Strategies for Conferencing with Teachers

Educator professional practice is supported and improved with effective conferencing that offers data-informed discussion. Using data and given focused time to conference with their leaders, teachers can be supported to:

- ✓ **Reflect** on their own effectiveness
- ✓ **Identify** and celebrate successes
- ✓ **Identify** areas for growth and improvement
- ✓ **Set annual goals**
- ✓ **Monitor their own progress**
- ✓ **Evaluate** their own growth and improvement

And of course, driving all LEA/school leadership teams to conduct healthy, constructive conferences is the knowledge that with improved professional practice, we see improved student achievement.

Conferences are NOT just conversations with teachers who receive PVAAS teacher-specific reporting.

They are conversations with ALL teachers about their student data and its connection to instructional practices!

*Remember: **All teachers have data!***

Who are you, as a school leader?
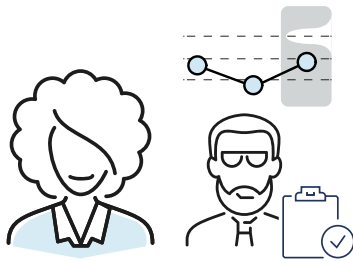
Principal A:
Meets with each teacher individually at least once per year to discuss past and current student performance data

Principal B:
Meets only with teachers who receive PVAAS teacher-specific reports

Principal C:
Meets with teachers mostly around teacher evaluation requirements

Think about **the power of conferencing with teachers annually.** As a leader, you want to promote discourse and dialogue about professional practices. You want to encourage self-reflection, enhance self-awareness of targets, and enhance the shared ownership for both school improvement *and* the bottom line. To do this, you'll want to hold deliberate data conversations with each teacher individually, and go beyond "compliance" to support teachers in their own self-reflection, goal setting, and planning for current and/or future students. With your leadership, teachers will self-reflect on student learning data, leading to teacher growth, which leads to enhanced student outcomes. **Teacher effectiveness matters!**

The Power of Conferencing with Data

By anchoring teacher conference conversations with data, a leader can:

✓ Promote discourse and dialogue about professional practices

✓ Encourage self-reflection

✓ Enhance self-awareness of targets for professional growth

✓ Share ownership for school improvement

There are a range of ways to engage teachers in conversation and reflection on professional practices.

Formal methods involve one-on-one discussions that create a space for individual reflection and support:

- Annual supervision/support process reflecting on annual growth data
  - » Supporting professional growth of ALL teachers to improve outcomes for ALL students
  - » At report release time (annually) and along the way
- Annual Evaluation process (with or without PVAAS three-year rolling average available)

Informal techniques can build a relationship with the teacher:

- Knock-Knock: "I have a question…"
- Office, Hallway, Classroom, Parking lot, Faculty Meeting

> "Although many personal, family, and neighborhood factors contribute to a student's academic performance, a large body of research suggests that — among school-related factors — teachers matter most."
>
> *https://www.rand.org/topics/teacher-effectiveness.html*

Conferencing Process

For a leader, your preparation for each conference could look something like this:

- **Getting ready** for conversations:
  - » System-Level Preparation: Leadership Needs
  - » Teacher-Level Preparation: Differentiation
- Take an advance look at the **data:**
  - » Student Academic Data
    - Achievement Data (State Assessments, Local Assessments, Mid-terms/End-of-course Exams, Grades)
    - Growth Data (Value-Added Report, Diagnostic Report)
  - » Attendance Data
  - » Behavior Data
  - » Student Feedback
- **Get "first impressions" organized** and combine them with other data sources
- **Identify questions** to determine root cause (The Digging Deeper Guides)
- **Find time** to hold productive conferences
- **Seek opportunities for connected conversations** with the PVAAS Custom Student Report
- **Make an action plan** – Focus, actions, and strategies to implement this year (including Act 13 SPM)
- **Reflect on the conversation**

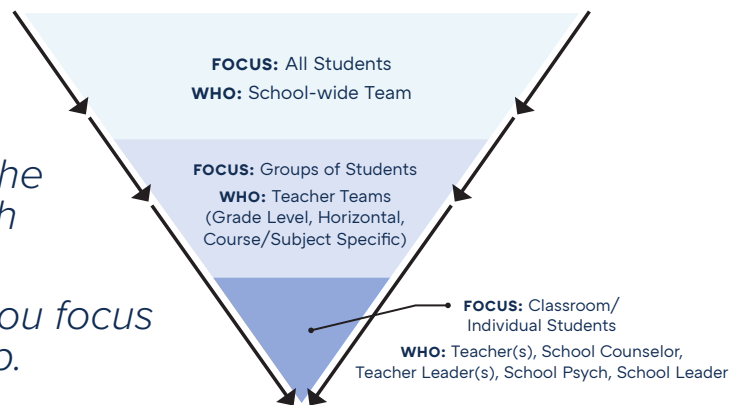## Getting Ready for Conversations

System-Level Preparation:
Leadership Needs

Where is your support and leadership most needed? Where should you be focusing your work? From the evidence in PVAAS and other data sources, should your focus be with one teacher, multiple teachers, the entire grade-level or department-level team, or on the entire school? Many times, you may find it is a combination of these.

