Research Brief

Teacher Evaluation

Questions: What are some guidelines for implementing an effective teacher evaluation system?
How can technology support a principal's work evaluating teachers?

In a Nutshell

Every school district has policies and procedures for evaluating teachers that are shaped by state law and local collective bargaining agreements. As a result of No Child Left Behind and other accountability legislation many states modified requirements about the frequency of evaluation and now require the use of student achievement data as one measure of effectiveness. The research is clear that effective evaluation systems are based on a mutually agreed upon model of good teaching. Effective systems include both a formative and summative component and provide for self-assessment and reflection. The most effective models reflect a culture of collaboration and commit to continued professional growth. They use multiple measures and recognize that no single visit to a classroom can provide a comprehensive understanding of a teacher's knowledge and skill.

In recent years principals have begun to use mobile technology such as iPads and laptops and software designed purposively to record data gathered during classroom visits. Many different vendors provide such software, some tailored to the individual needs of school districts.

Summary of Findings:
The No Child Left Behind emphasis on teacher quality and its relationship to student achievement has made teacher evaluation an area of increased concern for today's high school principal. Numerous problems associated with the evaluation of teachers have been cited in the literature, including lack of agreement on what constitutes good teaching, an emphasis on accountability rather than improved performance, limited feedback, and low benefit to teachers as a means for improving instruction. In response, efforts have been made to better understand the characteristics of effective teacher evaluation systems and improve current practice.

A review of the literature on teacher evaluation (Bradshaw & Joyner, 2002) identified criteria that can be used to develop more effective evaluation systems. These criteria included things like linking evaluation to school goals, gathering and using data on teacher performance, establishing feedback mechanisms, and including ways to meaningfully involve teachers in the process. Efforts to improve the technical quality of evaluation systems over the past two decades have not produced evidence of improved teaching and increased student achievement. Thus, newer thinking treats teacher evaluation as an organizational problem that includes improving school climate, having the principal become an instructional leader, and building links between school improvement, professional development, teacher evaluation and student learning.

Effective Evaluation Systems

The following guidelines for developing effective evaluation systems are synthesized from the literature.

- Start by identifying a common framework or model that defines good teaching. Involve teachers to ensure understanding and acceptance of the framework and standards for performance. Research conducted in Cincinnati, Baltimore, and Miami-Dade County school districts concluded that selecting a teacher competency model was the most important step in the process.

- Decide if the purpose will be to improve practice (formative evaluation), make decisions about retention, advancement, and dismissal (summative evaluation), or both. Effective evaluation systems align methods and procedures with the purpose of the evaluation and may address accountability and development in different ways.

- Utilize multiple and variable sources of data on teacher performance. Researchers conclude that principal reports of teacher performance based on 1-2 classroom visits using a rating form or anecdotal record are often inaccurate and unreliable. Walk-through techniques can produce more useful and valid data because they sample classroom behavior more reliably over time and are less intrusive to ongoing instruction. Effective evaluation systems use multiple and variable data such as lesson plans, samples of student work, assessment results, and portfolios, in addition to data from direct observation in classrooms.

- Determine how to meet the leadership responsibilities associated with effective teacher evaluation systems. Research shows that effective educational leaders play a strong, positive role in the evaluation process, collaborate with teachers, provide useful feedback, and facilitate teacher reflection on their work. Studies focused on teacher perceptions of evaluation found that effective feedback was the most important contributor to changes in teaching behavior. Feedback is particularly challenging at the secondary level because subject matter expertise is so critical. High school principals should consider a peer subject-matter component as part of teacher evaluation.

- Assess school culture and climate to ensure that the evaluation environment is supportive of ongoing professional learning. The literature cites school cultures that focus on teaching and learning for all students, collaboration among teachers, and teacher reflective practice as characteristics of supportive evaluation environments.

Characteristics of Effective Teacher Evaluation Systems

- Place the teacher at the center of the process
- Incorporate multiple data sources
- Reflect multiple observations and interactions with the teacher
- Incorporate discussion of student achievement data
- Promote teacher reflection and analysis
- Value the teacher's thinking about their teaching and their professional growth
- Tailor the process to fit the individual teacher and their needs while meeting all legal and contractual obligations.

Adapted from: Williamson & Blackburn (2009). *The Principalship from A to Z* and Peterson & Peterson (2005). *Effective Teacher Evaluation: A Guide for Principals*.

The Effective Supervisor

Principals are responsible for creating a climate where professional learning and continued professional growth are central to the work of every teacher. Danielson and McGreal (2000) identified five factors that contribute to this climate of professional learning. They include the following:

Factor	What it Looks Like
Reflection on Practice	• Structured reflection as part of evaluation system • Open-ended responses as part of assessment of all activities
Collaboration	• Team, content and grade-level meetings focused on professional work • Looking at student work is part of inquiry among teachers
Self-assessment and Self-directed Inquiry	• Presence of a protocol for self-assessment of teaching • Teachers asked to identify areas for continued professional study and growth • Evaluation system includes self-assessment component
Community of Learners	• Teacher study groups engage in professional learning • Opportunity for peer observation and feedback on teaching • Critical friends program designed and implemented
Formative Assessment	• Feedback includes specific advice about strengthening practice • Discussion is not judgmental but focused on continued professional growth

Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2004) identified six factors that characterize effective evaluation systems. These factors recognize that there are significant differences between a novice teacher in the first year of his/her career and a veteran teacher who has been recognized for his or her skilled instruction.

