

Evaluation Procedures in the Charlotte- Mecklenburg Career Ladder Plan

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Factors in the program's success include explicit expectations, fair and continuous observations, and action-growth plans that give teachers a clear sense of direction.

Among the greatest barriers to the implementation of teacher career ladders is the difficulty of designing an evaluation system that is technically defensible, operationally manageable, and politically viable. This article describes the evaluation system of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, which has made substantial progress in overcoming these barriers.

Because the Charlotte-Mecklenburg evaluation system is fairly new, evidence of its effectiveness comes primarily from the degree to which teachers and administrators have accepted it. In the long run stronger validation measures will be necessary. Given the controversial nature of the system, however, political acceptance and positive testimony are not bad indicators of present success.

Based on interviews with teachers and reactions of outside observers, it is fair to say that the system is at least as sophisticated as any other evaluation system in the country. The vast majority of teachers agree that the new system is technically superior to the system it replaced. As one experienced teacher put it, "This is the first time I understand why I received the rating I was given." Other teachers, however, have remarked that the system does not give adequate attention to the quality of the content teachers present.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the evaluation system is its political viability. Although some teachers have found the system threatening, generally they have lauded its fairness. Interestingly, many positive comments have come from teachers who have received negative evaluations. For example, one teacher who received a low rating for classroom management said, "You know, I've always taught

that way, and I've always had trouble. I bet I won't make that mistake again." Her ratings have indeed improved. Cases like this one are not isolated.

Of course, normal problems and confusion accompanied the implementation. For example, one component calls for teachers to develop and implement action-growth plans. Initially, many teachers and administrators misinterpreted the nature and purpose of these plans. Until this matter was clarified, confusion led to the generation of numerous forms that threatened to bog down the system with overwhelming and unmanageable paperwork.

Purposes of the Evaluation System

One unique characteristic of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg evaluation system is that its basic underpinnings are informed more by the literature on personnel evaluation in high technology and information-processing industries than by the technical literature on education evaluation.¹ Among the authors whose work was most influential are Drucker (1973), Pascale and Athos (1981), and Grove (1984).

A second unique feature is the system's implicit assumption that evaluation in education is more properly understood as a political and moral problem than as a legal, technical one. Politically, evaluations must be believable, and more important, people must be persuaded to act on the basis of the evaluations. To paraphrase House (1980), the Charlotte-Mecklenburg evaluation system is more oriented toward persuading a local audience than convincing the universal audience.

Given this conceptual base and philosophical orientation, the system combines formative and summative evaluation and does not distinguish

between evaluation as a means of improving practice and evaluation as a means of making personnel decisions. The specific purposes are to:

1. clearly communicate performance expectations to teachers and administrators;
2. provide feedback to teachers about the extent to which they are meeting the stated expectations;
3. provide the school system with information regarding the kinds of training, assistance, and support teachers need to meet expectations;
4. provide data to assess the quality of the training, assistance, and support provided by the school system so that revisions can be made;
5. provide system personnel with data and information to make and defend personnel decisions.

Expectations and Competencies

The first step in designing the evaluation system was for a team of teachers and administrators to identify the expectations that could reasonably be held for classroom teachers. The basic question put to this team was, "What is it that our outstanding teachers now do?" Through dialogue and group activity, the team developed a series of descriptive statements, which were eventually translated into 14 expectation statements such as, "The teacher is expected to perform in the classroom in ways that are consistent with the research on effective teaching."

The second question put to the design team was, "What knowledge and skills would one need to have to enhance the likelihood of meeting the expectations held for outstanding teachers?" The result was a list of competencies, such as "The teacher should know the research literature on effective teaching."

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Neither the expectation statements nor the list of competencies is set forth in a way that is easily "measurable." The evaluation system is not oblivious to the problems of measurement, nor are issues of validity and reliability treated casually. By casting the problem of measurement in a frame of reference different from the psychometric one that dominates the field of teacher evaluation, however, the design team asked: "What kind of evidence and how much of this evidence would be needed to convince a reasonable panel of neutral, knowledgeable professionals that each expectation is being met, and that the competency being assessed is present?"

From Belief to Design Principles

To address the question of competency and expectation, system planners carefully considered how managers in high technology organizations are evaluated. From this study evolved the belief on which subsequent principles of evaluation design rest, namely that a fundamental distinction should be made between the evaluation procedures used for new and for established employees.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, new teachers are evaluated to affirm that they possess the *competencies* (knowledge and skills) assumed to be necessary to meet the *expectations* the system holds for experienced teachers. Once the necessary competencies are deemed present, the focus shifts to the expectations. It is possible, for example, for an effective teacher to be unfamiliar with the literature on effective teaching. One can reasonably assume, however, that if teachers are knowledgeable about the literature, and if they can demonstrate the repertoire of skills the literature associates



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with effective teaching, then more teachers should be able to perform in ways consistent with the theory and practice of effective teaching.²

Consistent with the belief underlying the evaluation system, beginning teachers are evaluated on whether they *can* demonstrate these skills, and experienced teachers on whether they *do so* consistently and routinely. If teachers are not meeting an expectation because of lack of competence, the fault lies with the induction system, not with the teacher.

