

TRUTH OR MYTH ABOUT THE MARZANO TEACHER EVALUATION MODEL

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Truth or Myth About the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model

Since the adoption of new teacher evaluation systems under Race to the Top, many U.S. school districts are struggling with inflation in teacher observation scores.¹ High-stakes teacher evaluation scores are dependent on student assessment scores. Moreover, when state evaluation systems are linked to state policy, and in some cases “pay for performance,” teacher evaluation may become an issue where emotions are likely to run high. In this environment, it is understandable that frustration can occur.

These high-stakes circumstances can result in inflated scores or scoring that is perceived as arbitrary—from year to year, school to school, or district to district. When the purpose of an evaluation model is perceived by teachers as retributive, rather than as a growth framework designed to support continuous professional improvement and student learning, the system itself can cause anxiety. Teacher evaluation under these circumstances may fall short of Race to the Top objectives, which

specify that teacher evaluation systems adopted by school districts must be “**valid, reliable, fair, and aligned to standards.**”² In these circumstances, it is important to separate out three distinct issues in any discussion of a teacher evaluation system:

- The teacher evaluation framework itself
- State or local policy, which determines scoring, weighting of scores, final evaluation scores, use of student assessment data, and performance pay
- Implementation and training issues around the evaluation framework

The goal of this paper is to dispel some of the myths that have circulated about the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, to provide research-based evidence for the model, and to refocus efforts on making the shift to standards-based, rigorous, student-centered instruction to best support teacher growth and student achievement.

¹Ho, A. D., & Kane, T. J. (2013). *The reliability of classroom observations by school personnel*. The MET Project.

Retrieved from http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MET_Reliability-of-Classroom-Observations_Research-Paper.pdf

²U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *Race to the Top Program Executive Summary*.

Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>

Myth 1: There is no fair, objective, and reliable definition of effective teaching.

Fact 1: The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model defines an effective teacher as one who makes instructional decisions that produce student learning gains.

The Marzano model provides schools and districts a *common model of instruction* derived from a half century of research on effective teaching. Teaching is challenging and complex work that requires deep understanding of each student, curriculum, instruction, and assessment

in ways that enable all students to be successful. The Marzano model, when implemented with fidelity, supports rigorous, standards-based teaching that prioritizes the critical thinking and interpersonal skills necessary for students to succeed in college and in the workforce.

Testimonials:

In the Marzano model, DQ3 and DQ4 especially help prepare students for college and the global workplace, as long as they are implemented effectively. We have no way of predicting what the future will be like. We need to help students develop the abilities to examine similarities and differences, examine errors in reasoning, develop and use strategies and processes, revise their knowledge, engage in cognitively complex tasks, and generate and test hypotheses. These are skills students will need whether they work in the corporate world, run their own businesses, or opt out and start their own permaculture homesteads.

– Andrew Sias, Teacher

Before we implemented the model, we were not teaching to the level of intent of the standard. I did not realize as a leader, until I looked at things with a different lens, [that] what I thought was really good teaching was not at the level it was supposed to be.

– Amy Dujon, Principal

The level of instruction is really improving at our school. Our teachers are taking the feedback that we're giving them as part of the Marzano model and they're putting that into practice in their classrooms.

– Shelly Bell, Teacher

The students will benefit from an overall increase in effective teaching and the renewed enthusiasm in the profession. We were a really good school district before we started this. This Marzano model has been the piece that is bringing all our work together. Teachers are inspired, and you can see and feel the increased pride in their work. This model is allowing us to reach a higher level. While demonstrated student achievement is the measure, come look at our classrooms—what is going on is not window dressing or gamesmanship, it is just a focus on excellent teaching.

– Dr. Keith Smith, District Superintendent

We have seen a dramatic difference in teaching. We're seeing that the learning in the classrooms has been increasing since implementation.

– Ben Threadgill, Principal

Myth 2: The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model does not produce measurable student learning gains.

Fact 2: Studies have found a relationship between implementation of the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model and student achievement. Furthermore, evidence demonstrates higher correlations to student achievement in areas where there was a focus on fidelity.

While several studies assess the use of the model and student achievement, two studies address the relationship directly.⁴ The first study was one of the largest validation studies on an observation framework for an entire state. The study found that across three years of data, the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model had significant and small correlations with teacher state value-added measures (VAM). Moreover, while there were small variations in the correlation coefficients by element, each element almost always had a small and significant correlation with teacher VAMs. Taken as a whole, these findings support the model as a valid system to measure teacher proficiency statewide.

