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Policy Brief, EDSE 6460, UNT  
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May 1, 2011

## THE USE OF GROWTH PLANS WITH INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS

### Introduction

Race to the Top (R2T), the educational agenda of President Obama, reframes targets for educational reform instituted by The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 by emphasizing systemic reform in education. According to the White House fact sheet on Race to the Top 2009, the health of our nation's democracy and the strength of our nation's economy is dependent upon *every* American child receiving a high-quality education. This is no longer an option but a prerequisite in attaining success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One of the primary components of the Race to the Top agenda is its focus on the *quality of instruction in the classroom*. The White House R2T fact sheet delineates the importance of the quality of instruction and teacher quality in the following statement:

**One of the primary goals of Race to the Top is to attract and keep great teachers and leaders in America's classrooms**, by expanding effective support to teachers and principals; reforming and improving teacher preparation; revising teacher evaluation, compensation, and retention policies to encourage and reward effectiveness; and working to ensure that our most talented teachers are placed in the schools and subjects where they are needed the most. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/fact-sheet-race-top>

The achievement of this goal on the local level, particularly as it relates to teacher evaluations and processes used to effectively support ineffective teachers with professional growth and development, is of considerable importance as the United States implements measures to achieve success. This policy brief is written to inform readers of the issues surrounding this goal.

### Vocabulary Terms

*The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001* - is the revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act focused on providing "highly qualified" teachers to all students and the implementation of standardized tests to assess whether schools were meeting the standards and students were meeting the necessary improvements over the year.

*Race to the Top (R2T)* - is a \$4.3 billion educational reform program that is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The competition provides federal funds to support educational reform initiatives at the state level.

*Systemic Reform* – is change that affects all elements and levels of an educational organization.

## The Use of a Growth Plan with Ineffective Teachers

*Hard to Staff Schools*- There are as many as 17 to 63 identified indicators of hard to staff schools including teacher working conditions, administrative support, professionalism, high concentration of high poverty students, high crime and high populations of non-white students.

*Suburban schools*- the primary characteristics of a suburban school are that they exist outside the inner city and are highly populated by middle to upper middle class students.

*Highly Qualified teachers*- a term used during the NCLB reform, which used teacher certification as the primary indicator as to whether or not a teacher is identified as “highly qualified.” Teacher performance, student achievement and teacher effectiveness were not used as indicators of highly qualified teachers.

*Teacher quality*-For the purpose of this policy brief, teacher effectiveness is defined as the teacher’s ability to positively impact student achievement. Teacher ineffectiveness is defined as the teacher’s inability to positively impact student achievement. Documenting either of these terms is complex and requires a trained eye to identify the subtleties of effective and ineffective teaching in various school contexts, disciplines and grade levels. Other related terms include teacher performance, teachers in need of assistance, teachers at risk, and highly qualified teachers.

*Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS)*-was developed in accordance with the Texas Education Code (TEC), §21.351. The evaluation tool is used to assess and measure teacher performance (teacher effectiveness) by independently scoring the teacher’s proficiencies in seven domains. The PDAS is interchangeably referred to as teacher evaluation and/or teacher accountability. It is the responsibility of the principal to use the PDAS to measure effective/ineffective teaching in various contexts, disciplines and grade levels. For policy makers, it is important to note that the PDAS is used to evaluate teaching effectiveness in a variety of settings. The domains indicated on the PDAS are not altered if the evaluator is using the tool in various contexts, disciplines and grade levels. The measures of effectiveness are limited to 1) student participation; 2) learner-centered instruction; 3) evaluation and feedback on student progress; 4) management of student discipline, instructional strategies, time and materials; 5) professional communication; 6) professional development; 7) compliance with policies, operating procedures and requirements; and 8) improvement of academic performance of all students based upon the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

Source: The provisions of this §150.1001 adopted to be effective August 1, 1997, 22 TexReg 4200; amended to be effective February 17, 2010, 35 TexReg 1205.

