With the increase in teachers’ salaries has come a growing tendency to use standards of teacher rating. In an article in November’s magazine a board member in Glencoe pointed out the need for some means of recognizing teacher growth and effort. ASCD, throughout its history and at its 1947 meeting in Chicago, has taken the stand that teacher rating should not be a part of supervisory activity. However, the mere stand against teacher rating does not mean a total absence of any type of evaluation. In this article Mr. C. H. Pygman, superintendent of schools in Maywood, Illinois, describes a way in which one school system eliminated rating and tried a new plan.

IN ALMOST any form, rating and marks are somewhat obnoxious. Especially is this true for teachers, supervisors, and principals who are aware of all the complications involved in setting down, with any degree of objectivity, marks for pupils’ work. Therefore, when a similar plan is applied to an attempted evaluation of their own work, they are rightfully resentful. Recognizing the violation of principles of good human relations involved in a scheme of rating, the Maywood schools set out to do something about it.

We Discarded This

At one time various rating blanks containing as few as ten items or as many as forty were used in rating teachers. At rating time the principal and supervisor would fill out the blank in current use by marking the teacher 1, 2, 3 or 4 on the various items and arriving at a general average of the marks given, so that the teacher might be referred to as a "1" teacher, a "2" teacher or a "3" or "4" teacher; the implications, of course, were that "3" stood for average and applied perhaps to the majority, "2" meant above average, "1" denoted excellency and "4" below average. Often this rating was handed to the teacher with no opportunity for a conference—unless the teacher was aggressive enough to ask for one and to insist on knowing why the marks she had received were given. Many needless controversies, opposing opinions, a state of poor rapport between teacher and principal or teacher and supervisor were too often the result.

And Looked for Something New

So a committee began a study of this problem of teacher rating. A thorough study of many rating systems and much discussion of the subject ensued. Two conclusions finally were reached:—that it is desirable to have some method of evaluating teachers’ work in order to maintain a high standard for the teaching profession, and that the main objective of such an evaluation is to improve instruction through teacher
growth. The committee further stated that teachers realize that in the teaching profession there must be some way to eliminate those who are misfits and those who do very poor work. It also reported that most teachers are willing and anxious to improve their work. How to devise and implement an evaluation plan that would meet these needs and improve human relations was then considered. The result was the new and challenging pattern herewith presented.

How the New Plan Works

► Before the close of the first semester principals are to write (in triplicate) an evaluation letter to each teacher new to the system. This evaluation letter should be a frank evaluation of the teacher's work. It should contain acknowledgement of the teacher's strong points; recognition of extra-curricular work; praise for the things she has done for the boys and girls under her care, for the school, for the system as a whole; and constructive criticisms and suggestions.

► These letters are to be signed by the principal and sent to the superintendent to be read and signed by him. The letters will then be mailed from his office. One copy will be returned to the principal and one filed in the superintendent's office.

► The principal should invite and urge his teachers to come in for a conference on their evaluation letter. The letter in itself is not enough. A face-to-face discussion of mutual problems contributes much to the high quality of human relations necessary to cooperative effort.

► Since this letter is of major importance for teacher improvement, much time, thought, and consideration should be given to a fair evaluation of the teacher's work, to the constructive criticisms and suggestions, and to the manner in which they are expressed.

► Teachers are asked to keep in mind that their evaluation letters are confidential.

► Since our state provides for tenure status after a two year period of probation, all new teachers will receive an evaluation letter each year for the first two years. After she is employed on a tenure basis she may or may not receive such a letter.

► Whenever it is thought desirable the principal may give teachers who are on tenure an evaluation letter. Sometimes teachers ask for such an evaluation. At other times principals write a letter of commendation to teachers of many years of service expressing appreciation for their good work and splendid contributions to the profession. Sometimes, too, it is necessary to offer guidance and counsel to teachers on tenure whose work does not measure up to accepted standards. In other words, after the two year probation period the letter is not required but may be used.

Everyone Shares in Growth

This plan has been functioning now for several years and the results are gratifying. Not only has it contributed to growth on the part of teachers, but it has led principals to realize the need of working more closely with teachers in studying teaching procedures and curriculum content. To write such evaluation letters as are prescribed in this plan the principal must know his personnel and their individual prob-
lems. The principals have become leaders in the instructional field and coworkers of the teachers who feel that they can find in their principal a source of guidance and help. The many conferences preceding and following the evaluation letter are added helps in enabling the teacher to see that her principal and the supervisors are interested in her problems and are willing to help in solving them.

