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# State Actions to Advance Teacher Evaluation



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## Inside

Executive Summary .....	2
Introduction .....	4
Methodology highlights .....	5
Taking action moving forward.....	5
Design teacher evaluation primarily as a system for growing teachers.....	6
1. Focus on accurate, practical and timely feedback. ....	6
2. Clarify the role of student growth measures. ....	7
3. Facilitate educators' use of evaluation data for professional growth. ....	10
Continue supporting implementation, while increasing local ownership for professional growth.....	13
4. Develop a long-term strategy to sustain and improve evaluator training and certification. ....	13
5. Strengthen partnerships to build a culture of professional growth in schools.....	15
6. Increase flexibility for districts, while maintaining comparability across the state. ....	16
7. Direct technical assistance to schools with the least resources and greatest challenges to implementation.....	17
Monitor system implementation and model the continuous improvement expected of educators.....	18
8. Prioritize monitoring to improve implementation and to hold schools accountable. ....	18
9. Develop a monitoring system that works within state regulations and available resources. ....	19
10. Learn where and under what conditions a teacher evaluation system works.....	21
Conclusion .....	22
References .....	23

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*The authors would like to thank Matthew Smith, Luke Kohlmoos, Paul Pinsky, Megan Boren, Danielle Douez and Shalanda Childers for their research assistance. They would also like to thank SREB state department of education staff who participated in interviews and reviewed data for this report.*

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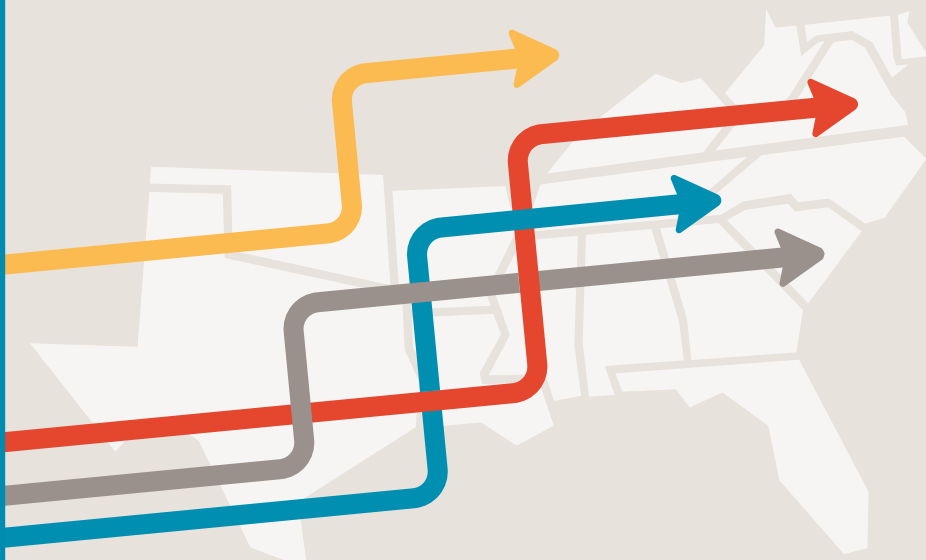
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# State Actions to Advance Teacher Evaluation

February 2016

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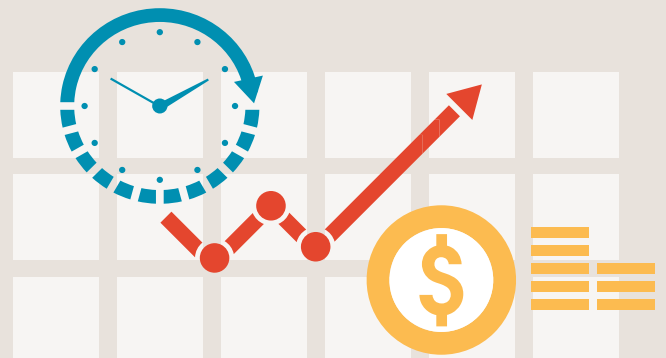
# Taking action to share ownership and sustain teacher evaluation implementation



Every SREB state education agency has taken foundational steps to strengthen evaluation and feedback for educators. Many educators agree that new teacher evaluations are better than the yes-no checklists that were previously in place. State agency leaders across the SREB region share a promising commitment to continue with teacher evaluation, regardless of federal policies — and SREB is here to help.

As states gain flexibility with the passage of the **Every Student Succeeds Act**, now is an opportune time for them to improve evaluation's impact on teaching, and minimize the burden on educators. The accuracy of observation ratings and quality of feedback still vary widely across districts and within schools. Evaluators and teachers need more training to give and receive feedback and use evaluation data to accelerate improvements in teaching. States must focus and sustain their efforts to impact teaching through evaluation and feedback, even in states that have been at it for several years.

This report draws on research and ongoing work within SREB states to identify action areas for state leaders facing this complex task within diverse local contexts. SREB offers 10 suggestions on evaluation system design, support and monitoring for continuous improvement that states should consider in taking action moving forward. The suggestions reflect our current best thinking on how state agencies can make the smartest use of funds, time and partners for refining and sustaining teacher evaluation and feedback systems.



**Design** teacher evaluation primarily as a system for growing teachers.



1. Focus on accurate, practical and timely feedback.
2. Clarify the role of student growth measures.
3. Facilitate educators' use of evaluation data for professional growth.

Continue supporting **implementation**, while increasing local ownership for professional growth.



4. Develop a long-term strategy to sustain and improve evaluator training and certification.
5. Strengthen partnerships to build a culture of professional growth in schools.
6. Increase flexibility for districts, while maintaining comparability across the state.
7. Direct technical assistance to schools with the least resources and greatest challenges to implementation.

Monitor system implementation and model the **continuous improvement** expected of educators.



8. Prioritize monitoring to improve implementation and to hold schools accountable.
9. Develop a monitoring system that works within state regulations and available resources.
10. Learn where and under what conditions a teacher evaluation system works.