*Professional Development*-According to the National Staff Development Council standards (NSCD, 1998), there are five characteristics of professional development. It must be 1) ongoing; 2) collaborative; 3) research-based; 4) driven by data based decision-making; and 5) supported with adequate resources. The confusion is created when educators and policy makers use various terms for professional development; however, all do not necessarily address teacher effectiveness unless by design and intent (Zepeda, 1999). The following terms used to reference tools and methods that address the developmental needs of teachers are: teacher interventions, growth plans, intervention plans, plans of action, teacher professional growth, lesson study, staff training, mentoring, modeling, observation, and building teacher capacity.

Descriptive Context for Policy Change

According to Hall & Hord (2011), achieving systemic change in any organization is far more difficult than achieving superficial change. Smith and O’Day (1991) report that there are three major elements involved in systemic reform:

- 1.) Unifying vision and goals
- 2.) Developing a coherent system of instruction
- 3.) Restructuring of the governance system to support appropriate practices.

In this context, educational reform does not occur in isolation but within a system that has multiple components that interconnect and interrelate. Additionally, systemic reform requires that attention be given to all levels of the organization - national, state, district, school and classroom (Hall & Hord, 2011). The use of growth plans to support the development of teachers in need of assistance is a systemic issue and will require a policy that will address the complexity, interrelatedness, and interconnectedness of the roles and responsibilities of teachers, evaluating administrators, and curriculum/instructional experts. It will be necessary to address the state, district and campus level practices and interpretations of policy as well as the barriers that presently prohibit the development of a culture that promotes effective teaching. In order for Texas to meet Race to the Top, policy makers must become informed of which areas interconnect with teacher quality and how that interconnectedness supports or prohibits achieving effective teaching in every classroom. The issues and questions posed by the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of teacher effectiveness and the use of growth plans is illustrated in the concept map. (See Figure A)

A Concept Mapping of Locus of Control for Issues Related to Teacher Growth Plans

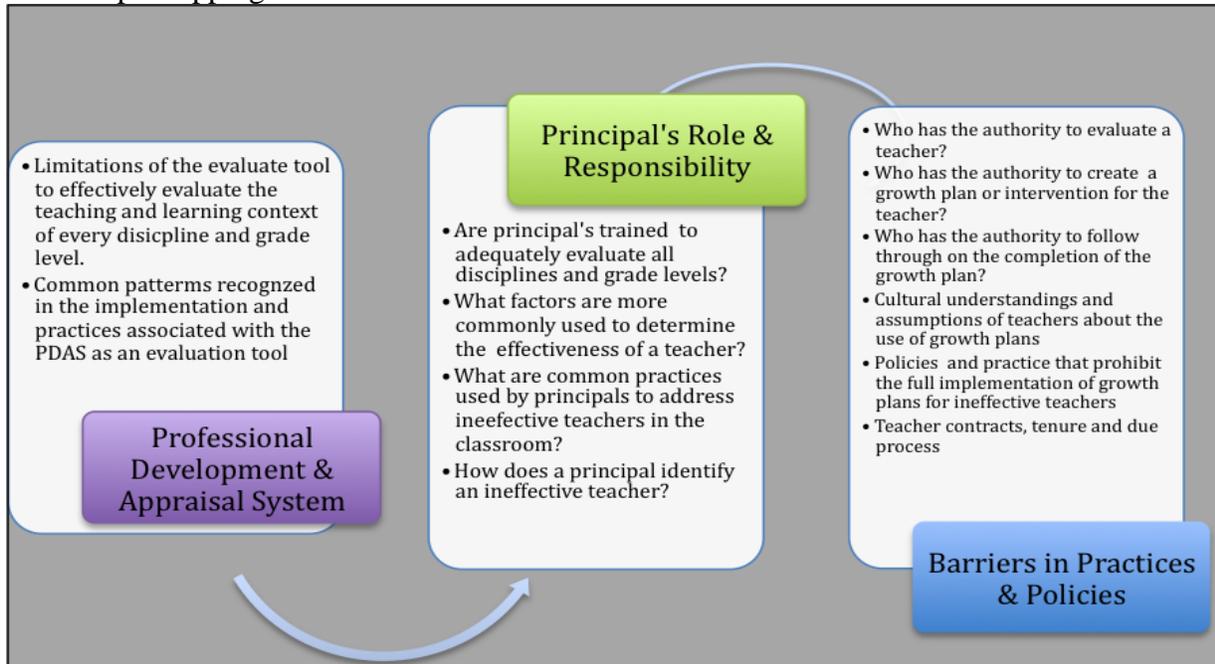


Figure A.

