

ARTS TEACHER EVALUATION: HOW ONE
CHARTER SCHOOL NETWORK SHOWS ITS
SUPPORT

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**ARTS TEACHER EVALUATION: HOW ONE CHARTER SCHOOL NETWORK
SHOWS ITS SUPPORT**

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DEDICATIONS

Dedicated to my husband, Jeremy, my children, Gabby and Sadie, and every arts teacher who is in need of a little extra support now and then.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the evaluation and support system for specials teachers at National Heritage Academy Charter schools. This study uses an exploratory sequential mixed methodology. Research included interviews with leadership members of Brooklyn Dreams Charter School, followed by a survey sent to all of the New York NHA specials teachers.

Both parties came to the conclusion that leaders were under-prepared to fully evaluate and support specials teachers due to lack of knowledge in the specialized subject matter as well as insufficient training in using the company's evaluation tool as it applies to specials teachers. I suggest the organization work to improve the evaluation tool to have the flexibility to work for any staff member that does not fit the mold of a general education teacher and for the organization to also work towards restructuring some key staff positions to better support specials teachers across the charter. Specific guidance documents are suggested for each specialty to support the evaluation tool along with an added position with special skillset in specials teacher. These results and suggestions can be useful for organizations who use teaching artists and any other education setting that works with and evaluate specials teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Specialist teachers occupy a vital role in every school, teaching subjects that include music, art, dance, theater, physical education, library, and technology. These teachers, who receive and require years of training in their craft, enter the workforce only to find themselves constantly evaluated by supervisors with little to no experience in their specialty. University programs for special education such as art, music, physical education, etc. include intensive training in the subject matter with the additional course work required for understanding the pedagogy behind it all. These students are trained and evaluated by experts in the field. However, the moment they graduate, hold a teaching certificate and get their first job, all of that support and expertise tends to shrink and potentially disappear. Now, their supervisor who does all of the evaluating may have no background in their subject matter nor have the skills to best support these vital positions. At best, there is a single special supervisor or department head with background in the specialty. In the worst case scenario, special teachers are the only teacher of their kind (including within administration) in a building, district or charter school organization.

This can make anyone feel uneasy. With teacher evaluations becoming an ever-rising hot topic in our country, how can this particular group of teachers be evaluated

efficiently? It is this exact tool which can make or break a person's career and future. Teacher evaluation tools hold the key to retention, raises, promotions, and have a huge effect on the quality of life in the workplace. What is it about leadership models within our schools that lead to this quandary?

Most arts educators and specials teachers in K-12 settings, myself included, have experienced a gap between the administrative support given to general education classroom teachers versus the type of support that specials teachers generally receive. In my experience, which is predominantly in charter schools, specials teachers are expected to achieve at the same level as their general education peers but rarely receive the guidance from their superiors that would be necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to explore the factors and needs of leadership models in a school setting to provide effective evaluation and support to help develop arts and specials teachers at National Heritage Academy Charter Schools. This study also seeks to find what skills an administrator currently has, what skills he/she is offered training in, and what he/she would need to effectively evaluate and support arts and specials teachers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Arts programming does not exist in a vacuum or only at arts organizations. Teaching artists and school arts teachers alike need support structures in place to be completely successful. I will be using the National Heritage Academy Charter Schools, known as NHA henceforth, as one example of support systems in place for arts and specials teachers. As all NHA schools group their art and music teachers together with

teachers for physical education, technology, library and foreign language, I will include all “specials” teachers as a part of this study. Henceforth, I will consider the teachers in this study as specials teachers. To seek the answers surrounding the evaluation and support systems for specials teachers, I will be asking the question, how does the current leadership model for NHA evaluate and support its arts and specials teachers?

This study strives to discover what is working, what is lacking and how that information can be used both internally for the organization and for other organizations who deal with specials teachers across school systems and external organizations. These programs could include organizations that supply teaching artists, charter schools, independent schools, nation-wide school systems and small school districts. Any school system or program that is not physically connected or in close proximity as is the case in a standard suburban district can benefit from this information.

