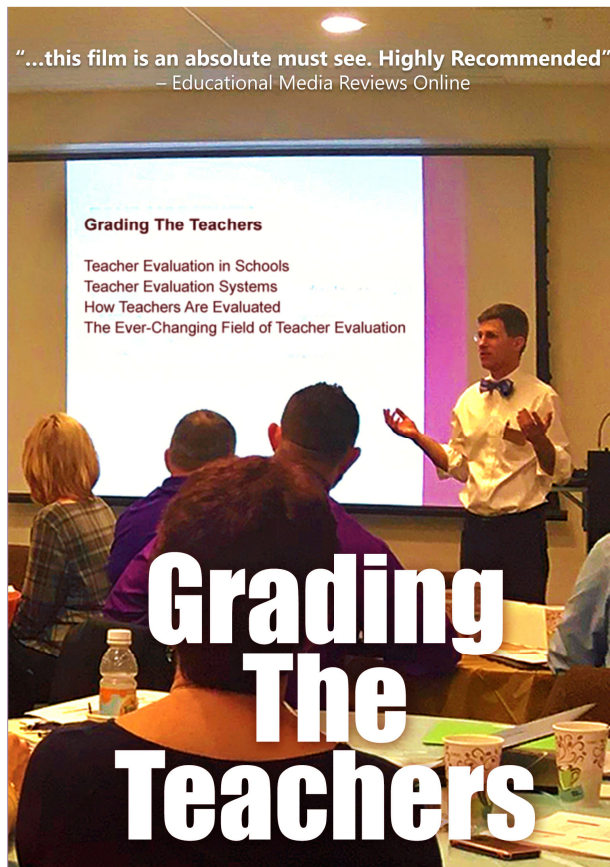




GRADING THE TEACHERS: AN EXPLORATION INTO TEACHER EVALUATION



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GRADING THE TEACHERS

RACE TO THE TOP

Race to the Top, is a \$4.35 billion contest rolled out in 2009 by the United States Department of Education created to encourage innovation and reforms in state and local district K-12 education.

It is widely viewed as the successor to No Child Left Behind. It is the keystone for Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, cosigned emphatically by President Barack Obama. States are awarded points for meeting policies, such as: adopting and implementing Common Core standards, easing charter schools restriction, low-performing school takeovers, creating a system for compiling and using data to inform policy-decisions and curriculum adoption, and compliance with Annual professional performance reviews for teachers and principals.

To ensure eligibility (and access to funding), many states have adopted value-added modeling as a form of evaluating teacher effectiveness. Some states had previously banned value-added modeling, but changed their laws to be eligible. Value-added modeling can be summarized as utilizing students comparative test scores to determine the effect the teacher has had on the quality of the students' learning experience.

Critics of this system argue that many of the factors contributing to student standardized test performance are beyond the control of individual educators. Some of those factors include outside tutoring, and the health of the child (mental, emotional, AND physical). Another argument against this method involves access to data over time. Therefore it becomes problematic to effectively evaluate Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers (as their students have very little previous test data), and young teachers.

Most districts adopting this form of teacher evaluation, are very clear that value-added methods account for a percentage of an educator's overall effectiveness. Involving teachers and other education professionals in the discussion of what makes teachers effective and how that effectiveness should be evaluated, The United States Department of Education is making an effort to engage teachers in an effort "to elevate and transform teaching and leading so that all of our students are prepared to meet the demands of the 21st century. As the demands of our world continue to expand, our students need educators who are well prepared, compensated, and treated as professionals.." (<http://www.ed.gov/teaching>)

More info:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value-added_modeling

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>

CURRENT EVALUATIONS

Teachers are currently evaluated annually, or bi-annually. This evaluation usually entails a classroom visit by that teacher's principal. The visits are not spontaneous, and the teacher has time to prepare a lesson that will virtually ensure favorable marks.

Common concerns about current teacher evaluations:

1. The evaluation takes into account but a single lesson, and possibly a few perfunctory classroom visits.
2. Teachers receive very little from this evaluation, as their tireless efforts are only perfunctorily acknowledged.

Many educators believe that the purpose of an effective evaluation system is to "inform, instruct, and improve teaching and learning; to provide educators with meaningful feedback on areas of strength and where improvement is needed; and to ensure fair and valid employment decisions."

(<http://www.cta.org/Issues-and-Action/Teacher-Quality/Teacher-Evaluation-Principles.aspx>)

Current evaluations fail to address the core of these concerns and assume teachers are evaluated with a focus on avoiding negative practices in a snapshot of time. Teachers more fully support a system of evaluation that shifts the focus on highlighting effective best practices over the course of the entire school year.

Relying on test data, or superficial and inconsistent classroom visits just fails to appreciate the planning, care, and craft that effective teachers are implementing in their classrooms on a daily basis. Forward-thinking teachers are just as, if not more, critical of current evaluations as the legislators attempting to implement value-added systems. And they see it as an opportunity to become involved in the process of creating holistic evaluations that honor the craft of teaching, while providing real data for growth as a professional.

More info:

<http://www.cta.org/Issues-and-Action/Teacher-Quality/Teacher-Evaluation-Principles.aspx>

NEW EVALUATIONS

Many educators assert that the purpose of an effective teacher evaluation system must focus on development to improve teaching and learning for all stakeholders. This can be achieved if the evaluations provide meaningful feedback on areas of strength and where improvement is needed. We also cannot ignore that, at the end of the day, the ultimate purpose of any employee evaluation is to provide for fair employment decisions.

