

Finally, teachers said their evaluation processes open people up to receiving coaching and mentoring from their peers in areas needing improvement—something they said was taboo in the conventional settings where they had previously worked.

Teachers in the eighth school have *de jure* autonomy in the area of teacher evaluation but have elected not to do formal evaluation of teachers. These teachers also have one-year, at-will contracts, which they believe nullifies the need to conduct formal evaluation—there is no need to document progress toward tenure or to document poor behavior that could lead to dismissal. Teachers at this school view student and parent satisfaction, as well as daily informal evaluation from their colleagues, as their gauge of how well they're performing.

Finally, teachers in the remaining three of the eleven schools do not have autonomy in the area of teacher evaluation and are using conventional evaluation methods.

Even with the variances in autonomy and approaches to evaluation, 76.1 percent of all teachers surveyed for this book rated themselves as excellent (19.6 percent), very good (38.0 percent), or good (18.5 percent) at holding one another accountable. Almost 73.7 percent rated the quality of their performance review as excellent (12.1 percent), very good (42.9 percent), or good (18.7 percent). And 78.1 percent rated the speed of addressing problems with teachers' performance as excellent (13.2 percent), very good (31.9 percent), or good (33.0 percent).

AUTONOMOUS TEACHERS IN THREE SCHOOLS VISITED USE 360-DEGREE, MULTISOURCE EVALUATION

- Avalon School (Avalon)
- EdVisions Off Campus (EOC)
- Minnesota New Country School (MNCS)

With complete autonomy over evaluation methods, teachers in the three Minnesota chartered schools—Avalon, EOC, and MNCS—invite feedback from multiple sources including peers, students, and parents; and all of it is considered.

Teachers reported that three factors contribute to the success of this evaluation method, the first two cultural and last one structural. First, teachers in these environments see themselves as unfinished learners who must always use feedback to improve their teaching and their schools. Second, these teachers are open to be coached and mentored, and each look to 360-degree

evaluation outcomes as a guide for the areas in which they need to be coached. Third, these teachers have elected to have one year, at-will employment contracts, so their job security depends highly on the outcomes of their evaluations.

“There’s a real ‘loss of job’ consequence for a poor evaluation and failure to correct yourself. So accountability for performance is high,” said Carrie Bakken at Avalon. Bakken went on to explain that one-year commitments also mean that any teacher could choose to leave annually. This provides the incentive for teachers to conduct evaluations respectfully, especially to prevent the loss of quality colleagues.

Teachers at EOC and MNCS conduct the peer aspect of 360-degree evaluation annually (MNCS) or biannually (EOC) using rubrics they designed to gauge and improve performance. The rubrics measure skills and abilities necessary to implement their schools’ distinctive learning programs, as well as every teacher’s individual value-added. On a four-point scale, peers rate peers’ content knowledge, evaluation skills, ability to assist students in developing project proposals, reflective practice, coaching and advising ability, and organization.

Avalon teachers have a different system. Using an online platform called SurveyMonkey, peers annually evaluate peers on three questions: (1) What is going well? (2) What suggestions do you have for improvement? (3) Should this person return next year? First, peers answer this last question on a four-point scale: strongly confident, confident, have some reservations, have strong reservations. Then, in an open-ended space, peers offer feedback.

Comments are to be respectful and constructive in nature, but Avalon teachers said they’ve struggled in this area and have experimented with different methods to ensure people take care with their criticism while still feeling comfortable to state concerns.

At all three schools, student and parent evaluations weigh heavily in the areas of parent communication, relationship building, and ability to create a strong learning environment.

Since reviewing the results of these processes is a large undertaking, autonomous teachers in these schools delegate the task to a personnel team that is made up of teachers. Personnel teams usually find that no corrective action is necessary for most teachers. On the rare occasions when corrective action *is* needed, personnel teams appoint a group of their colleagues to help teachers who are having difficulty to set personal goals and map how to accomplish them. The appointed colleagues are expected to frequently work with each individual to assess progress toward goals and report progress to the personnel team.

Individual teachers in all three schools use evaluation results to set challenging goals for themselves for the coming year. Personnel teams are responsible for holding teachers accountable for accomplishing these goals.

