The Institution that Time Forgot

A battle is now raging over the very essence of our public schools. At stake is not only the quality of education of our children but the very future of our nation. While the rest of the world has changed dramatically in the last 50 years, our public schools have proven to be as impervious and immovable as a mountain rising high above the swirling maelstrom of fierce public debate. This debate has sparked wave after wave of reform all of which has seemingly crashed into this mountain with little or no discernable effect. But this is changing. More than 30 years of constant attacks by politicians, the media, business leaders and the public are now starting to erode the once impervious institution of public school. Adding fuel and momentum to this change is the recent new and more intense global competition our students now face. As a direct result of the erosion of public confidence and fear of an impending change in the world order, federal and state policymakers have seized more power from local school boards in the last two decades in reaction to the negative swing in public perception. Despite this colossal shift, the mountain still stands and very little has actually changed in how we educate our children. Real reform and change will take time, valuable time that we do not have. The students in our schools today need to be prepared now to face a world that is dramatically different from the one we faced when we entered the job market. As public education debate nears the end of its third decade, the rest of the industrialized world continues to improve their educational systems at alarming rates while our public school systems continue to operate much the way they did 50 years ago.
Change Now

But what if I told you that school leaders can make dramatic improvements in student achievement right now? Not only are significant improvements in student achievement possible but also improvements in the recruitment and retention of exceptionally talented teachers and other employees. Your school or work environment will improve remarkably as productivity and achievement increase leaving mediocre to poor employees fleeing in the wake of your school’s success! You might ask how these improvements are possible. What does such a program or initiative cost? Traditionally, ideas focused on improving achievement have proven costly. For example, in 2009 the State of Florida spent $15.8 billion to lower class size without reaping any appreciable result. The cost for the initiative that I am advocating is quite cheap, and in fact will actually cost you not one additional dime. So what is this amazing innovation?

The answer is quite simple – effective teacher evaluation.

That’s right! Conducting effective teacher evaluations has a direct impact on the one variable within our influence, which has the largest impact on student achievement – the teacher! Organizations focus on increasing efficiency, streamlining processes and reducing waste in order to improve operational efficiency. We change textbooks, add programs, conduct after school tutoring, align curricula with state standards, hire specialists, change schedules and even bring in consultants all in an attempt to find the student learning gains we seek. I am not discounting any of these items individually, but I believe we are missing the most important element – the human element. If you have read books like Good to Great by Jim Collins (2001), you understand the importance of people in truly moving an organization from merely good to truly world class. Effective performance management will help you take your organization to the next level by focusing on improving human capital and human engagement. From a school perspective, the most important “human” in the world of a student is the teacher.

The impact of a teacher is extraordinary. Research by Sanders and Rivers (1996) shows that a teacher can impact a student’s growth positively or negatively for up to two years. Another similar study (Mendro, 1998) in the Dallas public schools found the teacher’s residual effect to last three years. What is troubling is that researchers have found that poor teaching causes a student to rapidly lose ground and if a student has two poor teachers in a row, the results can be devastating. Three consecutive years of poor teaching in a row could result in a difference large enough to place a student in a remedial class instead of an accelerated one. With the limited time teachers have with students, this is ground our students can ill afford to lose.

Still not convinced that ineffective teachers can wreak havoc on the education of our children? Consider these examples. One ineffective teacher can be responsible for 20 to 200 students per year depending on subject and grade level taught. These numbers show that one teacher can impact the learning of large groups of students in a year’s time (Chait, 2010). An even more striking example is provided by Stanford’s Eric Hanushek (2009). In his research he found that removing the lowest performing six to 10 percent of teachers would cause a leap in student achievement gains that would move the progress of US students from the low ranking of 29th to the 7th in the world as measured by the Economic Cooperation and Development’s Program for International Student Assessment in mathematics! Yes, ineffective teachers do have a considerable negative impact on student achievement.
On the positive side, the research findings show that the impact of good teachers was even better than expected, and really great teachers help their students achieve significantly more than a year’s typical learning gains. This research reinforces why it is important to hold onto our very best teachers! Sanders and other researchers found that the impact of a highly effective teacher on student gain scores was several times greater than the impact of other factors including socioeconomic levels, heterogeneous or homogeneous ability grouping, racial mix . . . or even class size! (Gordon, 2006)

So what is it that good teachers do that poor teachers do not? The answer to this question is also found embedded in research. According to Marzano (2000), the most important factors for students to learn is providing the opportunity to learn coupled with time engaged in learning – time on task (See Fig. 1).