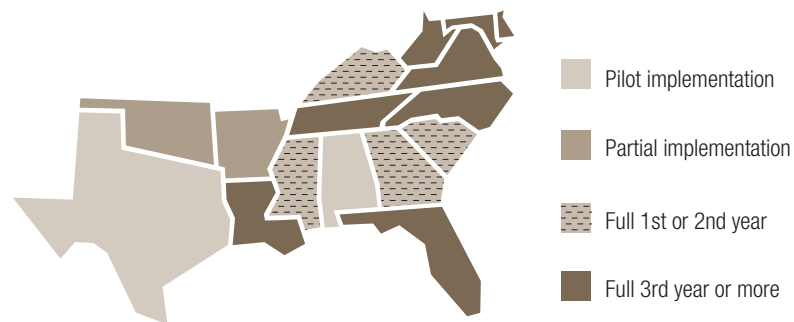


# Introduction

Since 2010, SREB states have overhauled teacher evaluation systems. Many state education agencies rushed to implement new systems or develop guidelines for local education systems to meet the requirements of Race to the Top federal fund awards and No Child Left Behind waivers. Educators often use the expression, “We’re building the plane while flying it” to describe the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system in their state.

By 2015, every SREB state education agency had taken foundational steps to strengthen evaluation and feedback for educators. Some state education agencies implemented a statewide evaluation model, while others determined guidance for locally designed systems. All states have made progress in giving teachers clearer standards for teaching aligned with student college- and career-readiness standards. New classroom observation procedures encourage observers to provide specific and tangible feedback about an educator’s strengths and weaknesses. New observation models also encourage more frequent conversations between teachers, school leaders and peers about instruction and student learning.

**FIGURE 1:** Stages of implementation of new teacher evaluation systems in SREB states (2015-16)



Even in states that have been working with new evaluation systems for several years, educators report widely varying experiences of evaluation and feedback across districts, and even within schools. Observation data show an overwhelming majority of teachers receive the highest possible ratings, which does not correlate with the academic progress of their students. Even ratings on individual criteria on observation rubrics lack the variation and spread one might expect to see in a statewide sample of teachers.

For example, the Maryland State Department of Education reported that 45 percent of Maryland teachers were rated overall as “highly effective,” and 53 percent were rated “effective” in the 2014-15 school year. The Delaware Department of Education also reported that between 80 percent and 90 percent of teachers were rated “proficient” on every evaluation criterion (such as using effective questioning techniques or developing student assessments). Similarly inflated observation ratings across the SREB region suggest many evaluators are missing an opportunity to give teachers feedback on areas in which they need to improve, and education leaders lack accurate data about teaching quality to inform their decisions.

State education agency staff report common challenges in getting a large number of evaluators trained and teachers oriented to the systems: too little staff time, and money, lack of engagement from principals and teachers, and active pushback from educators, particularly on the use of student growth measures. Many teachers and leaders agree that new classroom observation systems are better than the yes-no checklists previously in place. But evaluation systems as a whole need further refinement if they are to raise student achievement.

With the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law in December 2015, federal requirements that have shaped teacher evaluations under No Child Left Behind will be relaxed. States have renewed autonomy to continue aspects of teacher evaluation systems that are working and make smart changes to improve their quality and sustainability.

State, district and school leaders must continue flying the plane, and SREB is here to help. State leaders tell us they believe in the potential of teacher evaluation systems to accelerate teacher growth. We hope this report guides states in taking action to build educator ownership of evaluation systems and make a culture of professional growth a reality in all schools.

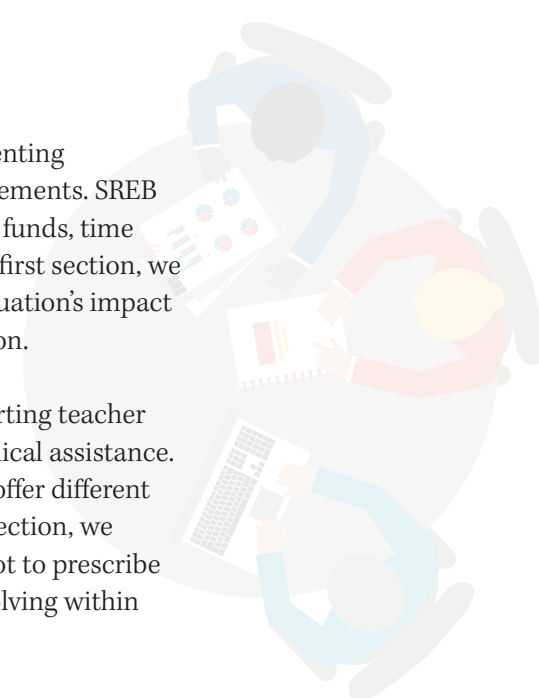
### Methodology highlights

- This report is based on SREB research conducted in 2015. Sources include individual and group interviews with state agency staff and other state-level leaders; a review of state documents and artifacts; a review of independent studies about teacher evaluation implementation in SREB states; and focus groups with teachers, principals and district staff.
- Figures and tables show key characteristics of teacher evaluation systems in SREB states for the 2015-16 school year; state education agency representatives confirmed this information in December 2015.

## Taking action moving forward

This report offers state leaders key areas for action to continue progress in implementing evaluation systems, even as federal policies on teacher evaluation relax state requirements. SREB offers its current best thinking for how state agencies can make the smartest use of funds, time and partners to refine and sustain teacher evaluation and feedback systems. In the first section, we highlight ways to refine the **design of evaluation systems** that could increase evaluation's impact on teachers' professional growth and increase educator ownership of their evaluation.

In the second section, we draw lessons from the successes and challenges in supporting teacher evaluation **implementation** through effective training, district flexibility and technical assistance. In the third section, we discuss the importance of **continuous improvement** and offer different approaches to monitoring implementation that fit various state contexts. In each section, we illustrate examples of promising practices we see in SREB states. Our objective is not to prescribe particular practices but rather to encourage conversations and creative problem-solving within and between SREB states.



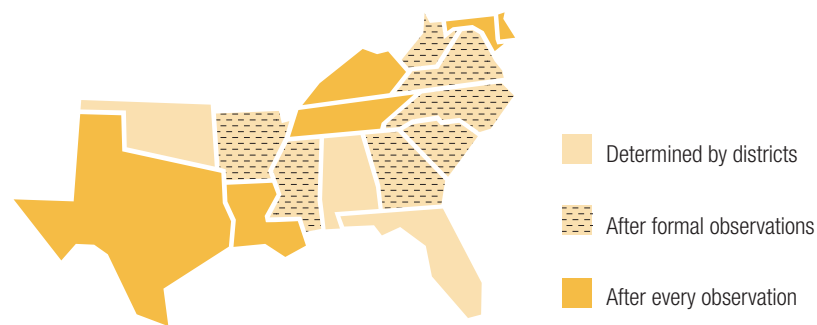
## Design teacher evaluation primarily as a system for growing teachers.