Many argue evaluations must be conducted comprehensively and cannot rely on one criterion. A multi-faceted approach considers student achievement on state and district standardized tests/assessments, and teacher performance observed during classroom visits and through evidence-based evaluations as conducted by administrators. In all new teacher evaluation systems there is a focus on professional development, collaboration, and authentic opportunities to gauge teacher effectiveness: including peer reviews, portfolio reviews, consideration of

parent/student feedback, as well as classroom visits, observed lessons, and analysis of performance data on standardized tests.

- Peer Reviews: Colleagues can offer unique insight into an educator's ability to collaborate within the school community. Teachers are expected to be team players with the ability to contribute to the community, cooperatively plan, and be open-minded regarding the best practices of other teachers.
- Portfolio Reviews: This would provide authentic opportunities to evaluate a body of teacher work. It would effectively eliminate the one-off lesson observation approach, and allow administrators to assess effectiveness holistically. Many teachers feel that the inclusion of portfolios of student work are a key component to a fair, "evidence-based" evaluation process.
- Parent/Student Feedback: Teachers, as members of a learning community, must interact professionally with students and their parents, each also important community stakeholders. By considering feedback from these stakeholders, administrators can further assess the teachers ability to provide engaging, relevant instruction on a daily basis.
- Classroom Visits/Lesson Observations: These face-to-face opportunities to observe a professional at work are still an integral part of any evaluation system. Some argue visits should be less scripted and more authentic.
- Test Data: Analysis of standardized test performance (the value added method), would be considered as only a snapshot percentage of any given evaluation.

In this system, underperforming teachers would be given opportunities to improve through professional development and working with consulting teachers, mentors, and with the support of administration. If ineffectiveness persists, the decision to terminate employment would be considered.

Meanwhile, teachers who demonstrate effectiveness as instructors and developing and contributory community members would be renewed for the school year and left to implement their quality instruction unhindered.

Many districts are working to implement a student assessment to teacher observation model that highlights and reward best practices. Teacher's would be evaluated based on student achievement on standardized assessments (whether district, state, or both) and direct observation/consultation by administrators.

More info:

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

http://www.gesci.org/old/files/docman/Teacher_Professional_Development_Models.pdf

http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin224.shtml

OPPOSITION

With any new system, there are bound to be unforeseen consequences, and a healthy amount of detractors. Using test data in any capacity, while accepted by the Department of Education, still elicits a collective eye-roll from many educators. Even as a percentage of teacher evaluations, there exist inconsistencies and biases, not to mention some quirky and unbalanced point systems for determining effectiveness and informing employment decisions.

No matter how holistically administrations attempt to revamp teacher evaluations, there is systematic distrust at the inclusion of test data in determining a teachers overall effectiveness. Many teachers view their profession as a craft or an art, where the score a student receives on a test given on an assigned day in the life of a real child dealing with real life just doesn't add much to the discussion.

Los Angeles Unified School District, as well as other districts nationwide, have seen their teacher performance data published in major newspapers like the Los Angeles Times, essentially allowing parents to prejudge how well they will work with their child based solely on the results of single test.

These issues, along with faulty implementation of other aspects of new evaluation systems, have led to some hefty backlash to the entire process. This shift the focus even more acutely on involving all stakeholders when developing new evaluation systems.

More info:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/06/18/new-problems-with-new-yorks-teacher-evaluation-plan-found/>

<http://www.newsday.com/long-island/education/state-officials-admit-problems-with-new-teacher-ratings-1.7109812>

<http://www.uft.org/news-stories/evaluation-problems-worse-imagined-0>

ADMINISTRATION'S ROLE

The process of adopting new teacher evaluation models must be implemented with conviction and strength of purpose, teacher input/collaboration, and clarity. To overlook any of these facets of implementation would be to risk stakeholder (teacher) blowback in the form of resentment, disaffection, or all out revolt.

"In (Oaxacan teachers') view, universal systems for certification and evaluation are ill-suited for a region with numerous indigenous, rural, and poor people."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Common-Ground/2013/1007/How-to-break-the-cycle-of-massive-teacher-strikes-in-Mexico>

Proof of growth (as an educator, and in student achievement) is the overriding purpose of any

successful teacher evaluation model. These models must be fair and consistent and supported by all parties. Beginning with this goal, and involving all stakeholders in developing the best plan to achieve this goal, is integral to the success of the model.

Quality leadership and involvement by all affected parties makes implementing a system where it is more difficult to achieve qualitative proficiency possible. Often these more rigorous performance standards come with a promise of differentiated professional development. This allows for clarity of purpose, and assistance in meeting specific professional growth goals.

When the varied interests come together to collaborate in the best interest of the child (student), fears of this process being a "waste of time", or simply a hurdle for teachers to be able to "scheme the system", can be diminished. This also highlights the need for a new teacher evaluation process to be multi-faceted and dynamic.

Any new systemic change must be accompanied by trust. All participants in new teacher evaluation processes must be able to operate in good faith. This systemic trust is only gained by involving all stakeholders in the education community, and most meaningfully those most affected by these changes, teachers.

Administrators and the Districts must trust that teachers, when included, respected, and given the opportunity to contribute to the new system, have the ability and desire to change and improve.

Each individual stakeholder in the process of adopting a new teacher evaluation must trust that the process of adoption will be conducted with fairness, and be standardized. Administrators must work to understand the directive not only from the perspective of the teachers on the front line, but at a district level as well. Districts must also work to understand the perspectives of administrators and teachers by involving them in this process and valuing/relying on their input. Ultimately understanding that teachers need time and support to develop professionally.

More info:

http://hechingerreport.org/content/ga-with-deborah-gist-involving-teachers-in-evaluation-policy_7603/

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