Great teachers provide students with not only an opportunity to learn but also maximize a student’s time on task, thus maximizing that opportunity to its fullest. Teachers, particularly in the US, have a limited time with students. In fact, when you compare the time we allocate per year for student learning to other countries, you will see that we fall short. As you can see from the chart comparing days per year (See Fig. 2), at 180 days the US is the lowest of industrialized countries (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Already at a 45 day disadvantage to South Korea with the longest school year, US teachers have little time to waste. Unfortunately, wasting time while languishing in mediocrity, seems to be a specialty for some US teachers, and this downtime can have troubling results. Based on a typical six hour elementary school schedule, a teacher who wastes just five minutes per day will lose a full 2.5 days of instruction. A teacher wasting 30 minutes of instruction daily actually loses 15 days of instruction over the course of the school year. While at first you might think it is unlikely that a teacher would actually waste 30 minutes in a day, the reality of this scenario is probably more common than you might imagine. For example, if a teacher teaches six periods of a seven period day, he/she could easily waste time during the first five minutes of every period taking attendance and performing other administrative, non-instructional activities. Stopping five minutes early each period, another all too common practice, translates into another 30 minute loss resulting in a potential 30 days lost over the course of the year (Rolewski, 2010)!

### Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Opportunity to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pressure to Achieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>School Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Figure 2

**Days of School per Year by Nation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Days per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Days per Year

- USA: 180 Days
- Canada: 188 Days
- UK: 190 Days
- Russia: 195 Days
- China: 221 Days
- Japan: 223 Days
- S. Korea: 225 Days
Instead of wasting time, great teachers take the precious time given and expand academic learning time to fill all the time they are allocated. As we see from the examples above, their students spend significantly more time engaged in learning – a difference that can be measured in not just hours but days!

A Broken System

Despite the tragic results of poor teaching, our public school system still manages to continue to employ many even less than mediocre teachers for years. Teachers as a profession are rarely terminated. According to the 2007 – 2008 Schools and Staffing Survey conducted by the US Department of Education, school districts dismiss only an average of 1.4 percent of tenured teachers per year. The same survey reports a mere .7 percent of probationary teachers are released for poor performance. These numbers seem grossly disproportionate with the findings of a recent survey of principals and teachers on whether or not they had ineffective teachers in their building. A surprising 59 percent of teachers reported that there were teachers at their work location “who failed to do a good job!” (Chait, 2010). Another similar study reported that 81 percent of administrators and 58 percent of teachers reported that there was at least one tenured teacher in their school who provides poor instruction (Levin, Mulher, & Schunck, 2005). Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers simply states, “No teacher, myself included, wants ineffective teachers in the classroom.” (Chait, 2010). It seems the majority of school-based staff feel that they have at least one poor teacher on staff yet the infinitesimal dismissal rate would indicate a real misalignment.

Obstacles to Dismissing Ineffective Teachers

Unfortunately there are many obstacles which may prevent the dismissal of ineffective teachers. According to principals the following barriers were most often reported: “length of time required for termination” (59.5 percent); “effort required for documentation” (64.6 percent); “tenure” (71.8 percent); and “teachers associations or unions” (61.2 percent). These barriers do impact the principal’s willingness to move forward in a termination proceeding. One recent study, The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness (2009) reported that 86 percent of administrators surveyed admit to not pursuing dismissal even when it is warranted!

