Building Teacher Capacity

Tools to strengthen instruction through multiple measures of evaluation.

By Maribel Childress

We have entered a new era of teacher evaluation—one where everyone understands the importance of getting it right. While research has shown that teachers are the most important factor in student achievement, *principals* are key to successful teacher practice. A significant element of a principal's influence on good teaching is the effective use of a teacher evaluation system that is predicated on meaningful feedback, mentoring, and coaching. It is also imperative that principals receive appropriate support to execute evaluation models that accomplish the goal of evaluation: to improve instruction and learning.
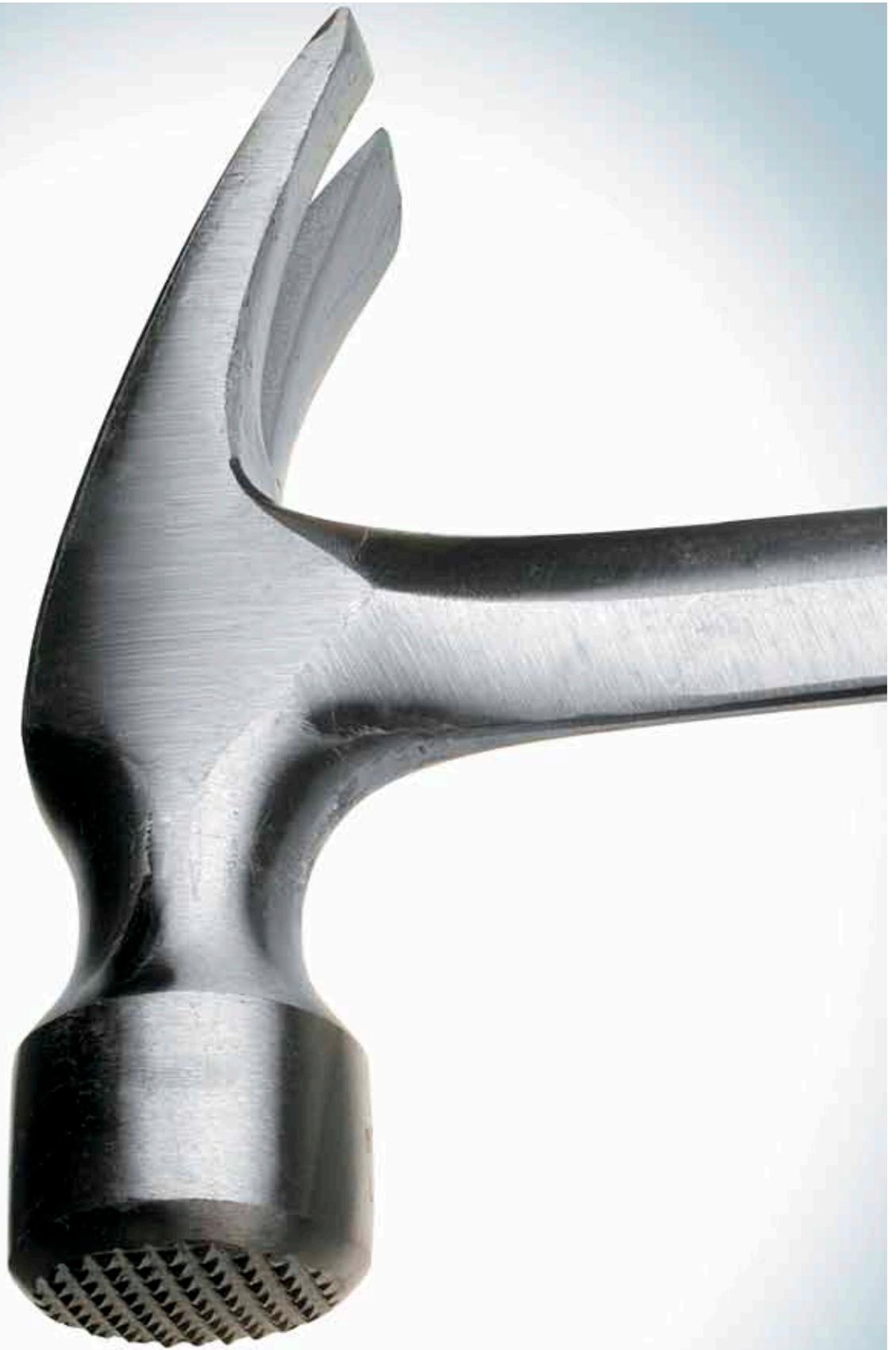
Since 2009, most states have made significant changes to how teachers are evaluated in order to improve instruction. The Center for Public Education's *Trends in Teacher Evaluation* reports that 41 states now require or recommend that teachers be evaluated using multiple measures of teacher performance. While states have taken varied approaches to developing and implementing teacher performance systems, two of the most popular models are those by Charlotte Danielson and Robert Marzano. These models include student achievement data, classroom observations, student surveys, lesson plan reviews, teacher self-assessments, student artifacts, and teacher portfolios.

