**CHAT**

Lincoln County, Tenn., used its cut of federal Race to the Top cash to create a new type of staff-development position: a teacher-evaluation director. Renee Pryor, one of *Education Week*’s 2016 Leaders to Learn From, works with novice teachers and those who have been flagged for performance in the evaluation system to strengthen their practice. And she uses an array of tools—videos, collaborative conversations, and coaching—to make the process supportive rather than confrontational.

In this chat, Pryor and the district’s former superintendent talk about the development of this evaluative role and how teachers have responded to it.

*This chat took place on Monday, February 22, 2016, at 3 p.m. ET.*
Leaders To Learn From Virtual Events
From Teacher Evaluation to Support: A District’s Journey

**Mike Bock**
Good morning, and welcome to today's free live chat, From Teacher Evaluation to Support: A District’s Journey. I've just opened the chat for questions, so please start submitting them now. We'll be back at 3 p.m. E.T. with Renee Pryor and Dr. Wanda Shelton. Hope to see you then!

**Stephen Sawchuk**
We'll be starting in just a few minutes. Keep those questions coming in!

**Stephen Sawchuk**
Hi everyone, and welcome to today's chat: From Teacher Evaluation to Support, A District's Journey.

**Wanda**
Good afternoon. I am Wanda Shelton, former director of schools in Lincoln County, Tennessee. We have been involved in helping teachers help students learn for several years.

**Stephen Sawchuk**
We have two wonderful panelists: Wanda Shelton and Renee Pryor, from Tennessee's Lincoln County. Together, the two have helped build a new approach to teacher evaluation that gives specific feedback for teachers, especially new ones and those who have struggled.

**Renee Pryor**
Good afternoon! I am Renee Pryor and I supervise evaluation programs in Lincoln County which is in Fayetteville, TN. I am in classrooms everyday working with teachers and supporting the evaluation process.

**Stephen Sawchuk**
Renee is one of our 2016 Leaders to Learn From. She's profiled in our report, which goes live this Wednesday, right here at EdWeek. [https://leaders.edweek.org](https://leaders.edweek.org). You'll be able to read much more about her then. But for now, let's have Wanda and Renee introduce themselves.

**Stephen Sawchuk**
Thank you both!

**Stephen Sawchuk**
Ready for the questions, panelists? We'll start with this one, from Raymond. Wanda, why don't you take first crack at it.

**Comment From Raymond**
Good afternoon. Could you tell me what was the biggest obstacle to teacher buy in during the implementation of your system.

**Wanda**
I think the most difficult thing to help teachers see that evaluations can be helpful is the need to develop trust.
Wanda
If the evaluation process is always “got you’, then that trust does not exist. We spent a great deal of time in team meetings, developing two way communication.

Wanda
Helping teachers grow by providing the professional development THEY NEED

Wanda
Having one evaluator to support teachers helped so much

Stephen Sawchuk
Lots of questions coming in on this theme, so let's dig a little deeper. Here's a question from Laura P. Renee, you take this one.

Comment From Laura P.
How do you change teachers' perceptions about what evaluation is for? How do you take the fear out of it?

Renee Pryor
First, I believe that teachers must know that the evaluator empathizes with them as educators and our goal is just to support implementation of teaching strategies that support student learning.

Renee Pryor
Conversations revolve around what is actually happening in the classroom, what teachers and students are doing, and if what is happening is supporting student learning.

Renee Pryor
Meeting with teachers regularly so that they can trust they your work is to help them be better for students...it is not about a number, it is about student growth. And when I say meeting with teachers, it is not just me, it is building administrators and other district instructional support personnel.

Stephen Sawchuk
Good point, Renee. One thing we talked about is that In Tennessee, teachers who get a low growth score automatically get a notice from the state.

Stephen Sawchuk
With that in mind, how do you take the focus off the score, and put the focus on instruction? Mariann's question gets at this, too, so I'll move it up.

Comment From Mariann
How often do you need to have those conversations, and with who, to actually impact instruction? And how do you know if you are doing that?

Stephen Sawchuk
Renee, how often do you work with each teacher you support?
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Renee Pryor
We complete four evaluations at a minimum each year. Then, we also complete walk throughs throughout the year that do not require scores, but do require feedback from the observer.

Renee Pryor
I meet with teachers several times throughout the year for “coaching” which involves looking at TVAAS scores and comparing the scores to evaluations that have been completed.

Renee Pryor
TVAAS is the state growth scores.

Renee Pryor
I personally meet and support teachers as often as needed and the number of times is different for each teacher. The school administrators meet with teachers weekly.

Renee Pryor
Monthly PD sessions at the district level are offered and based on indicators on our TEAM rubric...Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model.

Stephen Sawchuk
So, Renee, that means that the PD sessions align to the evaluation objectives (i.e., questioning techniques, checking for understanding, etc.)?

Renee Pryor
Exactly, Stephen! The first two years, we organized and provided PD on all indicators. Now, much of the PD takes place in our schools and is led by Teacher Leaders that work with me and their administrators to determine areas of focus.

