

Book Review:

Accountable Teacher Evaluation!

Toward Highly Qualified and Competent Teachers

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*Florida Journal of Educational
Administration & Policy*

Spring 2008
Volume 1, Issue 2

Keywords: Teacher Evaluation; Accountability

Andrews, H. A. (2004). *Accountable Teacher Evaluation! Toward Highly Qualified and Competent Teachers*. Stillwater, Oklahoma: New Forums Press.

Meaningful teacher evaluation is often touted as being integral to student learning and achievement. In most cases, a comparison or reference is usually made to traditional forms of evaluation in which administrators are perceived as the sole purveyors of knowledge and more recent trends that view teacher evaluation as a collaborative effort between faculty and administration. Critically concerned about the ineffectiveness of most teacher evaluation systems, Hans A. Andrews in his book *Accountable Teacher Evaluation! Toward Highly Competent Teachers*, posits the need for more meaningful forms of evaluation to be incorporated in not only elementary, middle and high school (K-12), but also post K-12 institutions-- particularly community colleges. He posits that dramatically improving the quality of teacher evaluations will result in an increase in the number of competent teachers within the classroom, improved instruction and subsequently leads to increased student achievement.

In the prologue, Andrews documents the various experiences that influenced his decision to write this book and why he chose to focus on K-12 and community colleges. Some of the major reasons include the endemic lack of effective teacher evaluation systems in most educational institutions, and the need to remove incompetent teachers. He argues that "teaching can be improved through teacher evaluation if it is taken seriously, accomplished by competent administrators and supported by serious governing boards' intent on improving instruction in their schools and colleges" (p. xviii). In an era of increased accountability, this book provides a welcome insight into the issue of teacher evaluation and the steps that must be utilized to create effective teacher evaluations systems.

To present his case, Andrews divides the book into three sections. Section 1, "Justifications for Accountable Evaluation Systems" consists of four chapters. In these chapters Andrews underscores the need to make "teacher evaluation programs more

meaningful” (p. 3). He provides research to support his view that present systems of teacher evaluations possess numerous flaws and so should be revamped and revised. Some of the common themes throughout these chapters are: (1) the inclusion of feedback in all teacher evaluations; (2) the need for well-trained and competent evaluators; (3) the need to garner faculty and union support of any teacher evaluation system; (4) the need for remediation to be an integral component of any evaluation system; and (5) the need for clearly defined standards that will motivate and inspire teachers to achieve excellence. He suggests that many incompetent teachers have remained in their positions, because administrators have failed to conduct effective evaluations that would lead to improved instruction or the dismissal of teachers who “refuse to or cannot improve” (p. 32). The author cautions against the growing use of the student and peer evaluations as the sole forms of teacher evaluations in universities and community colleges. In his view, these forms of evaluation may provide useful information; but may not lead to improved classroom instruction, and “lack credibility in arbitration hearings” (p. 71).

Section 2, “Establishing Teaching and Evaluation Standards” consists of five chapters. Each chapter offers suggestions and recommendations for establishing an effective teacher evaluation system. Several common themes are found in the chapters of this section. One theme is the inherent benefits of teacher recognition programs. Here, Andrews cites cases where teacher recognition programs were being used in various educational settings. He notes that whereas, there is a “significant increase” (p. 186) in their usage in many schools and community colleges, there is still room for improvement. He provides a brief description of some of the benefits and challenges of such programs. Some of the benefits noted include: (1) an improvement in the quality of teaching; (2) improvement of the teaching environment for teachers; (3) improved public image of the teaching profession and schools; (4) a caring attitude toward faculty by administrators and governing boards; and (5) promotion of positive attitudes. The author also cites cases where teacher recognition has resulted in peer rejection, and encourages administrators to create school environments that “stimulate recognition and growth among all faculty members.” (p. 184). Another theme of this section is the need to effectively train evaluators and define quality standards for evaluation forms and processes. The author encourages universities and colleges to make teacher evaluation training a salient component of their educational administration degree curriculum. He notes that the evaluation process should include: (1) unannounced visitations, (2) post classroom observations meetings with teachers, (3) follow-up visits if concerns exist, (4) notice to remediate (5) more follow-up visits (6) decision to terminate or retain teacher. Andrews uses one chapter to present cases to answer the question of whether evaluations should be formative, summative or a combination of both. The first three cases provide examples of positive and negative formative evaluations, while the final case provides an example of a formative evaluation that resulted in a summative evaluation about whether to continue or terminate the teacher involved.

