

ClassroomLeadership

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Evaluating Educators

The Toledo Plan

Helping All Teachers Improve Their Practice

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The key factor in building a quality system is to place professional decisions in the hands of the teachers themselves.

I believed this statement when I was a high school history teacher; I continued to believe this statement when I was president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers (TFT), and I still believe it today.

New teachers who need professional development and veteran teachers who need professional renewal should get assistance from an experienced colleague.

In Toledo, this has been the norm since September 1981, when the Toledo Plan was approved and implemented.

Beginnings

I remember my first evaluation as a teacher. The principal didn't come into my classroom at all that first year. At the end of the second semester, I was called down to the office where the principal handed me a completed evaluation form: Satisfactory. "How did you know that I'm satisfactory?" I asked, curious to understand how he could complete an evaluation without ever having seen me teach. "Oh, ah, ah, the kids let me know," he responded. "I knew I didn't have to spend any time with you. You're doing a good job."

The incident stayed with me. I was certain that many other teachers probably had similar stories, and I found such laxity troubling. When I became head of the TFT, I was determined to turn the traditional approach to teacher evaluation on its ear. I wanted a program that provided professional development for teachers and by teachers—a program that would ensure that all teachers had a common understanding of the elements of good practice. Such a program, I was convinced, would help all teachers grow in their profession.

A New Approach

The Toledo Plan has two components: the intern program and the intervention program. Through the intern program, all newly hired teachers are paired with an experienced, expert teacher for one year. Through the intervention program, experienced teachers who are severely deficient in performance are given intensive peer assistance to bring their work to



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acceptable standards. This program, therefore, is aimed at those most in need of professional help—beginners in our system and those veteran teachers who are in trouble. For these individuals, the Toledo Plan delivers the finest professional help available from peers who are themselves excellent teachers.

The Intern Program

All teachers newly hired by Toledo Public Schools can be included in the Intern Program. Those who are designated as interns are assigned a consulting, mentor teacher for professional development and evaluation. The consulting teacher conducts a complete evaluation of the intern's progress and ultimate success (or lack of it) in meeting the school system's performance standards.

The evaluation process is one of ongoing goal-setting, classroom observations, and follow-up conferences. A consulting teacher may use any of a number of methods to assist the intern in meeting the goals they set together, such as demonstration lessons, videotaping, and observations of other teachers. Areas in which interns are evaluated include instructional strategies, classroom management, and knowledge of subject matter. An intern's disposition to learn good instructional practices is also evaluated.

The consulting teacher assigned to each intern has final responsibility for the evaluation of the intern. The consultant files evaluation reports twice a year; these reports are based largely on the intern's progress toward meeting specific goals. Toward the end of the year, the consulting teacher recommends to the Intern Board of Review whether to continue to employ a new teacher. This nine-member board, composed of five teachers and four administrators, can accept or reject the consulting teacher's recommendation. Six votes are required to reverse the consulting teacher's recommendation.

The Intervention Program

When a principal decides that a veteran teacher's performance is so unsatisfactory that improvement or termination is imperative, that teacher can be referred to the Intervention Program for assistance. Both the principal and the union building committee must agree that a teacher should be assigned to intervention. (Teachers can appeal the decision.) Once that's done, the teacher meets with his consultant.

The goal of intervention is to bring the teacher to a satisfactory level of teaching performance. There are no artificial time limits imposed, and the consulting teacher decides when intervention ends. At that time, the consultant files a status report with both school management and the union. Representation and due process rights and procedures exist for intervention teachers who are subject to termination.

It's important to point out that identifying a teacher for intervention is not synonymous with placing the teacher's job in jeopardy. The goal of the intervention program is to improve the performance of that teacher so that her job remains secure.

And this final note about intervention: It can and should be used for administrators as well as

for teachers. We do this in Toledo, and it works.

Teacher Evaluation That Works

One of the criticisms of the Toledo Plan is that it's more costly than the traditional approach to evaluation. Consulting teachers are released from their regular duties and paid more for taking on the challenge of mentoring others.

Still, as the old saying goes, you get what you pay for. New teachers who don't receive assistance are more likely to leave the profession. Poorly performing veteran teachers who don't receive some form of professional renewal either quit or they're fired. The truth is, the Toledo Plan strengthens teachers' performance and can help save careers.

Who benefits most? The students, of course. When you improve the quality of instruction and promote the professional growth of the teaching staff, student learning just has to improve.

Points to Ponder

The Toledo Plan is now a model for other schools and districts across the United States that are interested in establishing peer review programs. Lawrence offers the following advice for those just starting out.

Initially, there must be widespread support from teachers, the union, and the administration. The union must be strong and have the trust and confidence of its members, as well as a solid contract that firmly protects the rights of teachers. The administration must be willing to change the existing relational agreements, which means they must be willing to give up some power, authority, and responsibility to teachers.

Any peer assistance and evaluation program should have a detailed plan with procedures that clearly specify desired goals and outcomes. This plan should reflect the unique characteristics of the school or district.

It's important to stay focused on the big picture. Incompetence isn't the issue; establishing good standards and raising the level of everyone's ability to reach those standards is the issue. It's important, therefore, for your program to address both novice and experienced teachers.

And finally, administrators and teachers should remember that not all program outcomes can be quantified. The program changes the attitude of teachers about the job, about themselves, and about others. It really has a dramatic affect on the culture of the school.

Toledo Plan in 1981. Now retired, Lawrence serves as the assistant to the president of the TFT, and he can be reached via e-mail at DAllawrenc@aol.com. For information on the Toledo Plan, call the Toledo Public Schools at 419-729-8329 or the Toledo Federation of Teachers at 419-535-3013.

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