Every opportunity is given the teacher to know early in the school year problems in which she needs to work for improvement. If there is little growth she cannot say she "didn't know" or "wasn't told." It seems the fair and "sporting" thing to point out these deficiencies early enough to give the teacher an opportunity to overcome them rather than, as in the old plan, waiting until the end of the year and then give her a low rating mark which endangers the renewal of her contract.

Naturally this plan leads to the necessity of an adequate record system, for the principal cannot be expected to remember all the details of each teacher’s work. A convenient record of classroom observations and conferences is kept on 4 x 6-inch slips made out in duplicate. One is given to the teacher after the observation or conference and the principal keeps the original on file. When a supervisor visits a teacher these blanks are filled out in triplicate, one for the teacher, one for the principal, and one for the supervisor. Observations are usually followed by conferences, especially if pointed suggestions have been given, so that the principal and teacher may discuss and formulate together plans and procedures for solutions of problems.

The principal also has the help of the superintendent who carefully reads his letters. Sometimes the principal is advised to "tone down" a letter, to add certain criticisms and suggestions, to form his statements in a more positive way, or to rewrite the letter on a more professional basis.

There Is Disagreement

The majority of the teachers like the plan now in operation. There are a few who see no need for any kind of evaluation. Following are some teachers comments (pro and con) on the plan.

"Before rating letters served as an appraisal of the teacher's work, there was a strong tendency on the part of some experienced teachers to 'slide along on their reputation.' With the coming of rating letters, however, this attitude has disappeared for rating letters place the emphasis on increased professional growth and teaching skill on the part of the entire teaching staff. Then too, recognition is given for work well done. This recognition serves as a definite stimulus to the conscientious teacher."

"Constructive criticism in a letter is more desirable than a number rating. On the other hand, well-deserved praise does a great deal toward creating a happy teaching staff. If a teacher is doing her work well and knows she has the approval of her principal, it naturally creates a more spontaneous attitude toward her work."

"I think there is a certain amount of good in this letter, and I respect it as a busy, one-man's opinion."

"Best method employed as yet. To read an acknowledgment of one's good points is always pleasing, and if criticism or suggestion is necessary, it is most kindly given in letter form."

December 1947
“My reaction is that the rating letters are effective as a general survey, but there is a need for closer contact between the principal and teacher in actual classroom instruction.”

“It is generally simply a repetition of suggestions and criticisms which have appeared on the principal’s and supervisor’s visit slips, and which the teacher has already used as much as she sees possible. As a summary to be referred to by principal or superintendent, the rating letter may have some value.”

“A definite written personal statement of one’s weaknesses and strong points is far more valuable to a teacher than a number because the number immediately compares her with another teacher whose weaknesses and strong points may be absolutely different.”

“I would prefer some form that would be more definite and give the teacher a chance to see just what her weakest points are according to the supervisor’s point of view.”

“Personally, I go on day by day doing each day’s work in a manner that I think is acceptable, but it gives me a glow of satisfaction to receive commendation in a rating letter and inspires me to try harder and attempt more for the future. Suggestions for improvement call certain things to mind and encourage me to focus on those things for improvement. I think both the commendations and suggestions make for improvement.”

Improved Human Relations Result

The plan is not perfect. It has its limitations. Different principals achieve results according to their individual backgrounds and experiences. In the final analysis it is the principal’s evaluation and can be no better than his understanding of the curriculum and teaching procedures, his knowledge of measurement and evaluation of results, and his sympathetic attitude toward his teaching personnel. Not always will he be able to give worthwhile suggestions to experienced and progressive teachers. On the other hand, he may learn much from them. However, even the experienced, progressive teachers are encouraged when they know their work is recognized and appreciated. While he may have very little in the way of suggestions to offer such teachers, he is able to help them with problems and new projects which they may attempt and as a co-worker give them much assistance.

From the superintendent’s standpoint this type of supervision and evaluation summary of each teacher’s work gives him a good overview of the principals’ supervision and a rather clear picture of each teacher’s work. Especially is it valuable to him in his follow-up of the newly appointed teacher and in watching her growth during her first two or three years. The letters which are placed in the teacher’s personnel file are a convenient source for recommendations which the superintendent is often requested to write.

This plan has brought about a definite improvement in human relations, improvement in instruction, and has done away with classification of teachers as to rating marks. No longer are teachers labeled as a “1”, “2”, “3”, or “4” teacher. Rather, a teacher’s growth is an individual—not a comparative—matter.