Fear

So why are administrators so reluctant to pursue dismissal of an ineffective teacher even when they feel it is the right thing to do? Actually there are many reasons but one of the largest is fear. Many principals simply want to avoid conflict and becoming involved in difficult conversations with teachers about their performance. Often these tough conversations lead to other collateral damage such as strained relations with other teachers and even being put through difficult public scrutiny themselves (McGrath as reported by Chait, 2010). Pursuing dismissal is one of the hardest tasks any administrator has to perform, and the outcome typically does not lead to any accolades from co-workers. As a result, many put off the task for as long as possible or simply avoid it altogether.
Contracts and Statutes

Another barrier to pursuing performance concerns is collective bargaining language. An analysis of collective bargaining agreements by the National Council on Teacher Quality found that, “a third of the nation’s 50 largest districts prescribe the procedures that must be followed in order to dismiss a weak teacher.” (Cohen, Walsh & Biddle, 2008) Provisions that require certain levels of documentation, due process hearings and requirements to provide additional assistance significantly increase time and costs associated with handling performance concerns. Similarly state statutory requirements also extend these time and costs even further and propel employee performance cases into a murky legal world few educators dare tread! Faced with such imposing obstacles as extended time in court, potential litigation and media scrutiny, it’s not a great mystery as to why administrators favor conflict avoidance strategies. Unfortunately the “ignore it and it will go away” strategy does not work well in the employee performance arena.

Flawed Evaluations

The final barrier to pursuing performance concerns also offers the best potential for reform – the employee evaluation system. Too often district evaluation systems are comprised of annual reviews which are considered a necessary evil amounting to little more than a five minute “feel good” session of very little substance. I recently asked a group of new assistant principals how many times they had received an evaluation as a teacher that provided feedback on their performance which caused them to go back and make improvements. Most indicated they had received little or no constructive feedback, not only as a regular part of the evaluation process – but at all over the course of their entire teaching career! Unfortunately, this type of response is not uncommon. Most teachers receive satisfactory or outstanding ratings as a matter of standard practice and almost no feedback is provided which would lead to any improvement effort. Evaluation systems are not structured to drive instructional improvement as a result of flaws in system design, implementation or both. School administrators lack the staff, training, or expertise required to implement an effective evaluation system (Chait, 2010).

Teacher Evaluations – The Ugly Reality

Despite these obstacles to dismissing poor teachers, the reality is that the real reason few teachers are actually terminated is that evaluations and related performance documentation are rarely conducted with any real meaning. Considered an unwelcomed inconvenience by most administrators, evaluations receive little attention and are typically completed in a manner that rarely distinguishes the top performers from the average ones, and in many schools fail to even distinguish the worst teachers from the very best! “School districts fail to acknowledge or act on differences in teacher performance almost entirely. When it comes to officially appraising performance and supporting improvement, a culture of indifference about the quality of instruction in each classroom dominates” (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009).

My experience as a Human Resources Administrator is aligned with these findings. Many times a mediocre or poor performing teacher will have a file full of evaluations considered the highest caliber and dating back many years. Anecdotal discussions with colleagues including the evaluating administrators, however, often paint a different picture of the true perception of the employee’s performance – a perception that is absolutely in misalignment with the evaluations!

Sound bad? Most of us, even in the education business, have little conception of how bad it is until we examine the research evidence related to the failure of evaluations to address poor performance or even distinguish among different performance levels. Instead all or most teachers are simply evaluated essentially the same regardless of their individual level of performance in the classroom and/or the results they obtain. Consider a study by the New Teacher Project (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009) that examined the evaluations of thousands of teachers in 10 different districts across the US. Half of these districts used binary systems that simply rated teachers as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Of these districts more than 99 percent of all tenured teachers received a rating of satisfactory. (See Table 1) The Denver Public School district was the only district with over one percent teacher unsatisfactory ratings. Springdale Public Schools did not rate a single teacher from 2005 to 2008 as unsatisfactory! The same study also examined evaluation practices in districts employing an assessment instrument with more ratings than simply satisfactory/unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, even when multiple level evaluation instruments are used, the results
are not significantly different. Of the district’s studied, only the Cincinnati Public Schools had rated higher than one percent of its teachers’ performance as unsatisfactory. Most other districts had a percentage of teachers rated as unsatisfactory significantly less than one percent with Akron actually rating none of its more than 1000 teachers at this level!

