

Shared Governance of Staff Evaluation

Douglas E. Harris and Keith A. Pillsbury

The Essex Town, Vermont, School District has not only increased teacher involvement in staff evaluation but has actually included teachers in the governance of its staff evaluation system. A teacher-administrator committee produced the six-part staff evaluation system.

- The *vita* records each staff member's professional and educational background and serves as a baseline for formative appraisal.
- *Formative appraisal* involves most staff members two years out of three. During this phase, staff members identify needs or emphasis areas, set goals, and confer with supervisors on progress and assessment.
- The *summative evaluation*, conducted in the third year, focuses on instructional effectiveness and job performance. Based on a clinical supervision model, it includes preconference, guided observation, postconference, and summative evaluation.
- The *remedial contract*, for teachers not meeting the minimum standards, identifies deficits of the staff member and obligations of the supervisor and sets minimum performance criteria.
- An *intensive assistance plan* lists professional development activities and indicates which evaluation activities and measurements will ascertain if the staff member has met the minimum standards.
- The *review committee* ensures that the evaluation system operates efficiently and administrators and teachers share responsibility for its success.

Role of the Review Committee

Administrators and teachers recognized that four factors are essential to the success of a collaborative evaluation process: (1) the system must be flexible to change; (2) purposeful change requires continual assessment; (3) the master contract, school policy, and the law necessarily constrain change; and (4) teachers and administrators must share responsibility and authority for implementing or changing the system.

Membership. The review committee is composed of two teachers per building, a counselor, a special educator, a subject-area coordinator or program director, a principal, and the assistant superintendent, who is a permanent member; other members serve staggered two-year terms.

Functions. The committee's six functions include: (1) gathering information from teachers and administrators for assessing the evaluation system; (2) recommending changes; (3) exploring and pilot-testing other innovative evaluation approaches; (4) introducing new staff members to the system; (5) sharing the system with other districts or agencies; and (6) conducting formative and summative reviews of the system. To protect employee rights and responsibilities and to decrease the likelihood of the committee's becoming politically volatile, the committee does not consider any grievance.

Activities. In its first year the committee implemented the *vita* process, spending considerable time discussing the forms with teachers and administrators, then editing and revising virtually all of them. It also dealt with the issue of inclusiveness and flexibility, addressing the concern that the system meet needs of support staff—counselors, learning center directors, school nurses. Although the committee also explored peer supervision and mentoring, we decided not to include them at that time.

During its second year, the committee is reviewing all documents, schedules, and processes and establishing a data base for the forthcoming summative evaluation of the system.

Responsibility and Authority

Many educators recognize that grassroots participation in staff appraisal is essential, but fewer would agree that staff should also be involved in system governance. When administrators and teachers share responsibility and authority for successful evaluation, however, the dynamics of staff evaluation change. Everyone becomes more accountable and the system becomes more responsive to the needs of all constituents. As the link between evaluation and effective schools, the review committee becomes a powerful staff development tool. It plans and acts on decisions made by the professionals who are most directly affected by them.

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“Effective [evaluation] systems distinguish between evaluatees on the growth and improvement track and those on the remediation track...”

anxiety and offers an opportunity to focus district resources on teachers needing the most help, and, alerts those who do not meet district standards. Evaluators often fail to tell evaluatees when they are deficient.

District performance standards that are clear, definable, and above minimal professional standards promote the development of levels of evaluation. This creates a “remediation zone” within which to attempt to improve the marginally performing individual before moving to the dismissal mode. The dismissal mode is reached only after effort has first been made to remediate the individual's performance.

6. *The evaluation distinguishes between the formative and summative dimensions.* This distinction may be absolute, taking the form of a “data curtain” between information collected during any formative activities and the contents of the summative evaluation report.

Especially when it is linked to a system with levels of evaluation, this distinction is valuable. An evaluatee in the growth/improvement mode, for example, would not need to be as concerned about the distinction between formative and summative as would the teacher in the remediation mode. For teachers in the validation/growth or growth/improvement modes, Glatthorn (1986) suggests that the summative portion of the evaluation process be conducted very early in the cycle so that the activities undertaken during the remainder of the cycle can be clearly formative.

Having the remedial teacher work with teams of other teachers, especially those familiar with peer coaching techniques, is one way to develop such a data curtain. The coaching teachers do not communicate with the

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