

# Promising Trends in Teacher Evaluation

Leading school districts are improving  
their appraisal programs in five ways.



Until recently school districts have invested considerable time and effort in evaluating student progress and relatively little in monitoring the teaching process. Students are questioned, observed, and tested daily to check their mastery of the lessons. Elaborate record-keeping systems track student learning, the results are closely monitored, and feedback is provided to improve student achievement. However, teacher evaluations, often conducted only annually, are seldom used as feedback to link classroom performance with effective instructional practices. Rather, evaluations are used to justify salary increments, tenure, or contract terminations.

With the educational reform and accountability movement has come increased attention to teacher performance, and evaluation is undergoing some important changes. Research for Better Schools has undertaken a review of exemplary teacher evaluation systems, which points to five areas in which the practice has changed considerably in the past decade. Progressive districts are:

1. linking evaluation systems to research on effective teacher practices,
2. providing improved training for evaluators,
3. holding administrators more accountable for conducting evaluations,
4. using evaluation-identified teacher deficiencies to focus staff development, and
5. making teachers active partners in the evaluation process.

### **Effective Teaching Practices**

In the past, criteria used to evaluate teachers have reflected an individual district's thoughts and biases. However, many districts have begun to develop their evaluation criteria directly from the literature on effective teacher practices (Caldwell 1986, Delaware Department of Public Instruction 1986, Florida Coalition 1983). In addition, studies are showing that performance on these research-based criteria correlates with student engagement rates, achievement gains, and perceptions of the school climate or learning environment (Ellett et al. 1980). Although these efforts are still not commonplace, they represent a growing trend in teacher evaluation.

### **Evaluator Training**

In most districts, central office personnel or school building administrators evaluate teachers. Because administra-

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tors are often assumed to be competent evaluators, they receive little, if any, training to standardize procedures or maintain acceptable competency levels. This pattern is slowly changing. A number of school districts are instituting evaluation training programs (Capie et al. 1979, South Carolina Department of Education 1982, Wise et al. 1984). While these programs may vary significantly in their focus and intensity, they usually include a review of the system's focus, content, and procedures and some supervised practice with a videotape or live classroom observations.

### **Accountability for Conducting Evaluation**

Even if administrators are well trained, successful teacher evaluation is not assured. Competition for an administrator's time is great, and since results are seldom used in any meaningful way, teacher evaluations have rarely been considered a high priority. As accountability issues have grown, districts are taking a closer look at their teachers' performance, and so evaluations have assumed more importance. In many districts, administrators responsible for conducting teacher evaluations now are held accountable for them (Wise et al. 1984). As might be expected, evaluation specificity and consistency improve significantly when high-level central office administrators begin reviewing them and using the results to make decisions. In this case, the quality of the system depends on its use.

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#### **Intervention-Oriented Staff Development**

Evaluations often identify teacher deficiencies, and administrators are expected to advise teachers on how to improve their performance. Instead of continuing to rely on teachers to carry out these recommendations with little additional assistance, many districts are now using evaluation results to refer teachers to intervention-oriented staff development programs (Caldwell 1986, Leach and Solomon 1984, Wise et al. 1984).

Although many of these staff development efforts were designed to help beginning teachers function effectively in the classroom, some districts are including probationary and tenured teachers in the programs. The efforts employ a variety of techniques, including formal coursework, inservice or workshops, pairing of successful and unsuccessful teachers, and intensive individualized assistance. Follow-up evaluations indicate if teachers have reached acceptable performance levels.

#### **Collaboration Between Administration and Faculty**

Although the concept of collaboration between district administrators and faculty is becoming more commonplace (Bacharach et al. 1986), cooperation between the two groups on

teacher evaluation systems is rare. At the forefront are the Toledo Public Schools (1985), where administration and the teachers' union have joined forces in the supervision and evaluation of first-year teachers. Other district- or state-initiated efforts have involved teachers and their unions in developing the evaluation system (Delaware Department of Public Instruction 1986, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 1984, and South Carolina Department of Education 1982). Some districts have also obtained teachers' assistance in appropriate follow-up staff development (Wise et al. 1984). Teachers are becoming more active partners in the system's development, use, and follow-up.

#### **Promising Trends**

As teacher evaluation has become part of the reform movement, more time and effort are being devoted to linking the evaluation process to classroom performance. A number of important changes are taking place. First, districts are becoming more conscientious about relating evaluation criteria to effective teaching research. Second, training is being provided to ensure that evaluations are fair and reliable. Third, principals are increasingly accountable for implementing teacher evaluation systems. Fourth, districts are beginning to integrate evaluation and supervision and to tie evaluation findings to intervention-oriented staff development programs. Finally, administrators and teachers are collaborating more in the evaluation process.

While it is rare to find all five changes in a district's teacher evaluation system, innovative school districts are making serious attempts to monitor, evaluate, and improve classroom teaching. □

*Authors' note:* The review of teacher evaluation systems is part of a larger project that has assembled a wide array of instruments and processes, which schools might find useful when assessing current conditions and planning for future improvements. This resource guide, *Looking at Schools: Instruments and Processes for School Analysis*, is available from Research for Better Schools, 444 N. Third St., Philadelphia, PA 19123.

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