

Meaningful Teacher Evaluation

In A Nutshell

For years the assumption has been that formal evaluation of teachers will positively impact teaching and student learning. What's become clear in recent years is that rather than promoting professional learning, many evaluation systems inhibit the significant discussions about student learning that need to occur (Marzano & Toth, 2013; Marshall, 2013).

No Child Left Behind and other accountability legislation mandated more prescriptive evaluation procedures including the frequency of evaluation and the use of student achievement data as a measure of effectiveness. The research is clear that the most effective evaluation systems are based on a mutually agreed upon model of good teaching. They 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 (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Marshall, 2013).

This brief will not debate the merits of individual evaluation systems but will instead focus on how the principal can assure a focus on professional growth and improved teaching while implementing a mandated evaluation system.

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 emphasis for principals.

The most effective evaluation systems explicitly link evaluation to school goals, gather and use data from multiple sources, establish feedback mechanisms, and include 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 nor increased student achievement. But when evaluation includes meaningful feedback, is linked to opportunities for professional growth and encourages teacher collaboration there is evidence for improved teaching and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Effective Evaluation Systems

Most states adopted multiple evaluation models for use by districts. The most common models are those developed by Charlotte Danielson, (Danielson, 2013), Robert Marzano (Marzano & Toth, 2013), Kim Marshall (Marshall, 2013) and the Center for Educational Leadership (5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, Univ. of Washington, 2013). This brief will not examine those systems but rather focus on how the evaluation process, regardless of the model used in your district, can be both collaborative and promote professional growth.

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Regardless of the system you use there are five steps leaders can take to assure the evaluation system they use is meaningful for teachers.

- Assure that teachers and others involved in the process understand the adopted model, performance expectations, and the organizational procedures that will be implemented (frequency of observation, type of observation, method for feedback, formative vs. summative process).
- Be clear about the purpose. Is it to improve practice (formative evaluation) or to 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 address accountability and development in different ways.
- Gather and use multiple and variable sources of data on teacher performance. 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 may produce more useful and valid data because they sample classroom behavior more reliably over time and are less intrusive to ongoing instruction. The most effective systems use varied data such as lesson plans, samples of student work, assessment results, and portfolios, in addition to data from direct observation in classrooms.
- Plan to play a strong, positive role in the evaluation process, to collaborate with teachers, and provide useful feedback while facilitating teacher reflection on their work. It is clear that effective feedback is the most important contributor to change in teaching behavior. Maximize the time you spend on this supervisory role.
- Assess school culture and climate of your school to ensure it is supportive of ongoing professional learning. It is clear that school cultures that focus on teaching and learning for all students, collaboration among teachers, and teacher reflective practice as the most supportive evaluation environments.

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

Effective Supervision

Effective supervisors recognize the importance of nurturing a school culture supportive of professional learning. They understand 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. They are also know that the way their evaluation process is implemented can either promote or inhibit professional learning in their school.

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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;
- Is empowering and motivating;

Adapted from: Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon (2013). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach* (9th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Principals are responsible for creating a climate where professional learning and continued professional growth are valued and 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured reflection is included as part of evaluation system • Open-ended responses are provided as part of assessment of all activities
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team, content and grade-level meetings focus on professional work • Looking at student work is part of teacher inquiry and professional learning
Self-assessment and Self-directed Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A protocol for self-assessment of teaching is present and used • Teachers are asked to identify areas for continued professional study and growth • Your valuation system includes a self-assessment component
Community of Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher study groups engage in professional learning • Opportunity for peer observation and feedback on teaching are available • Programs like a critical friends project are designed and implemented
Formative Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback to teachers includes specific advice about strengthening practice • Discussion is not judgmental but focused on continued professional growth

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A Meaningful Evaluation Process

One of the most prominent supervisory models is the clinical supervision model first used in the 1960's. A variation is used in many districts. The process is built on the premise that teachers are thoughtful and can analyze and reflect on their own learning. It includes a significant reflective component and encourages teachers to become active partners in the diagnosing their learning and identifying opportunities for improvement (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013).

Phase 1 - Pre-Observation or Planning

During this phase the teacher and administrator meet, share information about the class to be observed, the lesson to be taught, and identify a focus for the observation. Teachers value the opportunity to talk about their work and the planning conference helps to build trust and lay the foundation for further discussion about the lesson and the teacher's instruction later in the process.

Making the Conference a Success

- Meet at a mutually agreed-upon time and location
- Presume positive intentions
- Sit around a table or in a way to promote conversation; avoid using your desk
- Ask clarifying questions to understand the context of this individual classroom (e.g., students, prior lessons, where the lesson fits in the curriculum)
- Avoid distractions by putting cell phones and other calls on hold
- Listen attentively and authentically; use reflective listening practices to indicate understanding
- Summarize and agree on schedule for the observation

Discussion Prompts

You'll want to use open-ended questions and prompts to set a positive tone for the conference. Here are some suggested prompts.

- Thank you for meeting today to talk about my upcoming visit to your classroom. I want to use this meeting to plan the visit and to talk with you about your students and your lesson.
- I always enjoy the opportunity to visit classrooms. What sort of data might I collect during my visit that would be helpful to you?
- Tell me about your students. What is important for me to know about them and their learning?
- Talk with me about the curriculum for this class. What skills have the students been working on? How is this lesson connected to prior learning?

NOTE: Discussion prompts are just suggestions and are appropriately modified for each teacher.