### 1. Focus on accurate, practical and timely feedback.

In a Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project study, researchers who observed over 1,300 public school teachers found that close to 90 percent of them are performing at average, when rated by neutral outsiders in low-stakes contexts. A vital goal for evaluation systems should be to provide feedback to the majority of teachers in this “big middle” to help them excel.

Initial implementation of new evaluation systems in many states focused more on institutionalizing the practice of observing classrooms and less on generating conversations. After laying the groundwork for observations, states need to shift the focus to feedback. States should clearly communicate expectations for an evaluator’s written and oral feedback. They can set these expectations without creating additional, cumbersome formal processes for educators. Creating requirements for informal conversations without adding paperwork could increase the benefits of evaluation for teachers.

FIGURE 2: Requirements for post-observation conferences in SREB states (2015-16)



State expectations for more and better feedback should be matched with additional training and resources on giving and receiving feedback. Consistent with recommendations in the 2015 MET project practice guide on improving observer training, evaluators need strong knowledge of instruction, concrete ideas to recommend and model, and personal communication skills to give accurate, practical and timely feedback. Examples of promising feedback training strategies from SREB states:

- To signal that feedback is no less important than observations, [Louisiana’s guidebook for principals](#) focuses on case studies and links to videos of model feedback conversations. It offers practical ideas, such as how to prioritize time for delivering feedback.
- [Delaware, Virginia](#) and [Tennessee’s](#) evaluation trainings include role-play to give evaluators a chance to practice conferencing. In [Tennessee’s training program](#), evaluators reflect on personal challenges with the feedback process and develop a personalized plan for conducting conferences that fit them and their context.



## 2. Clarify the role of student growth measures.

A defining feature of new teacher evaluation systems is the use of student growth measures. These include value-added measures (VAM) and student learning objectives that assess a teacher’s impact on student achievement. But determining the appropriate weight and role of both types of student growth measures has generated contentious debates across the nation. Effective training and communication around both types of student growth measures take significant amounts of money and energy. Many state agencies have already spent significant resources on the student growth measures for teacher evaluation, yet the measures still lack widespread educator buy-in.

**TABLE 1:** Student growth measures in SREB states (December 2015)

State	Contribution or weight of student growth measures in summative teacher rating	Does the state use measures based on state academic tests?	Does the state use student learning objectives or student learning targets?
Alabama	District decision; must contribute, but amount not specified	District decision; must be used in combination with other measures	District decision
Arkansas	One of two factors in a decision matrix, starting 2017-18	Not finalized	Not finalized
Delaware	Significant factor in decision matrix	Yes, for informational use only in 2015-16	Yes, for all teachers
Florida	District decision; must be 33 percent to 66 percent of summative rating	Yes; three-year data must be used	District decision
Georgia	One of two factors in a decision matrix	Yes	Yes, for non-tested teachers
Kentucky	Significant factor in a decision matrix	Yes; must be used in combination with other measures	Yes, for all teachers
Louisiana	50 percent of summative rating	Yes, starting 2016-17; must be used in combination with other measures	Yes, for all teachers
Maryland	District decision; must be a significant factor	District decision; must be used in combination with other measures	Yes, for all teachers
Mississippi	50 percent of summative rating	Yes	No
North Carolina	One of two factors in a decision matrix	Yes; three-year data must be used	No
Oklahoma	One of two factors in a decision matrix, starting 2017-18	Not until 2017-18	No
South Carolina	District decision; must be 20 percent to 50 percent of summative rating	Yes	Yes, for all teachers
Tennessee	50 percent of summative rating	Yes	Yes, for all teachers
Texas <sup>1</sup>	20 percent of summative rating	District decision	Yes, for all teachers
Virginia	Must be a significant factor	Yes; two-year data must be used in combination with other measures	Yes, for all teachers
West Virginia	20 percent of summative rating	Yes; schoolwide growth counts for 5 percent for all teacher scores	Yes, for all teachers

<sup>1</sup> Based on Texas’ state-recommended system, which is expected to be used in approximately 85 percent of districts

While VAM (in some states referred to as student growth percentile measures) could provide strong evidence of teacher impact on student success, states that use VAM must closely monitor unintended consequences. SREB research and other studies of VAM implementation commonly find educators push back on the use of these measures for various reasons, including public sentiment against testing and concerns about the validity of state tests (compounded by implementation of assessments for new state standards).

VAM is frequently critiqued for its limitations in providing teachers with information on how to get better. A majority of teachers do not teach tested grades or subjects and do not receive VAM scores. Many teachers fear this uneven use of the measure may lead to unfair comparisons between teachers. Even in cases where value-added scores have been statistically validated, many teachers who do not understand how they are calculated do not trust their validity. All these factors could result in unintended consequences. For example, a 2014 study by Education Analytics found principals in several districts in New York inflated observation scores to offset fear of poor VAM results.

The transition to ESSA is an ideal time for states to consider changes in system design or guidance to ensure that the use of VAM does not take away from giving teachers feedback to improve. States should consider moving away from tying value-added scores to specific percentages or requiring it as a significant factor if doing so threatens teachers' trust of the evaluation system. VAM scores should instead be considered one of multiple sources of evidence of teachers' impact on students learning. VAM scores could add to a more complete picture of teaching effectiveness without being more important than other sources of evidence, such as interim and classroom assessments.

