

League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces

Education Study Committee

## **Teacher Performance Evaluation**

By Judith McGuire

Nothing is more important to the future of our nation than high-quality education from early childhood through adulthood, thus preparing our citizens to function in a global, diverse society. But who or what determines success and high-quality? How is success measured? Does teacher performance contribute to success and quality education? This paper discusses teacher performance and the impact it has on student success. A literature review, available information about federal and state legislation, and interviews conducted by the Education Study Committee of the League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces (LWVGLC) provide background information for this paper.

Performance evaluation encompasses a method by which the job performance of an employee (in this case teacher) is evaluated, generally in terms of quality, typically by the corresponding manager or supervisor (school principal). A performance appraisal is an integral part of guiding and managing career development. It is the process of obtaining, analyzing, and recording information about the relative worth of an employee to the organization. Performance appraisal is an analysis of an employee's recent successes and failures, personal strengths and weaknesses, and suitability for promotion or further training.<sup>1</sup>

Effective and valuable performance evaluation systems must provide teachers with regular, meaningful feedback that includes the information they need to maintain or improve performance. Evaluations should focus on keeping students on track to graduation and ready for success in college or a career. Good work should be recognized and rewarded and poor performance should be acknowledged and improved with additional support from school administrators. Evaluations that improve teacher performance pay huge dividends in student and classroom performance.

While most educators agree that we must find a way of fairly evaluating teachers' performance, not many agree on a particular method. One common thread of many evaluation systems is a recent focus on student achievement based on test scores, often referred to as "value-added" measures of student performance. Because value-added is based on standardized test scores, most experts agree it should be one of several measures to determine teacher performance. The debate about using value added measures in teaching as well as in measuring teacher and school success may well be the most divisive topic in education policy today.

Basing a part of teacher performance evaluation on test scores could lead to "teaching to the test", a common concern expressed by Las Cruces Public School educators and leadership during interviews conducted by the LWVGLC Education Committee during the 2011 Education Study.

### **Research reports**

In one study conducted in Cincinnati, Ohio and published in 2004, Anthony Milanowski suggests that a well-designed, performance-based teacher evaluation system may provide a measure of important teacher behaviors that can be used in a comprehensive model of teacher, classroom,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance\\_appraisal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_appraisal) last updated 6/17/2011

and school effects on student achievement.<sup>2</sup> In his study report, Milanowski provides evidence for the potential usefulness of a rigorous, standards-based teacher evaluation system and the use of a value-added measure of student achievement. He believes certain measurable teacher behaviors have important impacts on student learning. His research found a direct correlation between high test scores and measured, evaluated teacher performance. This relationship also provides evidence of the validity of formal evaluation scores as the basis for administrative decisions with retention consequences for teachers.

In another report, published in 2010 entitled, “Teacher Evaluation 2.0”<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Kenneth D. Peterson writes that “everyone agrees that teacher evaluations are “broken,” and he proposes six design standards that any rigorous and fair evaluation system should meet. He further states that “years of research have proven that nothing schools can do for its students matters more than giving them effective teachers. Research also has shown that the best predictor of a teacher’s effectiveness is his or her past success in the classroom. Most other factors pale in comparison, including a teacher’s preparation route, advanced degrees, and even experience level (after the first few years). The lesson is clear: to ensure that every child learns from the most effective teachers possible, schools must be able to gauge their teachers’ performance fairly and accurately”. (Peterson, p.1)

The seven guiding principles for the design standards suggested by Dr. Peterson are:

1. A meaningful teacher evaluation system should reflect a set of core convictions about good instruction.
2. All children can master academically rigorous material, regardless of their socioeconomic status.
3. A teacher’s primary professional responsibility is to ensure that students learn.
4. Teachers contribute to student learning in ways that can largely be observed and measured.
5. Evaluation results should form the foundation of teacher development.
6. Evaluations should play a major role in important employment decisions.
7. No evaluation system can be perfect—teaching or in any other profession. (Peterson, p 2)

Peterson then sets out six design standards for effective performance evaluation systems.

1. School leaders should evaluate every teacher at least once a year.
2. Teachers should be evaluated against clear, rigorous performance expectations based primarily on evidence of student learning (as opposed to teacher behaviors)
3. No single data point can paint a complete picture of a teacher’s performance, so

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Milanowski; Consortium for Policy Research in Education University of Wisconsin–Madison; “The Relationship Between Teacher Performance Evaluation Scores and Student Achievement: Evidence From Cincinnati” *Peabody Journal of Education*, 79(4), 33–53 Copyright © 2004, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> <http://tntp.org/publications/issue-analysis/teacher-evaluation-2.0> to download full report.

evaluation systems should use multiple measures to determine whether teachers have met performance expectations. Whenever possible, these should include objective measures of student academic growth, such as value-added models that connect student's progress on standardized assessments to individual teachers while controlling for important factors such as students' academic history.

