionally, although the average time between the first and second observation was 11 weeks, and the average time between the second and third observations was six weeks, nearly one quarter of teachers had less than one week between their second and third classroom visits (Table 1).

Table 1. Amount of Time Between Administrators' Observations of Teachers, by School

School	Number Of Teachers	Weeks from first to second observation			Percentage of teachers with <1 week between	Weeks from second to third observation			Percentage of teachers with <1 week between
		mean	minimum	maximum		mean	minimum	maximum	
Akins	79	13	<1	33	9%	2	<1	10	46%
Brown	19	15	<1	22	5%	4	<1	13	5%
Harris	32	7	<1	24	19%	8	<1	24	9%
Lanier	34	14	<1	35	6%	9	<1	29	21%
Martin	25	8	<1	30	16%	6	<1	30	20%
Norman	1	22	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
Reagan	3	10	2	26	—	17	6	28	—
Rodriguez	30	12	3	19	0%	7	<1	20	17%
Sims	10	16	3	22	0%	3	<1	7	30%
Sunset Valley	34	14	<1	24	3%	7	<1	20	15%
Travis	40	6	<1	17	15%	8	<1	25	20%
Webb	18	9	<1	30	28%	4	<1	14	33%
Total	325	11	<1	35	10%	6	<1	30	24%

Source. 2012–2013 administrator observation database

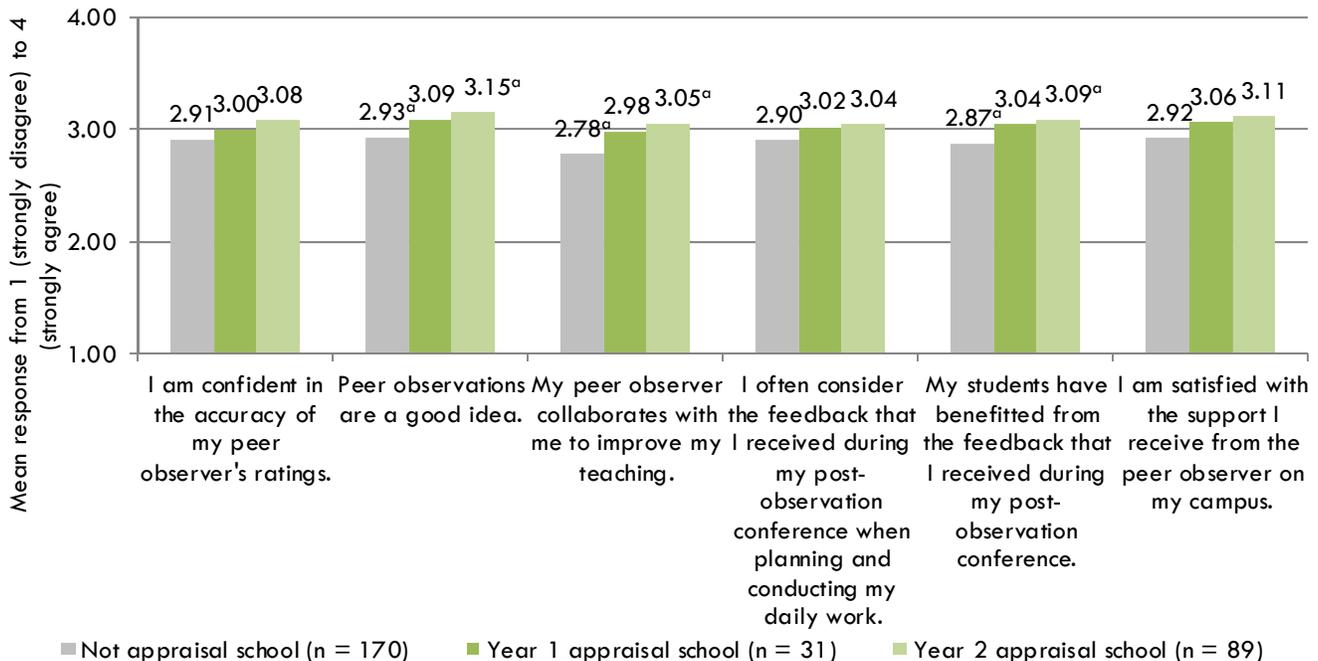
Note. Administrators entered observational data, including the date of their observation, into the observation database. Data from teachers who had data for all three required observations are included.

