
Improving Staff Evaluation Systems

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Evaluating staff is a critical component in an effective performance management system and should be connected to other areas of educator talent management and support. In particular, a rigorous approach to evaluation should be clearly connected to a district's system for providing professional development so that growth opportunities are well-aligned with teachers' and school leaders' areas of weakness (Milanowski, Heneman, & Kimball, 2009). Where evaluation systems are tied to compensation or other high-stakes outcomes, it is especially important that they be accurate, fair, linked to growth opportunities, and fully transparent.

Too often teacher evaluations are too lenient, fail to adequately differentiate between teachers at different levels (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009), or to differentiate among teachers based on specialized roles and specific contexts (Chait, 2009; Toch & Rothman, 2008). To be effective, teacher evaluation systems must be well understood by teachers and should result in the identification of genuine differences in performance (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Milanowski, Prince, & Koppich, 2007).

Implementing an effective evaluation system involves including individuals with significant, recent experience in the classroom as evaluators. Everyone involved in the evaluation process should undergo training in the use of the assessment instruments including the use of classroom observations, portfolio reviews, or whatever other methods are employed. In addition, evaluations should be conducted frequently, using multiple measures, in order to gain a comprehensive and accurate picture of a teacher's competencies. Those responsible for conducting the evaluation should provide immediate formative feedback. At the very minimum, all teachers should be evaluated annually, but more frequent evaluations should take place in cases where teachers are found to be under-performing (Mathers, Oliva, & Laine, 2008).

School leaders must also be evaluated. Their evaluations should be based on clear standards and objective criteria that are a matter of description and not conjecture. They should be honest, helping leaders to identify strengths as well as weaknesses. They should be reciprocal and empowering, providing school leaders with a chance to give feedback to the district and to shape the decisions that will improve their effectiveness (Reeves, 2009). For both teachers and school leaders, the evaluation system must be monitored for its perceived usefulness and to guide revisions to the evaluation process.

Action Principles

For District

1. Include multiple people in conducting evaluations. They should have experience in the classroom and should include individuals with expertise in the subject or grade level of the teacher being evaluated.
2. Provide high-quality training for those conducting evaluations.
3. Incorporate teacher self-reflection and personal goal-setting in the evaluation process.
4. Evaluate a variety of teacher skills and knowledge, using a variety of valid and reliable evaluation tools (for examples of such tools, see A practical guide to evaluating teacher effectiveness).
5. Require evaluators to provide timely, clear, and constructive feedback.
6. Link the evaluation process with the district's collective and individualized professional development programs.
7. Use the evaluation results to differentiate among educators when granting leadership opportunities and making other decisions (See performance-based incentives).
8. Differentiate among teachers at different stages in their careers, in specialized roles, or working with at-risk students and students with special needs. Consider teaching context when deciding upon which instruments to adopt and when determining how to use the results of the evaluation.

9. Develop a review process and communication plan to gauge teacher and administrator perceptions and concerns about the evaluation system and revise the system as necessary.
10. Standardize and document the evaluation process.
11. Evaluate the performance of school leaders in a similar manner.

References and Resources

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