Section 3, “Implementing Accountable Outcomes” consists of eight chapters. Each chapter provides information regarding the various steps in the evaluation process. In one chapter, he examines the topic of remediation as a tool for ensuring that quality instruction is occurring within the classroom, and emphasizes the need for detailed plans to be implemented when teachers are found to be incompetent. The author also provides step by step instructions that he supports be utilized to address the challenging issue of teacher

termination. In another chapter, Andrews briefly discusses the issue of post tenure evaluation by citing research conducted between the periods 1984 to 2004. These studies show that faculty leaders and academic administrators in the community college system support post-tenure evaluation, and think that they should be used to promote faculty development. In addressing the issue of governing boards, the author emphasizes the need for these boards to make the necessary decisions regarding hiring, tenure, and dismissal and should be held responsible for ensuring that students receive quality teaching. He proposes that it is easier to remove tenured and untenured, incompetent teachers when board members establish sound policies that demand high quality in hiring, evaluations, and decisions regarding tenure and dismissal, and post tenure terminations. The need for an evaluation system for part-time faculty is also addressed in this section. Andrews proposes that increased growth of part-time faculty should be considered as schools and colleges seek to improve student learning and achievement.

Teacher evaluation has taken center stage with the various standards that were promulgated as a consequence of “No Child Left Behind” legislation. *Accountable Teacher Evaluations! Toward Highly Qualified and Competent Teachers* is therefore well timed and provides administrators with valuable and insightful information regarding teacher evaluations systems and programs. The numerous subheadings within each chapter make this book an easy read, and provides administrators at various level of educational system with a wealth of information on creating effective and meaningful evaluation programs or systems within their institutions. Andrews does a concise but in-depth job of acknowledging the various issues that have prevented many administrators from developing quality evaluation programs and forced them to retain incompetent instructors. He also offers valuable suggestions on how administrators can effectively interact with governing boards and other constituents of their school community during this process.

Allington and Cunningham (2002) posit that “schools that work are a collection of classrooms that work” (p. 273). These classrooms will only work however, if school administrators utilize evaluation systems that foster teachers’ professional growth and development. In his book, the author provides administrators with numerous well-researched praxes that can be utilized to improve the evaluation systems within their institutions. The use of real situations adds credibility to the author’s suggestions and recommendations, and encourages the reader to utilize many of his proposals within their institutions. He presents cases and research-based evidence to accentuate his discussion of various evaluations steps that he proposes. The use of case studies from different levels of the educational system also makes the information applicable to a wider cross-section of educational administrators. The suggested exercises at the end of each chapter stimulate further discussion of the topic being presented, and force the reader to deeply examine each topic from varying perspectives. Andrews provides examples of forms and formats that have worked in other schools and colleges, and so provides a practical guide that administrators can adapt to meet the unique needs of their institutions. This makes the application of his suggestions easier for those administrators who have long sought for meaningful evaluation forms to improve their institutions’ level of performance.

Accountable Teacher Evaluation! Toward Highly Competent Teachers is a must for all educational administrators, and will be a priceless addition to their repertoire of information related to teacher evaluation. The book could also serve as a primary text or resource for

professors and students in educational administration programs. I would equally recommend this book to individuals in other leadership positions who seek to incorporate a valuable evaluation system within their organization. Andrews has definitely demonstrated the closely-linked connection that exists between sound teacher evaluation and quality instruction.

References

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