States that continue to use VAM should further develop tools and routines that will encourage educators to use VAM data to improve teaching. When these measures are validated for accuracy, reliability and absence of bias, they enable educators to compare student success across many classrooms, schools and districts. They provide a rare opportunity for state agencies, districts and schools to compare the learning of student subgroups and improve instruction for all. For example:

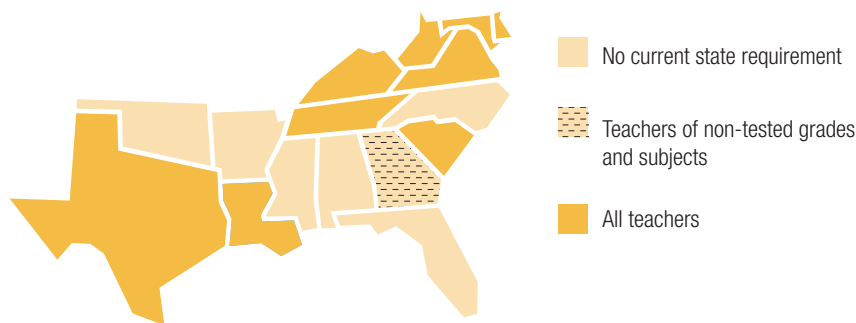
- In **North Carolina**, principals are invited to attend [regional trainings](#) every fall and spring to review their staff's value-added scores by grade level, alongside school diagnostic assessment and teacher survey data. At these trainings, principals meet with peers in similar roles and instructional experts to discuss ways to increase student achievement.
- **Delaware** decided not to use student growth results based on state test measures to evaluate teachers during its transition to new standards and assessments. However, student growth results will still be provided to educators for informational use in fall 2016. Individual teachers, teacher teams, and school and district leaders are encouraged to use the data to understand how their curriculum aligns to new standards, identify gaps where teachers might need to adjust instruction, and tailor professional learning to their specific needs.

States that use student learning objectives (SLOs, in some states referred to as student learning targets) must also closely monitor implementation and check for unintended consequences. In the abstract, SLOs may resonate more than value-added measures. Most teachers who understand the

general process of writing them see SLOs as characteristic of good reflective teaching — setting learning goals, assessing student progress and evaluating achievement. However, an eight-district study conducted by the Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Mid-Atlantic in 2015 found limited evidence for the reliability and validity of SLOs. SREB and state research found the quality of SLOs largely depends on the skill and will of the individuals writing them. A 2014 field guide from Education First found educators need time, tools and training to create high-quality SLOs and not turn the process into another compliance exercise.

The transition to ESSA is an ideal time for states to consider their main purpose for using SLOs and make decisions accordingly. One decision involves identifying which teachers should be required to write them. Many states originally promoted and adopted SLOs as a way to measure student growth for teachers of non-tested grades and subjects. If an important goal is to encourage reflective teaching practices, states should consider setting the expectation that teachers of all grades and subjects write SLOs, not only teachers of non-tested subjects.

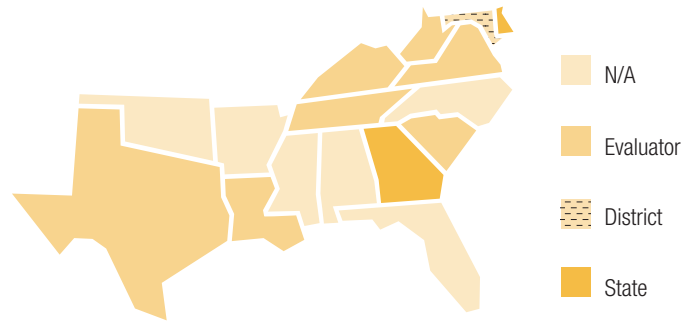
**FIGURE 3:** Which teachers are required to write SLOs in SREB states (December 2015)?



Another key decision about SLOs is determining how standardized they should be. States that want SLOs to be more relevant to instruction should allow teachers greater flexibility in selecting assessments and setting growth targets. In states where evaluation data is used in high-stakes personnel and career ladder decisions, making SLOs and their corresponding assessments more standardized can make them more comparable. Georgia and South Carolina try to strike a balance in the following ways:

- **Georgia** school districts are responsible for developing SLOs, and the Georgia Department of Education provides guidelines, conducts audits and approves locally developed SLOs to make sure they are relatively comparable across the state.
- Even though **South Carolina** has a history of local control, the Department focuses training on developing SLOs and provides an approval rubric and review tool to ensure SLO quality. South Carolina districts are responsible for ensuring SLOs are comparable across schools.

**FIGURE 4:** Who approves SLOs in SREB states (December 2015)?



Notes: Alabama districts make the decisions about whether or not to use SLOs and who approves them.

In Tennessee, the Department of Education approves the measures on which SLOs are based; the SLO itself is developed between the evaluator and teacher.

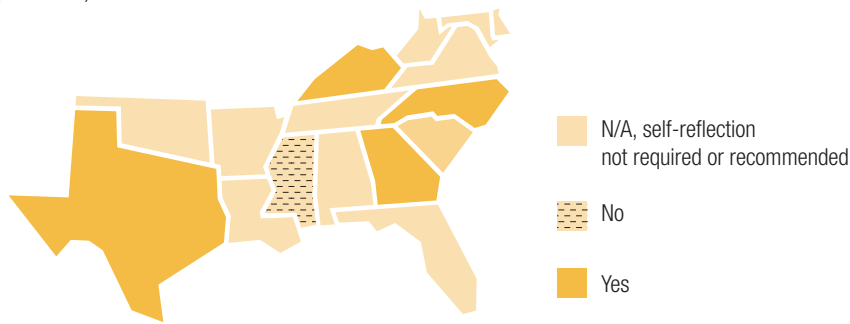
### 3. Facilitate educators' use of evaluation data for professional growth.

SREB and state research found that many educators value the opportunity to self-reflect during the evaluation process. Several SREB states require or recommend that teachers reflect on their teaching, but few require teachers to use evaluation data in the process. Several states require or recommend that all teachers create professional growth plans regardless of their effectiveness rating, but do not always require that teachers make those plans using evaluation data.

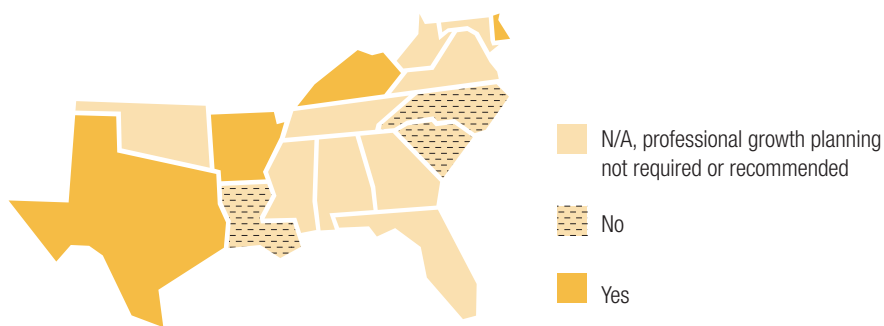
As states refine how teacher evaluations should work, state leaders should create policies that explicitly encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching with data and artifacts from their evaluation. This could include student growth data from multiple measures, observation ratings and feedback and additional sources of evidence they prepared for their evaluator. Examples of states that have built in educators' use of evaluation data in self-reflection and professional growth planning:

- **Texas'** state-recommended teacher evaluation process includes [goal setting and professional development planning](#). Teachers are expected to reflect on data about students' academic and developmental needs (possible data sources include state, curriculum-based and classroom assessments) as well as data on teachers' professional growth needs (including student performance trends and observation feedback).
- Teachers in **Delaware** are expected to have a [fall conference](#) with their evaluator to discuss and plan professional growth activities. The discussion is based on their individual and joint analyses of the teacher's student growth data.