— data were not sufficient to perform this analyses

Peer observations. Peer observation was implemented on REACH campuses in 2011–2012; however, peers' observation scores were not added to the pilot teacher appraisal system until 2012–2013. Although district administrators had some concerns that including peer observation scores in the appraisal system might affect teachers' relationships with their peer observers, teachers generally reported favorable attitudes toward including them in the appraisal system. Teachers from only three schools felt that peer observation was more punitive in 2012–2013 than it had been in 2011–2012

(prior to its inclusion in the appraisal system). Indeed, several teachers (including veteran teachers) felt that peer observation was the best part of the pilot teacher appraisal system, and said that they had “learned a lot through the process,” that peer observation “really helped [them] grow,” and that peer observation has helped them make changes to their instructional practice. Survey data reflect similar views. Survey participants rated peer observation positively, with average ratings greater than 3 out of 4 points (Figure 11). In fact, teachers from appraisal schools (the Year 2 cohort, specifically) rated peer observation more favorably than did those from non-appraisal schools.

Figure 11. Mean Rating for Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) Items Regarding Peer Observations, by Pilot Appraisal School Status



Source. Spring 2013 ECS

Note. Means sharing the same superscript were significantly different from each other.

Many teachers appreciated that the rubric for both the peers’ and the administrators’ observations were very clear and “like a roadmap.” However, at nine of the pilot appraisal schools, teachers expressed some concerns with the qualifications of their peer observers and/or the validity of ratings provided by someone without knowledge about their student population. For example, some teachers were concerned with including observation data from peer observers whom they believed knew little about their content areas. One non-core area teacher stated, “I cannot tell other teachers in specific subject areas other than my own how they should teach their subject, and I don’t want someone with no experience in my area telling me how to teach dance.” Other teachers were bothered that their teaching was rated based on criteria such as whether they had “stuff on the walls”³ or that scores depended on when peer observers visited their classroom (e.g., right after taking STAAR instead of during core instructional time). Some teachers voiced concern about procedural issues (e.g., not receiving

³ The peer observation rubric did not assess whether teachers displayed anything specific on the walls.

post-observation feedback from their peer observer or the timing of the peer’s observations) and with being told that achieving a score of 4 out of 4 on the various components of the observation rubric was unattainable. Finally, some teachers at four schools described frustration that their peer observer had rated them differently than had their administrator.

“I found it very alarming that two people could come into our room using the exact same tool and [results] could be so very different.”

Teachers had suggestions for improving the pilot appraisal

system. When asked what they thought was missing from the pilot teacher appraisal, most teachers could not think of anything to add, and most, upon reflection, agreed with the components included. Teachers from two elementary schools did, however, suggest including a parent survey. One stated “Parents are aware of the level of learning taking place in the classroom,” and another said, “A parent survey would serve as a more reliable and valid assessment of [their] work in the classroom [than would a student survey].” Teachers at one campus also suggested a reflective teaching component, while teachers at another campus similarly recommended the addition of a teacher self-assessment. Teachers from three schools mentioned the value of REACH professional development units (PDUs) and recommended their inclusion in the appraisal system.

Overall, teachers expressed greater concern with the weighting of each component than with the components, themselves. Teachers from several schools mentioned concerns about the point allocations for the team and individual SLOs. Teachers from one school recommended reducing the weighting of all SLOs in the appraisal system. One teacher stated, “The combined individual and team SLOs should not have greater weighting than the combined administrative observations, since SLOs are narrowly focused and do not capture everything a teacher does for the students.” Teachers from three additional schools echoed these sentiments with recommendations to increase the weighting of administrators’ observations, while teachers from four campuses suggested eliminating SLOs from the appraisal altogether.