## The Use of a Growth Plan with Ineffective Teachers

Current policy, described as practiced in one state under *The Issue in Practice*, involves the campus administrator in annual evaluation of the teacher that may lead to development and monitoring of an intervention or growth plan. The following issues arise, however, as limitations to current policies that exist somewhat differently in each of the states.

- As policy makers, educators and evaluating administrators discuss how to improve teacher effectiveness; it is difficult to find common meaning or understanding of the issues. Under the current policy, various terms and interpretations describe the processes and practices used to improve teacher effectiveness.
- Under the current policy, educators, policy makers and evaluating administrators use growth plans, intervention plans, individualized professional development and various other terms interchangeably. Differing perspectives convey differing values to these terms. The arbitrary use of these terms cultivates a tumultuous culture, making it difficult to gain wide spread acceptance and usage of growth plans to impact teacher effectiveness.
- Current policy assumes the evaluating administrator has received adequate training to develop individualized, personal development (growth/intervention plans) that will address the knowledge and skill deficiencies in all disciplines.
- Current policy assumes the evaluating administrator has adequate time to implement, monitor and evaluate the individualized professional development of ineffective teachers in various disciplines without the input of outside experts, i.e. curriculum specialists, instructional specialists, coaches, mentors and so forth.
- Current policy assumes the evaluating administrator can adequately recognize, identify and document effective teaching in all disciplines, all grade levels and all socio-cultural environments. This assumption minimizes efforts to support ineffective teachers by offering them the specialized assistance they may need to develop. Other barriers are who is qualified to appraise teachers and what are their roles and responsibilities.
- Current policy supports teacher tenure as a factor in determining which teachers are retained rather than teacher effectiveness. While seniority is important, it does not guarantee teacher effectiveness.
- Under the current policy, teacher certification is not questioned; however, teacher certification does not equal teacher effectiveness.
- Under the current policy, the evaluation tool is considered one-dimensional and does not offer multiple lenses with which to observe effective teaching in complex, dynamic settings.

### Differing Perspectives

Research suggests that, “All teachers can benefit from professional development focused on improving effectiveness” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008, pg. 6). Nevertheless, although TAC §150.1004 delineates the use of the growth plan as a professional development tool, there are various meanings and values attached to it. For some teachers, the stigma or

meaning attached to the use of the growth plan is associated with the fear of termination and/or punishment rather than professional development to benefit the teacher. Teachers and teacher organizations have historically opposed the implementation of a growth plan and perceive it as demoralizing rather than prescriptive or supportive. According to Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), teachers oppose growth plans initiated by evaluating administrators who are unfamiliar with the successful teaching practices and instructional strategies of their discipline. Educators view the use of the growth plan as a means to remove them from the classroom. Teachers who teach in urban schools also oppose having the same requirements placed upon them because the urban context is more difficult.

### Snapshots of Research

“The quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Terry, 2009, pg.1). Students with effective teachers for the span of three consecutive years achieve 50% more than students with ineffective teachers according to Sanders & Rivers, (1996). Hanushek (2003) propose that the difference can be an entire year of learning. Sanders and Rivers also suggest that the effectiveness of teachers has more effect on student achievement than race, socio-economic level, class size, or classroom heterogeneity. This research suggests that any obstacles to closing the achievement gap associated with ethnicity, race and poverty can be erased within three to five years if the student has an effective teacher in front of the classroom. It is well documented that struggling teachers harm students in the process of trying to teach (McKinsey, 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2003; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

The socio-cultural context of teaching is also a factor in teacher effectiveness. According to Fuller (2010), teacher quality, student achievement and the socio-cultural context are significantly related. Fuller (2010) suggests that students in low performing schools, high poverty schools and predominantly minority school have less access to quality, effective teachers.