4. Each teacher should earn one of four or five summative ratings at the end of each school year: for example, "highly effective", "effective", "needs improvement" or "ineffective". Ratings should allow for clear, consistent distinctions between each level and allow for meaningful differentiation of teacher performance within schools and across the district.
5. An evaluation system should not be limited to a single rating assigned at the end of the year. Instead, instructional managers should strive to cultivate a performance-focused culture by observing their teachers frequently, thus providing for regular feedback conversations.
6. An evaluation process must have meaningful implications, both positive and negative, in order to earn sustained support from teachers and school leaders and to contribute to the systematic improvement of the teacher workforce. (Peterson, p 4-8)

Although performance evaluations are typically performed by the teacher's supervisor, usually the school's principal, it might be useful and helpful to the evaluator to include input from students and peers (other teachers). It is recognized that while this information can provide some input, it is often based on personality or other non-objective measures. Most important, is using a consistent and widely understood system within the individual school and throughout the district.

Additionally, principals must receive initial and ongoing education and support about the evaluation process. Teacher performance evaluation should be a top priority for the principal. Time must be made available for observation of teachers, preparation of the evaluation report, and the follow-up process. Individual school summary evaluation ratings should reflect the patterns of student academic growth in any given school throughout the district.

In an Education Study Committee interview with Superintendent Stan Rounds and Associate Superintendent Steven Sánchez, Ph.D., Division of Learning, Teaching and Research on December 14, 2010<sup>4</sup>, there was general agreement that teacher performance should not be based on the results of student testing. The valid evaluation occurs when the principal spends time in the classroom. In a busy schedule it is hard for the principal to carve out this kind of evaluation time. More difficult, however, is having compelling conversations (talking about the hard stuff) with the teachers. The school district will incur between \$10,000 to \$30,000 in legal costs to terminate a teacher. Any terminations should be done before year three when the teacher achieves permanent status and tenure. Superintendent Rounds believes that by giving improvement incentives to the entire teaching staff, the group lifts the weak teachers and improves their performance.

In another Education Study Committee interview with Eugene Gant, Commissioner, District 7, New Mexico Public Education Commission<sup>5</sup>, in reference to Teacher

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<sup>4</sup> [www.LWVGlc.org](http://www.LWVGlc.org), Programs, Education Study, General Education Issues Related to Las Cruces Public Schools, Superintendent Stan Rounds, and Steven Sánchez, Ph.D., Associate Superintendent

<sup>5</sup> [www.LWVGlc.org](http://www.LWVGlc.org), Programs, Education Study, NM Public Education Commissioner, Eugene Gant, District 7

Performance, he stated: “Overall teachers want to perform well and work hard to educate students. Teachers are being asked to do more with less of everything (e.g., salary, classroom resources, preparation time). The three-tiered salary program is encouraging teachers to move out of their comfort zone and to grow.”

## Laws and Regulations

In 2001 the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed by the US Congress.<sup>6</sup> NCLB requires annual testing of all students. Also, it states that all students are entitled to qualified teachers. This criteria led some states to redefine qualified teachers and to establish rigorous standards for certifying teachers as competent, prior to attaining tenure, a system that commonly refers to life tenure in a job and specifically to a senior academic's contractual right not to have his or her position terminated without just cause.

NCLB establishes specific standards for High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE): NCLB allows states to develop an additional way for current teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency and to meet highly qualified teacher requirements. Proof may consist of a combination of teaching experience, professional development, and knowledge in the subject garnered over time in the profession. Also, in NCLB to be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach.

In 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, President Obama included competitive grant funds for his education program, Race to the Top, that encouraged states and districts across the country to revamp outdated teacher evaluation systems to meet both the needs of schools and the professionals who work in them. Time will tell if these grants in fact improve education and teacher performance.

Well crafted and widely understood standards should then encompass and define regulations governing performance and tenure that permit a fair, rigorous and frequent evaluation system. Regulations also should provide for effective procedures for correcting poor performance and removing ineffective teachers. Some states have introduced performance-based merit pay or bonus programs as reported by Michael Podgursky and Matthew Springer in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 2007<sup>7</sup>. For example, school systems in Colorado, Texas, Florida, and Minnesota have established specific programs to reward teachers with a bonus and/or salary increase based on obtaining advanced education, student performance and/or professional evaluation outcomes. Bonus and salary increases are funded through state grants to school districts based on specific funding formula.

During the 2003 NM legislative session, House Bill 212,<sup>8</sup> was approved creating “an assessment and accountability system based on challenging academic content and performance standards as well as rigorous testing against those standards to determine annual adequate yearly progress (often referred to as AYP) of students, schools, school districts and the state department of public education”. In addition, this law provided “for more stringent competency requirements for K-12 teachers and school principals and provided for licensure of teachers and principals”.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No\\_Child\\_Left\\_Behind\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Child_Left_Behind_Act), last updated 6/16/2011

<sup>7</sup> “Teacher Performance Pay: A Review,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp 909-949, Douglas J. Besharov, Editor, published online at [www.interscience.wiley.com](http://www.interscience.wiley.com)

<sup>8</sup> [www.lcps.k12.nm.us/committees/Policies/HB212.pdf](http://www.lcps.k12.nm.us/committees/Policies/HB212.pdf)

Section D (2) of the Legislative Findings and Purpose states that “teachers who do not meet performance standards must improve their skills or they will not continue to be employed as teachers. The act further defines a teacher as a person who holds a level one, two or three-A license and whose primary duty is classroom instruction or the supervision, below the school principal level, of an instructional program.

