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Reflective practice, professional growth a cyclical path to improvement in PGES

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Jennifer Howard, right, helps students in her geometry class at Magoffin County High School. With the proposed Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES), she said she is working on telling less and questioning more. Photo by Amy Wallot, Jan. 9, 2013

The Kentucky Department of Education, along with several partners and more than 50 school districts, is in the third year of a four-year plan to develop the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES). Schools statewide will pilot the new system in the 2013-14 school year, with full implementation scheduled for 2014-15. This is the third in a series of stories that will examine different aspects of the proposed system.

By Matthew Tunate
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At the beginning of the school year, [Jennifer Howard](#) tested her Magoffin County High School honors Algebra II students to get baseline scores. What she found was students were coming into the class with a wide range of knowledge levels.

Now she knew where her students stood on the material. Next she had to find out where she stood as a teacher.

As part of the field testing for the [Professional Growth and Effectiveness System](#) (PGES), Howard sat down with the [Kentucky Framework for Teaching](#) for two hours to impartially look at her practice.

“It was the most reflection I had done on my teaching ever, and this is my 18th year,” she said.

Using a template provided as part of the field test, Howard rated herself in numerous components.

“There’s not always enough time in our jobs to really focus on yourself professionally and do all of that thinking,” Howard said. “For two hours, I was just looking at myself and my self-evaluation, and looking at that template and just kind of scoring myself, and just having a real honest look at where I would fall on the framework.”

So after some thought and discussion with her principal, she decided her professional growth goal would be: "I want to be able to teach a rigorous course to students on grade level while meeting the needs of students who are well below grade level." She needed to learn how to increase rigor without leaving students behind.

Howard's already seen some success in how her changes are affecting her students. Overall, students who were the most behind at the beginning of the year were making the fastest progress by the mid-point of the year, she said.

PGES Multiple Measures

Self-reflection and professional growth are two of the multiple measures used in the PGES. During ongoing self-reflection, teachers look at the effectiveness of their instructional planning, lesson implementation, content knowledge and beliefs to improve their teaching and student learning. Teachers create a professional growth plan that either develops or hones their professional practices and leadership skills by identifying practical activities and experiences to meet their growth needs.

Carol Franks, an effectiveness coach with the Kentucky Department of Education, said districts field tested self-reflection and professional growth separately last year. However, they have been combined in this year's broader field test because of feedback that said they should go together, Franks said.

For a detailed description of the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System for teachers, review the Field Test Guide.

"A teacher is not going to grow unless they have that opportunity to reflect on their practice," she said.

Just as Howard did, teachers should refer to the Kentucky Framework for Teaching when completing their self-evaluation, Franks said. Doing so will help teachers not only better understand their practice but see what actions will make them more effective teachers, she said.

PGES in summary

The Kentucky Department of Education, along with several partners and more than 50 school districts, is in the second year of a four-year plan to develop the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES).

Brian Conley, an English teacher at Magoffin County High, said using the template helped him reflect on the components he needed to work on.

"It probably helps you to consider things that maybe you wouldn't consider that you need to grow professionally in," the 13-year veteran teacher said.

Justin Bailey, a Magoffin County High social studies teacher, said using the template is much like teachers grading students.

"This creates a rubric where we are not as partial to some of our tendencies because we have to abide by the rubric," he said.

Schools from every district will pilot the new system in the 2013-14 school year. Once implemented in 2014-15, the results will count as 10 percent of a school's and district's score in the Unbridled Learning: College and Career Ready for All accountability system.

While the initial self-reflection begins the reflection process, it's not the end, Franks said.

Teachers should have ongoing reflection throughout the year. That means teachers should be asking themselves: are strategies working, am I meeting my professional growth goal, am I learning what I needed to learn and are my students improving. They should also evaluate mid-year how they are doing on meeting their goals.

