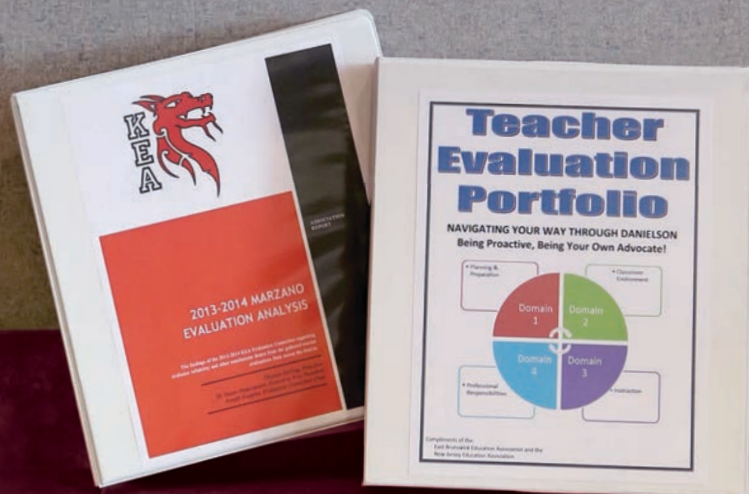


DIFFERENT PATHS TO ADVOCACY

BY LISA GALLEY

Q WHAT'S THE RIGHT WAY FOR A LOCAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE TO ADVOCATE FOR ITS MEMBERS?

A IT'S A TRICK QUESTION. THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY. THERE'S JUST THE WAY THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR ASSOCIATION.



During a workshop for members, EBEA President Dana Zimbicki describes the materials included in the binder prepared by her Local Evaluation Committee.

When AchieveNJ went into effect in September 2013, teachers and administrators around the state were thrust into a system that was significantly different than the previous way educator effectiveness was determined. Despite repeated calls from NJEA and other groups for an additional pilot year, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) pushed ahead. Soon a new evaluation lexicon was born—including an entire crop of acronyms—followed quickly by growing confusion and mounting frustration. (PSST—want to ScIP tomorrow’s DEAC so we can work on our SGOs?)

Some districts made genuine attempts to train staff in the new teacher practice models and AchieveNJ procedures. Other districts either underestimated that task or hoped, perhaps, that this initiative would, like so many programs that came before it, perish in the education reform graveyard. Regardless of which of these scenarios describes your district, an evaluation system this complex and implemented this hastily was bound to have its problems.

From the time the NJDOE piloted the new system to the present, NJEA has monitored the program, developed trainings for members and generated resources to assist local associations with the transition. That support was complemented by articles in print and online, hundreds of workshops and ongoing support provided by UniServ field offices. Behind the scenes, Association leaders and staff met with NJDOE officials to change some of AchieveNJ’s most egregious shortcomings. Just one example of NJEA’s success in this area was the changes to the formula used to calculate teachers’ summative ratings in 2014-15. The new formula significantly diminishes the impact of standardized testing on a teacher’s final score.

At the same time, local associations encountered a new set of crises—ones centered on deadlines and data, indicators and inter-rater reliability, student surveys and summative ratings. There were SGOs to prepare. And at least one person had to be able to understand and explain the complicated methodology used to calculate SGPs. The lack of adequate training in teacher practice models and the absence of clarity among many administrators regarding AchieveNJ’s procedures sent members to their local leaders in droves.

From the start, NJEA encouraged every association to form an evaluation committee if one did not already exist. The NJEA Achieve Organizing Playbook was prepared to assist locals as they advocated for their members. Based on the unique characteristics of its district, each local evaluation committee (LEC) approached this challenge in its own way. There were some general best practices, of course, such as the ones listed in the sidebar on Page 37. But it soon became clear that each local association had to find its own way to serve its members with regard to AchieveNJ.

The East Brunswick (Middlesex County) and Kingsway (Gloucester County) education associations are locals that followed very different paths. In East Brunswick, the LEC focused on training members in the Danielson teacher practice model. Meanwhile, the Kingsway EA set out to determine if administrators were consistent when applying the principles of the Marzano teacher practice model during observations.



EAST BRUNSWICK EA

Early last summer, the leaders of the East Brunswick EA (EBEA) decided to be proactive in dealing with the new tenure law and the teacher evaluation system that resulted from it. According to EBEA President Dana Zimbicki, district administration had created a District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC) and School Improvement Panel (ScIP) and provided training sessions on the Danielson Evaluation Model. But EBEA decided to offer more support.

“We wanted to give each member a tool to help ensure their success under the new evaluation system,” explains Zimbicki. “Our members needed direction in learning to self-advocate and how to make certain ‘student-directed learning’ occurs in their classrooms each and every day.”