Competence or lack of it is only one possible explanation for a teacher's not meeting a particular expectation. Lack of organizational support, lack of motivation, idiosyncratic psychological problems, and overt rejection of the expectation's value are equally plausible. In addition to the belief that an evaluation system must distinguish between beginning and experienced teachers, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg system adds the following principles.

1. Evaluation should be continuous.
2. Evaluation should be based on multiple criteria and multiple forms of data.
3. Multiple evaluators should be used.
4. Evaluations that are used to make personnel decisions should be based on data collected over a long period of time.
5. Evaluations should be evaluated.

Evaluation Areas

Teachers in the Career Development Program are evaluated on:

1. *classroom performance*: competencies and expectations directly related to instructional delivery;
2. *faculty performance*: competencies and expectations that concern work-related activity outside the classroom (identifying and resolving school problems, serving as a mentor);
3. *professional performance*: competencies and expectations that bear on enhancing the state of the art (engaging in action-oriented research).

Career Level I teachers are expected to produce convincing evidence that they are meeting the classroom performance expectations and at least some evidence of meeting those for faculty and professional performance. Career Level II teachers are expected to produce convincing evidence that they are meeting classroom and faculty performance expectations and at least some evidence that they are meeting professional performance expectations. Career Level III teachers are expected to produce evidence in all three areas.³

The Observer/Evaluator

Developing the competence to meet the classroom performance expectations and performing in ways that clearly demonstrate mastery of these expectations is the bottom line in the

Career Development Program. Consequently, emphasis is on collecting data that provide evidence of the extent to which the competencies are present and the performance expectations are being met. A key element in this data collecting process is the observer/evaluator.

Observer/evaluators are expected to visit the classrooms of all teachers in the Career Development Program, compile and analyze detailed, descriptive notes, analyze and rate the teacher in five classroom performance areas: management of instructional time, management of student behavior, and instructional presentation, monitoring, and feedback. Observer/evaluator reports track how consistent a teacher's classroom practices are with specified standards. Although the system implicitly assumes that, on occasion, there could be good, reasonable, and justified reasons for being inconsistent with these standards, the presence of these standards compels the teacher to take them into account and to justify any deviance.

Observer/evaluator reports provide teachers with ratings and with a narrative description of the events that prompted them. From the over 2,100 observations conducted, fewer than ten *descriptions* of classroom events have been challenged. Furthermore, with one exception, the fewer than 50 *rating challenges* have focused on extenuating circumstances that led to the rating, rather than on the rating itself.

Eleven full-time observer/evaluators conduct an average of eight observations per week. Once the program is fully implemented, approximately 30 observer/evaluators will be required (for 4,200 teachers). This heavy investment is justified by the importance the district places on evaluation.

Observer/evaluators are not permitted to remain in that role for more

than two years. There are two reasons for this. First, the long-term intention is that observer/evaluators will eventually be drawn from an existing cadre of Career Level II and III teachers. It would be unwise and unfair to remove such qualified teachers from the classroom on a permanent basis, particularly since the observer/evaluator experience should improve teaching skills. Second, evaluation is deemed to be a professional activity. There is no intent to create a "supervisory class," a situation that would surely result from permanent assignments.

The Observation

During their first semester of teaching, beginning teachers are observed by an advisory/assessment team made up of the principal, the assistant principal, and a senior teacher mentor. This team observes the beginning teacher's classroom performance or holds a work-related conference about once a week. These observations focus on the classroom performance standards to be reviewed later by the observer/evaluators.

During the second semester, the beginning teacher continues to be observed by the advisory/assessment team. In addition, two observer/evaluators make announced observations. One observer/evaluator observes once, and the other observes twice.

During the second year of teaching, a teacher is observed six times. The first three of these are announced, and the second three are unannounced.⁴ Thereafter, the advisory/assessment team observes the teacher on a reduced schedule.

During the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth years, teachers are observed by observer/evaluators three times each year, once announced and twice unannounced. When teachers achieve Career Level I status, they are observed

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four times every three years on a 1–1–2 basis. All observations are unannounced.

The observation of Career Level I, II, and III teachers is a random quality control check, to provide the system with data regarding its ability to maintain desired performance. Of course, if a teacher consistently does not meet performance standards (for example, if every unannounced observation over a three-year period shows substantial performance deficiencies), then specific personnel action might be indicated.⁵

The Action-Growth Plan

In addition to the observations of classroom performance, another source of data is the action-growth plan. For beginning teachers, this plan is an agreed-upon strategy for improving competencies in the five areas of classroom performance that are evaluated on the classroom performance assessment instrument. For example, the beginning teacher who consistently has problems with classroom management might observe and confer with a mentor teacher known for mastery in this area. Together, they develop mutually agreeable observation and conference strategies. As beginning teachers demonstrate mastery of the competencies, the plan begins to focus on areas beyond immediate classroom performance, such as the design of tests.