The proposed system will help define what is effective teaching and leadership, and provide support, assistance and resources to help all educators reach that goal. The Kentucky Framework for Teaching is the basis of PGES. There are five domains within the framework: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, professional responsibilities and student growth. Within each domain there are individual components and elements.

At the end of year, teachers will look at their results and decide if they met their goal, did they affect student learning and what are their next steps. That can be another time to revisit the framework and see how they compare to the performance levels of ineffective, developing, accomplished and exemplary, Franks said.

Teachers could even receive additional training over the summer, re-evaluate themselves again at the beginning of the next school year and decide whether they needed to adjust their goals, she said.

Franks said teachers ideally will be accomplished in all areas.

"I've heard it said that accomplished is where we want teachers to live, and then we want them to visit exemplary," she said.

One of the fundamental principles of the PGES is that teacher effectiveness cannot be measured by using a single piece of data or at a single point in time. Instead, the proposed system will rely on multiple measures. For teachers those measures are professional growth, self-reflection, classroom and peer observations, student voice, and student growth. For principals the measures are: professional growth, student growth, self-reflection, observation, and teacher reflection.

One of the things the field test is designed to find out is how frequently teachers need to document their self-reflection, she said.

"All teachers are in the habit of self-reflection," she said.

After doing a self-evaluation, teachers will decide on a professional growth goal, around which they will develop an action plan, Franks said. The goal is based on more than their self-reflection, though. It also includes students' needs, feedback from observations and supervisor input, she said.

Feedback from this system will provide principals and teachers with targeted areas for growth and opportunities for individualized professional development to meet their specific needs.

Sample professional growth goals

To narrow their goal, teachers will answer three questions:

1. What do I want to change about my instruction that will effectively impact student learning?
2. What is my personal learning necessary to make the change?

3. What are the measures (evidence) of success?

The first question “really zeroes in about instruction that is going to impact students,” Franks said. The second identifies what teachers need to do to meet the goal, and the third is about what evidence teachers can use to show they have grown professionally, she said.

“For instance, did the principal observe change in instruction that supports the goal; is there teacher reflection that shows growth; is there documentation of action research, a book study or an on-going workshop; or is there analysis of student work samples that demonstrates the teacher’s professional growth? Professional growth can be demonstrated in a variety of ways,” Franks said.

For the field test, teachers developed just one goal. But Franks said teachers can grow in other areas, too.

“Just because they’re narrowing down to a growth goal doesn’t mean they’re not going to think about, reflect on and work toward growing in these other areas, too,” she said.

Reflective Practice and PGP Cycle

Bailey said what he likes about PGES is that teachers create a goal at the beginning of the year, and review it in the middle and end of the year. The current system, where teachers create a goal at the beginning of the year and see if they met it at the end of the year, doesn’t allow for much change or flexibility in between, he said. He also likes that teachers get to decide how they measure whether they successfully meet their goal.

Additionally, Bailey likes that the system includes collaboration with the principal. After going through the initial self-reflection, teachers find the components where they could use the most growth – but those are broad principles, he said.

Working with an administrator helps teachers narrow the focus to a goal that can be accomplished, Bailey said.

“That discussion was a valuable discussion because you’re talking to someone who knows the ins and outs of the school and the student population that we have here and who can really narrow down what we need to do to really meet our student population’s needs,” he said.

Franks said the PGES’ focus is on professional growth – supporting teaches with the right kind of feedback.

So when teachers come to the principal with a growth plan based on their reflection and their rationale, the principal’s role is to provide feedback, give suggestions, flesh out ideas and ask questions, she said.

Chris Meadows, assistant principal at Magoffin County High, said teachers in the field test all had goals based on their reflection and student needs that were easy for him to support.

“One of the main parts of this new teacher-effectiveness system is that the teachers take more of a role in leading the meetings with the administrator. That’s not always easy because that hasn’t been the case in the past,” he said. “I tried to serve mainly as a guide just to help them move in the direction they felt like they needed to.”

MORE INFO...

Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES)

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