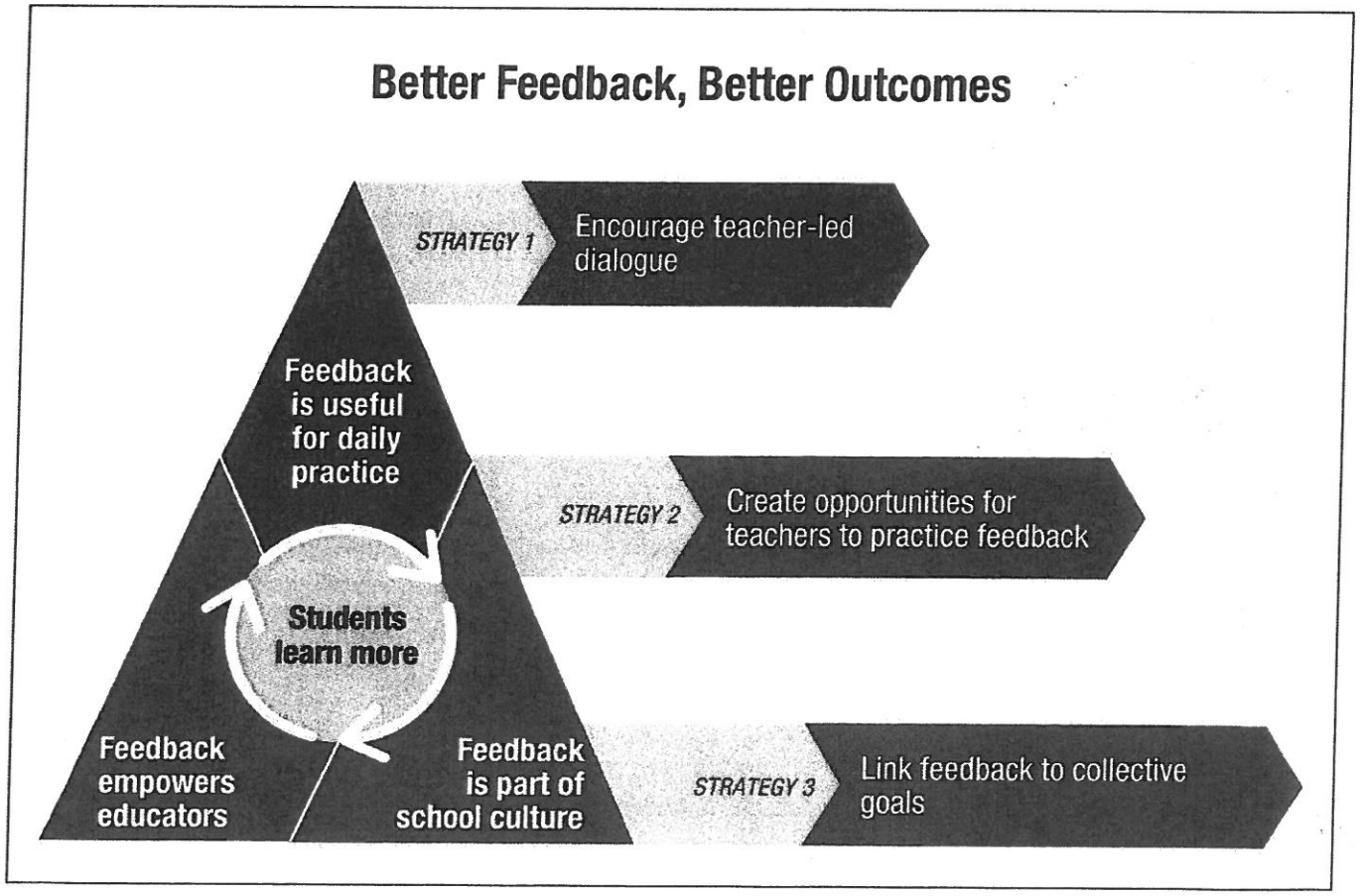
FEEDBACK ON TEACHING *A fresh look*

How can schools establish and sustain feedback practices that increase student learning?

Imagine that a principal hands a teacher a scored rubric, summarizes the rationale behind each rating and asks the teacher if he has any questions. Technically, the principal has fulfilled his duty and complied with state regulations. But did the principal provide feedback that would result in better teaching and increasing learning?

Most SREB states require evaluators to conduct post-observation conferences with teachers. Some state regulations describe the tasks that principals should accomplish during these conferences, such as sharing ratings, presenting evidence and working with teachers on professional growth plans. But among teachers interviewed during SREB's statewide focus groups, the situation described above is common. Educators reported that even when they received useful feedback, evaluators often did not recommend aligned resources to help them apply the feedback to their daily practice.

SREB proposes three strategies that, when adopted together, support better feedback and improved outcomes for teachers and students.



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Strategy One

Encourage teacher-led dialogue and reflection during debriefings.

Most state guidance describes *what* an evaluator is expected to deliver — ratings, evidence and feedback — but does not specify *how* the evaluator should deliver them. Furthermore, state guidance rarely addresses a teacher's role in a successful debriefing.

Although current state expectations improve upon old practices, administrators can maximize the value of debriefing sessions by using evolved practices that focus on *how* feedback is used and allow *teachers* to take a more active role.