Are there certain criteria that need to be dealt with to even qualify as a supervisor to a specials teacher? To help answer this question, this study uses an exploratory sequential mixed methodology. First, to research the evaluation methods currently in place, I conducted qualitative interviews. These interviews were of individuals at various levels of administration within NHA, i.e. Deans and a Principal. The interviews sought to find out what types of structures are in place, the thinking behind those particular structures and how each individual was able to act as an evaluator to an individual(s) with specialty skills-sets different from their own. Second, a follow-up quantitative survey was sent to all of the specials teachers for New York NHA schools. This created a pool

of over 35 individuals. Through that survey, teachers had a chance to respond with their thoughts regarding evaluation and support in their school.

Some background data will come from a review of the literature surrounding leadership models, teacher evaluation and evaluation specific to arts teachers. I conducted an analysis of what current trends already exist in the field of teacher supervision and evaluation and how school leadership models help develop this process. The remaining data emerged from a deep analysis from the interviews and completed surveys.

I anticipated my findings would show the basic structures and models at various schools within NHA. The research has shown how the different deans support their arts/specials teachers and how schools divided their specials teacher load among them. I expected methods and structures to vary wildly from school to school, even person to person. I also expected that findings would show what skills are needed and/or what professional development is needed to create an effective dean/administrator when dealing with specials teachers.

As teachers are notoriously busy and overwhelmed, time, proximity and willingness for interviewees to participate was a limitation with a 32% survey response rate, a total of 12 respondents out of 38. NHA granted permission to use the six New York NHA schools, which cut out a large portion of potential teachers from the other 80+ nation-wide NHA school possibilities. With the teacher survey pool reduced to less than 40, the data pool is small. Teacher time and willingness to participate was another factor in participation.

This study did not focus on a city, state or nation-wide scale, rather it was tied directly to the NHA organization based on permissions received and the need for more data-driven research behind the problems of special teacher evaluation and support systems. By keeping it within one organization, the findings can be used to offer up more research ideas and connections specific to their processes. Any other charter that may have a similar setup could easily benefit, and more study among those charter systems who go about the evaluation process completely different would benefit all involved, especially if they are not seeing as big a gap in support.

There is plenty of literature regarding school leadership and overall teacher evaluation. My question, though, while connecting directly to those thoughts, delves more deeply as to how a specific set of teachers are supported. To date, only a handful of articles and writings specifically addressing this topic have been found. This gap in the literature, as well as the findings of this study, suggest that more research is needed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Charter Schools

When they were founded, charter schools were meant to create experimental situations for education that could be applied to schools in the mainstream. Since then, charter schools have simply become a part of mainstream public education.

From Jack Perry's section on the history of Charter Schools, he cites that "Dr. Ray Budde and Albert Shanker (former president of the American Federation of

Teachers) were the first to introduce the concept and advocate for charter schools” (Karanovich, 2009). This took place from a book outline developed in 1974 by Budde. It wasn’t until 1988, that Budde wrote *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts*. His ideas suggested that teachers could enter into a contract and be chartered by a school board for three to five years while adhering to a specific instructional curriculum (Karanovich, 2009). Budde’s ideas were later developed further by Albert Shanker in a speech in 1988. “In his speech, Shanker proposed that the teachers’ union work with school districts to develop a system that would encourage any group of teachers in any building to opt for a different type of school” (Perry 2013, 18). Charter school legislation was first brought in 1991 in Minnesota based on that support. Since then, legislations have continued through the states, passing in New York in 1998.

By 2013, 41 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico all had laws regarding Charter Schools (Perry 2013, 19). As of the 2013-2014 school year, the *National Alliance for Public Charter Schools* reported that there were 6,440 public charter schools in the United States serving 2,569,029 students (pg. 3).