No consistent pattern of responses emerged regarding the point allocations for either the school-wide measure or the professional expectations component. Only one group of secondary teachers suggested greater weight be given to school-wide measures. Additionally, responses were inconsistent regarding the relative weights that should be applied to peers’ observations and administrators’ observations. Teachers from three schools suggested increasing the weighting of peers’ observations, and reported that peers’ observations were more valuable than were administrators’ observations. Conversely, teachers from three schools indicated that administrators’ observations should be given greater weighting than given by the current allocation.

Teachers’ preferences for peers’ observation or administrators’ observations seemed to depend on the relationships established between teachers and their observers, the levels of trust fostered by the observers, and the type and quality of feedback provided by either the peer observers or administrators. For example, a teacher at a school favoring peer observers noted, “It is a difficult climate... [administrators] come into your classroom once or twice a week criticizing what you are doing.” One teacher explained her peer observer had framed the conversations differently, stating,

“Here is what you are good at and here is what you need to work on.” According to another teacher, “[Peer observation] was the best feedback [we] ever received.” Additionally, many teachers valued the “positive” and “upfront feedback” they had received from their peer observers. One teacher noted that the peer observer “was very positive, asking questions and listening, while letting us formulate what we needed to work on.” Teachers at schools favoring administrators’ observations found that the peer observers’ feedback was “not received in a timely manner,” was “judgmental,” or was “unhelpful and unrealistic.” Teachers from schools favoring administrators’ observations emphasized the poor relationship established between themselves and their peer observers.

DISCUSSION

In general, teachers' perceptions of the pilot teacher appraisal system were inconsistent across campuses with regard to the components, their relative weighting, and even the need for a new appraisal system at all. Teachers at some campuses were so unfamiliar with the system that they could not respond to questions without a great deal of clarification about what was included and how it was scored, while teachers at other campuses spoke with clear knowledge about the system. The lack of familiarity with the appraisal system was, of course, more common at schools new to the appraisal pilot than at schools with prior experience. However, teachers from two new schools were among those most familiar with the system. Thus, we conclude considerable differences exist with regard to the ways campus administrators introduced and supported the use of the new appraisal system.

The pilot teacher appraisal system was intended, in part, to provide more useful feedback to teachers through multiple measures. However, only about one quarter of the administrators' observations were conducted during the first semester, and even more were conducted so late (i.e., in April or May) that the resulting feedback could not be used constructively to implement instructional changes during the school year. Many teachers reported limited or no discussion with administrators post-observation, and up to 46% of teachers at some campuses had their final two observations within a time span of less than one week.

Considerable differences also existed in regard to the experiences teachers had with peer observation. Teachers at some campuses described peer observation as one of the most valuable components of the pilot appraisal system, while those at other campuses reported dissatisfaction with peer observation. However, despite the negative experiences teachers from a few schools described, survey results suggest favorable overall attitudes toward peer observation among both new and veteran pilot appraisal schools, and evidence suggests peer observation was even better received at pilot appraisal schools than at other schools. Additionally, the observational rubric, itself, was well-received by both teachers and administrators.

Attitudes toward SLOs, however, were less favorable at pilot appraisal schools than at other schools. It seems that including SLOs in the teacher appraisal system may have altered the way teachers feel about them. Indeed, some teachers described how the nature of the SLO process changed after it became part of their appraisal score. No longer were SLOs simply an opportunity to establish rigorous targets and receive a reward for accomplishing the goal. Rather, a potentially punitive element was added to SLOs, enough that some teachers described rethinking their rigorous targets and questioning the contributions of other teachers to their team SLOs. The different standards across campuses for SLO minimum targets also caused some frustration, especially among teachers with concerns that their own appraisal scores would be lower than scores of teachers at schools with more lenient minimum SLO target requirements. In reality, the minimum target percentage of students required to meet the SLO for stipend purposes had no bearing on the appraisal score computation. However, the minimum test score students were required to achieve could have influenced the appraisal score. Some evidence indicated that a greater percentage of students at schools with higher target percentage and minimum score