While greatly improved, new teacher evaluation models create new challenges for principals. I, along with other colleagues representing the nation's principals, explored these issues as a part of the joint NAESP and NASSP Teacher Evaluation Committee. As outlined in *Supporting Principals in Implementing Teacher Evaluation Systems*, the brief the committee developed, there are several factors that limit a principal's ability to implement effective teacher evaluation models. These include, to name a few, insufficient training, unclear or narrowly defined rubrics for observations, and inadequate time during the school year in which to complete observations.

Supporting Principals in Implementing Teacher Evaluation Systems provides seven recommendations to bolster principals as new teacher evaluation systems take root. The recommendations address the time issue by suggesting a reduction in the number of observations required for teachers who demonstrate effectiveness. The recommendations call for consistent funding for assistant principals, and other measures such as providing principals professional development on teacher evaluation and technology tools to perform the evaluations.

POLICY CORNER:
Recommendations for Teacher Evaluations

A new joint brief from NAESP and NASSP, *Supporting Principals in Implementing Teacher Evaluation Systems*, offers policymakers and district leaders seven recommendations to bolster principals as implementers of new evaluation systems. According to the brief, states and districts should:

- **Spend 10 percent of Title II funds on professional development for school leaders.** Currently, states and districts spend less than 4 percent of Title II "allowable use" funds on principal professional development.
- **Provide principals with training, credentialing, and ongoing professional development on teacher evaluation.** This should include training on instructional coaching.
- **Respect principals' judgment.** Principals must be given latitude to make decisions regarding evaluation tools, improvement plans, and personnel.
- **Reduce the number of observations required for teachers who demonstrate effectiveness.**
- **Provide consistent funding for schools to hire assistant principals and other school administrators who provide direct support for teachers.** At minimum, every school with more than 400 students should have an assistant principal.
- **Provide personalized professional development for all teachers to support collaboration and best practices.** Schools must provide ongoing professional learning for educators at every stage of their career.
- **Provide principals with effective technology and related tools to facilitate efficient observations.** Support them to disseminate timely feedback to teachers as well as personalize professional development and learning opportunities.

Read the brief at **naesp.org/teacher-evaluation**.

A New Era

Arkansas, my state, has stepped toward ensuring high-quality instruction and instructional leadership by passing the Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS). This Charlotte Danielson model is both an evaluation and a support system. The tiered system is tailored to meet teacher needs through self-assessment, the development of professional growth plans, informal and formal observations, pre- and post-observation conferences, and summative evaluations. Reflective conversations and instructional coaching are at the core of moving teachers forward in their professional work and ensuring academic success for their students.

Glenda Bryan, a master principal from the Marion (Arkansas) School District, finds that the Danielson

model has inspired teachers in her school to look deeper into their practice and to discover areas that they need to work on. Bryan thinks that this reflective practice will promote a greater understanding of the fundamentals of good teaching. "It is important to ensure there is a system of rewards that recognizes the great teacher, encourages the good to become great, and removes the bad teacher from the classroom," she says.

The Danielson rubrics lend themselves to personalized professional development, according to Dondi Frisinger, a master principal in the Springdale (Arkansas) Public School District. "The rubric provides the structure to have conversations about how to move instruction to a higher level that will improve student achievement," Frisinger explains.

Time Crunch

A February 2013 survey of NAESP and NASSP members found that a substantive teacher evaluation requires 11 to 15 hours per teacher over the course of a school year. On average, principals manage 10 to 40 staff members in smaller schools and upwards of 60 personnel in larger schools. Providing an accurate and actionable evaluation for every teacher poses a growing dilemma for principals, given their full range of responsibilities. The time factor has emerged as an overwhelming concern, particularly as some districts continue to eliminate assistant principal positions and other instructional support positions.

One actionable solution recommended by the NAESP/NASSP report, is the use of assistant principals or other administrative personnel. In my Springdale (Arkansas) Public School District, every elementary school has a full-time assistant principal to support the full range of a principal's leadership responsibilities. In Arkansas, both principals and assistant

principals receive the same extensive evaluation training and have to pass the same online calibration assessments to be certified as evaluators. Thus, I am able to share the responsibility of the teacher evaluation process equally with my assistant principal.