So Zimbicki and Diane Heilman, chairperson of the local’s LEC, prepared a handbook for teachers to use so they understood what was necessary for them to be rated “effective” or “highly effective.”

“Our handbook soon morphed into a binder that would allow our members to collect their own evidence for each of Danielson’s domains,” notes Heilman. “We divided our handbook into seven sections with the first section, Personal Documents, being the cornerstone of the binder.”

The Personal Documents section included a modified NJEA “Educators in the Lead” packet for teachers to fill out prior, during and after evaluations. This tool allows teachers to engage in meaningful dialogue with observers, which is essential to showing effective and highly effective teacher practices.

The next four sections of the binder are broken down into each domain. In these sections, EBEA included examples of effective and highly effective strategies that teachers can immediately implement in their classrooms. Coupled with the domain sections is a resource section that provides valuable, ready-to-use tools. These tools include examples of higher order thinking questions,



Science teacher Michael Kestlinger asks a question during EBEA's Evaluate "IT" training for members.

student-centered learning activities, a parent-teacher communication log, ideas to create a getting-to-know-you student survey, a personal learning style assessment and formative and summative assessment strategies.

Perhaps the most valuable portion of the binder is the teacher comment section, known to many as the "rebuttal" section.

"We believe in keeping the teacher comments positive and professional," Zimbicki says. "That's why we provided a list of guidelines for writing teacher comments as well as sample comments for when observations result in low and high scores. It is our fundamental belief that all teachers should comment on their observation in order to demonstrate their strong desire to be highly effective teachers."

Sample items from EBEA's binder can be found on njea.org and in the tablet version of the *Review* available from your app store.

TOOLS + TRAINING = SUCCESS

This fall, EBEA invited all of its members to attend three-hour trainings titled, Evaluate "IT." At the workshops, members learned how to effectively incorporate the binder into their daily practice and use it during all conferences with administration to advocate for themselves. Attendees also received information about the procedures associated with the evaluation system as well as the Danielson Evaluation rubric.

"Our members exited the workshop more knowledgeable and feeling empowered," Heilman believes. "Additionally, the implementation of student-centered learning strategies became a natural consequence of this workshop. In East Brunswick the teacher practice score is based on the preponderance of evidence. Our members learned how to collect evidence and how to present the evidence to administration to show effective teaching practice."

Workshop trainers also addressed how to handle pre and post conferences, collect evidence and data, present evidence to observ-

ers, incorporate effective teaching strategies into everyday lessons and respond to each evaluation.

THE NEED FOR ONGOING SUPPORT

Zimbicki and Heilman aren't alone in these efforts. The association's LEC has approximately 25 members who also serve on subcommittees.

"We meet regularly to discuss what is occurring in all 11 of our buildings to ensure consistency with the evaluation rubric," notes Zimbicki.

When teachers have questions, the committee is able to assist, whether it be to help the member better understand a specific domain or write a response to an evaluation. Additionally, Heilman set up a Google Doc account where all EBEA teachers can enter evaluation scores for each observation. This allows the LEC to spot trends and patterns that can be brought to the attention of administration.

Zimbicki and Heilman strongly encourage other locals to form an LEC that creates tools to help members.

"We believe that when members use these binders, the evidence they've collected speaks for itself," Heilman explains. "Teachers are sometimes nervous when speaking with an administrator, so the binder helps tell their story of success."

"This approach has leveled the playing field, resulting in a better working environment for our members and a better learning environment for our students," adds Zimbicki. "Isn't that the goal of every local association?"

"I am confident that the efforts of East Brunswick's LEC will prevent problems down the road," notes Jan Basler, the NJEA UniServ field rep for EBEA. "Teachers who use the binder and attended the training now understand what observers are looking for in their teaching and can use these tools to ensure a summative rating that truly represents their skills and dedication."



The Kingsway Education Association Local Evaluation Committee compiled data from members' evaluations to investigate the inter-rater reliability of administrators' observations. From left: Laura Newton, Wendy Lynch, Joe Kuppler, Tom Stelling, Amy Tomasco and Reena Ninan.

KINGSWAY EA

Although it was not an official pilot district, Kingsway did select the Marzano evaluation model a year earlier than required by the state. By most accounts, the rollout of the new teacher practice instrument was chaotic, although Kingsway EA (KEA) President Tom Stelling wasn't surprised.

"Much like the rest of the state, there was little if any research on the efficacy of these models," says Stelling. "It happened too fast and without proper planning."

Further, KEA members recognized that administrators did not have a common understanding of Marzano's four domains and how to recognize if teachers were demonstrating the elements contained in each.

"We lost faith that everyone had the same understanding of what success meant," notes Joe Kuppler, chair of the association's LEC.

To complicate matters, KEA had not been consulted regarding which members should sit on the DEAC.