We want to **start with a systems-level view, because it affects our conversations with teachers.** What you uncover with your LEA/district, school, grade, or subject-level data can change the conversation!

> *What you uncover at the various levels can change the conversations you have with teachers.*
>
> *And, it can change where you focus your support and leadership.*

FOCUS: All Students
WHO: School-wide Team

FOCUS: Groups of Students
WHO: Teacher Teams (Grade Level, Horizontal, Course/Subject Specific)

FOCUS: Classroom/ Individual Students
WHO: Teacher(s), School Counselor, Teacher Leader(s), School Psych, School Leader

A systems-level view allows you to analyze what is going on at the LEA/district or school level in terms of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It allows you to look at how your overall system is organized and structured, and whether it will allow for the most effective delivery of education to all students.

It is important to remember that a "systems-level view" is not only about curriculum. It is also about scheduling, course availability and sequence, professional development on the PA Core Standards, the consistency of effective instruction across all teachers, how assessments are used across all courses/grades/subjects, the effectiveness of the core reading and math programs, and so on.

Looking at your system first enables you to best decide where your support and leadership should be focused.

Teacher-Level Preparation:
### Differentiating Your Conversations

Start with the common understanding that all teachers, whether they teach in a tested grade or subject or not, share in the responsibility for student achievement and student growth. However, there will be a need to plan for the differentiated needs of teachers.

How might the conversation vary for:

- New teachers?
- Veteran teachers?
- Teachers who are eager for feedback and guidance?
- Teachers who are less open to feedback?
- Teachers who are comfortable with using data?
- Teachers who are not at all comfortable with data?

An advance look at the data

After the data is released, but before you talk with your teachers, take an advance look at the data. **Do you see patterns across all teachers' in a particular grade or subject?** Or, does the "system" seem to be working, but there is a particular teacher who may need your support and guidance as the instructional leader? This may, and often can, vary by grade and by subject.
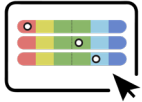
Take a look at your LEA/District, School, and Teacher Value-Added Reports

Take a look at your LEA/District, School, & Teacher Diagnostic Reports
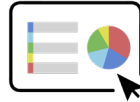
Take a look at Teacher Summary Reports

Any systemic issues or concerns you've identified?

Are there areas to highlight as strengths?

Get "first impressions" organized:

- **Know** the teacher's data
- Be able to **explain** teacher reports
- **Integrate** the data with other evaluation data
- **Prepare discussion prompts** to lead a collaborative discussion into the data for root causes
- **Draft possible reflective actions** that can be discussed with the teacher

BE WILLING TO

listen and learn.

Take a moment before each conference to get in the right mindset to listen and learn from teacher data and reflections.

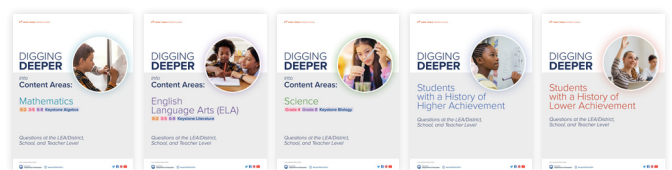## Identify Questions to Determine Root Cause

You've analyzed your data for patterns and trends to determine areas of strength and areas of concern. The *Digging Deeper* documents have content-specific questions to help you determine root cause – the "why" – in order to plan for improvement and enhancements leading to continuous growth for all students.

The Guides have content-specific questions organized in these areas:

- Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Organization – variables over which schools/educators have influence
- Math, ELA, Science, and Keystones – a content-area focus to each guide
- At the system level (LEA/district/school) and the teacher level

They are also tagged with the four Domain headings in the observation and practice rubric in PA's Educator Effectiveness system (Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities).

Administrators can use these questions to help teachers reflect on their practices and determine the variables that may be contributing to the results that we are seeing in the data – both positive and negative! The questions support strategic discussion and probing in the specific subject area being examined. We don't want to make changes in our curricular, instructional, and assessment practices just for the sake of making changes – rather we want to make sure those changes are supported by very careful and systematic analysis of the patterns and trends in your data. We must not skip this critical step of determining the *"why"*.

