For the last two weeks, I have shared some of the impacts on schools as we change standards in our state. Basically, standards tell schools what is to be expected as the end product. Then, schools go out and write curriculum to set a course toward that end, and we write assessments to monitor that progress along the way.

So as you see, changing standards eventually impacts how teachers plan lessons for any given day. Even though you are likely not a teacher, it isn’t a big stretch to see that changing standards will take time and energy from the teachers to implement change successfully.

While all of this work is going on, there is another big change. Schools across the state are implementing another new law, Educator Effectiveness, also known as Senate Bill 191. SB 191 is bringing about some big changes in teacher evaluations and teacher contract law.

We used to evaluate teachers by what they do in the classroom through observations of the teacher’s actions. Under the new law, these evaluations count for only half of the evaluation. The other half of the evaluation will be based on the results of student test scores, which is a significant change.

Under the new law, teachers can lose their tenure status. If a teacher is not getting student achievement results for two years in a row, he or she can lose protections of employment under tenure. Getting tenure is no longer automatic.

In the old system, if a teacher worked in a district for three years and you hired them back, they received their tenure status automatically. Under the new law, a teacher may work for a district for five years and still not have performed to the level necessary to earn the tenure.

Of course there is much more to this law, but those are the primary highlights. As you read how much the new Educator Effectiveness law is changing, I’m sure it is no surprise that teachers across the state are concerned, watching closely and of course getting involved in developing policies and practices to be sure that this new evaluation system is fair and can be successful.

Holyoke teachers are no exception.

Holyoke has a teacher-led Leadership Team that is charged with helping to refine policy and procedures related to evaluation and employment decisions for the district. This Leadership Team has attended trainings, reviewed materials and worked together all year to better understand the law and to make suggestions as to the best way to implement the requirements here in Holyoke.

To this point, the Holyoke teachers have embraced the accountability and have been working together to find positive solutions that focus on student achievement results, hold teachers accountable and at the same time support teachers in their development.

Just like changes to standards and assessment, this change is also positive. It is just one more ball in the air to juggle, or like I stated before, it is the knife that we are juggling along with the chain saw, flaming torch and egg. The education landscape is changing for sure, and we hope for the better.

Holyoke Enterprise March 14, 2013