These numbers are even more jarring when compared with how staff report on the incidence of poor performance. For example, the Chicago Public Schools teachers reported that a full eight percent of teachers were poor performers yet less than a half of a percent (.4 percent) of teachers were evaluated as such. Similarly, in the Akron Public Schools poor performance was identified as an issue for five percent of the teachers, yet no teacher received an unsatisfactory rating. The study also looked at the number of formal dismissals of tenured teachers for poor performance and found even more alarming results. Of the 10 districts studied, only Chicago, Cincinnati, Rockford and Toledo actually formally dismissed teachers for performance. Even these districts dismissed only fractions of a percent of their tenured teachers with all but one district dismissing two teachers or less. The majority of districts within the study did not dismiss a single teacher for poor performance.

Administrators surveyed regarding the percentage of teachers who should be dismissed for poor performance reported a remarkable difference when compared to the actual numbers of teachers dismissed (See Figure 3). Similar to the teacher responses, administrator perceptions on how many teachers should be dismissed for poor performance were significantly out of alignment with the reality of how many were actually terminated.

### Table 1: Binary Evaluation System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Percent Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>2374</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonesboro</td>
<td>3918</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pueblo City</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springdale</td>
<td>1772</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>1105</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Multi-Tier Evaluation System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Superior</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Improvement Needed</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akron</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1062</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>25332</td>
<td>9176</td>
<td>2232</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>36889</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>2310</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elgin</td>
<td>2035</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockford</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>374</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Growing Frustration

This lack of alignment between the perception of poor performance and the reality of what little poor performance is actually addressed has caused a growing frustration that has rapidly eroded the public confidence is our public schools. Now we see state legislators taking drastic measures to address these concerns, which is sending a slow but powerful shockwave through the system. This debate has even reached the national stage with the President and other major policy makers weighing in on the subject of addressing teacher performance.

“If a teacher is given a chance or two chances or three chances but still does not improve, there is no excuse for that person to continue teaching. I reject a system that rewards failure and protects a person from its consequences. The stakes are too high. We can afford nothing but the best when it comes to our children’s teachers and the schools where they teach.” President Obama (2009, March 10)

### Shifting the Paradigm

Of the many variables leaders could attempt to shift in order to bring about the change needed none has the
impact of the teacher. So why do we not do more to remove ineffective teachers while recruiting and retaining highly effective ones? A more important question; however, is how.

While the public, the media and even our educator colleagues stand ready to point out what is wrong with a given situation, we seldom are provided with solutions that work. Politicians and pundits too often try to provide simple, sound-bite answers to highly complex problems without ever providing a workable solution. Even worse, are solutions that ask for changes that fail to consider the culture within which they must operate or that cost more than what is within the realm of possibility. While I firmly believe that large-scale reform is underway the reality is that it will not come in time to impact the children in our schools right now. Small-scale but impactful changes such as evaluation reform are possible now but we need to act quickly if our children are to be prepared for a globalized world education they need and deserve.

Starting Today

I told you at the beginning of this article that I am advocating a solution which is not only possible but will also cost nothing beyond what is already being spent today. This solution is already in place in many of our highly effective schools but must become the norm instead of the exception if we are to truly make a meaningful difference in the education of our children. Effective and ongoing teacher evaluation that differentiates among performance levels must become an integral part of every school and ingrained into public school culture.

So how does effective and ongoing employee evaluation lead to improved student achievement, retention of high quality employees and de-selection of the low performers? For an answer, let us go back and look at the research into school-based variables which positively impact student achievement. Recall that according to Marzano (2000) the most important school-based factors influencing student achievement are the
opportunity to learn, time to learn, monitoring and pressure to achieve (expectations). (See Figure 1) Teachers influence all of these factors and administrators can influence teacher behavior in these areas as well. One of the best ways to influence teacher behavior is through effective and ongoing teacher evaluation, which is the remaining focus of this article.

Getting Teacher Evaluation Right – Establishing an Effective Evaluation System

Effective evaluation begins with the establishment of a comprehensive system that accurately differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in the classroom. Researchers from the New Teacher Project (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009) found that credible systems share several common characteristics. The first characteristic is that effective evaluation systems establish “clear and straightforward performance standards” which focus on the core mission of the organization – student achievement.