Guskey (2003) states that in order for staff development to be effective, it must address the needs of particular teachers in their particular settings. This implies that effective teaching in a suburban context may look different from effective teaching in an urban context, especially if the school is hard to staff. However, effective teachers do not remain in inner city schools but rather quickly move to easier job assignments (Education Trust, 2005). Consequently, for students, the impact of ineffective teaching is traumatic.

### The Issue in Practice

The intervention plan is embedded in the PDAS evaluation process, which means that the evaluating campus administrator (principal) is responsible for identifying the critical needs of the teacher as well as being able to develop a plan to address those needs. The intervention plan becomes a means of monitoring quality teaching as well as implementing an accountability system that identifies successful teaching and informs human capital decision-making processes.

#### ***The Growth Plan & the Principal's Responsibility***

Under TAC §150.1004(f), an intervention plan may be developed at any time at the discretion of the appraiser when the appraiser has documentation that would potentially produce an evaluation rating of "below expectations or "unsatisfactory" in any domain. As an instructional leader, the

principal may offer suggestions for improving instruction informally or formally with an intervention plan at any time. This policy implies that the process is collaborative. The certified appraiser and the campus principal or designee, in consultation with the teacher, should develop the intervention together (Texas Education Code, Chapter 21).

The timeline for the intervention plan is the decision of the district and can be made in consultation with the teacher. The final completion date can be before contract decisions are made. The principal must document all the domains in which the teacher is struggling and design a plan that will address each. If the principal or evaluating administrator changes while a teacher is working on an intervention plan, that teacher will have to be re-evaluated by the new principal or evaluating administrator and documented as low performing before the previous intervention plan can be continued (Texas Education Code, Chapter 21).

### ***The Growth Plan & the Teacher's Responsibility***

Under these circumstances, an intervention plan must be developed for any teacher designated as a teacher in need of assistance. The teacher "in need of assistance" is required to address all the domains in which the teacher is less than proficient within the designated time frame. In order to refute the principal's evaluation, the teacher must write a rebuttal letter. The teacher can request a second appraisal if they believe the evaluation is bias or unfair.

### ***The Use & Misuse of the Growth Plan in practice***

Under the current policy, Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code outlines the purpose of an individualized professional development plan. It states the following:

(a) On the conclusion of a teacher's appraisal, the principal of the school at which the teacher is employed shall prepare an individualized professional development plan for the teacher. The plan must include continuing education requirements for the teacher and must be linked to:

- (1) any areas identified in the teacher's appraisal as needing improvement;
- (2) any areas identified by the teacher as appropriate for achievement of specific professional goals; and
- (3) the subject area taught by the teacher.

(b) The principal must provide opportunities for the teacher to achieve the requirements and goals included in the teacher's individualized professional development plan prepared under Subsection (a) (Texas Education Code, Chapter 21).

Based upon the current policy, the present evaluation system operates under the assumption that the principal or evaluating campus administrator is adequately trained to identify effective and ineffective teachers in every classroom. The system also assumes that the principal or evaluating campus administrator is able to differentiate levels of instruction. However, in practice, a superficial checklist is used when a principal or evaluating campus administrator does not know what to look for to determine proficiency (Alliance for Excellence, 2008). According to current policy, instructional coaches, curriculum coordinators or master teachers in the discipline are rarely used to evaluate teachers unless they have also received PDAS training and are invited by the evaluating administrator. Based upon the present policy, an intervention plan can be developed and monitored by the evaluating campus administrator, who may be less familiar with appropriate instruction in the teaching area. In this case, the intervention plan may be general in nature rather than specific targets to improve teacher effectiveness.

Primarily, two issues are interconnected and create quite a complex context. First, the PDAS is a poorly constructed evaluation tool that cannot adequately assess teacher effectiveness. The evaluation tool should use multiple measures, not just student test scores or classroom management (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Secondly, the growth plan is intended to be an intervention or professional development plan that builds the teacher’s capacity and effectiveness in the classroom. However, in practice, neither functions properly. As a result of the limited training of the principal, most teachers simply receive “good” evaluations. Very few are placed on intervention plans and/or dismissed because of ineffective teaching. Even though some principals are suspicious of the effectiveness of a teacher, the principal fails to document the teacher’s ineffectiveness, fails to follow up on teacher intervention plans, and fails to meet required deadlines that impact decision-making. The number of teachers dismissed by individual school districts is provided in Table 1.