What exactly is a Charter School? In short, a Charter school is a publicly funded school being run by a separate entity or organization while being held accountable for “advancing student achievement” by a city or state group (About Charter Schools, 2016). Sometimes, it is a single person or group of people that choose to open and operate a Charter, other times there are large-scale companies that operate a number of charter schools across the country. National Heritage Academies is one such company. Charter schools remain public and therefore are free to students who attend.

Debate around the overall concept of charter schools has been greatly contested. On one end of the spectrum, you have education researcher, Diane Ravitch, who is adamantly against for-profit charter schools and voucher systems. In her book, *Reign of Error*, she states that, “The problem with charters as currently configured is that they have strayed so far from the original intention of their founding fathers, Ray Budde and Albert Shanker” (Ravitch, 2013). She goes into great detail, outlining every possible issue she has seen surrounding the privatization movement in public education. Essentially, Ravitch argues that many charters do not serve the adequate public function that they were set out to perform.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is Michelle Rhee, who has held many high level education positions, including Chancellor of the D.C. schools. She, herself used to be against vouchers, until she had to make the decision whether or not to continue them in the Washington D.C. school district. She chose to interview families and get their perspective. “From my listening tour of families, and hearing so many parents plead for an immediate solution to their desire for a quality education, I came out in favor of the voucher program” (Rhee, 2013). Rhee has emerged as an advocate for school choice.

Ravitch has criticized Rhee in the privatization of public schools. There have been many such public disagreements over the role of charter schools and vouchers in the public school system. The most prominent, recent spat, has been between Mayor Bill DeBlasio of New York City and Governor, Andrew Cuomo over several issues involving charter schools in the city. New York City has ended the practice of awarding for-profit

charters in the public system, although it still allows not-for-profit charters. Existing for-profit systems, such as NHA, have been grandfathered in.

National Heritage Academies

National Heritage Academies or NHA is a for-profit Charter School system based out of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Founded by J. C. Huizenga, NHA was built out of the inspiration of his son's birth and the need for more educational opportunities. "As a successful entrepreneur, Huizenga had a vision to provide a quality education to all children by applying basic business principles to establish a system of schools that was more accountable and results oriented" (Our Story, 2016).

NHA is built on four pillars of "academic excellence, moral focus, parental partnership, and student responsibility" (Our Story, 2016). The first school, Excel Charter Academy, opened in 1995 with 174 students in Grand Rapids. Now, NHA has 86 schools in nine states, with more planned openings in the Fall of 2017. In New York City, there are four NHA schools: Brooklyn Dreams, Brooklyn Excelsior, Brooklyn Scholars and Riverton Street Charter School. Elsewhere in New York State, there is also Buffalo United in Buffalo, NY and Southside Academy in Syracuse, NY. Much of the focus of this study will be within these six schools, with leadership interviews coming from Brooklyn Dreams administrators.

The current leadership model within NHA schools is to have one Principal and a minimum of three Deans. Each dean is seen as an academic supporter for the different grade divisions (Grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-8). Some schools have an additional dean for

Special Education or Intervention and other schools have even more in roles that they deem necessary. Directly above the Principal is the Director of School Quality, and the remaining staff at the Service Center located in Grand Rapids, MI. The Service Center is where all administrative and executive staff and offices are. These include the CEO's office and all higher administration to Curriculum Specialists and People's Services. The Service Center is your one-stop shop for support. Any employee with NHA will ultimately speak with someone at the Service Center during their time as an employee. Within NY, when you need to make a call to the service center, it is colloquially known as "calling Michigan."

In 2001, *Inc. Magazine* recognized NHA as 19th among the nation's fastest growing companies. At the time, it was the, "...fastest growing privately held company in Michigan," reported *PRNewswire* (National Heritage Academies..., 2001). President at the time, Peter G. Ruppert, commented, "NHA is committed to providing the highest-quality education that challenges children to achieve their greatest potential, and this formula obviously resonates with our students and their parents" (2001).