Stephen Sawchuk
We’re getting lots of questions on the PD details! Wanda, you and your curriculum staff did a lot of work on professional development. Can you take Andrea’s question on what that looks like?

Comment From Andrea
What supports are currently in place to ensure that the professional development teachers receive is useful and of high-quality?

Renee Pryor
Just one more thing....As for meetings with teachers, much of the work is completed through the PLC process with grade level teams on a weekly basis. However, for teachers who need extra support, administrators meet privately with them to discuss plans and instruction.

Stephen Sawchuk
Thank you, Renee!
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**Wanda**
The first year Renee was with us, we wanted all teachers to have the skills they needed in content and to be successful on our evaluation rubric. We have PD sessions on all of hte TEAM evaluation indicators...like questioning

**Wanda**
and Feedback, problem solving, classroom management, and thinking skills. These were really general sessions

**Wanda**
The next year, we began to help specific teachers get what they needed and invited teachers who needed questioning PD to attend

**Wanda**
By blending content (mathematics teaching strategies) with skills, our teachers and students grew.

**Stephen Sawchuk**
Very cool, Wanda, thank you!

**Wanda**
Now, we can be really specific...with PLC’s on content, formative assessment, and pacing. This is not a quick process, but it is a valuable one

**Wanda**
You really must have a person watching and working with the teachers to keep it all on track...a 'Renee' is vital to the process

**Stephen Sawchuk**
A foreman, if you will, to keep everything on schedule, right?

**Wanda**
Everyone knows you need a supervisor to work with curriculum, but not everyone sees the need to have a person to track, inspect, and lead evaluation

**Comment From Sheila Edwards**
Is this chat intended for TN teachers only?

**Stephen Sawchuk:**
Not at all! It just happens that our district leaders were located in a Tennessee district, so their experiences are shaped by the state requirements, etc.

**Stephen Sawchuk**
That’s an excellent point, Wanda.
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Wanda
I think the process will work with any evaluation model. We have used more than one in the past, but it is the focus on student learning and HELPing teachers that really matters.

Stephen Sawchuk
The use of video for teacher observation and reflection is a big topic these days, so let’s have Renee talk about how she uses them in her PD and support work. Ready, Renee?

Comment From Merryl B
What role does the formal observation play in your model? Are videotapes utilized versus in-person observations to allow the teachers to reflect directly?

Renee Pryor
Every evaluation has someone in the room during the observation. It is important to see all of the evidence...assessment, student work, student engagement, etc. and a video camera can not capture all of that.

Renee Pryor
However, we do use video to support teacher reflection on the lesson because they need to see how the lesson actually unfolded.

Renee Pryor
While in the middle of delivering instruction, what they perceive happens and what actually happens may or may not be the same.

Stephen Sawchuk
Renee, do you find that teachers often see things when they look at a video that they didn’t realize they were doing (calling on some students too much, neglecting a corner of the room, or something)?

Renee Pryor
I use video to help teachers view their lesson objectively in a compassionate and non threatening way.

Renee Pryor
Yes, Stephen! I use a reflection instrument for teachers to record their impression of the lesson.

Renee Pryor
In most situations, the teacher will determine the area of strength and weakness that I observed through the reflection process.

Renee Pryor
This tool has been one of the most valuable parts of the support I provide, especially in the feedback component of the post conference process.
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Renee Pryor
It is amazing the conversations I have with teachers based on their reflections of the lesson.

Renee Pryor
This is still scary to teachers...no one likes to see themselves on video. They must get past that fear before they are able to be truly reflective.

Renee Pryor
We have asked teachers to just video themselves without evaluation or observation just to get use to the process.

Stephen Sawchuk
I think that’s one of the reasons your work deserves attention. You’ve thought through all the developmental stages it takes to get your teachers comfortable with the process.

Renee Pryor
I will add...The reflection document is something I researched and found several examples then adapted to meet the needs of our evaluation system.

Stephen Sawchuk
So, we have a nerdy policy question coming up. Ready, Wanda?

Wanda
ready

Stephen Sawchuk
As many of you know, the new federal law replacing NCLB backs off of teacher-evaluation requirements. Here’s Mark B.’s question about what that means for Lincoln County.

Comment From Mark B.
As a district-level teacher-evaluation official, how will you be working with your state education department as they come up with teacher accountability systems under the new Every Student Succeeds Act?

Stephen Sawchuk
I know you’re retired now, Wanda, but read the tea leaves for us, if you can!

Wanda
Although the ESSA is important to the work of system and state leaders, almost any ‘system’ can be used with the program we use here. It is the process of support that is important to our work, not the tool itself. I hope that we will be able to use more observation of teachers and students and less reliance on test scores

Wanda
But either way, the work will continue to support really good, engaged teaching and learning
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Wanda
I think people tend to feel that assessment is something ‘done to them’ instead of something that can be used like a temperature check. We need to check students temps along the way, but should that temp make all the decisions? I hope this flexibilty will free us up to use more and varied indicators of both teacher and student success.