**Teacher Dismissals by School District, 2001-2006**

School District	Teachers Fired	Teachers Employed
Arlington ISD	2	4,053
Austin ISD	3	5,745
Dallas ISD	133	10,643
Fort Worth ISD	4	4,839
Houston ISD	88	12,057
San Antonio ISD	9	3,633
Waco ISD	20	1,092

Table 1. As cited by Terry(2009, pg 7.)

**Related Issues**

In order to completely reform the system, all components related to growth plans and teacher effectiveness must also be addressed. Other related components include: teacher retention/teacher turnover/teacher recruitment; teacher preparation; teacher induction & mentoring programs, teacher certification; and site-based management & decision-making processes (Strayhorn, 2006; Texas Education Agency, 2010; Fordham Foundation, 2001).

***Teacher Tenure and Dismissal***

According to Sec. 21.154. Status under continuing contract, each teacher employed under a continuing contract is *entitled* to continue in the teacher's position or a position with the school district for future school years without the necessity for annual nomination or reappointment until the person:

- (1) resigns;
- (2) retires under the Teacher Retirement System of Texas;
- (3) is released from employment by the school district at the end of a school year because of necessary reduction of personnel as provided by Section 21.157;
- (4) is discharged for good cause as defined by Section 21.156 and in accordance with the procedures provided by this chapter;
- (5) is discharged for a reason stated in the teacher's contract that existed on or before September 1, 1995, and in accordance with the procedures prescribed by this chapter; or

(6) is returned to probationary status, as authorized by Section 21.106.

Source: Texas Education Code, Chapter 21.

This policy *entitles* the teacher to remain in the classroom regardless of their effectiveness as a teacher. Evaluators must use the intervention plan with ineffective teachers so that either they improve their instruction within the designated time frame or they are released.

Secondly, according to Sec. 21.206, the notice of contract renewal or nonrenewal outlines a timeline for evaluators to report ineffective or poor teachers (Texas Education Code, Chapter 21).

Much of the burden of proof is placed upon the evaluating administrator to document, design the intervention plan, and monitor the teachers' process; however, little is stated about continued responsibility to follow through with the deadlines in order to report and/or remove the ineffective teacher. Evaluating administrators must be held accountable for failing to remove ineffective teachers from the classroom. Without this measure of accountability, ineffective teachers remain in the classroom or are transferred to another campus within the district.

#### Snapshots of Court Decisions

Case #1 Mary Linda Ramirez vs. Edgewood Independent School District and Michael Moses, Commissioner of Education, In his Official Capacity.

This case demonstrates the use of an educational specialist as a part of the evaluation process and the strength of the collaboration when documenting an ineffective teacher. The teacher failed to comply with the growth plan and was terminated.

According to the case notes, Susan Aaron, an Edgewood educational specialist in the Edgewood Special Education Department and a certified appraiser, observed Ramirez's classroom six or seven times for a total of approximately six hours during the 1996-1997 school year. Aaron recommended to the Wrenn principal that Ramirez be given a growth plan to assist her in areas of student discipline and organizational skills. Specific problems observed by Aaron included the following: failure to discipline unruly students and redirect off-task students, poor planning and organizational skills, poor classroom management skills, and weak instructional skills.

Source: From the 45th Judicial District Court, Bexar County, Texas, Trial Court No. 1998-CI-15635

*Case #2 Chatman v. Houston Independent School District, TX.*

According to the case notes, the counselor failed to comply with directives regarding lesson plans, exhibited poor classroom performance, had excessive absences, and failed to comply with growth plans.

Source: Decision No. 010-R2-901

According to Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code, employees are entitled to an opportunity for improvement if the conduct or performance is remediable. However, remediation (growth plans) is typically associated with poor job performance, not misconduct.

