

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

campus to observe and evaluate. But this arrangement made documentation too long a process, ALBA teachers said. Teachers needed to schedule the off-site administrator to witness poor performers, and the administrator would not necessarily see poor performance upon arrival.

To speed up documentation and removal processes, ALBA teachers requested that the district assign them a part-time, onsite assistant principal who would have more familiarity with poor performers.

Independence's codirector (who is seen as an "assistant principal" by Baltimore Public Schools) conducts one full observation of teachers each year of their first three years of employment as required by the school district. In addition, the chartering agreement between Independence and Baltimore City Schools allows for every teacher to work with a peer review team to set and accomplish individual goals throughout the year. The codirector gets involved in the peer review process only when documentation is necessary.

At HSC, where schools throughout the entire city are moving toward a peer-evaluation model, peer groups meet monthly for discussions and give district-required formal ratings to individuals twice a year. Most schools conducting peer evaluation in New Haven must have an Instructional Manager (an administrator trained in evaluation) complete teachers' ratings based on peer-evaluation outcomes, but HSC has used its informal autonomy arrangement with New Haven Public Schools to customize the process and allow peer groups to complete the ratings themselves. HSC is still determining how to deal with documentation requirements.

Teachers in all four schools reported that, rather than risk removal, anyone who is not showing improvement during a documentation process typically seeks to leave the school. When teachers leave, they go back into their district's selection pool to be considered for other schools.

Partially autonomous teachers create formal peer evaluation processes to enhance individuals' commitment to self-reflection and continuous improvement

In all four schools with peer evaluation, autonomous teachers seek to create an expectation that individuals must continuously work to improve their craft. At ALBA, Independence and Mission Hill, peers hold one another accountable for setting and accomplishing teaching-related goals that individuals develop themselves.

At Mission Hill, teachers who are permanently employed by Boston Public Schools are peer reviewed every other year by a peer review team, which is made up of one peer of the teacher's choice and one peer of the principal's choice. Twice a year, all teachers being evaluated assess their own performance against a collection of teaching standards¹ and write-up a self-reflec-

tive, journalistic paper. After that, each teacher's peer review team conducts an observation, reviews the teacher's self-assessments, and dialogues with the teacher to encourage continued progress.

Teachers at Independence developed a similar process. Every teacher identifies three individual goals to accomplish by the end of the year: one instructional, one related to teachers' work in comanaging the school, and one in any area the teacher chooses. Teachers pick two colleagues to serve on their peer evaluation teams. Teachers are observed by their team every two weeks. They also meet with their team after each observation to discuss progress toward goals as well as strategies for achieving them.

At ALBA, teachers are peer reviewed by two colleagues and a parent. The teacher being reviewed picks one of their colleagues, and the other is chosen by peers. The three observe the teacher using a district- and union-approved rubric and consider the teacher's progress toward his or her own, preidentified goals. The three then have a dialogue with the teacher to discuss their observations and suggestions for growth.

Mission Hill, Independence, and ALBA focus on individuals setting their own goals as a means to self-reflection and continuous improvement, teachers reported. Jennera Williams at Mission Hill said, "Having to set goals, and evaluate others' accomplishments, encourages a lot of personal growth. I think deeply about my progress toward my goals, and I am really self-reflective about how I can improve." Elissa Guarnaro at ALBA said, "People seem more accountable for getting better when they set their own goals. Conventional evaluation can clump everyone together and let individuals off the hook."

While HSC teachers do not formally set personal goals, their process focuses them on continuous individual improvement. At HSC every teacher is evaluated by a peer-evaluation group made up of four randomly drawn, certified teachers, including one of two elected school leaders (the lead facilitator or student membership coordinator who, in the eyes of New Haven Public Schools, are the principal and assistant principal).

Every month, starting at the beginning of the school year, one group member observes the teacher for progress toward district-required benchmarks and then the full group meets to discuss the outcomes of the observation, identifying strengths and areas for development. Mid-year, the group meets to fill out district-required ratings and to discuss second semester goals. The lead facilitator and student membership coordinator must sign off on the midyear ratings and goals and submit them to the district central office. Then, the teacher gets a new peer-evaluation team.

By the end of the year every teacher has been observed, evaluated, and mentored by seven to eight certified teachers.