While I would like to provide a comprehensive examination of the overall academic status of NHA schools compared to local schools, I was not permitted access to that information. As a for-profit business, financial and specific academic information is proprietary and kept close for internal use only. According to Ravitch's book, however, "Typically, in most states and districts, charters on average do not get different test scores from public schools if they enroll the same kinds of students" (Ravitch, 2013).

Leadership Models

Leadership models have often been “subject to fashion, but often serve to reflect, and to inform, changes in school leadership practice” (Bush & Glover 2014). Since the school leadership conducts teacher evaluations, a strong and stable method of leading is needed. There have been various leadership models studied over the years. Some focused on the leader as a coach, others, the leader as a manager, and more often now a blended version of the two. Some specific examples follow.

“The International Successful School Principalship Project has been actively conducting research about the work of successful principals since...2001” (Gurr 2015, 136). The International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) is an organization which is in a constant state of study and continues to this day to run active research across the globe on what factors it takes to be a successful principal and leader. The ISSPP was built on the interests of a few principals in the UK in 2001. They chose to work together and create multi-perspective case studies across the globe. All of their perspectives are from the principalship standpoint. Therefore, the principal is the main character affecting student learning. Findings lead to the creation of an elaborate flow chart dictating various levels and styles of leadership. “There is sufficient evidence from the project to broaden the model to apply to all school leaders” (144). While the Project has not done specific research towards middle level leaders, “...the research has consistently indicated that principals need to draw on a repertoire of leadership ideas, and, in particular, utilize both instructional and transformational leadership styles” (144). The instructional style tends towards the idea of a disruption-free learning environment

where the focus is on proper teacher techniques and high standards, whereas the transformational style shows more engagements with the staff and works to create a sense of moral purpose.

One study out of Oregon found that a key trait of “model” schools is that their principals developed a “student-first culture.” “Teachers do not look at students as ‘my students’ or ‘your students’ but as ‘our students.’” With this student first type of thinking, all teachers in the building felt responsible for all of the students, not just those who they directly taught. Schools were also found to have a strong professional learning community at all levels in this model of thinking (Schmidt 2014, 8).

The following studies each presented a specific style of leadership suggested for schools to adopt. There is the Blended Model presented by Andrew Coleman, Strategic Leadership by Barbara Davies and Brent Davies, Shared Leadership by Claudia Khourey-Bowers, Richard L. Dinko and Raymond G. Hart, and IT Leadership by Patrick McGrath Jr.

The Blended Model is a variation on collaborative leadership. Coleman asserts that an “effective collaborative leadership...involves the skillful combination for a range of leadership styles and behaviors” (Coleman 2011, 302). Coleman finds that there must be an “appropriate mix” of elements to be the truly blended leader. These elements include: authentic leadership, relational leadership, distributed leadership, constitutive leadership and political leadership (303).

Authentic leaders have the ability to be transparent with their workers in a very open collaborative environment. The relational leader is a person who has a deep

understanding and ability to create relational capacity between themselves and other individuals in order to build a strong relationship of mutual respect and understanding. Distributed leadership is having the ability to understand that being a leader is not necessarily a purely “positional phenomenon” but can truly trust others and distribute the work as necessary for the group to succeed (307). “Constitutive leadership concerns the ways in which the context for collaborative working is defined,” meaning that the leader has to be explicit in the expectations for any given situation and what can be expected from them (309). Different situations require different actions and reactions, and constitutive leadership helps to define these needs. The political leader needs to have the tools to handle any potential conflicts that may arise between partners in and out of the organization. This type of leader also must be able to navigate the political realms at various vantage points across an organization (308). When a leader can put each of these leadership personalities/traits into one cohesive method, they can be known as a true blended leader, capable of handling many situations with nuances specific and necessary to each.