requirements than of students at schools with lower target percentage and minimum score requirements met teachers' SLOs (Schmitt, Lamb, & Ibanez, 2013). However, because campus SLO requirements may differ, teachers' concerns about the potential for inequity may have influenced their overall opinions about the inclusion of SLOs in their appraisal score.

Perhaps the most interesting finding that emerged from conversations with teachers was that they generally valued the student survey feedback as part of the appraisal, despite a great deal of initial concern. Although in many focus groups, teachers at first stated their disapproval of the student survey and some skepticism about the validity of responses that would be received, upon review of the instrument and further discussion about the value of student feedback, many eventually conceded that the survey results were indeed a valid source of information about their teaching. However, teachers commonly believed the point allocation should be lowered from 10% to 5% of their overall appraisal scores.

Teachers had very few suggestions about how to improve the appraisal system, other than the suggestion to revise the point allocations in various ways. Most did not suggest additional measures for inclusion, and teachers generally appreciated a system of multiple measures. However, the lack of knowledge at some schools about the appraisal system indicated many teachers had not ever seriously considered the appraisal process or how to improve the old system. Indeed, even teachers with knowledge about the components of the pilot appraisal system either did not know or expressed incorrect assumptions about why the district had implemented a new pilot system. Conversations with teachers suggested their principals had not explained the rationale for implementing a new system or perhaps had not reinforced the message throughout the year. Principals, themselves, may not have known the complete rationale for piloting a new teacher appraisal system. A conversation with principals suggested this could have been the case for some (Schmitt, 2013).

As the pilot teacher appraisal system continues in the 2013–2014 school year, the need for communication with principals and teachers is paramount. In addition, consistency of implementation across pilot appraisal schools must be ensured with regard to communication about the appraisal system, the timing of observations, the quality of feedback provided to teachers, and the SLO requirements. Finally, the potential changes in teachers' SLO practices as a result of inclusion in the pilot appraisal system cannot be ignored. Future research should examine the implications of expanding the uses of SLOs beyond their original intended function.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Ensure that principals implement the pilot appraisal system as intended.** Results indicate wide variability in implementation of the pilot teacher appraisal system. Teachers at some schools were knowledgeable about the appraisal system and spoke with great ease about their perceptions of the new system. At other schools, teachers knew very little about the system and could not discuss it with confidence. Teachers described different levels of principal involvement with the new system and differing experiences with appraisal components (e.g., administrator walk-throughs). To ensure consistent implementation of the teacher appraisal system across all campuses, the district must create methods by greater accountability for principals.
- 2. Provide additional training to campus administrators and SLO facilitators regarding the pilot teacher appraisal system.** Because teachers from each of the pilot teacher appraisal schools raised questions of varying degrees regarding aspects of the pilot teacher appraisal system, additional training about the pilot teacher appraisal system seems necessary. The training should provide more in-depth information to campus administrators and SLO facilitators to ensure resources personnel are present on each campus who are informed about the pilot teacher appraisal system and can address teachers' specific questions and concerns with the system. Training should include information about the rationale for the new system.
- 3. Distribute email reminders to teachers throughout the school year that include links to the training video, handbook, and website.** Although all teachers attended initial informational sessions and watched a video about the appraisal system, many forgot important details of the pilot teacher appraisal system as the school year progressed and could not recall where to locate answers to their questions. Teachers should be reminded about the resources that are available to them.
- 4. Develop an FAQ section on the pilot teacher appraisal system website and in the handbook that addresses some of the common concerns raised during the focus groups.** Although a FAQ section is included in the pilot teacher appraisal system handbook, many of the questions and concerns discussed during the focus groups are not included. Based on feedback received from teachers during the focus groups, the FAQ should include the following: specific information for special education teachers and non-core area teachers so they can easily understand how their appraisal computations might differ from other teachers' computations, and where and how to contest various components of the pilot teacher appraisal system. In addition, teachers would benefit from hearing about their peers' experiences. Videos or narrative descriptions from teachers who have experience with the pilot teacher appraisal system might assuage some teachers' concerns with the system.
- 5. Include references and links to the pilot teacher appraisal system on the REACH, peer observation, and SLO websites.** Teachers often did not know where to find information regarding the pilot teacher appraisal system, but visited other related websites to look for pertinent information. Adding links to the pilot teacher appraisal system's website might help teachers locate the information they are seeking.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Overview of the 2012–2013 Pilot Teacher Appraisal System