The Administrator

Old Practice	Current Expectation	Evolved Practice
Observes teachers and rates their performance	Provides evidence and rationale for performance ratings	Asks teachers to identify and share examples of the impact of their instruction on student learning and behavior
Asks teachers if they agree or disagree with the ratings	Sets aside time for teachers to provide input on the feedback given	Prepares targeted questions to probe for teachers' insights and promote self-reflection
Pinpoints areas teachers should work on to improve their craft	Works with teachers to develop or revise professional learning plans	Reviews teachers' current professional learning plans and recommends aligned resources Collaborates with teachers to revise plans to include action steps and follow-up opportunities

Resources You Can Use

Carnegie Brief (2013) highlights strategies that promote teacher agency during conferences, including developing question probes, establishing a clear and predictable process, and allowing teachers to identify areas of strength and potential growth.

Insight's Six-Step Feedback Guide provides a template and examples of how to facilitate action-oriented debriefings.

The New Teacher Project's Toolbox includes a variety of guides and templates for feedback meetings.

Challenges for Strategy One

Implementing Strategy One entails shifting the focus of feedback meetings from *what* to *how* — and redefining the roles of both administrators and teachers. These operational and cultural shifts can cause implementation challenges for districts and schools.

Challenges	Addressing Challenges
Skill: Principals may have gaps in content knowledge that prevent them from effectively helping teachers. Will: Principals may be uncomfortable providing critical feedback in such a direct forum. Time: Principals may find that customizing probes and resource recommendations require more effort than current practices. Role Uncertainty: Teachers may struggle with taking on a more active role during debriefing meetings. Follow Through: Teachers and principals may not hold each other accountable to complete or revisit action plans.	Create Networks of Shared Responsibility: Administrators share responsibility for teachers' professional growth with instructional coaches and teachers themselves. Administrators seek advice from content specialists. Develop Active Learning Mindsets: School leaders adopt building practices and tactics that empower teachers to advocate for themselves, rather than providing abstract presentations about how to do it. Monitor Milestones: Teacher-leaders and administrators track classroom teachers' individual and collective progress on their action plans.

Strategy Two

Create opportunities for teachers to practice feedback with each other.

Most districts champion the use of one or more professional growth processes, such as walk-throughs, peer observations, instructional coaching or professional learning communities. School leaders should capitalize on practices that are already in place to provide opportunities for teachers to practice *giving and receiving* feedback with their peers.

Using teacher-to-teacher feedback has the potential to improve individual instructional practices and collective school culture. It also creates valuable time and space for teachers to practice the skills described in the previous section.

Challenges for Strategy Two

Strategy Two encourages the use of existing professional learning formats to increase the frequency of feedback sessions. With proper planning, districts and schools can effectively address challenges related to communicating the value of peer feedback and create capacity for teachers to take turns giving and receiving feedback.

Challenges	Addressing Challenges
Logistics: Teachers may struggle to find time to coordinate peer collaboration without creating extra work or sacrificing their planning time. School Norms: School leaders may feel hesitant to give teacher learning teams the level of autonomy needed to collaborate and experiment. Role Uncertainty: Teachers may have difficulty balancing their traditional role with instructional leadership roles. Alignment: School leaders may discover that new feedback activities do not fit seamlessly into current new teacher supports and mentoring initiatives.	Schedule Creatively: School staff adapt existing professional learning activities and strategies to include peer feedback and collaborative experimentation. Frame Expectations: Instructional leaders frame informal feedback and action planning among peers as opportunities for meaningful professional growth and ways for teachers to set themselves up for successful evaluations. Communicate Ownership: Administrators and teachers communicate openly with each other about how implementation is progressing and challenges associated with redefining adult roles and processes within the school.

Strategy Three

Link feedback to the pursuit of collective goals.

By (1) redefining teachers' roles in debriefings, and (2) driving professional learning through peer feedback, the first two strategies are likely to challenge current cultural norms in a school building. To build buy-in for these strategies and develop shared responsibility for student learning, school leaders should consistently model feedback roles and provide incentives for teachers to persevere in the work.

Establishing a common language and protocols for formal (and informal) feedback sessions helps school staff sustain a healthy culture that is focused on student learning. Although a common vocabulary and shared strategies do not guarentee group-level improvement, they do allow educators to use feedback in an integrated way and to institutionalize the practices that make feedback a powerful growth tool.

Challenges for Strategy Three

Implementing Strategy Three requires administrators to establish the tools and working environment that sustain the practices described in Strategies One and Two. District and school leaders can address implementation challenges by focusing on consistency, collaboration and connections between concurrent initiatives.

Challenges	Addressing Challenges
Resistance: School personnel may view teacher-led feedback processes, collaborative planning, and the use of common language and protocols as buzzwords or reform fads.	Walk the Talk: School leaders model collective ownership by using common language and supporting teacher-led feedback during day-to-day school operations.
Lack of Principal Support: Administrators may be unsure which language and protocols to use, and how to make their use consistent schoolwide.	Connect the Dots: School staff co-develop protocols and link new strategies with existing practices to make any needed shifts in mindset or practice cohesive.
Lack of Results: Common language and shared tools may not contribute to quantifiable improvements in student achievement.	Plan for Outcomes: Together, teachers and administrators identify desired benefits, determine tactics for monitoring impact and develop contingency plans if they do not see progress.

The Bottom Line

Effective classroom teachers assess student needs and provide feedback to improve student learning. This approach means involving students in their own learning. Similarly, the facilitation techniques described in Strategy One create an expectation that teachers own their professional learning. Strategy Two provides teachers with time and space to give, receive and apply instructional feedback. The final strategy urges administrators to use shared tools to frame feedback activities and build an improvement-minded school culture. By implementing all three strategies together, districts and schools can establish and sustain a building culture that supports growth for teachers and students.

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