Setting Expectations

The establishment of performance standards, sometimes referred to as goals or expectations, is a critical component which many evaluation systems lack. School or departmental administrators should begin this process by first analyzing key data elements such as student achievement results, discipline and attendance data, demographic trends, employee data such as absence and attendance information just to name a few areas to consider. The point is to establish priorities and identify areas which need additional focus. Once critical data elements have been analyzed, administrators should work closely with staff to establish improvement goals and expectations for the next school year or annual cycle. School improvement goals, curriculum and programmatic standards, and staff handbooks are examples where these goals and expectations and should be codified. Examples of goals may include establishing student achievement or learning gains targets in reading and mathematics; developing a new school safety and supervision plan coupled with teacher roles as related to the plan or providing ongoing, engaging instruction from bell to bell to encourage maximum academic learning time.

Once standards, goals and/or expectations are established, it is critical to establish a linkage to the evaluation instrument. It is not only important that the performance standards or expectations are clear, but how employees will be evaluated based on these established standards and expectations must also be understood by those being evaluated.

Inspect What You Expect

The old adage, “Inspect what you expect,” emphasizes a second characteristic found in effective evaluation systems – regular monitoring. High expectations, lofty standards and rigorous goals have little impact unless coupled with a transparent and ongoing system of monitoring. Administrators should develop monitoring systems for all important expectations prior to the beginning of every school year. Monitoring systems can take a variety of forms from regular classroom visits to ongoing analysis of classroom achievement data. What is important with monitoring systems is that they are transparent and understood by employees as well as directly related to the expectation or standard. Once the goal is established and linked to a monitoring system, employee expectations begin to align with the administrator’s expectations tremendously increasing the probability of achieving the stated goal.

For achievement gains to be achieved, administrators must monitor indicators directly tied to this achievement. Are teachers making maximum use of the allocated time provided to engage students in learning.
aligned with the curriculum standards? Are students progressing sufficiently and is the instructional delivery achieving the desired result? Are teachers performing other duties such as hall duty or monitoring the bus ramp as expected? All of these questions can be answered through the establishment of regular, ongoing monitoring systems.

Feedback, Feedback, Feedback!

In order for a teacher to understand whether or not his/her job performance meets the expectations of the administrator requires that the administrator provide frequent and ongoing feedback – the third characteristic of effective evaluation systems. Unfortunately, performance feedback is not an integral part of most evaluation systems. In a study of 12 districts, only 26 percent of teachers received specific feedback on how to improve their performance, and amazingly, only 43 percent of teachers in their first three years had any developmental areas identified! Researchers from the same study also found that almost half of all teachers report not even having an informal conversation with their administrator regarding their performance as classroom teachers in the last year. Of the small group of teachers who were identified as needing improvement or as unsatisfactory, most reported (62 percent) that they were not aware of the concern until the evaluation (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009).

“School leaders should invest significant time in managing teachers’ performance – conducting evaluations and providing appropriate feedback and support.” (Chait, 2010 p. 23) Performance feedback should be provided to all teachers on a regular and consistent basis and most importantly this feedback should be provided to new or low performing teachers. Waiting until a final evaluation to provide feedback should be considered simply unacceptable.

Another characteristic of effective evaluation systems is that they possess multiple rating options which differentiate among the varying degrees of teacher performance. The ability to distinguish between performance which is outstanding from performance that merely meets the lowest acceptable level is critical. Evaluations with multiple rating levels distinguish top performers, while letting others know that while their performance may be satisfactory there is still room for improvement. Failure to provide different levels gives the evaluation process little leverage or incentive to improve current performance levels.

