

Background

Senate Bill 207 (SB 207) changes the minimum requirements for the evaluation of probationary and career teachers. The statutory deadlines for evaluating probationary teachers had been November 15 and February 10 of each year. SB 207 eliminates the date-specific deadlines for probationary teachers, mandating only that they be evaluated once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester. SB 207 also states that career teachers who have been rated “superior” or “highly effective” under the Tulsa Model may now be evaluated every two years.

Probationary Teachers

We will revise the deadlines in the Tulsa Model Handbook for probationary teachers so that there are no date-specific mandates. The procedures will require only that probationary teachers be evaluated once in the fall and once in the spring semester. The Tulsa Model Handbook used the specific November 15 and February 10 deadlines for probationary teachers because they were statutorily mandated, not because of any research findings or overarching policy and best practice concerns.

Please note that districts need to check their negotiated agreements and internal policies. These directives may set forth mandates over and above the minimum requirements of state law and the procedural requirements of the Tulsa Model.

Career Teachers

The procedural requirement in the Tulsa Model that every career teacher be evaluated once a year **will not change**. The Tulsa Model Handbook will continue to require annual evaluations of career teachers regardless of their last evaluation score.

Best practice, expert guidance and actual experience support the decision to maintain course and require more than is mandated by SB 207. Every teacher needs and deserves feedback regarding his/her practices on a regular basis. Regular feedback validates and sustains the demanding work of high-performing teachers. In addition, evaluators need to be in every classroom documenting and discussing what is observed on a regular basis to ensure that high-quality practices continue and that teachers know how they might improve their work. To evaluate less frequently than once a year inappropriately assumes that high-caliber practices and behaviors are in continuous use. “Highly effective” and “superior” practices require incredible effort and craftsmanship on the part of the teacher, especially in the ever-changing world of education. To sustain the high levels of quality and prevent performance drift requires vigilance on the part of the teacher and his or her instructional leader, the evaluator.

Strong performers, especially, recognize the importance of reflection, feedback and continuous improvement. Just think about top-caliber sports professionals and artists—their obligation to sustain and even improve already superior skills never ceases, and they use the expertise of coaches and experts in the field to assist them in refining their performance. Top performing educators are no different. They need the feedback and guidance of their evaluators to affirm and sustain already excellent practices, and to identify how their work might be even better. Evaluators are the instructional leaders of the school and must support every teacher in their buildings.

As a practical matter, completing an annual evaluation for every teacher also supports a district's long-term obligation to identify, support and, if necessary, exit ineffective teachers. If there are no processes in place to ensure that the evaluator is formally observing a teacher's work using the Tulsa Model framework, poor performance may not be identified in a timely manner. If there are dramatic changes in the performance level of a high-scoring teacher (or if a previous evaluator gave the teacher an inappropriately high score), there needs to be a process in place to monitor and document the teacher's performance. Otherwise, the district is in the untenable position of needing to exit an ineffective teacher without the necessary documentation, feedback and support in place that make that decision feasible.

An annual evaluation for every teacher makes sense all around. It validates high performers, sustains expert practices and allows for instructional leaders to monitor and ensure effective teaching in their schools. Accordingly, the Tulsa Model will continue to require an annual evaluation for every career teacher, even those rated highly effective or superior in a previous evaluation.