**FIGURE 5a:** Is the use of evaluation data for teacher self-reflection required or recommended by SREB states (2015-16)?



**FIGURE 5b:** Is the use of evaluation data for teacher professional growth planning required or recommended by SREB states (2015-16)?



Note: Based on Texas' state-recommended system, which is expected to be used in approximately 85 percent of districts

School and district leaders also have the opportunity to use teacher evaluation data to inform and improve professional growth strategies. As evaluation data begin to accumulate, states should encourage school and district leaders to make good use of them to develop professional growth plans that target critical or common areas for improvement. They should not solely be used to trigger corrective plans for the lowest performing teachers. While providing intensive support for struggling teachers is important, the majority of teachers are in the “big middle.”

As recommended by REL West at WestEd, evaluation data can help shape professional development programs, such as district in-services and individualized teacher trainings. TNTP’s 2015 report also suggests testing new approaches for improving teaching, such as creating new structures for the teaching profession and implementing alternative school designs. Evaluation data would be critical for assessing the impact of such approaches.

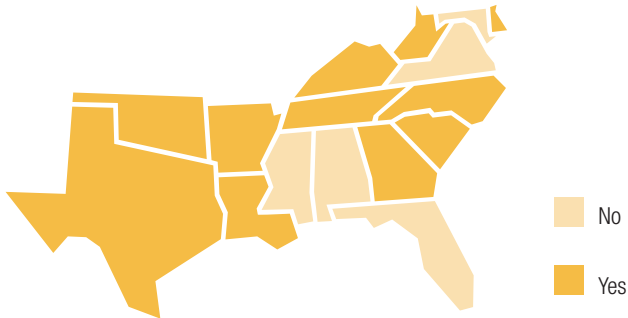
Improving data access is an important step in promoting data use. A majority of SREB states have developed electronic data management systems to give education leaders easy access to evaluation data. Some states use dashboards districts can opt into, including Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. Local-control states could recommend districts adopt or develop data systems more tailored for local contexts.



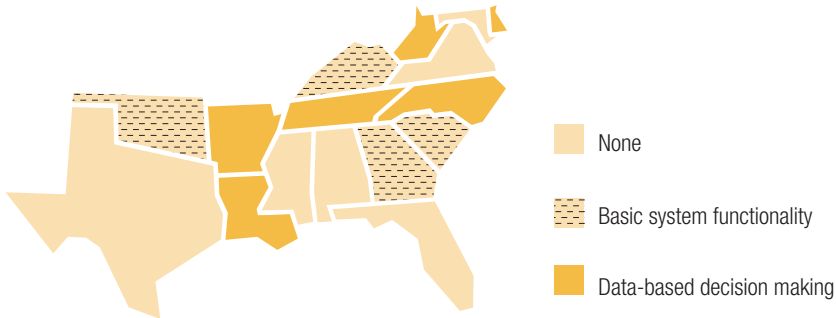
Beyond improved data access, education leaders need to be able to use data systems and proficiently integrate data into decision-making practices. Wherever data management systems are housed, user-centered design and implementation are critical. Learning resources on using the systems (step-by-step manuals, how-to videos, a help desk for troubleshooting technical problems and training sessions) are essential to a smooth roll out of these tools. Education leaders also likely need training on data literacy and data-based decision-making. To avoid overwhelming principals, a growing number of SREB states have developed data analysis training separate from basic evaluator training. It builds on foundational knowledge and skills, such as teaching standards and conducting observations. For example:

- In fall 2015, the **Arkansas** Department of Education started offering [BloomBoard University](#) — a one-day opportunity for leadership teams to build skills in data-driven planning. Teams learn about the cyclical process of analyzing data, creating action plans, aligning resources and monitoring progress. They begin to plan professional learning activities for the school, a team or individual teachers.
- Principals in **North Carolina** can elect to attend [one-day, in-person trainings](#) offered every fall and spring to review various types of data (from state tests, local assessments, student surveys and student work reviews). They can also sign up for a six-week [online course](#) led by an instructor or a self-paced, online module on data literacy.

**FIGURE 6a:** Does the state provide an electronic information system for school or district leaders to access evaluation data (2015-16)?



**FIGURE 6b:** What evaluation data training does the state provide (2015-16)?



## Continue supporting implementation, while increasing local ownership for professional growth.

### 4. Develop a long-term strategy to sustain and improve evaluator training and certification.

SREB and state research from across the SREB region found that effective evaluator training is key to ensuring teachers develop positive perceptions of the evaluation process, are genuinely engaged and ultimately benefit from it. Evaluators in every state are already being trained in some way. States should now focus on expanding training and improving its quality. Based on current knowledge about best practices in evaluator training from organizations such as the MET project and Education First, states should improve evaluator training in the following ways. Training should:

- Communicate the purpose of the evaluation system: to accelerate professional growth for teachers.
- Be comprehensive, particularly in explaining teaching standards and the ideal evaluation process centered on feedback for teachers.
- Encourage the use of evaluation data for educators' reflection and planning.
- Be offered beyond the initial implementation phase, given principal turnover.
- Be provided for late hires who might have missed the annual training in the summer.

Providing high-quality training statewide requires significant staff time that may exceed the capacity of many state agencies. Below are examples of state agencies that use training models that fit their internal constraints and build on partnerships with external partners.