The act covers the state and local school governance systems as well as teacher education. Section 22-10A 4 through 11 defines in detail the new “3-Tiered Teacher Licensure System” that provides for pay increases based on specific achievements. (See Attachment 2)

The *Guidelines for the New Mexico Annual Teacher Performance Evaluation*, Third Edition, was published in May, 2005.<sup>9</sup> The guidelines are based on the three-tier licensing system and include nine common competencies:

1. The teacher accurately demonstrates knowledge of the content area and approved curriculum;
2. The teacher appropriately utilizes a variety of teaching methods and resources for each area taught;
3. The teacher communicates with and obtains feedback from students in a manner that enhances student learning and understanding;
4. The teacher comprehends the principles of student growth, development and learning, and applies them appropriately;
5. The teacher effectively utilizes student assessment techniques and procedures;
6. The teacher manages the educational setting in a manner that promotes positive student behavior, and a safe and healthy environment;
7. The teacher recognizes student diversity and creates an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of positive student involvement and self-concept;
8. The teacher demonstrates a willingness to examine and implement change as appropriate;
9. The teacher works productively with colleagues, parents, and community members.

In addition each teacher is required to develop an Annual Professional Development Plan (PDP) each year in cooperation with their principal. The PDP includes annual goals, measurable multi-year objectives for each goal with a plan to annually review the progress towards meeting the objectives and goals. Once the plan is agreed upon by the teacher and principal, the plan should be expanded to include competencies and indicators to be addressed, an action plan, observable results and a “written reflection of the PDP including an analysis of student achievement and learning growth”. Before the end of each school year, the principal and teacher will meet to assess how well the PDP was carried out and the extent to which measurable objectives were achieved. The PDP then forms the basis of the annual performance evaluation.

The 2005 Guidelines further state that: “Progressive documentation of a teacher’s performance and professional development plan is a continuous process by which data are collected and analyzed annually to improve teacher quality.” Further on the Guidelines state that “Unless

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<sup>9</sup> <http://teachnm.org/experienced-teachers/annual-evaluation.html>

teacher performance indicates otherwise, a Summative Performance Evaluation will be completed for Level II and III teachers only at the end of each three-year period". A standard summative evaluation form is included as Attachment 1.

The Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS) 2011-2013 National Education Association (NEA) union contract<sup>10</sup> includes an entire section on evaluation and the following statement:

"Throughout the evaluation process and at any evaluative meeting described in this article, the immediate supervisor will inform the certified employee that he/she may invite an NEA-Las Cruces representative to attend the meeting. The certified employee will be provided a form indicating his/her right for representation. The certified employee will indicate on the form whether he/she chooses to have representation and the employee will sign and date the form and will be given a copy of the signed forms." (LCPS NEA Contract, p. 28-34)

In the 2011 NM Legislature, Governor Susana Martinez supported Senate Bill 502. It had three important provisions:

- It required public school districts, including charter schools, to adopt a state teacher evaluation framework to improve student achievement .
- It provided for a school principal evaluation system based on school achievement.
- It provided for termination of teachers and principals that do not meet minimum standards.

The bill did not pass. However, the Governor did issue an executive order creating the New Mexico Effective Teaching Task Force<sup>11</sup> to develop the framework for a statewide initiative to reward excellent teachers and educators. The task force, that includes education leaders, teachers, parents and other community stakeholders, will focus on finding ways to identify, recruit, reward, and retain the most outstanding teachers. August 31, 2011 is the deadline for reporting recommendations of the Task Force.

"When it comes to putting the pieces together for a quality education system, the main ingredient is great teachers," said Governor Martinez. "Excellent educators inspire their students and play a vital role in their academic success. It is absolutely necessary that New Mexico has a system in place to identify, recruit, reward, and retain outstanding teachers and educators." It remains to be seen if the Task Force can develop an effective and sustainable initiative by end of August, 2011. (A Google search did not identify any outcomes of the task force, as members are still being appointed.)

## Summary thoughts

A review of the literature and interviews with the Las Cruces Public School leadership seems to suggest a need to improve the system of teacher performance evaluation. In order to evaluate a teacher, like performance evaluation of any other professionals, one needs to determine what that teacher/professional needs to know and be able to do and then how that teacher/professional demonstrates this knowledge through performance. Strong negative opinions were

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nea-nm.org/CollectiveBargaining/CollectiveBargaining.html>, NEA-Las Cruces (Certified) and Las Cruces Public Schools

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.governor.state.nm.us/>, Governor Martinez Forms Task Force to Reward New Mexico Teachers, New Release, April 25, 2011

expressed verbally and in writing regarding “teaching to the test” and using test results as a major part of teacher performance evaluations. The task force created by Governor Martinez may result in future NM legislative initiatives mandating additional design and implementation of teacher performance reviews. All agree that teacher performance evaluations impact the successful education of our students.

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