Connecticut’s Educator Evaluation Process: 
The Concerns and Experiences of Educators in Two Pilot Districts

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This article provides select results from a study designed to explore and describe school personnel’s concerns about implementing Connecticut’s newly developed model of a system of educator evaluation and development. Data were gathered from school personnel in two public school districts involved in a statewide pilot of the model system. To examine change in educators’ concerns over time, study volunteers completed an Internet-based survey twice: in the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year. A subsample of survey respondents also participated in a focus group at the end of the pilot school year. Results revealed a shift in educators’ concerns about the new educator evaluation system, moving from a focus on self and tasks to ideas about how to improve the process. At the same time, the level of commitment to implementing the new system as experienced in the pilot decreased somewhat.

Keywords: Teacher concerns; teacher evaluation systems; change; pilot

Background and Rationale

Despite countless U.S. federal and state school-reform efforts over more than four decades, significant national concern about the academic achievement gap between subgroups of students remains. On the one hand, it is understood that student’s academic achievement is a complex issue with factors related to the individual child, families, communities, schools, and teacher quality each playing a role. On the other hand, federal mandates such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and its most recent reauthorization, the landmark No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), squarely place responsibility for closing the achievement gap on school district personnel. The Congressional intent behind NCLB is to make certain that all students learn (McDonnell, 2005; Reichbach, 2004; The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2001). Among other provisions, the law mandates that schools provide highly qualified teachers for every classroom and attempts to assess school districts’ progress toward the implementation of comprehensive school reform efforts through an emphasis on accountability. Having a teacher that is considered highly qualified under NCLB (2002) is only a beginning and does not guarantee in any way the teacher’s classroom performance would lead to improvements in student achievement. Ongoing educator supervision and evaluation systems that provide a direct connection between teacher practice, professional development, and improvement in educational outcomes for all students must be in place (Guskey, 1986; Peterson, 2000; Stronge, 2006).

A combination of recent state and federal policy initiatives have begun to address the issue of educator supervision, and this has resulted in a significant number of states passing teacher evaluation legislation designed to address educator effectiveness based in part on student learning (Mead, 2012). Among these states is Connecticut, where in 2012, the state legislature passed a