

# Calling the Right Plays to Help Teachers Succeed

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My beloved New York Giants seem like a different team than they were just a month ago, when they were coming off a humbling string of losses. If the Giants' owners had simply demanded a new lineup, or the coaching staff had told the players to figure it out on their own, I have no doubt the team would not be playing any playoff games, as they will this afternoon.

I'm not privy to the Giants' game tape analyses, but I can bet that the team—from top to bottom—took a hard look at what was and wasn't working, and worked together to figure out and implement solutions. It's what winning teams do, and it's a lesson American public education could learn much from.

In education, teacher evaluations are supposed to gauge what is and isn't working in teachers' practice, and provide feedback to ensure teachers are at the top of their game. Even though administrators have always had this responsibility, teacher evaluations have rarely met that standard. They often are little more than quick snapshots, taken by a principal sitting in the back of the classroom with a checklist once a year. Yet these snapshots—"drive-by evaluations" as they are known—frequently serve as the basis for decisions to keep or dismiss teachers. More recently, so-called reformers have pushed to replace that inadequate snapshot with another kind—once-a-year standardized student test scores in math or English—even though such tests are not designed to evaluate teachers and the majority of educators teach subjects not currently assessed by standardized tests.

Neither of these limited approaches makes any sense—for neither one does anything to improve teacher practice or increase student learning. And after all, isn't that the point?

The American Federation of Teachers has proposed a different approach. We have developed a framework to both assess teachers and develop their skills

throughout their careers. This framework calls for ongoing feedback and rigorous reviews by trained evaluators as well as appropriate supports. The aim is to help new teachers get a strong start, to help good teachers acquire the skills to continually improve (like great athletes), and to accurately identify teachers who are struggling. And if those teachers don't improve after receiving help, this approach aims to do what's needed to usher them out of the profession fairly.

One of the first school systems to adopt a framework based on this model was New Haven, Conn. The first-year results of New Haven's evaluation system, which focused both on teacher practice and student learning and which provided genuine assistance and support for teachers needing improvement, show a positive effect on teacher quality. While

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## Pressing for an evaluation system that improves classroom performance.

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much of the media attention was on the teachers who didn't make the grade, the real story was that this collaboratively negotiated approach focused on continuous improvement for all teachers in the district. I was honored to join Con-

necticut Gov. Dannel Malloy last week at a conference launching the state's latest reform efforts at which the New Haven teacher development and evaluation system was held up as a statewide and even a national model.

Unfortunately, in neighboring New York, teacher evaluation is being used (pardon the analogy) as a political football. It's easier to sound tough about weeding out poor performers than to put in the hard work and resources necessary to improve teaching and learning on a sustainable and scalable level. And that's exactly what New York's teachers union is trying to do—press for an evaluation system that improves classroom performance. As with Gov. Malloy, we welcome New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's involvement in public education but ask him to listen to those closest to our kids—their parents and educators.

Just as die-hard Giants fans like me didn't walk away from our team when it was down, we know that Americans who understand the importance of fostering a high-quality public education system won't walk away either. You wouldn't field a football team without proper conditioning, coaching and equipment. Yet, in effect, this is what happens every day in classrooms across America. We all have an interest in ensuring that our children's teachers are effective, but we must help them sharpen their game, not just keep score.



Weingarten with students at William B. Patterson Elementary School in Washington, D.C.

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