Reflective of a national trend that has states re-examining how they evaluate the performance of teachers, Ohio is moving ahead with a revamped system that relies less on student test scores and places a greater emphasis on professional development.

**SB 216** was signed into law this summer.

Legislative approval of the changes capped two years of work that began with a request from the state superintendent of public instruction. In the Buckeye State, such reviews are handled by the Educator Standards Board, a mix of teachers, school administrators, legislators and higher-education leaders established by the General Assembly 14 years ago.

The legislature, in turn, incorporated the board’s proposed recommendations into SB 216. Among the changes is the elimination of a state requirement that 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation be based on student academic growth.

“That growth data is still important, but we wanted to take a more holistic approach,” says Julia Simmerer, senior executive director of the Center for the Teaching Profession at the Ohio Department of Education. Instead of being a stand-alone criterion for teacher evaluations, student growth will be incorporated into other components of a teacher’s evaluation. Every teacher, too, must receive an individualized professional growth plan based on the evaluation.

As in many states, Ohio’s evaluation of teachers has received considerable legislative attention over the past decade and a half. Under the Obama administration, states were pushed (via a mix of federal grants and waivers) to make data on student academic growth a significant part of teacher evaluations. The result: Between 2009 and 2015, the number of states using measures of student growth in their evaluation systems jumped from 15 to 43, according to the Education Commission of the States.

But more recently, with enactment of the U.S. Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015, these federal incentives and mandates are gone.

Kaitlin Pennington, a senior analyst with Bellwether Education Partners, says it makes sense for states to take a fresh look at their evaluation systems for teachers. But she adds that student growth should still be recognized in state policy as an important indicator of a teacher’s performance.

“The way we talk about teacher effectiveness has probably changed forever,” she says. “We know the power of teachers to influence student achievement.”
new ohio law will change how teacher performance evaluated