The Effective Supervisor . . .

• Understands that teachers are adults and respond well to the principles of adult learning;
• Recognizes that all teachers are not at the same stage of their career and should not be treated alike;
• Supports the needs of teachers at different stages of their career cycle;
• Helps teachers to understand and learn from their teaching and from career events;
• Accommodates the varied roles of teachers;
• Considers the socio-cultural context of teaching;
• Is empowering and motivating;

Adapted from: Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon (2004). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Principal's Use of Technology in Teacher Evaluation
As technology has become more mobile principals have increasingly turned to iPads, iPhones, iPod Touch and laptops for gathering data during classroom observations and walkthroughs, for organizing the data and for generating reports about the observations.

Several companies have developed software that can be used for these tasks. Many of the companies provide customized software that matches your district's evaluation system, rubrics and forms. Some even provide an "app" for their software. You can access many of the companies selling this software by conducting an online search for "Teacher Evaluation Software" or "Mobile Teacher Evaluation Software." A site that discusses many of the software tools is eHow.com (http://www.ehow.com/info_7903973_software-teacher-evaluations.html). This author has not evaluated any of the software and does not make a recommendation regarding purchase and use.

McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning), a non-profit education research organization, in collaboration with the North Carolina State Board of Education and the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission (http://www.mcrel.org/topics/TeacherPreparation/products/386/) developed one software system. Their system provides a valid and reliable online system aligned with nationally accepted professional teaching standards.

Online Resources:

- **Teacher Evaluation: New Directions and Practices**
  This website provides an array of resources, including an overview of practices to improve the evaluation role of principals, forms and procedures for using multiple data sources in teacher evaluation, guiding principles, essays, and a bibliography of teacher evaluation articles, books and documents.
  http://www.teacherevaluation.net/

- **Answers.com™ Overview of Teacher Evaluation**
  Access to a textbook-like description of the history, goals, trends, issues, and controversies related to teacher evaluation.
  http://www.answers.com/topic/overview-of-teacher-evaluation

- **Research on Summative Teacher Evaluation**
  This report from the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) provides an overview of the research on summative teacher evaluation in several states. It provides a synopsis of the findings and a table with links to additional information.
  http://www.secc.sedl.org/orc/rr/secc_rr_00052.pdf

- **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**
  The NBPTS home page provides links to numerous resources including descriptions of the teaching standards and assessment processes used to certify teachers in various instructional areas, and access to an overview of research findings related to the National Board Certification process.
  http://www.nbpts.org/

- **A Blueprint for Teacher Evaluation**
  This ASCD site provides public access to chapter 3 from the Danielson and McGreal book titled Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice. The blueprint includes a general discussion of exemplary practice, the conditions that lead to good practice, and thoughts about the nature of professional learning. Charlotte Danielson's framework for professional practice is currently part of many teacher evaluation systems.
  http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.chapter/menuitem.83f4b2b5537730a98d7ea23161a001ca/?chapterMgmtId=def564597dcaff00VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD

- **Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development**
  Summary of a research study that outlines some of the reasons teacher evaluations may present an inaccurate view of performance. The findings reveal potential challenges faced by high school principals attempting to link evaluation practices with improved teacher learning.
  http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/news/coverStories/teacher_eval_and_prof_dev.php

- **New Directions in Teacher Evaluation**
  This article details a shift over the past decade from evaluation systems that focus on accountability to approaches that integrate teacher accountability with professional growth.
  http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED429052&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED429052

- **Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems That Support Professional Growth**
  This publication details the differences between evaluation systems designed for teacher growth and those that focus on accountability, examines how to develop a formative system, and provides examples.
  http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED367662

- **Using the Classroom Walk-Through as an Instructional Leadership Strategy**
  The essential elements of an effective classroom walk-through as a tool for instructional supervision are described in this brief article.
  http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Feb07.pdf

- **Evaluations That Ensure Growth: Teacher Portfolios**
  This article describes the research and theory behind teaching portfolios, outlines how to select a model for use, and how to implement portfolios as part of a teacher evaluation system. Available to NASSP members only – login and enter "portfolios" as the search item.
  http://www.principals.org

- **Standards-Based Teacher Evaluation as a Foundation for Knowledge and Skill-Based Pay**
  A policy brief that describes research findings on links between teacher evaluations and student achievement, teacher and administrator reactions to the evaluation systems, and the impact on teacher practice. Guidelines are provided for designing and using a standards-based teacher evaluation system as the basis for teacher pay.
  www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED493116

http://www.educationpartnerships.org/

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