



*A Union of Professionals*

## **A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MODEL FOR TEACHER EVALUATION**

With rare exceptions, teacher evaluation procedures are broken—cursory, perfunctory, superficial and inconsistent. Despite their deficiencies, such evaluations often form the basis for many consequential decisions, such as whether a teacher is deemed to be performing satisfactorily, receives tenure, or is dismissed for what is determined to be poor performance. Equally important, inadequate evaluation procedures miss a prime opportunity to systematically improve teacher practice and increase student learning. The American Federation of Teachers is proposing a way to change that.

Our framework for teacher development and evaluation has been created by union leaders from around the country, with input from some of America's top teacher evaluation experts. We propose regular, rigorous reviews by trained evaluators, including peers and principals, based on professional teaching standards, best practices and student achievement. The goal is to improve public education by helping promising teachers improve, enabling good teachers to become great, and identifying those teachers who shouldn't be in the classroom at all.

Teacher development and evaluation must be a vehicle to achieve the mission of public schooling. And that mission must evolve from the outmoded, industrial model of education that currently exists in far too many places, to a new paradigm that will prepare students for today's knowledge economy. In addition to offering students a rich and rigorous academic foundation, a well-rounded education includes helping students develop critical and creative thinking skills, as well as other skills that will prepare them to lead productive lives and contribute meaningfully to society. Their teachers must have a system of professional growth and evaluation that reflects the sophistication and importance of their work, which is the aim of the AFT's continuous improvement model for teacher development and evaluation.

### **Principles for Effective Teacher Development and Evaluation**

Any valid approach to evaluation necessarily will consider both outputs (test data, student work) and inputs (school environment, resources, professional development). And it must include deconstructing what is working and should be replicated, as well as what isn't working and needs to be abandoned.

Student test scores based on valid assessments should be one of the performance criteria, as should classroom observations, portfolio reviews, appraisal of lesson plans, and student work.

### **The Structure of the New Approach**

This new approach represents a shift in how we think about overall school-system quality. The education community as a whole and all of its actors are responsible for providing every student the opportunity to learn and thrive. Teacher performance is one element of system quality—but not the only element. Accountability and responsibility for quality lie with teachers, administrators, other school staff and other community members.

The following components comprise the AFT's approach to teacher development and evaluation:

- **Professional Teaching Standards.** Every state should have basic professional teaching standards that districts must use as the basis for how they evaluate teachers. These standards can be augmented to meet the specific needs of the community. Standards should spell out what teachers should know and be able to do.

- **Standards for Assessing Teacher Practice.** To assess how well teachers meet these standards, multiple ways to measure teacher effectiveness should be used (classroom observation, lesson plans and materials, portfolios, etc.). Students' test scores based on valid assessments should be considered by determining whether a teacher's students show real growth while in her classroom (not by comparing the scores of last year's students with those of this year's students). Other student outcomes also matter, including attendance, commitment, engagement and the mastery of life skills.
- **Implementation Standards.** Effective evaluation requires spelling out how the evaluation system works, including details such as how teachers are involved, who evaluates them and how often, what criteria will be considered, and how the results of the evaluation will be used.
- **Standards for Teaching and Learning Conditions.** A school must be conducive to teaching and learning for achievement to occur. Conditions that affect outcomes include teachers' time, facilities and resources, teacher empowerment, school leadership, professional growth opportunities, and the school climate and safety. All members of the school community are responsible for these conditions. These elements of a school's professional context should be assessed regularly.
- **Standards for Systems of Support.** Programs to support professional development and growth should be available throughout a teacher's career. Any teacher identified as not meeting standards must be given sufficient opportunity to improve. Professional development should be guided by the results of evaluations and include efforts such as induction, mentoring and coaching.
- **Accountability.** Once a valid and comprehensive system of teacher development and evaluation is in place, districts can formulate a fair process for tenure, career ladders and, when necessary, removal of ineffective teachers who do not improve.

Some observers may be surprised by the AFT's determination to lead the way to a more rigorous system of teacher development and evaluation that includes among its components frequent and consequential assessments and the use of student test results. However, teachers, as well as students, benefit when their colleagues are well prepared and supported, and suffer when they aren't.

The AFT recently asked our members: When your union deals with issues affecting both teaching quality and teachers' rights, which of these should be the higher priority—working for professional teaching standards and good teaching, or defending the job rights of teachers who face disciplinary action? By a ratio of 4 to 1, our members chose the former. They—and the AFT—want a fair, transparent and expedient process to identify and deal with ineffective teachers.

Teachers want to do the best for their students, they want to be treated as professionals, and they want their union to advance the quality of the teaching workforce.

The AFT proposal strives to achieve those aspirations by continuously improving and informing teaching so as to better educate all students.