The strategic model puts an emphasis on the need for schools and school leadership to move away from, “short-term improvements,” and toward the, “...strategic dimension of leadership to ensure sustainability” (Davies & Davies 2006, 121). Their findings showed that strategic leaders, “...involved themselves in five key activities: direction setting, translating strategy into action, enabling the staff to develop and deliver the strategy, determine effective intervention points, and develop strategic capabilities” (123). Key characteristics displayed by strategic leaders include: “Dissatisfaction or

restlessness with the present; prioritize their own strategic thinking and learning; create mental models to frame their own understanding and practice; have powerful personal and professional networks” (131). This type of leader is most advantageous for thinking about a school building as a whole. They have the capability to of looking at every aspect and level of the school, from leadership focus, to teacher focus to student focus and putting every aspect into perspective and prioritize decisions based on the information given at all levels.

The shared leadership model puts an emphasis on teachers and leaders owning and solving problems together. “When teachers do work together to deal with problems of curriculum and instruction, they cultivate collegiality, openness, and trust.” (Khourey-Bowers, Dinko, & Hart 2005, 6). The Information Technology Model is in response to the rapid growth of technology over the past twenty-five years. McGrath suggests that as more technology devices get into the hands of our students, schools need to react to that changing environment. He suggests the IT model be used to make decisions for the use of technology in both, “...teaching and learning, assessment, communications, infrastructure design and maintenance, hardware acquisition, and management systems software” (McGrath 2016, 2). The school leaders would need to be at the forefront of any of these changes and become the masters of any environmental change in order to actively support their buildings.

The bulk of the remaining literature applies more directly to dealing with Charter Schools, as they are still a relatively new phenomenon. Their management has presented its own set of problems and necessary circumstances. Lina Hall did a Standards Based

Assessment of Charter School Administrators. She used the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders, which contains 6 standards. These standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Offices in collaboration with the National Policy Board on Educational Administration. After many interviews with a variety of school principals, she found there was room for growth and professional development in each of the standards (Hall 2006).

Kerry Donohoe discusses “leadership and school culture” as “essential ingredients of high performing schools” (2006). How the teachers, staff and students think and react to their environment has the ultimate authority over what happens within the school setting.

Yessica Garza looked at the skills and qualities necessary for successful charter school leaders and what type of training program would be needed. According to charter leaders in Garza’s interviews, “...a charter school leader needs to know about finances, budgets, accounting, management, and marketing to operate a charter school. A background in business and education was essential” (Garza 2010). Are training programs enough for a charter school leader? Jack Perry looked at that exact topic. His study found that “charter school leaders are prepared for leadership by university programs, non-profit programs, and charter schools themselves” (Perry 2013). He ultimately found that the success of these programs varies. Some of the limitations in leadership training from Perry’s study include: “Networking with effective school leaders, communication skills, leadership development, data driven instruction” (Perry 2013, 104). One respondent suggested that programs establish a “quality residency

program that last minimally 3 months to a year” (104), meaning that a principal in training would shadow a mentor in that time. In general, Perry found that

participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with the areas of school culture, development of effective school culture and assessment of school culture and climate, and mission and vision development. Conversely, participants were consistent about feeling...least prepared in...strategic and financial management. (109)

Many educational leaders may not be fully aware of these models, but they can provide useful lenses for analyzing and evaluating leadership techniques.

Teacher Evaluation

In the realm of teacher evaluation, there is a great debate. How much is too much? Should state test scores matter? What do teachers really think? Below is some of the literature regarding this general topic as it applies to non-specialized subject matter teachers.

The Race to the Top Grant instituted in 2009 by President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan may have had some unintended consequences to teacher evaluation. Researchers coded articles “...by national media, education publications, and arts education publications” to search for biases or even “inadvertent causes” towards how teacher evaluation was thought about (Aguilar and Kapalka, 2014). The more the public and lawmakers got into the game, more ideas, theories, and methods were sprouted regarding teacher evaluation. Aguilar and Kapalka went through an exhaustive research review of all literature they could find dealing with teacher evaluation specific to arts teachers and its connection to Race to the Top. Ultimately, they came to the conclusion

that when stakeholders saw that Race to the Top policymakers foresaw the problems they were creating with this policy, teachers could then have a stronger backing to hold policymakers accountable for these negative consequences.