Monessa Newell at Avalon said, “We’ve found that having your own goals, and being accountable to your peers for accomplishing them, is the best way to make teacher evaluation productive.”

PARTIALLY AUTONOMOUS TEACHERS IN FOUR OF THE
DISTRICT-AFFILIATED SCHOOLS VISITED USE PEER
EVALUATION IN ADDITION TO WHAT IS REQUIRED BY
THEIR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS

- Academia de Lenguaje y Bellas Artes (ALBA)
- High School in the Community (HSC)
- Independence School Local 1 (Independence)
- Mission Hill K–8 School (Mission Hill)

In three district-affiliated school environments—ALBA, Independence, and Mission Hill—teachers have autonomy to conduct peer evaluation in addition to the more conventional evaluation required by collective bargaining agreements. They do not have autonomy to forgo conventional evaluation or to document poor performance indicated from peer review.

Conventional evaluation requires that someone with an administrative credential be a part of evaluation, and these three schools have someone with such a credential on their team (Mission Hill must have an administrator on site; ALBA and Independence teachers have the option to use an off-site administrator, but do not use the option as they currently have administrators on site).

At a fourth district-affiliated school—HSC—teachers are embracing a city-wide break from convention. All New Haven Public Schools have been moving to peer evaluation since 2009. HSC teachers have customized the requirements for their own governance model. They do not have autonomy, however, to do anything but peer evaluation.

Why do these teachers pursue their own, additional evaluation when they are also required to use district- and union-required methods? They reported that evaluation is an essential tool for their governance models, because they are collectively responsible for whole school success.

As with the 360-degree model, teachers chose peer evaluation to open the opportunity and expectation for coaching and mentoring from one another—something they reported was too often missing when they worked in more conventional settings. Also, teachers indicated that peer evaluation for both new and veteran teachers reinforces individual responsibility to improve performance as part of accountability to the whole team.

Partially Autonomous Teachers Find a Balance between Administrator-Conducted and Peer-Conducted Evaluation, as Required by the Nature of Their Autonomy Arrangements

The ways in which these teachers balance administrator-conducted and peer-conducted evaluations vary. The pilot school agreement between Mission Hill and Boston Public Schools requires that a principal conduct district- and union-required evaluations for nonpermanent teachers—who are in their first three years in the school district—in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid liability. The pilot agreement allows for the school’s governing board to give teachers the ability to determine what happens after that, and Mission Hill’s governing board has granted teachers this authority.

At Mission Hill, teachers determined that teachers who have permanent employment with the district will be peer reviewed every other school year. Teachers chose to use the phrase “permanent employment with the district,” and not tenured, because no teacher at Mission Hill has tenure within the context of the school. Every teacher has a one-year, at-will contract for employment. Principal Ayla Gavins said, “So, a teacher at Mission Hill could be permanent and not be invited back to the school. The same is true in reverse. A teacher who is not permanent yet can be invited back repeatedly.”

Teachers have decided that Principal Gavins should participate in some of these evaluations, but in the role of peer/teacher. The principal only gets involved in her principal role on rare occasions; mainly when legal documentation of a teacher’s poor performance is necessary. School districts typically require a lot of formal documentation from a trained administrator for a teacher to be removed from a school, so these teachers must use that route when they are concerned that a colleague might not be a good fit.

Teachers find a similar balance at ALBA and Independence. In these schools, however, there is more flexibility regarding principal or other administrator involvement. ALBA teachers have a modification from their collective bargaining agreement allowing for peer evaluation teams to conduct teachers’ final reviews in the first and second years of their employment with Milwaukee Public Schools, while a district-appointed administrator (on or off site) completes one observation during each of those years. In year three, when tenure is granted, the district-appointed administrator must conduct the final evaluation.

The collective bargaining agreement requires that tenured teachers will be evaluated in years four and five, and then every five years thereafter, by two peers and a parent. Teachers have the authority to evaluate teachers more often, but ALBA teachers rarely exercise that authority.

As is the case with Mission Hill, an administrator must handle documentation of poor performance. Until fall 2010, ALBA did not have an administrator on site. Instead, an assigned administrator from the district would visit