Professional Development

Effective and comprehensive evaluation systems must be linked to professional development that is in turn linked to the expected performance standards. In an environment of continuous improvement, teachers require access to quality staff development targeted to meet their specific needs. Effective systems also provide more intensive support for teachers identified with performance in need of improvement or unsatisfactory. (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009)

Train Administrators in Evaluation and Make them Accountable

According to researchers from the New Teacher Project, fair and accurate implementation of an evaluation system designed to differentiate among variable performance levels requires ongoing and intensive training. Administrators must not only understand the evaluation system well but must also be schooled in how to develop and set performance standards and then link them to this evaluation system. Once these standards are set, the administrators must be trained to establish ongoing systems for monitoring these standards as well as providing feedback to instructional staff.

Success for school-based administrators requires ongoing training and support by district staff prior to im-
plementation and even more importantly after implementa-
tion. Like the school-based administrator, the
supervising district administrator must provide on-
going guidance and monitoring to insure the evalua-
tion system is being implemented fairly and consist-
tently throughout the district. As the front-line ad-
ministrator, the school principals and assistant prin-
cipals will not only be implementing a new evalua-
tion system but will also be on the leading edge of
changing the entire culture—which is important to
positively impact achievement. District officials must
monitor and support school-based administrators in
this implementation to achieve the desired result.
Similarly, the evaluation of the school-based admin-
istrators must also be linked to the same perform-
ance standards and the implementation of the
evaluation system.

“Administrators who cannot effectively evaluate
teacher performance will be unable to reward and
retain top performers, improve and remove poor per-
formers, or help all teachers to understand and re-
spond to their own strengths and weaknesses. This
fundamental failure translates to an inability to en-
sure that students receive consistently high-quality
instruction, a failing that administrators’ own evalua-
tions must reflect.” (Weisberg, Sexton, Mul-
hern & Keeling, 2009)

Meaningful Performance Evaluations

Finally, it is vital that performance evaluations are
used as a key data element in decisions impacting a
wide variety of important employment areas. Promo-
tions, teaching assignments, staff development deci-
sions, retention and dismissal decisions should be
based in a large part on the performance evaluation.
Accurate, comprehensive evaluations thoroughly
grounded in the performance standards provide in-
formation on job effectiveness—particularly effective-
ness in the classroom. This information is extremely
useful for making other important decisions which di-
rectly impact student achievement in the classroom.
Excellent teachers can be consistently recognized for
additional compensation and/or career ladder oppor-
tunities. Similarly, low performing teachers can be tar-
geted for needed professional development or, in se-
vere cases, removal.

Getting Started

We are already witnessing a dramatic shift in the
world which has resulted in our children being placed
at a huge, competitive disadvantage as they enter the
workforce. Our schools continue to operate much as
they did 50 years ago preparing our students for ca-
reers of the past. The reality is that most students in
school today will take jobs in tomorrow’s workforce
that simply do not yet exist.

Other countries took notice of our educational success
during the 1950s and 1960s and began moving rap-
idly to improve their own systems. Unfortunately, dur-
ing this period of amazing change our educational sys-
tem stayed relatively unchanged. As a direct result,
much of the industrialized world has not only caught
up but many nations have actually surpassed us in
academic achievement. In the new globalized economy,
our students enter the workforce to compete for jobs
not just with their neighbors but with the others from
around the globe, all at a time when we have lost our
competitive edge. We need reform.

Realistically, many of the long-term reforms necessary
will take too long to put into place to impact students
sitting in our schools today. But we can make dra-
matic differences right now, which will have a signifi-
cant and powerful impact on student achievement. By
influencing the most important school-based variable
linked to a child’s educational achievement—the
teacher—we can effectively begin our schools’ much
needed reform.

Effective teacher performance evaluations will make a
positive difference in teacher behavior and therefore student achievement outcomes. Analyzing student data outcomes and setting clear performance standards while establishing transparent and ongoing monitoring systems will help these systems achieve the desired degree of success necessary to raise our students’ achievement to an acceptable performance level. Finally, providing both teachers and administrators the necessary feedback and support will not only sustain this effort but also encourage an atmosphere of high performance to become deeply embedded in the culture which permeates public education.

Teachers have a tremendous impact on the future. Our role as administrators is to ensure that this impact is a positive one. Comprehensive, meaningful and effective evaluation systems are critically important for collecting important information, while providing necessary feedback in an effort to improve teacher performance.

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