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Phase 2 – The Observation

The principal gathers data during the observation phase. In many districts the length of the observation and the types of data may be proscribed. In addition to gathering any required data, the principal should look for data that helps the teacher reflect on areas identified during the planning conference. Regardless, the teacher should always know what data is being gathered and how it will be shared following the observation.

Following the observation the principal and teacher should agree on a time and location for the post-observation conference. The principal should begin to analyze the data and identify questions that will be used during the post-observation conference to elicit reflection by the teacher and guide the discussion of the lesson. This is important because the evidence is that teacher growth is most likely to occur following a reflective conversation about their teaching.

Making the Observation a Success

- Arrive at the agreed-upon time
- Ask the teacher where you might sit so that you don't distract from the lesson
- Focus on and gather data about the agreed upon items
- Gather sufficient data
- Avoid becoming distracted from the observation
- Remain for the agreed-upon time
- Thank the teacher for the opportunity to observe
- Shortly afterwards suggest a tentative time for the post-observation conference

Phase 3 - Post-Observation Conference

The most important part of an evaluation system is the post-observation conference where the teacher is an active participant in analyzing data, reflecting on their lesson and identifying ways to strengthen and enhance their teaching. Even the most skilled teachers value the opportunity to reflect and consider ways to grow professionally.

During the conference it is important to identify teaching strategies to affirm and continue, as well as those that should be modified. It is critical to reinforce effective teaching as well as develop instructional capacity.

Making the Conference a Success

- Meet at a mutually agreed-upon time and location
- Assure that you have scheduled adequate, uninterrupted time for a thoughtful and engaging discussion of the lesson
- Presume positive intentions
- Sit around a table or in a way to promote conversation; avoid using your desk
- Ask clarifying questions to understand the lesson and the teacher's thinking about the design and delivery of the lesson
- Listen attentively and authentically; use reflective listening practices to indicate understanding
- Summarize and identify appropriate next steps

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Discussion Prompts

You'll want to use open-ended questions and prompts to promote reflection during the post-observation conference. Here are some examples.

- Thank you for meeting with me today. I'd like to spend some time talking with you about the lesson.
- Let's talk about planning. When you plan a lesson, what are the things you consider in its design?
- What strategies do you use to ensure that each lesson is linked to students' prior learning?
- Describe the ways you monitor whether or not your students are learning what you are teaching.
- Occasionally, I've been in the middle of a lesson and I know it is not working the way I would like. When that happens to you, how do you adjust your teaching? What data or information do you use to guide adjustments?
- Talk with me about the strengths of this lesson. What would you describe as its strengths? What evidence do you have to support those strengths?
- Let's spend some time analyzing the lesson. How do you critique the lesson and how you implemented it?
- When you teach this lesson again, what adjustments might you make in its design?
- Let's think about next steps. What additional support may I provide for you and your teaching? During my next visit, what instructional area would you like me to focus on?

NOTE: Discussion prompts are just suggestions and are appropriately modified for each teacher. For example, the prompts might be quite different for a less experienced teacher or for one with performance concerns.

NOTE: The material on the supervisory model is adapted from *The Principalship from A to Z* (Williamson & Blackburn, 2009) and *One Teacher at a Time* (Williamson & Blackburn, *Principal Leadership*, 2009).

Summary

Successful principals recognize the importance of improving teaching. They value working with their teachers, both the most skilled and those in need, to think about, analyze and reflect on their practice. While teacher evaluation is often viewed as a burdensome administrative task, it can become an opportunity for professional learning and contribute to a culture focused on improvement.

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Resources

Teacher Evaluation Models

Danielson Framework for Teaching

<http://www.danielsongroup.org/article.aspx?page=frameworkforteaching>

Marzano Evaluation Model

<http://www.marzanocenter.com>

http://www.oregoned.org/images/pages/Marzano_White_Paper_on_role_of_Teacher_Evaluation_in_Student_Achievement.pdf

Marshall Model

<http://www.marshallmemo.com/about.php>

Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning

<http://www.k-12leadership.org/services/5-dimensions>

Online Resources:

Creating a Comprehensive System for Evaluating and Supporting Effective Teaching (2012) – Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education

This report by Linda Darling-Hammond discusses teacher evaluation systems and discusses seven successful approaches to teacher evaluation.

<http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/creating-comprehensive-system-evaluating-and-supporting-effective-teaching.pdf>

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/>

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://secc.sedl.org/resources/briefs/formative_assessment_core_content/Formative_Assessment.pdf

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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/publications/books/100219/chapters/A-Blueprint-for-Teacher-Evaluation.aspx>

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>

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Print Resources

- Danielson, C. (2013). *The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument*. Princeton, NJ: The Danielson Group.
- Danielson, C. & McGreal, T. (2000). *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). *Getting Teacher Evaluation Right: What Really Matters for Effectiveness and Improvement*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Glickman, C., Gordon, S. & Ross-Gordon, J. (2013). *Supervision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach* (9th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Marzano, R. & Toth, M. (2013). *Teacher Evaluation That Makes a Difference: A New Model for Teacher Growth and Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Marshall, K. (2013). *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation: How to Work Smart, Build Collaboration, and Close the Achievement Gap* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Peterson, K. & Peterson, C. (2005). *Effective Teacher Evaluation: A Guide for Principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Sullivan, S., & Glanz, J. (2013). *Supervision that Improves Teaching and Learning* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

This *Research into Practice* brief was prepared by Practical Leadership, LLC and authored by Ronald Williamson, Professor of Educational Leadership at Eastern Michigan University and Howard Johnston, Professor Secondary Education at the University of South Florida. This brief is prepared for use by principals and school staff in Oregon GEAR UP schools.

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