- **Texas** employs the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), which has a track record of supporting evaluation system implementation. NIET hosts train-the-trainer sessions at each of Texas' 20 educational service centers (ESCs). ESC trainers conduct three-day, face-to-face training for evaluators and district staff who then train teachers using orientation materials differentiated by school level. In addition, an [online training module](#) is available for educators to complete independently.
- In **Maryland**, a state with a tradition of local control, districts are responsible for training and certifying evaluators. The State Department of Education offers optional training and support in specific areas such as SLOs. SLO training is provided to district teams of teachers, leaders and district staff who are then responsible for training others in their district.
- Districts in **Kentucky** implement local variations of the state evaluation system. The Department of Education offers different levels and forms of [technical assistance](#), from in-person advisory to phone consultation to webcasts and documents that match unique district needs.

As with training, criteria for evaluator certification vary from state to state. State investment in an effective system to assess and certify evaluators is worth the high expense. It will ensure the credibility of the whole evaluation system. Observer assessment and calibration offered by vendors, such as Teachscape and Empirical Education, may be worth the cost since they also provide valuable learning opportunities for educators. The Georgia Department of Education found some districts were willing to share the cost of evaluator assessment and calibration because they provide valuable gains in principal knowledge of evaluation and feedback.

**TABLE 2:** Evaluator training and certification in SREB states (2015-16)

State	Evaluator training program	Are evaluators required to complete a certification process?	Evaluator certification criteria
Alabama	District decision	District decision	N/A
Arkansas	Face-to-face training + online observer training	Yes	Pass lesson-rating assessment + complete annual training
Delaware	Face-to-face training	Yes	Pass multiple-choice assessment every 5 years + complete annual training
Florida	District decision	District decision	N/A
Georgia	Train-the-trainer modules + online learning resources	Yes	Pass lesson-rating and proficiency assessment + complete annual training
Kentucky	Face-to-face training + online observer training	Yes	Pass lesson-rating and proficiency assessment + complete annual training
Louisiana	Train-the-trainer modules + online learning resources	Yes	Complete annual training
Maryland	Train-the-trainer modules + online learning resources	District decision	N/A
Mississippi	Face-to-face training + online learning resources	No	N/A
North Carolina	Train-the-trainer modules + online learning resources	Yes	Complete initial training
Oklahoma	Face-to-face training + online learning resources	Yes	Pass lesson-rating assessment + complete additional training every 2 years
South Carolina	District decision	Yes	Pass lesson-rating assessment
Tennessee	Face-to-face training + online learning resources	Yes	Pass lesson-rating and proficiency assessment + complete annual training or test out
Texas <sup>1</sup>	Face-to-face training + online learning resources	Yes	Pass lesson-rating assessment + complete annual recertification exam
Virginia	Train-the-trainer modules	District decision	N/A
West Virginia	Face-to-face training + online learning resources	Yes	Complete initial training

<sup>1</sup> Based on Texas' state-recommended system, which is expected to be used in approximately 85 percent of districts

## 5. Strengthen partnerships to build a culture of professional growth in schools.

SREB state leaders say their goal for evaluation systems is to build a culture of professional growth in every school. This requires sustained effort to build principals' instructional leadership, coupled with strategies to reach teachers, who must be engaged in changing the culture of their schools. This goal is too big for state agencies to take on by themselves, but they are well-positioned to accomplish it by creating partnerships with stakeholder groups. State agencies should partner with vetted national and state educational organizations to provide training and learning resources for principals and teachers across the state. For example:

- **Louisiana** partners with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to provide support for school leaders in implementing the System for Teacher and Student Advancement, a [comprehensive educator effectiveness model](#), or components of the model through the Best Practices Center. Louisiana also started a 16-month principal fellowship program in 2016 in partnership with the National Institute for School Leadership, which has a track record of running effective leadership programs.
- **Texas** also employs trainers from NIET. The trainers train the staff at 20 educational service centers, who then provide training and technical assistance to principals and teachers in their region.
- In **South Carolina**, where there is no regional technical assistance network to provide training, the Department of Education supported the state educator association in creating student learning objectives professional development conducted in summer 2015. The Department also provides consultation to other professional educator organizations on trainings.

State agencies that lead efforts on evaluator training should ensure evaluators and teachers receive consistent information about the evaluation system. However, districts are generally better suited for providing training and resources to reach large numbers of teachers. SREB state agencies should work closely with districts in thoughtful partnerships to provide training and support for teachers. For example:

- The **Alabama** Department of Education is committed to developing evaluation systems that districts own. They plan to assist each district in designing and implementing local models aligned with a state framework. An SREB study of pilot districts showed this process is time intensive but valued by district leaders, principals and teachers who helped design the evaluation system to which they are now committed.
- In **Georgia**, the Department of Education anticipated a reduction in the number of trainer positions available once Race to the Top funding ended. They prepared for this by training and certifying district staff who are qualified to provide support to educators around evaluation.

State departments of education must also consider ways to involve educators more as leaders of evaluation systems. Teacher leaders with an excellent record of effectiveness should play an important role as trainers and provide peer support to less effective teachers. This could help reduce the burden of evaluation on principals. For example:

- A **Tennessee** initiative paired teachers based on complementary strengths and areas for growth to increase teacher collaboration and personalize professional learning. The pairs were free to determine their meeting agendas, although the Department of Education provided some suggestions. The pilot had a positive impact on teacher learning and student growth, and this professional learning model is being expanded to other districts.
- **West Virginia** partners with its Center for Professional Development to train teacher leaders — teachers with an advanced credential endorsement on their teaching certificate — to become mentors for beginning teachers. The Department plans to train teacher leaders to help principals with conducting observations and giving teachers feedback.

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to prepare educators for evaluation. State agencies should start to align with colleges and universities to prepare new principals and teachers for evaluation and professional growth systems. For example:

- Since 2006, **South Carolina's** higher education institutions have been required to integrate the state's teaching performance standards into educator preparation course work, field experience and clinical practice.
- **Georgia** began convening a regional [P-20 collaborative partnership](#) in fall 2014. One of the goals is to ensure teaching candidates are prepared to implement Georgia's teacher evaluation system.