PD & Instructional Coaching

According to the Center for Public Education, 31 states align teacher evaluation results to inform professional development opportunities for teachers. Professional development, although targeted to the specific needs of students and teachers, is a broad term that includes any setting in which teachers become more knowledgeable about practice. Examples include listening to a lecture, planning instruction after analyzing student data, reading a text, participating in a webcast, or receiving support from a coach. There are no limits to how teachers can grow in their knowledge through professional development.

A professional development activity related to the teacher evaluation system that my faculty and I find most valuable is conducting peer classroom walkthroughs together using individual components from the Danielson rubric. During these walkthroughs, the teachers and I collect evidence to support best practice implementation of that component. Then, we use Peter Pappas' Taxonomy of Reflection to look for patterns in practice, and determine what was important about what

we saw and how we can use those same strategies in each of our classrooms.

Instructional coaching, on the other hand, is a type of professional development where an expert coach works alongside a teacher. It results in meaningful, high-quality professional development for teachers because it is job-embedded, and addresses issues teachers face daily in their classrooms. The ultimate goals are improved instructional practice and student learning. Coaching is confidential, non-evaluative, and supportive. It is a process that requires a delicate balance with a teacher evaluation system.

My assistant principal and I use data from the evaluation process to align instructional coaching that is personalized for each teacher and supported by the administrators and instructional facilitator or coach.

While many principals are too busy to lead the coaching process with every teacher, developing this capacity among assistant principals and instructional coaches is essential, advises Diane Sweeny, author of *Student Centered Coaching: A Guide for K–8 Coaches and Principals* (2010).

"Principals who value the process participate in the process," writes Sweeny. "They not only gain insight

regarding where the teachers and students are and where they need to be, but are able to hold teachers accountable to take the necessary steps for increasing student achievement." Sweeny also reminds principals that they are responsible for holding teachers accountable for implementing a specific curriculum or set of practices. "The coach is the source of support to help teachers get there," Sweeny writes.

Tech Tools

Many of the time constraints principals experience with teacher evaluation can be solved through the use of technology tools, which make conducting observations and providing feedback to teachers more efficient and effective. Thirteen Ed Online suggests that "teachers can use spreadsheets to track student work and track their teaching plans. If a group of students is performing poorly in a particular area, this kind of record keeping can highlight areas that the teacher needs to focus on in their own teaching."

These tools can also help administrators assess and improve teacher performance. A range of devices are available for teachers to use in producing materials for evaluation. Teachers can use scanners, digital photographs, digital portfolios, and

Principal ONLINE

> **"** Principals must also remember to recognize the art of teaching—those elements that aren't always measured in an evaluation rubric. **"**

video to record evidence and produce artifacts of their teaching. These tools are not only great time-savers, but they also help organize and manage information in ways that are more useful to teachers and instructional coaches.

Another major advantage to digital technology is that the work can become part of a conversation. I use Google Docs for these collegial conversations. Constant feedback between teachers and administrators allows teachers to continually adjust course. The goal is set, but the actual path responds to the needs of the students.

Frisinger uses Excel to scribe during observations, which allows her to reflect on the components observed and sort them. She sends notes in the natural order they occurred and also sorted by components. The teacher can use the notes for reflection on the rubric prior to the post-conference.

Bryan and her assistant principal use iPads, which enable them to provide immediate feedback to the teachers when they have finished the observation. They also use DocsServer Document Management, a software program to aid with artifact gathering.

Principals have many tech choices;

each leader just has to find the tools that work best for him or her.

Affirm & Celebrate the Work

Principals must also remember to recognize the art of teaching—those elements that aren't always measured in an evaluation rubric. Pre- and post-observation conversations provide an opportunity for a teacher to talk in depth about his or her logic in making classroom decisions, Frisinger says. She then uses these conversations as an opportunity to affirm a teacher's work as well as to learn about instructional tools and strategies teachers are using that can be shared schoolwide.

"Principals need to do things to help inspire the new teacher, reaffirm the seasoned professional, and recognize the gift that teachers give to us all," Bryan says. Bryan's school begins grade-level meetings with a time of celebration. Staff members give "shout-outs" to people who have exhibited the art of teaching through acts of kindness, helpfulness, and sharing.

"As a principal, I have always provided an avenue for staff members to be recognized and nurtured. We have a themed bulletin board on the wall for staff members, parents, community members, and students to write notes of praise to staff members," Bryan says. "This year we are doing a 'Survivor' theme with Tribe Vibe forms to fill out and post on the banners. All of these things recognize and nurture the art of teaching."

Teacher quality is the single most important school-based factor in student achievement. Like my principal colleagues nationwide, I want my school and students to achieve. I want the teacher evaluation process to be successful. No one is more invested than principals in the quality of instruction throughout the nation's schools. I want to get it right! ▣

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