A group of highly qualified teachers in California worked together to form their own method of teacher evaluation. As of 2015, they suggest that the evaluation system in California has not changed much since 1971. From their study, they built 7 principles of a successful teacher evaluation. Shortened versions of their principles are as follows:

1. Teacher evaluation should be based on professional standards and must be sophisticated enough to assess teaching quality as it is manifested across the continuum of teacher development.
2. Teacher evaluation should include performance assessments to guide a path of professional learning throughout a teacher's career.
3. The design of a new evaluation system should build on successful, innovative practices in current use, such as evaluations built on teachers' self-assessments in relation to high standards of performance or evidence-based portfolios that demonstrate ways that a teacher's instructional practice is contributing to student achievement.
4. Evaluations should consider teacher practice and performance, as well as an array of student outcomes for teams of teachers as well as individual teachers.
5. Evaluation should be frequent and conducted by expert evaluators, including teachers who have demonstrated expertise in working with their peers. Evaluators at each juncture should be trained in the recognition and development of teaching quality, understand how to teach in the content area of the evaluated teacher, and know the specific evaluation tools and procedures they are expected to use.
6. Evaluation leading to teacher tenure must be more intensive and must include more extensive evidence of quality teaching.
7. Evaluation should be accompanied by useful feedback, connected to professional development opportunities, and reviewed by evaluation teams or an oversight body to ensure fairness, consistency, and reliability. (Ed. Darling-Hammond 2015, 4)

In light of the subject matter in this study, principle five strikes a note, especially the need to “understand how to teach in the content area of the evaluated teacher” (4). This seems to be the largest missing piece when it comes to evaluating special teachers.

Many experts have attempted to create a strong and consistent system of teacher evaluation. Charlotte Danielson created a popular framework and in her article, *Evaluations That Help Teachers Learn*, the focus was on having a “consistent definition of good teachers, a shared understanding of this definition and skilled evaluators” (Danielson 2011, 36). She came to the conclusion that “...a teacher evaluation system that engages teacher reflection and self-assessment—yields benefits far beyond the important goal of quality assurance” (39).

A study by Mary Himmelein looked at how principals are frequently the evaluators in a school setting but yet have received little training to do so (Himmelein 2009). Attitudes towards evaluation seem positive, with a goal towards increasing teacher ability and effectiveness and helping the overall community. However, the formal evaluation process has not been helping in the matter. According to Himmelein’s data, 56% of principals said that formal styles of evaluation were useful while the other 44% responded “no” (91). Her data showed a positive culture around the idea of hard data but found more conflict around the idea of using student scores to measure a teacher as a part of the process. Separately, Edit Khachatryan found that school leadership could benefit from:

...leadership preparation and professional development (that) concentrates on instructional leadership as much as, if not more than, other areas. Leaders need ongoing professional development, especially in the

observing teaching and developing skills in providing the type of feedback known to be effective. (Khachatryan 2015, 184)

Khachatryan further supports this idea with specifically utilizing state and federal funding for professional development to be used for leadership in how to “observe teaching and provide performance feedback” (184).

Although there is no national standard for teacher evaluation, the No Child Left Behind Law began to tie federal funding to standardized testing results during the George W. Bush administration. Once Race to the Top came into effect, there were even greater incentives to follow national standards. All teachers had to be evaluated and states began to pickup on various methods and forms of evaluation. “By 2015, 43 states required that objective measures of student achievement be included in teacher evaluation” (Aldeman, 63).

As a result from these investments, “teachers are evaluated more frequently, evaluators use higher-quality observation rubrics, and teachers receive more detailed feedback on their performance” (63). Conversely, there were problems, too. Aldeman saw four main issues with the language used under the NCLB waiver initiatives. “The dangers of universal approach, the definition of ‘reform’ was too rigid, the perils of prioritizing a process over its end result, and proper pacing” (64-67). While many of these aspects are being debated in governments and councils across the country, the evaluations themselves actual use has then been put on hold and the data is not getting used as it should.

