

CASE 13



Poor Evaluations for a Teacher

Reassigning an Ineffective Educator

BACKGROUND

Recent school reform efforts have focused on the principal's leadership skills, but teacher effectiveness has always been an integral part of instructional improvement. Evaluating instruction, identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and providing professional development opportunities constitute an assessment cycle that promotes growth and student learning. Oliva and Pawlas (2004) wrote that "a fully-developed program of teacher evaluation consists of three components: *self-evaluation*, *formative evaluation*, and *summative evaluation*" (p. 445).

Many school districts use clinical supervision procedures to evaluate their teachers because that method is an objectives-based, formative model designed to foster improvement. Developed in the 1960s to assess student teachers, the model consists of five steps.

Step One: The Pre-observation Conference

The pre-observation conference offers a forum in which the teacher outlines for the principal plans for the lesson to be observed and talks about learning objectives, teaching strategies, resources, and evaluation plans. The principal has an opportunity to clarify the plan and offer suggestions.

94 Case Studies in 21st Century School Administration***Step Two: The Classroom Observation***

The teacher's task is to teach the lesson that was discussed with the principal, who records events that occur during the lesson and includes verbal and nonverbal activities. The principal's notes should be objective, not judgmental.

Step Three: Analysis of the Lesson

After observing the lesson, the principal should analyze notes made during the session, paying particular attention to the elements of teaching discussed in the pre-observation conference. A thorough analysis will help to distinguish effective teaching strategies, identify patterns of student and teacher behavior, and find ways in which the teacher may improve.

Step Four: The Post-observation Conference

The teacher and principal meet to talk about the lesson's effectiveness, discuss what went well during the lesson, and review teaching strategies used during the observation to develop a plan for improvement. Specific suggestions should be identified and agreed on.

Step Five: Post-observation Analysis

After the teacher has had a brief period of time to reflect on the principal's suggestions for improvement, specific activities aimed at strengthening weaknesses identified in the lesson should be identified for the teacher's professional development. These usually include suggestions to attend graduate classes, make observations in other schools or classrooms, or attend workshops tailored to the teacher's needs.

There are problems associated with teacher appraisal systems. According to Lunenburg (1995), "Most teachers do not like to be evaluated, and they do not find it helpful to them professionally" (p. 212). He also suggested that their negative feelings may relate more to the manner in which the evaluations are conducted than to the idea of being evaluated, but clinical supervision is designed to attend to their professional needs and improve their teaching abilities.

School districts usually prescribe the instrument that will be used in evaluations, but the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that constitute effective teaching are research based and consistent. Gorton and Schneider (1991) wrote that successful teachers

1. Set high expectations for student achievement
2. Diagnose students' current skills and knowledge before establishing learning objectives and assigning work

3. Set specific learning goals for each lesson
4. Plan thoroughly for each lesson
5. Provide instruction at the appropriate level of difficulty for most students
6. Assign tasks to students based on their ability levels
7. Spend more time on teaching and learning tasks than on administrative work
8. Assess student progress regularly
9. Keep students focused on the task at hand
10. Provide regular feedback to students to promote improvement
11. Reinforce correct student behavior with positive rewards (p. 294)

Teacher efficacy has become important as a result of high-stakes testing in schools. Requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress in the No Child Left Behind Act mean that administrators must know what constitutes effective teaching and help faculty to improve their skills through meaningful professional development activities.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Pre- and post-observation conferences with teachers
- A comprehensive plan to evaluate faculty
- Professional Development Plans
- Communication skills
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Tenure laws

THE CASE

East LaFayette Middle School was four years old when Ron Altman became its second principal. Altman, an assistant principal in a neighboring district, had become acquainted with Dr. Arthur Allen, the school's first administrator, at regional meetings and conferences. When Dr. Allen was selected to head his district's Human Resources Office, Ron had been interviewed and selected for the vacant position at East LaFayette. Dr. Sandra Rose, the superintendent,

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wanted administrators with fresh, new ideas, and Ron had impressed her during his interview with ideas about middle school curricula and collaborative decision making.

The position at East LaFayette was challenging. Dr. Allen had hired all 52 of the teachers on staff and was reputed to be a hard, fair boss. Few teachers sought transfers from the school. Ron interviewed new faculty as enrollment continued to increase. Most applicants came from inside the district.

The school surpassed its academic goals and enjoyed the community's support. Altman envisioned East LaFayette's earning national recognition for its accomplishments, but he wanted to wait a year or two before going through the rigorous application process.

Ron's ideas about instructional leadership took him to teachers' classrooms regularly. He completed the district's mandated observation forms but set a personal goal of visiting three classes each day for 30 minutes. He enjoyed a good relationship with teachers and students, many of whom respectfully called him "Mr. A." They described him as fair and as a good listener.

On a warm Tuesday in July between his third and fourth years at LaFayette, Ron answered the telephone and heard Dr. Allen's voice.

"Hey, Ron, how's the summer going?"

"Fine, Arthur," Altman replied. "Are you calling to tell me you found a seventh-grade math teacher?"