In 2011–2012, the AISD developed a new teacher appraisal system that was piloted at three schools ([Lamb & Schmitt, 2012](#)). In 2012–2013, changes were made to the pilot system and the revisions were piloted at the original three plus an additional nine schools.

In 2012–2013, the following measures were used to evaluate teachers (more detailed information can be found on the pilot teacher appraisal system [website](#)).

Student growth

- Individual Student Learning Objective (SLO) (20%)
- Team SLOs (10%)
- School-wide measure (10%)

Observations of instructional practice and classroom climate

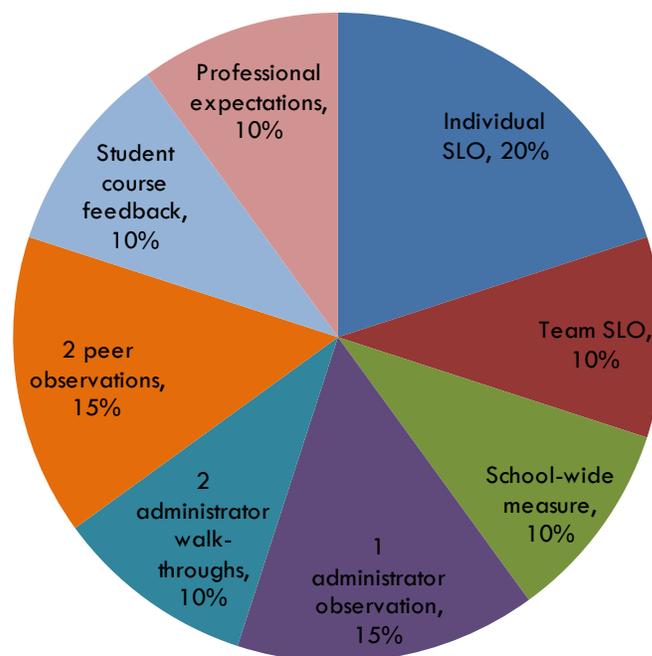
- One Administrator observation (15%)
- Two Administrator walk-through observations (10%)
- Two Peer observations (15%)

Student input

- Student Response Survey (10%)

Professional expectations

- Administrators' ratings of professional expectations (10%)



Appendix B. Spring 2012–2013 Focus Group Protocol

- 1) Describe your thoughts about the pilot appraisal system?
- 2) Was the system clearly explained to you? Who presented the information to you? Where do you go if you have ongoing questions?
- 3) Do the components reflect valid assessments of your work? Is there anything missing?
- 4) What are your thoughts about the distribution of points in the appraisal?
- 5) How does the feedback that you receive using the new observation instrument compare to what you received using PDAS?
- 6) To what extent does the rubric allow observers to accurately identify your effective instructional practices? Is there anything you would change about the rubric?
- 7) What changes have you made to your instructional practice after receiving feedback from your administrator?
- 8) What changes have you made to your instructional practice after receiving feedback from your peer observer?
- 9) What are your thoughts about peer observations as part of the teacher appraisal system, along with the administrator observations?
- 10) What are your thoughts about student feedback as part of your appraisal?

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