## 6. Increase flexibility for districts, while maintaining comparability across the state.

Several SREB states have created greater flexibility in teacher evaluation systems to allow districts to customize the design and process to fit their priorities. This could create greater local ownership of the system, but states must also ensure the comparability of evaluation ratings across the state. Comparable evaluation ratings allow state and local leaders to understand differences in teaching quality. Comparable ratings also ensure that evaluation systems are fair for teachers across the state despite differences between local designs. Several SREB states have attempted to strike a balance between flexibility and comparability. Only systematic monitoring of implementation and outcomes will show the effectiveness of various approaches. For example:

- **Oklahoma** has multiple local evaluation systems, so Oklahoma's evaluation commission developed a [checklist](#) for reviewing and approving proposed models based on state law and national best practices. Having common criteria makes it possible for the Department of Education to analyze comparable data on key features of the models. For example, the Department was able to examine if the distribution of evaluation ratings differs by model.



- In **Florida**, another local-control state, the Department of Education developed a [template](#) for submitting system descriptions for state approval. This approach allows the department to potentially connect similar districts to share knowledge and support one another.
- **Arkansas** has a statewide system and [clearly distinguishes](#) what is required by state statute and rules (for example, teachers must develop a professional growth plan) and what can be determined at the district level (for example, how many goals are required in a professional growth plan). Such distinctions are highlighted in evaluator training and on the state website.
- In **Kentucky**, districts are required to establish committees with equal teacher and administrator representation to make key decisions about their evaluation model and its implementation. For example, they can determine how many full, mini and peer observations are required. The state provides them with a [framework](#) that specifies what can be determined by districts.
- The **Mississippi** Department of Education reduced system requirements in response to educators' feedback. The Department explained which system components became optional in a memo from the state superintendent and in evaluator training. [Clear explanations](#) about the changes are vital not only for minimizing confusion, but also for letting educators know the state is responding to their feedback.

**TABLE 3:** Local flexibility in teacher evaluation systems in SREB states (December 2015)

One state system	One state system and state-approved alternative systems	One state framework with district-determined components	State-approved local systems	State-aligned local systems
North Carolina	Delaware	Arkansas	Florida	Alabama
West Virginia	Georgia	Kentucky	Maryland	Texas <sup>2</sup>
	Tennessee <sup>1</sup>	Louisiana	Oklahoma	Virginia
		Mississippi	South Carolina	
		Tennessee <sup>1</sup>		

<sup>1</sup> Tennessee has both state-approved alternative systems and a state framework with district-determined components.

<sup>2</sup> Texas has a history of strong local control, but the state has developed a system that approximately 85 percent of districts are likely to use.

## 7. Direct technical assistance to schools with the least resources and greatest challenges to implementation.

States working with limited staff, time and money must be strategic about allocating resources. While many departments of education have been able to provide basic training to all districts, they need to provide more assistance or grants to districts that have the least local capacity and are struggling with implementation. Departments of education need to intervene in districts that face multiple barriers to successful implementation.

Examples of how states allocate technical assistance:

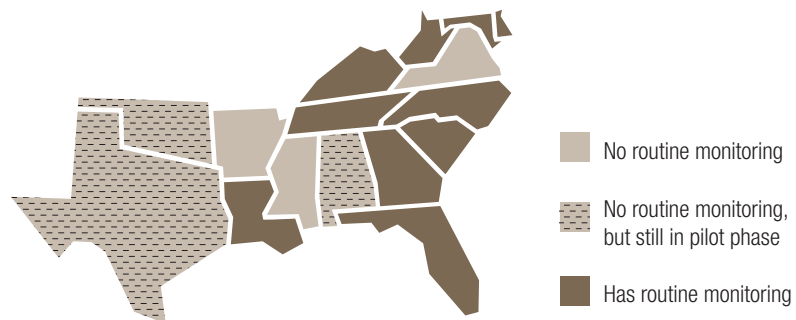
- In **Virginia**, a local-control state, the Department of Education focuses its evaluation support on the lowest-performing schools with the highest need. Even though Virginia districts are largely responsible for building local capacity to implement evaluations, the Office of School Improvement provides comprehensive support for Priority and Focus schools (schools that do not meet federal and state accountability standards for student achievement).
- **Texas** districts are allowed to develop local evaluation models. The state also developed a recommended model with training to ensure districts without capacity to develop their own still have a good system to adopt. The Education Agency estimates approximately 85 percent of Texas districts will use the state-recommended teacher evaluation system.
- **Tennessee** employs evaluation coaches to provide on-the-ground support for schools that are struggling with implementing the evaluation system. The Department of Education has a robust evaluation monitoring mechanism that flags these schools. Coaches learn more about the unique needs of the school through visits and provide individualized support, which has had a [lasting effect](#).

**Monitor system implementation and model the continuous improvement expected of educators.**

**8. Prioritize monitoring to improve implementation and to hold schools accountable.**

Evaluation ultimately is about learning and states should model that concept. A state mechanism to learn about evaluation system implementation is essential to refining the system. States should establish a data collection, review and revision cycle that occurs at least annually to improve evaluation's effect on teachers over time. Findings from monitoring can inform state and district priorities (what training is needed, for example, or where more intensive technical assistance is needed) so states can make smart resource decisions.

**FIGURE 7:** Do SREB states have routine monitoring of evaluation system implementation (2015-16)?



A 2015 report from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders showed how monitoring evaluation results can help states pinpoint what's not working well and focus state actions on supporting those areas. Monitoring data can also help states track and demonstrate progress, which is equally important for garnering support for the system and increasing engagement among educators and the public.

States also have a legitimate role in holding districts and schools accountable if they are not making a good effort to provide teachers with an effective feedback and professional growth system. Even if states are not able to provide additional training or technical assistance, providing evaluation data to districts and schools could encourage them to reflect and improve.

State leaders seeking guidance on balancing local autonomy with collective responsibility should consider applying the performance compact approach to accountability proposed by Bellwether Education Partners in a 2015 publication. In a performance compact, the state education agency and local districts must agree on some kind of data collection to monitor how teacher evaluation is working. Local districts implementing the evaluation process relatively well should keep autonomy or gain more. Those that are not implementing well should be called on more often to account for their performance and develop or adjust plans for improving their work. Some SREB states have already started allowing greater flexibility for districts based on good performance:

- **Georgia** recently started considering alternative models to the state evaluation system and decided schools that have been implementing well can have greater flexibility. For example, the district could choose to change the frequency of observations for different groups of teachers. To qualify, schools had to complete 45 percent of their observations by midyear, show differentiation among teacher ratings and show higher-than-average correlation between observation ratings and student growth.
- **Tennessee** allows greater flexibility at the individual level. Among teachers with professional licensure, the minimum number of required classroom visits varies from four to one, depending on the teacher's previous student growth or final evaluation score.

