

Teacher Recognition:

An Exercise in Authentic Professional Development



BY SHELLEY H. BOCK

Teacher evaluation can bring about feelings of angst for the teacher being evaluated as well as the administrator conducting it. The reason for these feelings may be fear of failure on the part of the teacher and fear of expertise in the skill of evaluation on the part of the administrator. Processes or instruments for evaluating teachers are often criticized for lacking relevance and value regarding the use of results to improve teachers' instruction and the overall program quality. After all, improvement of practice should be the intended outcome of teacher evaluation.

In career and technical education (CTE), teacher evaluation is unique. Teachers are evaluated not only on the quality of their instructional practices but also on the Perkins Act indicators that are directly tied to the funding stream supporting their programs. A way to conduct effective teacher evaluation in CTE is needed to mentor new and veteran teachers to success.

need for a systematic way to identify those secondary CTE teachers who are demonstrating high-quality practices that show positive results. The establishment of the Exemplary Teaching Program (ETP), a competitive process for evaluation, was developed to recognize teachers demonstrating standards-based exemplary practices worthy of replication. Modeled after the original exemplary teacher recognition program established by the former National Center for Career and Technical Education, this award program provides a structured process for demonstrating exemplary teaching that is aligned to customized standards of practice. The basics of the program can be used by anyone to develop a relevant, statewide evaluation program for CTE teachers.

Getting Started

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) contracted with the Research and Curriculum Unit at Mississippi State University to manage the ETP project. An advisory committee, which included a



- Identify exemplary best practices for replication.
- Increase visibility of programs and exemplary practices.
- Provide a statewide network for teachers who need support to reach exemplary status.

The big task was then to examine the original national program for ideas and customize it for Mississippi's CTE teachers. The committee determined a framework of 15 ETP standards clustered around the following three areas of instruction:

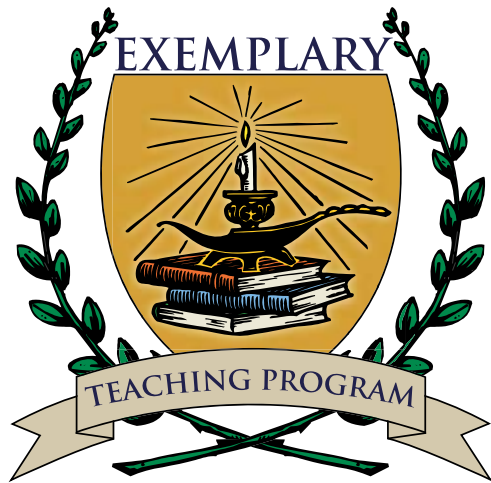
- Program quality
- Educational significance
- Evidence of effectiveness and success

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In the field of education, measuring the quality of teaching has reached a level of critical concern not only in K-12 academic education but also in the field of CTE. The state of Mississippi recognized a

collaborative range of CTE professionals, was established. Vision and mission statements were adopted for the ETP along with goals to reach the intended outcomes. Three basic ETP goals were established:

Because the program is competitive, the committee established basic eligibility requirements and an application process for teachers to follow. Minimum guidelines for participating include the following:



- Minimum of three years of teaching experience
- A standard educator license
- Currently teaching a secondary CTE course/program

Additionally, teachers must complete a dossier including a lengthy application with many open-ended responses, letters of support, and documentation that they meet the eligibility requirements. Those

teachers accepted into the rigorous, eight-month ETP become referred to as ETP candidates and compete for exemplary status and a one-time, state-funded equipment allocation to enhance their classroom. ETP winners also receive public recognition at the annual Mississippi ACTE conference and at a state board of education meeting. All candidates who achieve a minimum of promising status and complete 100 percent of the program receive five continuing education units.

Program Components

The advisory committee determined the menu of components required to effectively evaluate candidates in the program. ETP includes a blended approach to professional development; that is, face-to-face as well as online learning opportunities are provided. The ETP components include the following:

- Application process
- Kick-off orientation
- Portfolio development
- Weekly online discussions

- Desk review of portfolio
- Site visit evaluations

Authentic Professional Development

Described by one ETP winner as an intensive process, the ETP is not just a typical recognition program; it is an exercise in authentic professional development. Self-assessment can be a powerful tool in personal and professional growth and can possibly help alleviate the fear associated with performance evaluations. The components of the ETP provide the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own professional practice as well as join a learning community of fellow ETP candidates to learn more about themselves as practitioners. A coach guides the group of candidates through the whole process to mentor them to success.

The candidates' journey begins with an orientation to the program in a face-to-face training venue. Prior to the orientation, candidates are required to complete a series of pre-work activities to prepare for engagement in the program. The coach provides training and all of the tools necessary for candidates to

experience a level of success. Candidates meet each other and begin fostering a learning community that will continue online throughout the eight-month process.

The Portfolio

The portfolio component is used for evaluation in the desk review. It includes not only a collection of artifacts but also an extensive, technically written narrative from the candidate explaining instructional and professional activities that demonstrate alignment to the ETP stan-

ditionment in the very beginning to ensure retention in the program.

The Community of Learners

The ETP coach facilitates the community of learners online using a course site in Blackboard Learning Systems. All resources needed by the candidates are archived on the site. The online discussion tool is used to manage weekly discussions focused on topics related to each individual ETP standard. These weekly discussions help candidates to reflect on their own practices and springboard them

at this point. The coach helps to calm any of those "old fears" about teacher evaluation. Finally, those candidates with a combined minimum score from the portfolio and the site visit are awarded exemplary status.

Hard Work Pays Off

Getting the program started takes a considerable amount of marketing strategy. Eligible teachers need to be recruited via Web sites, listservs, brochures and informational presentations at conferences and professional meetings. Buy-in from

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dards. Artifacts included in the portfolio must provide clear evidence supporting the standards included in the narrative. In an effort to standardize the desk review process, the coach provides style guidelines for each part of the portfolio to which candidates must adhere. Candidates are provided the official evaluation rubric the scoring team uses for the portfolio so that they may self-evaluate their work. As a self-reflective tool, the portfolio provides a way for candidates to examine what they teach, why they teach it, the way they teach it, and if the intended outcomes are being achieved.

One candidate commented, "I am constantly analyzing myself, but I've never engaged in something so all-encompassing before." The portfolio process does take a considerable amount of time for the candidate, and they receive coaching and support through the process; however, it is important for them to understand the personal time com-

into writing the narrative pieces required in the portfolio. To earn the continuing education units for the program, candidates must follow the participation guidelines for the weekly online discussions. One ETP winner described the weekly online discussions as "a wonderful way to capture the standards a piece at a time" to help build the portfolio progressively over the eight-month period.

Site Visits

For those candidates who achieve a minimum score on the portfolio component, a site visit is awarded. The scoring team visits the candidates in their teaching and learning setting to observe firsthand whether or not the candidate is meeting ETP standards in the classroom. Again as part of the coaching process, candidates are provided the official site visit rubric in advance to self-evaluate prior to the scoring team's evaluation. The coaching aspect of the program is really critical

building-level administrators who will support teachers in the process is critical. Those who have engaged in the program have all said the biggest reason they did it was for "professionalism," meaning their own professional growth—not the monetary award. One ETP winner said, "It [participation] gave me the opportunity to analyze what I do and make improvements to better serve my students." That statement summarizes the ultimate goal of professional development. **i**

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