Download the Digging Deeper Guides >

https://www.pa.gov/en/agencies/education/programs-and-services/instruction/elementary-and-secondary-education/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/using-pvaas/digging-deeper-resources.html

Find Time for Productive Conferences

We've arrived now at a big question for leaders: *how do you find the time?* It's not always easy, but it may force you to be a bit creative in reallocating time. Look at the following opportunities for time that can be dedicated to a self-reflective discussion:

Getting More time:
Less Likely

Reallocation of Time:
More Likely

Informal: Act 13 LEA-Selected Measure, Student Performance Measure Conversation

A reflection could be part of the conversation you are having with teachers about the Act 13 LEA-selected measure or the SPM. The SPM template suggests that the educator reflect on student challenges and needs and develop a plan of action. The template prompts the user to enter corresponding evidence of the identified challenge or need. Then, it asks for an action plan to address the need. This is an opportunity for educators to reflect on data and how it connects to their practices. *Are you having those conversations?*

Informal: Teacher goal-setting meeting at BOY, classroom data chats BOY through MOY

In similar goal-setting meetings at the beginning of the year, or data chats with a teacher throughout the year about the progress students have made to-date, self-reflection based on data can help add richness to the conversation. *Are you having those conversations?*

Formal: Annual summative evaluation under Act 13
(a MUST with a PVAAS Three-Year Composite)

You can also use existing formal opportunities like your annual summative evaluations and your meetings about differentiated supervision to check on or help facilitate the self-reflection process. This is an opportunity for educators to reflect on the data and how it connects to their practices. *Are you having those conversations?*

Whether your teachers have one year, two years, or even three years of PVAAS teacher-specific data, we suggest conversations with a teacher about their PVAAS data every year. When a teacher has a PVAAS Three-Year Composite, the data must be included on the teacher final rating form under Act 13. Some data available teachers will have one year, two years, or three years of PVAAS teacher-specific data. This is an opportunity for educators to reflect on how the data connects to their practices. *Are you having those conversations?*

Note: We strongly encourage you to not wait until there are three years of data to be including PVAAS as part of the conversation. Waiting can result in a conversation that is less meaningful than annual, ongoing conversations.

Formal: Differentiated supervision plan meeting

While sometimes these conversations may surface from a quick chat with a teacher, these conversations often need more planning, and you may not be able to do that planning every time. There is flexibility with this. As a school leader, you may have the conversation with a teacher, then a follow-up conversation by a coach or teacher leader to help plan for current students and/or create Custom Student Reports. In other words, there are pieces that could be shared and run across multiple conversations. *Are you having those conversations?*

Seek Opportunities for Connected Conversations

Though we are focusing on holding formal conversations with teachers, these ideas and techniques can be used or applied to many types of leader conversations. If you have a broader school-, grade-, or subject-level issue, the conversations can begin in a larger group setting, such as:

- Whole-staff faculty meetings
- Grade-level or department-level meetings
- In-service days
- PLCs
- Data team meetings

Make an Action Plan

As you work on an action plan with steps, the goal is to model a collaborative process where **the teacher talks as much as the facilitator (the administrator, coach, or leader).** Scaffolding can be used as needed. Allow and promote "teacher talk" and be sure to end with an area of focus or clear set of action steps. Facilitate the conversation using:

- The Teacher Self-Reflection Guide (PDF)
- PVAAS teacher-specific reporting
- Local assessment data
- Other types of data – discipline data, perceptual survey data, etc.
- The Digging Deeper guides to collaborate on potential variables/factors (CIAO)

Reflect on the Conversation

As you reflect on your discussions with teachers, you may want to ask yourself some questions to grow your skills and confidence in these discussions. These may include:

- Did you talk WITH the teacher, NOT AT the teacher?
- Did you guide discovery and reflection?
- Did you have adequate data to talk about?
- Were you able to fully analyze the data before the conference?
- Did you have questions ready to discuss?
- Was the teacher less open to feedback or constructive comments?
- Was the teacher less reflective about their professional practice?
- Did the conference end with an action plan or next steps?
- What did you want the teacher to walk away with?
- What did YOU own as the principal?
- What did the TEACHER own?
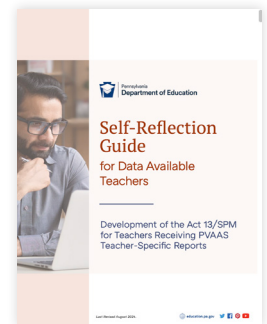
Self-Reflection Guide for Data Available Teachers (PDF) >

https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/usingpvaas/teacher-selfreflectionguide_data-available.pdf
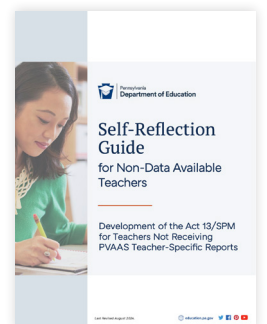
Self-Reflection Guide for Non-Data Available Teachers (PDF) >

https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/usingpvaas/teacherselfreflectionguide_nondataavailable.pdf

For more on this topic:

Using PVAAS as a School Leader
https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/instruction/elementary-and-secondary-education/assessment-and-accountability/pvaas/using-pvaas/school-leader.html

Use the accordion drop-down for "Enhance and Support Professional Practice: Teachers"