## 9. Develop a monitoring system that works within state regulations and available resources.

A scan of SREB states found multiple possible approaches to monitoring. State departments of education can decide who should have access to teacher evaluation data, what level of data they should have access to and methods of data collection. Each state needs to develop a monitoring mechanism that works within restrictions on data collection and with consideration for existing state capacity for monitoring. State leaders who need additional guidance should refer to a [2015 policy report](#) from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, which offers strategies for planning and funding monitoring studies.

**TABLE 4:** Who monitors teacher evaluation, and what level of evaluation data can states access (2015-16)?

State	Who monitors teacher evaluation?	Level of evaluation data state can access
Alabama	N/A, no state routine monitoring	Not finalized, still in pilot phase
Arkansas	N/A, no state routine monitoring	School-level data
Delaware	State agency and external team	Teacher-level data
Florida	State agency	Teacher-level data
Georgia	State agency	Teacher-level data
Kentucky	State agency and external team	Teacher-level data
Louisiana	State agency	Teacher-level data
Maryland	State agency and external team	Teacher-level data
Mississippi	N/A, no state routine monitoring	Teacher-level data
North Carolina	State agency and external team	Teacher -evel data
Oklahoma	N/A, no state routine monitoring	Teacher-level data
South Carolina	State agency and external team	School-level data
Tennessee	State agency and external team	Teacher-level data
Texas	N/A, no state routine monitoring	None
Virginia	N/A, no state routine monitoring	None
West Virginia	State agency	Teacher-level data

State departments of education in the SREB region currently employ internal data analysts and external contractors to monitor evaluation system implementation. In order to better work with local privacy laws and concerns, states should consider the following options for data collection:

- Directly collecting data
- Working with an external team (for example, a research organization or a university) that can give state departments access to de-identified data
- Working with an external team that only provides summary findings

Monitoring must strike a balance between privacy for individuals and usefulness of data. The following types of data could be used:

- Individual teacher-level data for all teachers
- Aggregated school-level data for all schools
- Aggregated district-level data for all districts
- Aggregated state-level summary data
- Data for a subset of units based on criteria or a trigger (for example, only monitor low-performing schools)

Monitoring efforts can be resource intensive, and states should prioritize data collection and analysis based on what information will be most useful at each stage of evaluation implementation. Different methods for monitoring can answer different types of questions about implementation progress, educator perceptions, conditions for success or outcomes.

**TABLE 5:** Methods for monitoring evaluation systems

Monitoring method	Sample questions
Analysis of observation ratings (quantitative)	To what extent are observation ratings differentiating teaching quality? To what extent are observation ratings correlated with student growth or other measures of teaching quality?
Analysis of observation feedback (qualitative)	How much feedback do teachers get about their strengths? Weaknesses? To what extent do teachers receive actionable feedback?
Educator interviews and focus groups (qualitative)	What successes and challenges have teachers and leaders experienced with implementing teacher evaluation? How have they benefited from the teacher evaluation process?
Educator surveys (quantitative and qualitative)	How do teachers across the state perceive teacher evaluation systems and implementation? To what extent do teachers across the state agree about the benefits and challenges to teacher evaluation
School and district reviews (quantitative and qualitative)	To what extent and in what ways is teacher evaluation implemented as designed? How do organizational factors support or hinder implementation?

## 10. Learn where and under what conditions a teacher evaluation system works.

While state-level data show evaluation system implementation is still uneven, SREB and state implementation studies find there are unique cases of early implementation success. States have a tremendous opportunity at this time to identify places where the system is working well, celebrate successes and learn from them for moving forward. Examples:

- **Louisiana** examined the 10 districts and schools showing the greatest student growth. The Department of Education reported a clear connection between academic gains and the practice of setting a high bar for teacher excellence. These schools were more likely to reserve the “highly effective” designation for the most exceptional teaching.
- **Delaware** used a combination of educator effectiveness, school climate and student outcome data to identify high-need schools that are positive outliers. Teachers at those schools are more effective and students are outpacing their peers in their academic growth. SREB is collaborating with Delaware to conduct case studies in these schools to learn more about the factors that contribute to their success.

Learning from differences in implementation is especially important in states with local evaluation systems and for state models that are increasing district flexibility. Monitoring systems statewide is a key tool for ensuring comparability and fairness across the state. Researching where and under what conditions teacher evaluation works can be particularly instructive for improving the system as a whole. State leaders who need more guidance on learning from variation should refer to work from the [Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching](#) on improvement science.



# Conclusion

Our current knowledge of the impact of teacher evaluations primarily comes from educators' initial experiences with and perceptions of new systems. While it may be too early to document the impact on students, evidence from states that implemented early suggests that a strong feedback and professional growth system will improve teaching and student success — if states continue in the right direction.

For example, in Tennessee's statewide survey of educators in 2015, two-thirds of teachers reported that evaluation improves teacher and student learning, compared to only one-third who reported that in 2012. Tennessee also reported that the alignment between observation and student growth scores have increased over time. In Maryland, the percentage of principals who reported being clear about expectations for teacher evaluation increased from 55 percent to 82 percent between 2013 and 2015. In the same period, the percentage of teachers who agreed that evaluation leads to improved decisions about instructional approaches increased from 38 percent to 53 percent.

We hope the ideas and examples from the field offer affirmation and helpful guidance for state leaders who have worked hard on implementation efforts. With the passage of ESSA, state leaders now have an ideal opportunity to reflect on the teacher evaluation progress in their state and make smart decisions for the future.

Each state must determine the best course of action moving forward. We invite you to use the areas for action in this report — based on what we have learned working with SREB states — as a starting point for conversation. We hope it sparks productive discussions and inspires you to stay invested in giving teachers the feedback and support they need to improve for their students.

## What You Can Do

- Share the executive summary of this report with your manager and peers. Discuss your takeaways.
- Share key recommendations with your state or district evaluation system advisory committee, and discuss at least one possible change to make in your current system.
- Reach out to your peers in another state and discuss what is similar or different between your systems and implementation approaches.
- Contact us with questions or to discuss SREB services.

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February 2016 (16E01)