*Case #3 Reincke v. Richardson Independent School District, TX. July 23, 2007*

Source: Decision No. 063-R1-0607

Case #4 *Askew v. Desoto Independent School District*, TX. Jan. 14, 2003

Source: Decision No. 014-R2-1202

Although evaluators were attempting to use a growth plan to rectify the teacher's behavior in these cases, the court ruled that their some behavior does not require a growth plan and the teachers were dismissed. In case #3, the teacher used racial slurs and derogatory language toward students and in case #4, the counselor falsified student records. Conduct sufficient to warrant termination is not remediable and to use a growth plan as a part of the documentation process is a misuse of the intervention. A growth plan is considered a *remedial* measure used to help a teacher improve his/her skills and performance in areas where he/she lacks competency. Hence, the confusion is centered on the language used to define the purpose and/or interpretation of the use and value of the growth plan or intervention in a teacher professional development.

### Recommendations

As Senate Bill 4 is discussed, the following recommendations are suggested in order to address the systemic reform needed to support and promote effective teaching in Texas public schools.

#### Recommendation # 1

Redesign the evaluation tool used for teachers so that it supports best practices for developing effective teachers. The tool should use multiple measures and teachers should be assessed throughout the year.

#### Recommendation #2

In order for policy makers and educators to improve schools and teaching, the execution and culture of professional development has to change (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2008). Policy makers must address the cultural assumptions surrounding professional development and reframe the role of professional development embedded in the teacher's evaluation tool. Danielson (1996) states that continuing professional development is a mark of true professionalism. It is a cultural understanding that educators are committed to life-long learning, especially if they want to attain status at the top of their profession. "Staff development promotes the continuous improvement of the total professional staff of the school district" (Zepeda, 1999, pg 4). It is important to also understand that professional development is not a one-time event, but a process that requires planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating (Supovitz and Chrisman, 2003; Education Trust, 2005). There are multiple models of professional development and if principals are responsible for the personal development of ineffective teachers, principals must also become knowledgeable of appropriate adult learning strategies and processes.

#### Recommendation #3

Expand who has authority to support and evaluate teachers. Incorporate a curriculum and/or instructional specialist as a part of the process that designs, implements, monitors and evaluates the professional development of ineffective teachers. It is highly unlikely that a principal will be apt in all areas of professional development, curriculum, instructional strategies and evaluation. A specialist should be able to support the principal. Specialist/coaches do not have to be teachers in the building but can be outside consultants or other district personnel.

Recommendation #4

Develop a consistent language when addressing the individualized professional development for teachers. This will allow teachers, evaluating administrators, and policy makers to communicate effectively

Recommendation #5

“The best evaluators are those who come from the same subject area or grade level as the teacher being evaluated” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008, pg. 8). Therefore, a provision should be made for outside experts to be a part of the evaluation and teacher development process. As cited by Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), Toch and Rothman (2008) further strongly recommend that these persons be rigorously trained and reviewed for accuracy on a routine basis.

Sources

*This website provides an overview of a legal framework for understanding the use of growth plans.*

[http://texasdocbook.com/chapter\\_excerpts](http://texasdocbook.com/chapter_excerpts)

*Outlines what type of documents can be used for evaluation*

<http://www.tcta.org/publications/08winter/informationporp.htm>

*Includes a list of policy web sources*

<http://texasedequity.blogspot.com/>

*The Texas School Administrators' Legal Digest Online Resource*

<http://www.legaldigest.com/news/surviving-contract-season-in-these-financial-times>

*Alternative methods of evaluating teacher effectiveness*

<http://www.danielsongroup.org/GrowthPlan.htm>

**IMPACT**

Washington, DC's new assessment program called, IMPACT is also modeled in Houston, TX. The model includes observations and an outside master teacher. Each is observed five times for 30-minute over the course of the year. The teachers are scored by their observers on 22 different measures and then presented with an intervention. The final assessment is at the end of the school year. Each teacher receives an overall assessment based on the observations, the school's academic growth, contributions to the school community, and student test scores.

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