"We decided it was time for KEA to see if we could achieve fairness and objectivity in the midst of the confusion and subjectivity that plagued the implementation of the Marzano model," recalls Stelling.

GOING DOOR TO DOOR

The first step in determining consistency among observers was to ask the six members of the LEC and building reps to collect copies of KEA members' evaluations, both "good" and "bad." Naturally, many teachers were reluctant to share this information; that's why it was important that the request for cooperation was made in person.

"You can't just send an email and expect members to email their evaluations right back," Kuppler explains. "We talked with teachers, assured them of the confidentiality of the process and explained

how we planned to use the data."

Stelling reports that KEA "pushed hard" for several months; eventually 80 percent of the association's 150 teachers submitted all three of their observations.

"Our overarching concern was fairness, not just if some teachers were getting poor scores," says Stelling.

CALCULATING TOTAL MEAN ABSOLUTE DEVIATION

With hundreds of evaluations in hand, it was time to plug in the numbers and do some math. Both teachers and administrators were assigned numbers to ensure anonymity. Kuppler was the only KEA member to know which identifiers were matched to which names. Next, massive spreadsheets were prepared and analysis was completed.

"We took the total number of elements that an observer gave and averaged them for the observer's average teacher score," says Stelling. "Our interest was not in the teachers, but in the district's 17 observers. Once each observer's score for a given teacher was sub-averaged, it provided three average scores for each teacher with each score pertaining to each observer."

Stelling and Kuppler noticed that observers rarely give the same score to the same teacher. So an average deviation was calculated to find out if each observer rated higher or lower than other administrators. Of course, one teacher doesn't make a trend. The question was whether the observer *always* rated teachers higher or lower than his or her peers and by how much as determined by a total mean absolute deviation (TMAD).

"We were pleased to see that aside from a few outlying points, most of the rater averages fall within a standard deviation of the ideal fairest rating," Kuppler notes. But, administrators with TMAD scores that fall outside of the standard deviation do not, in practice,

Now that the evaluation data has been gathered, processed and analyzed, Kingsway EA President Tom Stelling explains how his LEC plans to use this information.



have a common opinion with their peers of the teachers they observe. Their scores being too high or low mean that they too often deviate from other observers' opinions.

Stelling and Kuppler compiled the data in a 25-page report, complete with an explanation of their methodology. With the names of the 17 administrators still redacted, they emailed the report to every KEA member. At press time, Stelling had presented the report with administrators' names to Superintendent James Lavender, but they were yet to discuss it.

GETTING RESULTS

According to the calculations, one administrator consistently rated teachers higher than other observers. Three administrators, however, regularly rated teachers lower than their peers, and one of the three scored teachers significantly lower than other observers. This information could be particularly valuable for teachers who are rated partially ineffective or ineffective if they were observed by one of more of these administrators. KEA plans to repeat the data collection and analysis again this school year.

"I was very impressed with the fact the KEA took the initiative to use the Local Evaluation Committee to get all members involved in compiling data to assist with the analysis of the inter-rater reliability and have been able to see concrete results of their collective action," says NJEA Region 2 UniServ Rep Al Beaver. "I also think it is noteworthy to mention that they charged the Evaluation Committee in assisting ESP members with their evaluations as well as certificated staff and placed an ESP member on the committee so it was truly inclusive."

"We want an evaluation system that celebrates teachers for their success in the classroom and provides meaningful guidance to teachers who struggle," Stelling concludes. "This research provides an independent source of reflection for administrators as they continue to hone their own practice of teacher observation."

TIPS FOR YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION'S EVALUATION COMMITTEE

If your local association is seeking direction in starting or improving a Local Evaluation Committee (LEC), begin with the NJEA Achieve Organizing Playbook found at njea.org/achievenjorganizing. This will help you evaluate where your association is in its organizing and provide concrete actions and resources to help your local move forward.

- Design an LEC that adapts to the needs of your members. If members are reluctant to share their evaluations openly, find ways to address those concerns. The NJEA Achieve Organizing Playbook website includes an example how to efficiently (and anonymously if that is the direction your local association decides to go) collect information about members' evaluations.

- Use this committee to expand member participation in your association. This work provides opportunities for members with specialized skills—data analysis, response writing, researching state teacher evaluation code, etc.—to participate within the local behind the scenes.

- Stress the positive aspects of this work. The LEC is *not* meant to attack the administration. The real work of this committee is to empower members to take control of their own evaluations. The committee should also identify those members who excel under the new evaluation system, encouraging them to share their expertise widely with members.

- Some of the work of the LEC will identify biases and inconsistencies with regard to administrative practices around evaluation. This committee could provide evidence for the purpose of identifying professional development opportunities for the administration, defending members in arbitration and ensuring honest and effective practices around evaluation. 📢

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