The second study was a smaller-scale study that included a process and outcome evaluation to investigate whether implementation had the intended effect of increasing student achievement. In total, five treatment schools and five statistically matched control schools were included in the study. Only the treatment schools received training on the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, coaching, and diagnostic measures of effectiveness. Two sets of findings from this study are relevant to the validity of the framework. The first pertains to the magnitudes of the correlation coefficients with teacher VAMs. While the sample size is much smaller than the state-level study, the magnitudes of the correlations were higher where the model was implemented with fidelity.

The outcome evaluation used several different methods to assess program effects, including independent sample t-tests, ordinary least squares regression, and hierarchical linear modeling. Out of the 26 assessments that had a control group match, 21 showed positive and significant growth for students at treatment schools ($p < .10$). Consequently, favorable and significant results were shown for treatment students in 81% of administered assessments. Moreover, fixed effects models showed similar results: Students who attended treatment schools had significantly increased growth scores (.37 to .39 standard deviations above prediction) compared to students at control schools, which accounted for both student and school characteristics.³

Both studies outlined here provide support that the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model can lead to increased student achievement. Specifically, the first study found small correlations with teacher VAMs, demonstrating that educators can rely on the model. The second study found evidence of higher correlations and that student achievement significantly increased where the model was coupled with leadership coaching and implemented with fidelity.

³Basileo, L., & Toth, M. (2015). *Final report: Pinellas County public schools 2013-14 multiple measures pilot results*. Retrieved from <http://info.learningsciences.com/rs/860-TAJ-757/images/PCPS%20White%20Paper%2013-14%2020150604.pdf>

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Testimonials:

I believe I became a better teacher as a result of [the Marzano model]. It made me stop several times and become more analytical about the way I prepared my lesson plans. I think students were successful at identifying what they were responsible for learning and then using this information to track their own progress.

– Anonymous, Teacher [from post-implementation survey]

I was encouraged by the pilot to see that some of what I have stumbled upon through the day-to-day act of teaching is actually supported by research and deemed effective beyond my own classroom.

– Anonymous, Teacher [from post-implementation survey]

As a teacher and administrator, I'd read a lot of Dr. Marzano's work, and quite a bit on the importance of a common language of leadership and instruction. For a common language of instruction, I gravitated toward Marzano over other models. It's a good system, but what I really liked about it was that it's backed by so much literature. Every school you walk into has at least one book by Marzano; the name and the research behind the model give it a lot of credibility."

– R. J. Weber, Assistant Superintendent of Academics

Myth 3: The Marzano Teacher Evaluation model negatively impacts teacher and educator morale.

Fact 3: When implemented with fidelity, the Marzano model provides a safe place for teachers to develop pedagogical skills.

Currently, the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model is used in 50 states, Canada, Australia, and countries in Europe, Asia, and South America. The model has been implemented in 561 school districts, serving 217,000 teachers. The model was deliberately designed to help teachers, from apprentices to masters, to continuously improve their practice over the course of their careers, based on best practices and the most current research in teaching and learning. The model embeds a reciprocal

process of feedback, one in which teachers and administrators, as well as peers, participate in conversations with each other about teaching and learning around a common instructional framework. Domain 4 recognizes the importance of collegial relationships and focused professional development aligned with a teacher's strengths, needs, and interests.

Testimonials:

We have developed a building team of leaders who support colleagues in using the Marzano model, and we have a district team that addresses training, teacher rounds, and rater reliability. A culture of sharing which has always been a very strong characteristic for us has become stronger and routine. We recently created observation "norms" that outline how to collaborate on areas of strengths and weaknesses without creating negativity from overall ratings. Teachers have set up online forums for developing lesson plans (planbook.com, Google Drive, Dropbox, e-mail, and our local network).

I would like to share an example of the collegiality that has solidified within our staff. Last year I completed an observation with one of our very best teachers, identifying areas that needed growth (developing) and areas that were strong (applying). When I left the classroom, the teacher, who is respected and identified as highly effective, immediately reviewed her observation, printed it, and met with her team at lunch to get feedback and help with the suggestions I provided in her observation. Her colleagues were able to quickly implement the suggestions in their subsequent observation, and the

teacher received higher ratings as a result of her amazing collegiality. We have created a culture of collaboration to be rivaled by few. The Marzano model has been the best tool that I have used in my administrative career; it's the best thing that has ever happened for me.