The beginning teacher becomes a career candidate after demonstrating the competence required to meet the expectations in the areas of classroom, school, and professional performance. At this point, the action-growth plan, rather than requiring that the individual undertake a program to develop particular competencies, emphasizes performance goals. For example, the plan of a career candidate or Career Ladder I, II, or III teacher might ad-

dress a goal like “increasing the level of parental support provided to students in my class.” The teacher is required to specify what he or she would do to *achieve* the goal, what *measurable* results would indicate its achievement, how the results could be *assessed*, and what *criteria* would be considered reasonable in making this assessment. Data produced by the teacher’s performance in executing the plan are expected to be such that over two to three years the cumulative result will clearly indicate that the teacher is meeting the expectation for Career Level I, II, or III. This evidence combined with the observer/evaluator reports forms the basis for personnel actions.

The Advisory/Assessment Team for Career Teachers

It is important to note that the results of *both* the observer/evaluator report *and* the action-growth plan are considered in the evaluation process. Neither procedure is considered separately. The advisory/assessment team is responsible for evaluating the teacher and making preliminary recommendations regarding personnel action. Unlike beginning teachers to whom advisory/assessment teams are assigned, career teachers, in consultation with the principal, choose their own team.

The teams provide teachers with a source of direction and support as they develop action-growth plans and assess observation reports, summarize the data at the appropriate time, and recommend advancing the teacher’s career or salary.

The team operates under a discipline comparable to that of an outside review process. Every positive and negative recommendation is carefully reviewed by an intermediate district-level evaluation team of teachers and

administrators to determine if the evidence warrants the individual's continuation and advancement. Two critical pieces of evidence are the reports of the observer/evaluators and the results of the action-growth plans. If these reports and results are demonstrably deficient and if the advisory/assessment team decides to make a positive recommendation in the face of these deficiencies, the advisory/assessment team must justify their reasoning. This process affirms the principles of multiple criteria and multiple evaluations and of evaluating evaluations.

Problems and Prospects

One of the greatest problems in implementing this evaluation system is the confusion among some teachers and administrators—shared by some of their college professor-mentors—between evaluation and observation and measurement. Observation and measurement are critical to evaluation, but they are not, in themselves, evaluation. Evaluation is an expression of organizational values. The critical question in evaluation is, "If our evaluation system says a teacher is good (or bad or mediocre), is that the case?" Standards of good, bad, and mediocre—like standards of truth, beauty, and justice—are not questions of science but of value. Questions of value are better resolved by dialogue than by instrumentation. Indeed, until practitioners understand the inherent subjectivity of evaluation, it is impossible to make evaluation as objective as we all desire. □

¹One of the more interesting results of my study of the evaluation systems used in high technology industry was the discovery that, typically, an evaluator submits an evaluation report of a subordinate to his or her immediate superior before submitting it to the subordinate. The reason is *not* to re-

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port on the subordinate but, rather, to give the evaluator's superior an opportunity to review the report and provide corrective feedback. Furthermore, the quality of the evaluation of the subordinate is a critical element in the evaluation of the evaluator. (I know of no system for evaluating principals in which the principal's evaluation of teachers is given much weight, and few systems where *any* attention is given to this matter.)

²The fact that the Teacher Career Development Program does give emphasis to the effective teaching literature, coupled with the fact that some of the evaluation procedures are derived from this literature, has led some critics to assume that the system forces teachers into a narrow, mechanistic mode of teaching. This, however, is not the case. For example, the effective teaching literature reminds teachers of the commonsense notion that learning is an active process and that persons who are engaged in doing things are likely to learn more. Therefore, emphasis is on time-on-task and engaged learning time. How to get children on-task and how to

increase engaged learning time is, however, problematic. That it would be desirable to have more children on-task more of the time is not problematic. Thus, to have an evaluation standard that causes teachers to attend to time-on-task seems neither unreasonable nor stultifying.

³Career Level I, II, and III teachers are or will be persons who have experience and who have received tenure (persons who have gone through the induction process in which competency was developed or affirmed). Due to problems related to phasing experienced teachers into the career ladder programs, distinctions between classroom performance, faculty performance, and professional experience have not been as clearly maintained as was intended. The long-term intent is to maintain these distinctions.

⁴Unannounced observations for beginning teachers are inconsistent with one of the guiding principles of the evaluation design. The question for beginning teachers is, "Can they demonstrate the requisite skills?" (That is, do they have the competence to put on the appropriate performance when they know they must do so?) Whether they maintain such performances outside the presence of tight supervision is a question that should be answered only after one knows that the requisite skills are present.

⁵During the initial implementation phase (that is, the next five years), the intent is to provide presently tenured teachers the opportunity to achieve Career Level I status on a fast-track basis (one to two years). Given the deficiencies of past classroom performance assessment processes, it was decided that experienced teachers who select the fast track would be observed nine times during the course of the year. Three of these evaluations are announced and six unannounced. These observations are conducted by three different observer/evaluators.

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