"Sort of," Allen's voice trailed off. "I'm transferring a math teacher to you from Jemison Middle."

"That doesn't sound too bad. Who is it?"

"Her name's Anna Richardson, Ron. She's had some problems at Jemison."

Altman paused. This was unusual. Allen usually sent names of candidates to principals, who conducted their own interviews and recommended the applicant they wanted to hire.

Ron leaned back in his chair. "Why are you sending her here if she's having problems? I'm trying to build something . . ."

"I know, Ron, I know," Allen said. "Dr. Rose decided that she's received enough complaints about Ms. Richardson. She's tenured and the only way we can fire her is to do a better job documenting her problems."

"Arthur, you're sending me a problem teacher because Dr. Rose wants me to get rid of her?"

"Look, Ron, I don't know Ms. Richardson. Her file is thick with letters from parents complaining about her. There are lots of observation reports from supervisors and principals, but no one was willing to dismiss her. I'm sorry, but she's going to be assigned to your school. If you think it'd help, stop by the office and review her file."

After he hung up the phone, Ron considered what he'd been told. He knew Dr. Allen had no choice about assigning Ms. Richardson to East LaFayette Middle. At least he'd called with a warning. Altman wondered what he'd say to his faculty. He relied on them to help with interviews; they'd be surprised when Ms. Richardson arrived.

Altman decided to call Tyra Wright at Jemison Middle. She'd been the principal there for a few years and had always impressed Ron as hardworking and competent.

"Hello, Tyra," he said when she answered on the second ring. "This is Ron Altman."

"I know why you're calling, Ron, and I'm so sorry. I just didn't know what else to do, so I spoke with Dr. Rose. It was her decision to transfer Ms. Richardson."

"I know, Tyra. I'm not blaming you. I'm trying to figure out the best way to manage the problem. Tell me about Ms. Richardson."

Ms. Wright took 15 minutes to describe problems she'd had with the teacher. Parents and students complained often and loudly. Two members of the board of education had visited her classroom in response to calls they'd received.

"That's about it, Ron," Ms. Wright said. "She was the weakest geography teacher I've ever had and she just wasn't making satisfactory progress."

"Wait a moment, Tyra," Altman said. "Did you say geography?"

"Why, yes. She's certified to teach geography and math, but I didn't need a math teacher when she was transferred to me. Let me check something," she said, setting the telephone on her desk.

"Yes, that's what I thought," Wright said when she returned. "Ms. Richardson completed her fourth year at Jemison, but she's always taught geography or social science. She was a math major, but hasn't ever taught math."

Altman rubbed his chin. "Thanks, Tyra. I think I'll invite Ms. Richardson in for a meeting. It's time for us to talk."

"Good luck, Ron," Wright said as she hung up.

Altman stood and walked to a window overlooking the school's parking lot. He didn't like having a teacher assigned to the faculty without his approval, but there wasn't anything he could do about that. That had been Dr. Rose's decision.

He returned to his chair and reached for the telephone. He wanted to meet Ms. Richardson but wasn't certain about what to say to her.

"Hello, Ms. Richardson? This is Ron Altman, the principal at East LaFayette Middle School. You've been transferred to my faculty, and I thought we should meet and talk about your assignment. When can you come to the school?"

98 Case Studies in 21st Century School Administration**Questions**

1. Should Mr. Altman review Ms. Richardson's personnel file before he meets her? Why or why not?
2. How are interviews for teachers conducted at your school? How would you change the process of selecting teachers?
3. Anecdotal notes about a teacher's performance should include several elements. What are they?
4. What will you say to your faculty about Ms. Richardson's assignment to the school?

Activities

1. Role-play the meeting between Mr. Altman and Ms. Richardson.
2. After the meeting, write a letter or memorandum to Ms. Richardson specifying the level of professional performance you expect from her.
3. Discuss the personnel issues pertinent to this case study. What influence does tenure have on a teacher's performance? Did Dr. Allen behave ethically in making the decision to transfer an ineffective teacher to East LaFayette Middle School? If not, what should he have done?
4. Role-play a meeting between you and two or three faculty members during which you explain Ms. Richardson's assignment to your school.
5. To what grade and subject will you assign the new teacher? Why?

ISLLC Standards

STANDARD 5—A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Knowledge

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- Various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
- Professional codes of ethics

Dispositions

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- Subordinating one's own interest to the good of the school community
- Accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions

Performances

The administrator:

- Demonstrates values, beliefs, and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance
- Treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect

STANDARD 6—A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Knowledge

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- The law as related to education and schooling
- Models and strategies of change and conflict resolution as applied to the larger political, social, cultural, and economic contexts of schooling

Dispositions

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- Education as a key to opportunity and social mobility
- Importance of a continuing dialogue with other decision makers affecting education

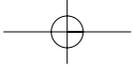
Performances

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- The environment in which schools operate is influenced on behalf of students and their families
- The school community works within the framework of policies, laws, and regulations enacted by local, state, and federal authorities

REFERENCES

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