– Karl A. Hartman, Principal

I have seen a shift in the culture amongst everybody who's working with this model; the teachers, program developers, the district—we're really focused on teaching and learning and what makes effective teaching and learning. It's very invigorating. We're all speaking the same language; we're all talking about what's going to make a difference in that classroom; everybody's involved and that's powerful.

– Dr. Michelle Gayle, Principal

Our teachers are becoming familiar with the Marzano model, and already the feedback they're getting from the walkthroughs [have them] saying, "This is already making me a stronger teacher."

– Shelly Bell, Teacher

Myth 4: The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model does not produce fair and objective evaluation results.

Fact 4: Teachers, school leaders, and district leaders agree that the Marzano model yields fair and objective results when implemented with fidelity.

Fact 2 addressed the relationship between observation scores and student achievement. Specifically, the studies found that there were higher correlations between the two where the model was coupled with leadership coaching and implemented with fidelity. Moreover, while there was a small correlation found statewide, when the model is used without fidelity or when the focus is perceived by teachers as punitive,

results can vary. The outcome of uneven implementation of evaluation frameworks can cause backlash against the frameworks themselves. A great many schools and districts have, however, achieved fair and objective measurement results using the Marzano model when the model is implemented with fidelity.

Testimonials:

The feedback that I'm receiving today on the Marzano [Teacher] Evaluation Model is different than in the past, because I know when I go into that post-conference with the principal, it's going to be more specific. And I've already had the pre-interview conference with the principal talking about the lesson beforehand, and we've already identified strategies that I'm working on this year. It forces not only me as a teacher to be specific with the strategies that I'm using but forces the principal as well to be specific with the feedback that [he is] providing to me as an educator.

– Brian Schum, Teacher

For other teachers who are going to be using the Marzano [Teacher] Evaluation Model, it's a great tool, and it's really there for support. It's not there to catch you or be punitive in any fashion. It's really there to help you to become a better teacher.

– Rebecca Shultz, Teacher

I've been teaching for 32 years and I have seen teacher evaluation systems come and go. I may have been observed two or three times in eight or nine year, and gotten just a little bit of feedback. The administrator came in and said, "Everything's fine." The Marzano model gives me specific feedback to help me become a better teacher. And it's great. I really like the fact that I know what observers are going to be looking for—it's an area that I'm working on, they come in, they notice other things as well, but they can give me feedback on what I'm working on, and I don't feel threatened by it.

– Frances Homme, Teacher

Myth 5: Teachers must be scored on all 41 instructional elements in the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model. Teachers must score perfectly on all 41 elements in order to achieve Innovating.

Fact 5: Teachers are not expected to demonstrate proficiency in all 41 elements.

The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model was never designed to require that all 41 classroom instructional elements be scored in any one (or series of) observations.⁴ No teacher would ever be expected to score Innovating on all 41 elements in order to receive an Innovating final score. The calculation for final evaluation scores is determined by individual states: In some cases, teachers’ scores are averaged across the year; in other cases, the final score is weighted for growth or improvement.⁵

Teachers use different strategies for different lesson segments or types of lessons. In some cases, principals and teachers may decide to focus on and look for improvement in a select number of the 41 strategies. No teacher should ever be expected to demonstrate proficiency in all 41 elements during a single observation. The evaluator scores observed elements and looks for those elements appropriate to any given lesson (e.g., introducing content, practicing and deepening, or elements for complex reasoning.)

Testimonial:

When we first started using the model, we focused on the elements with the highest effect size. It made sense to us that we should focus on the elements that Dr. Marzano has shown to provide the most bang for your buck. The Common Core assessments call for

different sets of skills. We took an incremental approach to how these problem-solving, higher-order strategies were going to be phased in. Some of the elements, obviously, focus very well on getting teachers to incorporate these higher-order skills into their lessons.
 – Dr. Keith Smith, School Superintendent

Myth 6: To receive the highest score, Innovating, a teacher has to demonstrate cookie-cutter use of the Marzano instructional strategies.

Fact 6: The exact reverse is true.

The differentiator between a score of *Applying* and a score of *Innovating* is based entirely on whether the observer witnesses the teacher making instructional adaptations during a lesson based on monitoring for student understanding. In other words, the teacher may deviate from the

trajectory of the lesson to creatively and immediately adapt instruction based on formative assessment of student learning to ensure all students accomplish the learning outcomes of the lesson. The teacher is, in effect, *Innovating* on the spot, rather than following a predetermined plan.

⁴Marzano, R. (2007). *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

⁵Marzano, R. & Toth, M. (2013). *Teacher evaluation that makes a difference: A new model for teacher growth and student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD

Myth 7: There is an expectation of perfection when using the Marzano teacher strategies.