Stephen Sawchuk
Renee, Heather wants to know if you're buried in paperwork! How do you balance the demands of the job?

Comment From Heather
I'm sorry if this was mentioned earlier, but can you go into detail about the role of the teacher evaluation director? I find that those roles end up putting people in mounds of paperwork; how did this position create a more supportive culture?

Renee Pryor
First of all, I stay very, very busy!

Renee Pryor
There is a lot of paperwork that goes along with the evaluation process. Scripting and evidence collection is time consuming.

Renee Pryor
However, nothing is more important than being present in a classroom observing instruction and supporting teaching!!!!

Renee Pryor
I am in classrooms everyday! One of the reasons teachers are not as stressed about evaluation and my presence, is that they see me often.

Renee Pryor
Relationships come first and paperwork comes next!

Stephen Sawchuk
Hmm - you're turning the "absence makes the heart grow fonder" conventional wisdom on its head!

Renee Pryor
I can share the paperwork with support staff but I can't share the work I do in the classroom!

Stephen Sawchuk
We have time for one more question. This time, I think I'll have both Renee and Wanda chime in.

Renee Pryor
By share, I mean all of the other stuff I do everyday that does not involve evaluation.
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Stephen Sawchuk
Oops, sorry Renee -- didn't mean to cut you off.

Wanda
We are ready!

Stephen Sawchuk
Here's our final question -- what do you do about a teacher who just isn't clear why she's gotten a low score on some portion of the evaluation.

Comment From Christina
Renee, how do you approach teachers who have flagged for performance...I am imagining that this this must be a touchy subject for teachers. Do you find that they understand areas of weakness, or do they seem really unclear on why they're being asked to improve? Is it different from the way you might approach novice teachers?

Wanda
We have a process in place for meaningful conversations. We look at test data and really help teachers understand both summative and formative data. We work with the teachers on planning lessons and creating good lessons before we ever evaluate.

Renee Pryor
First of all, we meet together to look at their student scores on standardized assessments and determine where areas of weakness are. Then we discuss instruction and if that instruction was standards based and on grade level. The next discussion revolves around the rigor of instruction.

Renee Pryor
There are situations where we have teachers that are a "5" in the classroom and instruction is awesome...it meets the needs of their students and students are engaged.

Wanda
the teacher. We do not ever try to create a moment where a teacher can't feel that they can ask us where they missed the point. Sometimes, teachers get scores that they don't like at all. And no one ever wants a low score...so we focus on how to improve, not what they are doing wrong....

Renee Pryor
Those teachers are the most devastated! We spend a lot of time working through the "emotional" support they need to feel good enough about their instruction to continue in the profession.

Wanda
Our principals and assistant principals help when our district staff can not be in the classroom, but the entire process is built on helping teachers grow!
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Wanda
No one ever wants to be a ‘1’ on a 1-5 scale, so helping them see the why almost always avoids a repeat of that low score

Renee Pryor
In those cases, I am a cheerleader for them...but I see myself as a cheerleader for all teachers because what they do is so important and so meaningful!

Wanda
Not just why did they score a 1 but how can they be a 5...vital to do both!

Stephen Sawchuk
Also, I want to add here that Renee has had teachers who have in the past gotten a low score, and who have made big improvements, present at district PD, so that they start to gain some of their self-confidence back.

Renee Pryor
Exactly, Stephen! It was important for them to show others the instructional practices that worked for their students and build their self-confidence!

Wanda
Yes, for all the district leaders out there...you have to have a plan to celebrate success! Growing teachers and students can be really really stressful and celebrating is so important

Stephen Sawchuk
Any closing thoughts, R and W, before we sign off for the afternoon?

Renee Pryor
Sometimes, our low self esteem defeats us...not our ability!

Renee Pryor
I want to add that much of evaluation is about "asking" teachers about their practice, not "telling" them about what I observe. Questioning is as important in evaluation as it is in instruction!

Wanda
Great questions to all those who were on this event. I hope we were a bit helpful and I hope you will see that we are passionate about the work so that all teachers can improve and enjoy their classroom experiences.

Stephen Sawchuk
Thanks to everyone for participating today!

Renee Pryor
I also believe that inspection is just as important as expectations.
Stephen Sawchuk
If you'd like to get in touch with Renee and Wanda, send me an e-mail, and I'll try to facilitate an introduction. ssawchuk@epe.org

Stephen Sawchuk
In the meantime, we hope you'll join us on Wednesday for the launch of Leaders to Learn From 2016. http://leaders.edweek.org/

Stephen Sawchuk
The report goes live Wednesday, and we'll have an event in Washington, D.C. on March 11 (where I'll finally get to meet Renee!) So I hope you'll consider joining us.

Stephen Sawchuk
Thanks again for participating in today's chat, and special thanks to Wanda and Renee for joining us.