If the single greatest effect on student achievement is the effectiveness of the teacher (Wong, 2007, p.1), then it stands to reason that teachers are the most vital component of a school organization. The most important thing that happens in a school, happens in the classroom (Norman, 2011), but how is quality teaching determined? How is it evaluated? School leaders have a responsibility to ensure that students are taught by highly effective teachers. Historically, the challenge has been evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher.

Donald Medley, Homer Coker, and Robert Soar (1984) consider the modern history of formal teacher evaluation the period from the beginning of the twentieth century to about 1980. The history has been divided into three overlapping phases: 1) The Search for Great Teachers; 2) Inferring Teacher Quality from Student Learning; and 3) Examining Teaching Performance. Today, teacher evaluation is transforming into a period of Evaluating Teaching as Professional Behavior (Pearlman, p.1). "The next several years represent a golden opportunity to create better systems that meet the needs of schools and the professionals who work in them" (The New Teacher Project, 2010).

States and districts across the country are transitioning from outdated evaluation systems, largely due to federal, state and agency funding that requires a reform in the teacher evaluation process. The federal Race to the Top competition and grants from the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association are some of the driving forces behind teacher evaluation reform.

The questions now facing education leaders are, "How can we create evaluations that become useful tools for teachers and school leaders, and that help push students to new heights? What can we learn from the districts and states that are making real progress?" (The New Teacher Project, 2010)

Criteria

According to the National Education Association, *New Policy Statement on Teacher Evaluation and Accountability* (2011), the criteria for evaluating teachers may be categorized into 3 general indicators of effectiveness:

1. Indicators of Teacher Practice - demonstrate a teacher's subject matter knowledge, skill in planning and delivering instruction, ability to address issues of equity and diversity, and ability to monitor and assess student learning and adjust instruction accordingly. Such indicators may include the following indicators or others chosen by a local or state affiliate: classroom observations, proof of practice (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum plans, student assessments, minutes from team planning meetings, curriculum maps, and teacher instructional notes), teacher interviews and self-assessments.

2. Indicators of Teacher Contribution and Growth - demonstrate a teacher's professional growth and contribution to a school's and/or district's success. Such indicators may include the following indicators or others chosen by a local or state affiliate: completion of meaningful professional development that is applied to practice; structured collaboration with colleagues focused on improving practice and student outcomes (e.g., by way of professional learning communities and grade or subject teams); evidence of reflective practice; teacher leadership in the school, district or educational community; collaborative projects with institutions of higher education; and positive engagement with students, parents and colleagues.

3. Indicators of Contribution to Student Learning and Growth – demonstrate a teacher's impact on student learning and growth. Such indicators must be authentic, reflect that there are multiple factors that impact a student's learning beyond a teacher's control, and

may include the following indicators or others chosen by a local or state affiliate: student

learning objectives developed jointly by the teacher and principal/evaluator; teacher-

created assessments; district or school assessments; student work (papers, portfolios,

projects, presentations); teacher defined objectives for individual student growth; and

high quality developmentally appropriate, standardized tests that provide valid, reliable,

timely and meaningful information regarding student learning and growth. Unless such

tests are shown to be developmentally appropriate, scientifically valid, and reliable for

the purpose of measuring both student learning and a teacher's performance, such tests

may not be used to support any employment action against a teacher and may be used

only to provide non-evaluative formative feedback.

Rigorous Standards

Teacher evaluation systems should reflect a core of research-based effective teaching

behaviors that influence student learning. The standards should include widely accepted

observable and non-observable professional practices that positively impact student achievement.

They should be rigorous and grounded in the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and responsibilities

expected of teachers. "Such standards maybe based on national models such as the National

Education Association (NEA) Principles of Professional Practice, the Interstate Teacher

Assessment and Support Consortium Model Core Teaching Standards, the Standards developed

by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or statewide standards for the

teaching profession" (National Education Association, 2011).

Clear Expectations

If the priority of a school organization is student achievement, then teachers ought to be

assessed on their ability to produce agreed-upon student learning outcomes. Teachers should be

evaluated against clear, performance-based expectations of student learning, not based on teacher

behaviors or routines.   Expectations and student achievement goals should be set at the

beginning of year and communicated and evaluated throughout the year. Expectations should be

clear, concise and well-documented to avoid misinterpretation. The State of Georgia adopted a

the Classroom Analysis of State Standards (CLASS Keys) teacher evaluation system, which is a

performance appraisal process based on teacher standards designed to evaluate teacher

performance, promote professional growth, and positively impact student learning. The CLASS

Keys is organized into five strands or "keys" to teacher quality: Curriculum and Planning,

Standards-Based Instruction, Assessment of Student Learning, Professionalism, and Student

Achievement. These five strands have been further developed and defined into performance

standards and elements with expectation rubrics that have accompanying evidence and artifacts

(Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

Comprehensive

Evaluation systems must be comprehensive and based on multiple measures and multiple

ratings to determine whether teachers have met performance expectations. They should include

objective measures of student academic growth, such as value-added models. Value-added is a

measure of the impact a teacher has on his or her students' learning over the course of the school

year, as usually evidenced by standardized testing (The New Teacher Project, 2010). In the

District of Colombia Public Schools, to generate value-added data, both "before" and "after" DC

CAS scores for students are used. In other words, scores from before students entered a class as

well as scores from after they spent a year learning with the teacher. This "before" and "after"

DC CAS data is required for reading and math teachers in grades four through eight. Even

though the DC CAS is administered in the third and tenth grades, value added data is not

calculated for teachers of these grades. This is because there is not any "before" data for their students, as they do not test at the end of second grade and do not yet use data from the new ninth grade test (District of Colombia Public Schools, 2011).

Teacher evaluation systems must also account for classroom observations, including analysis of classroom instruction, lesson planning, professionalism, and student engagement, and any other possible factors. Finally, teacher evaluation must include other student learning measures, such as Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals, district-wide or teacher-generated assessments, and end-of-course tests.

Meaningful Feedback

Effective teacher evaluations are meaningful and provide teachers with clear feedback that they are able to implement. In addition, feedback ought to be connected to customized professional development. Feedback that includes non-evaluative formative feedback, feedback that serves only to inform practice, is the most effective way to improve teacher practice. Non-evaluative feedback may include self-reflection, peer observation and/or teacher approved surveys of students to assess engagement and learning behaviors (National Education Association, 2011).

In order to avoid the futility of traditional teacher evaluation systems evaluation feedback should be significant and useful to teachers. The results of evaluations should be used to make important decisions about development, compensation, tenure or promotion. According to the 2009 report, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*, most of the school districts studied considered teachers' performance only when it came time to dismiss them. Teachers are individual professionals, who are not all the

same, and should be evaluated in a manner that reflects that belief (The New Teacher Project, 2009).

On-going

"An evaluation system should not be limited to a single rating assigned at the end of the year" (The New Teacher Project, 2010). Rather, they ought to include on-going and regular summative and formative feedback to teachers from instructional supervisors. Evaluators should have regular conversations with their teachers to discuss overall classroom performance, student progress, professional goals, developmental needs as well as the support school leaders will provide to meet those needs. Teachers and their supervisors should have a mutual understanding of the teacher's areas of professional growth and how the instructional supervisor will provide support. If teachers are surprised by their summative evaluation rating at the end of the year, then it most likely means the process was not continuous and it did not provide adequate formative feedback (The New Teacher Project, 2010).

Key Questions for Teacher Evaluators

Educational supervisors ought to base evaluations on the Clark Atlanta University School of Education Conceptual Framework. It is my belief that if there is evidence of the below mentioned as well as student learning, then effective teaching is occurring. Furthermore, school leaders ought to utilize the following questions in the hiring process to determine the quality of teacher candidates. The conceptual question that should be asked during hiring and evaluation is, "Does the teacher possess the knowledge, skills and dispositions to produce enhanced student outcomes?"

Knowledge

- Does the teacher demonstrate the content knowledge of the cultural, historical, social, political and economic realities and uses such to foster optimal development for all students?

- Does the teacher demonstrate the basic and broad knowledge and critical skills for culturally diverse groups to provide learning opportunities adapted to diverse learning needs?

- Does the teacher demonstrate how to teach subject content inherent in effective teaching and/or learning?

- Does the teacher exhibit understanding and knowledge of subject matter and how knowledge is constructed to improve student academic achievement in inclusive settings?

Skills

- Does the teacher demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to facilitate active learning in the classroom, or when working with students, parents, colleagues and members of the community to promote student success?

- Does the teacher incorporate technological applications to promote learning and ensure educational equity?

- Does the teacher systematically use formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and assess teaching/learning issues?

Disposition:

- Does the teacher model ethical and professional behaviors in all interactions with schools, families, and communities?

- Does the teacher demonstrate respect for the learners' communities and cultural norms and sees the learning potential in all students?

- Does the teacher view education as a dynamic political process in which to advocate improving the educational system?

Conclusion

Robert Marzano argues (2006) that research studies show an effective teacher enhances student learning more than any other aspect of schooling that can be controlled (as cited in Georgia Department of Education, 2009, p.1). Therefore, it is the responsibility of school leaders to evaluate teachers in a manner that ensures high quality teaching and learning. In addition, to the aforementioned criteria and methods of teacher evaluations, educational leaders should never undervalue student engagement. More importantly, school leaders need to maintain unbiased outlooks on their teachers and students as well as provide evidence of performance during the evaluation process.

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