

Educational Personnel Evaluation

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The Salt Lake City personnel evaluation program is a cooperative effort between the board of education and district employees. It has worked well for over ten years because there is a strong commitment by all involved.

The system is built on two important values:

1. Every employee is entitled to the safeguards of due process, and every employee is guaranteed due process protection.

2. Incompetent employees will be aggressively terminated from the school district.

Due process protection is established by identifying unsatisfactory performance, by providing extensive assistance, and by involving peers in making employment decisions. Due process is further protected by a series of appeals that any employee may initiate.

So far, over 100 employees have received remediation assistance. One half are still with us, and the others have found employment elsewhere. Employees who cannot provide satisfactory service or cannot learn the skills to do so will be terminated.

The principal plays a key role in our evaluation process. If an employee's performance is unsatisfactory, the principal attempts informal remedia-

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tion for 20 school days. If this approach fails, the principal requests formal remediation assistance from the superintendent.

At this stage, the superintendent assigns a learning specialist—a person trained in teacher evaluation, remediation, and termination—who forms an assistance team, composed of the specialist, the principal, and two peers (selected from a list provided by the association and approved by the superintendent). The team works closely with the employee to correct performance deficiencies. At the end of five months, a report is sent to the superintendent. Together, the superintendent and the assistance team conclude that remediation has been achieved, or the superintendent writes a letter of termination to the employee. Of the many cases in which termination has occurred, only two have gone to court. The district has yet to lose a case.

Our evaluation program is not magic. Sensitive and difficult issues are involved. It is hard for principals to initiate the process. Principals need extensive training. It is not feasible for all districts to have learning specialists. They are expensive. It is extremely difficult to involve peers. Most associations don't want to touch that one.

What we have in Salt Lake City is the fortunate combination of strong principals, able learning specialists, secure and confident teachers, and a strong and mature association. That's why things work so well in Salt Lake City. Under similar conditions, our program can work in other districts.

In sum, the validity of judgments of relative competence and the utility of teaching advice based on these assessments rest on the specialized expertise of the evaluator, the openness of the evaluation format to a wide range of indicators, and the use of criteria that rely on high-inference variables susceptible to individualized applications. These are features of a professional evaluation system.

Our study of effective teacher evaluation practices found that districts which are able to use evaluation for teacher improvement and for personnel decisions have adopted more professionally oriented evaluation strategies. They have increased the key resources for evaluation—time and expertise—by resisting the bureaucratic impulse to treat all teachers alike and by involving expert teachers in the evaluation process. The districts have addressed the dual functions of evaluation—monitoring general teaching quality and improving specific teaching performances—by dividing evaluation responsibilities between principals and expert teachers.

Indeed, it is the more professional role of teachers in instructional design and delivery that distinguishes the districts' approaches to the organization of teaching as well as to teacher evaluation. The result is a more clinical, client-oriented assessment of teaching practice as well as the development, for at least some teachers, of individually relevant strategies for instructional improvement.

Although we did not select our study districts for their use of "master" teachers in evaluation, we found that all of them have chosen to involve highly expert teachers in some aspect of the evaluation process as well as in other professional development activities. We are convinced that the use of such highly developed evaluation processes is no accident. The use of peer review or peer assistance in these districts greatly strengthens their capacities for effective teacher supervision by providing additional time and expertise for this function.

In addition, teachers serving in various differentiated staff roles provide other types of leadership and assistance to their peers, thereby promoting the development and dissemination of professional standards of practice. In

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