

## Texas Classroom Teachers Association



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**TCTA's T-TESS Video Tools****The Observation Cycle: Pre-Conference; Observation; Post-Conference  
PART 4: Observation II****Notes**

*The links in this background information take the reader to the state's T-TESS website: Teach for Texas, [www.teachfortexas.org](http://www.teachfortexas.org). Teach for Texas resources include training manuals, guidebooks, rubrics, videos, templates, documents, subject matter modules, and other resources that explain the components of the T-TESS process. This information is not part of the Commissioner's adopted rules that are enforceable by law. This information represents TEA's explanations of how the new appraisal system should work and TCTA's impressions about the new appraisal system.*

*This background material does not constitute legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship. TCTA provides this for information purposes only. TCTA members with questions about this information may call the TCTA Legal Department at 888-879-8282 to speak with a staff attorney.*

**For more on T-TESS, go to [www.tcta.org/t-tess](http://www.tcta.org/t-tess)**

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**Expanded Transcript**

I'm Dohn Larson, Director of Legal Services for Texas Classroom Teachers Association.

Welcome to this TCTA T-TESS video tool.

Today, the TCTA Legal Department continues a series on the observation cycle: pre-conference, observation, post-conference, with a multi-part look at T-TESS observations. We will post a transcript on [www.tcta.org](http://www.tcta.org).

**Who Can Appraise Teachers?**

In a departure from PDAS, the rules allow more district personnel to serve as appraisers. The rules do not lend themselves to brief explanations. TCTA members with questions about appraiser qualifications and who can observe teachers may contact the legal department at 888.879.8282.

**Rubric**

What a difference an appraisal system makes. Four T-TESS domains instead of eight in PDAS, but five new performance levels and 271 descriptors.

I have talked to some teachers whose principals spent two in-service days going through the rubric carefully. Others have not had the same opportunity.

Starting on the right of the rubric, the descriptors for Improvement Needed describe teacher-centered activities of low quality. On the far left, the descriptors for Distinguished identify student-centered activities of high, aspirational quality. In the transition from Improvement Needed to Distinguished, from teacher-centered to student-centered activities, Proficient, in the middle, represents “Rock Solid” performance.

Descriptors, all 271 of them counting sub-descriptors, represent a substantial departure from PDAS. T-TESS uses descriptors qualitatively.

“The rubric clearly differentiates between teaching practices and embeds feedback within each dimension and descriptor. With the rubric, teachers have an opportunity to reflect as they plan and deliver instruction.” T-TESS “Implementation Guide,” page 17. [https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource\\_Files/Guides/T-TESS\\_Implementation\\_Guidebook.pdf](https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Guides/T-TESS_Implementation_Guidebook.pdf)

During T-TESS training, it should be clear that Distinguished and Accomplished represent aspirational standards. While Proficient represents “rock solid” performance, the “Teacher Handbook” uses Accomplished descriptors to explain the T-TESS rubric. That’s an important point to note: teachers aspire to reach Accomplished and Distinguished levels; Proficient represents “Rock Solid” performance.

### **One Way to Simplify the Rubric**

The training appraisers received simplifies the rubric. Appraisers learned to anchor the analysis of the lesson in proficient (46 descriptors in Domain I-III) and see if evidence moved the analysis to the left or to the right.

### **Is Developing Bad?**

I don’t think so for several reasons.

First, if, as Teach for Texas states, Proficient in T-TESS equates to the highest possible PDAS rating, exceeds expectations (“T-TESS Implementation Guidebook,” page 30), then the state is telling many excellent teachers who received proficient ratings that they no longer meet the standards of proficiency. We do not think that changing an appraisal system means that a lot of excellent teachers suddenly turned bad.

(“Exceeds Expectations in PDAS are now represented in the Proficient level in T-TESS with two higher performance levels, Accomplished and Distinguished, added for growth and aspiration.” T-TESS “Implementation Guidebook,” page 30.)

Second, TEA makes the point that no particular performance level on the new rubric provides a reason to conclude that a teacher is bad.

“T-TESS is a developmental process, and it will be successful on one campus and unsuccessful on another based on culture alone. It works best when a campus’s approach reinforces one of the common T-TESS phrases, “It’s okay to be where you are; it’s not okay to stay there.” TEA, “T-TESS TIPS,” August 2016.

Third, according to TEA, a straight line from observation to nonrenewal does not exist; i.e., that T-TESS does not exist to justify firing a teacher. It’s a growth process, not a sledgehammer.

Finally, TEA does not describe Developing as an area of deficiency. 19 TAC § 150.1003(l), the Commissioner’s rule for less-than-annual appraisal says:

“A teacher may receive a full appraisal less frequently if the teacher agrees in writing and the teacher's most recent full appraisal resulted in the teacher receiving summative ratings of at least proficient on nine of the sixteen dimensions identified in §150.1002(a) of this title and did not identify any area of deficiency, defined as a rating of Improvement Needed or its equivalent, on any of the sixteen dimensions.”  
<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter150/ch150aa.html>

Until next time, I’m Dohn Larson. Thank you for watching this TCTA T-TESS video tool.