Fact 7: The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model contains a premise that no teacher—even the best, most experienced teacher—is perfect. No teacher has a perfect practice every day in every classroom or with every student.

The most effective teachers will adopt a growth mindset that supports them to continuously improve. The Marzano model was specifically designed to include a large and granular number of teaching and planning strategies, so that even veteran teachers could challenge themselves to work on weaker instructional skills. The model presumes

that all teachers should be willing and able to improve their practice over their career. When implemented with fidelity, the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model embeds the training, feedback, and common instructional framework to help teachers continuously improve.

Testimonials:

Even though I thought some of it was a pain in the neck, it definitely helped me pinpoint areas where I could grow as a teacher.

– Anonymous, Teacher [from post-implementation survey]

I think the teacher observation portion of this evaluation process is very solid.

– Anonymous, Teacher [from post-implementation survey]

Myth 8: Requiring learning targets and scales constitutes an undue burden on teachers’ time and energy.

Fact 8: The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model does not require teachers to post learning targets and scales for every lesson.

Teachers who consistently and appropriately use learning targets and scales—either posted or kept in students’ subject notebooks—have overwhelmingly found that using this strategy has transformed their classrooms. Students not only have a clear understanding of what the goal or target of the lesson or unit is; they are able to track their own learning and make decisions about their learning, improving student

engagement and investment. The benefit for teachers is that the scale is aligned to the state standards and functions as a scaffolded plan for lessons on a standard or group of standards. It is not the intent of the Marzano model that learning goals and scales be posted merely for compliance. They should be an active and dynamic component of teaching and learning for both teachers and students.

Testimonials:

The best thing for me this year has been starting to use learning goals with my students. I always had learning goals before, but I’ve never had them posted and I never explained them to the students. We’re now starting to look at rubrics for our learning goals so that the student can monitor their own learning, and that has been really exciting.

– Frances Homme, Teacher

I know the Common Core standards better, and I am (and my students are) more fluent using scales, student self-assessment, formative assessment, and monitoring for 100% of student understanding of target goal.

– Anonymous, Teacher [from post-implementation survey]

Since we’ve implemented the Marzano model, we’ve really seen a big uptick with the teachers with the learning goals. That was our one of our key areas: helping design learning goals that are good learning goals to help drive instruction. The teachers are responding really well and it’s keeping the students focused as well. They know when they come into the classroom [that] this is what we’re focusing on today and when they leave, they can go home and say, “Hey, you know, we did this in class today.

– Anicia Robinson, K-8 Science Developer

Myth 9: Replacing the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model with another evaluation system would improve teacher morale, help teachers improve their practice, and accelerate student learning.

Fact 9: Implementing the Marzano model with fidelity shows a great deal of promise in raising student achievement.

Fact 2 discussed the relationship between the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model and student achievement. As yet, very few studies have been conducted to compare the effectiveness of teacher evaluation frameworks⁶. However, there is evidence available on practices that increase teacher morale. One survey of more than 2,800 educators from 60 schools found that *teacher morale was more highly correlated with a focus on work to improve student learning*, rather than with discussions

of student behavior, building issues, or organizational activities⁷. If students are to meet the needs of the 21st century, we must maintain a laser-like focus on critical thinking skills, and teachers must collaborate effectively to meet student needs. Positive collaboration among teachers has been shown to positively impact student achievement and improve teacher morale. The Marzano model was developed and has been implemented to address precisely these vital imperatives.

⁶Mielke, P. (2012). *Investigating a systematic process to develop teacher expertise: A comparative case study*. Retrieved from http://www.marzano-center.com/files/Paul_Mielke_Dissertation.pdf

⁷Basileo, L. (2016). *Did you know? Your school's PLCs have a major impact*. Retrieved from <http://www.learningsciences.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/PLC-Report.pdf>

Conclusion

The purpose of the paper is to clarify the misunderstandings that exist around teacher evaluation and the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model. At times, rhetoric can distort these issues, advocating sweeping policy changes rather than focusing attention on the real needs of students and teachers for a fair and reliable evaluation system. Educators and policy makers should use caution when making recommendations in high-stakes situations where the decisions can negatively impact the lives of students, teachers, and administrators. We support revisions to improve evaluation systems based on research and evidence. Ultimately, educators all share the same goal—to provide students with the best education possible. Operating with these ethical obligations in mind will help us better work together to achieve this aim.

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