With all of this evaluation based on test scores, many lawmakers and community members continue to ask whether or not our student's test scores are improving and if we truly stand up to the international community. Ravitch notes that the common claim has been, "test scores are falling, and the educational system is broken and obsolete" but that the reality is, "test scores are at their highest point ever recorded" and this is under stricter expectations and than ever before (Ravitch, 2013). She also takes to task the concept of American students falling behind other nations. Since "1957, critics blamed the public schools when the Soviets were first to launch a space satellite" (Ravitch 2013). Ravitch demonstrates that the popular myth of failure compared to other countries only applies to the specific international tests. In terms of academic performance and achievement, American students are on par with the top countries in the world based on the results from the 2012 TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) test. Ravitch highlights limitations of testing in her work, but clearly the federal government and states rely heavily on testing none-the-less (Ravitch, 2013).

Arts Teacher Evaluation

Literature on the topic of evaluating "non-core" subjects such as art, music and physical education is not something many people have taken to studying. The music education world has taken the task on itself more so than other disciplines, so the following literature leans more towards looking at how music teachers are being evaluated using general teacher evaluation systems.

Both the National Association for Music Education and New York State School Music Association have posted position statements regarding music teacher evaluation. Both positions provide guidelines with which to effectively evaluate a music educator. Both include statements regarding qualified evaluators who have “sufficient expertise” in the area being evaluated as to “accurately observe and interpret the outcomes under measure” (NAfME). Successful music teacher evaluation “must limit observation-based teacher evaluations to those conducted by individuals with adequate training in music as well as in evaluation” (NAfMA).

Literature in general is lacking in this area, therefore two studies from the 1990s are presented here that do deal with this exact issue. Although the studies are over 20 years old, the ideas and values still hold true and match much of what is being found in recent years. Both were written in response to a growing trend in teacher evaluation and maintain that evaluators should have background knowledge in the subject (music) they are evaluating. In some cases, where teachers are evaluated on skills of subjects that do not directly apply to their methods of teaching, there can be “detrimental influence” (Taebel 1990, 53). This is a common factor where a cumulative score for a school’s state test data, which is typically made up of at least reading and math, is automatically built into a specials teacher’s overall evaluation. Both studies call attention to the fact that many evaluator strategies score verbal methods of teaching and that much of what goes on in music (as with many specialist fields) includes an immense amount of demonstration. At the time, there was nowhere on an evaluation field to score that method and it should be considered for future use (Brophy 1993).

Various states have set their own standards and methods for evaluating arts (music) teachers. In 2013, Pennsylvania reported on the new standards for evaluating all non-testing grade teachers. A key component to this evaluation included the implementation of “Student Learning Objectives (SLOs).” These objectives had to be high-quality and have their own set of guidelines to be considered appropriate in the first place. The Pennsylvania Music Educators Association took it upon themselves to then work on creating a set of “high-quality SLOs” (Deitz, Emert, and Sheehan 2013). While teacher evaluation has changed over the past few decades, “this transition ...has unfolded from an emerging debate about the purpose of the supervisory process in education” (Maranzano 2002, 47). Maranzano also found while studying Virginia’s evaluation structure that “direct systematic observation of teaching and informal observation of teaching play a major role. 39.9% of music teachers in Virginia studied also reported self-evaluation methods” being used (78). Based on the variance in methods from state to state, it is clear that there is no standard yet for evaluating specials teachers. As more comprehensive data becomes available across each state, it may be up to the national organization of each special’s subject matter to help determine the best method of evaluation and make the recommendation on a national level.

More recent research further supports the need for a different evaluation system for arts and specials teachers than currently exists. Specific to music, continued information states and supports the idea that teachers are looking for an evaluation process that produces a clearer professional development path and considers specialists as an actual “specialist” not a “generalist” so that it does not lead specials teachers to have

to negotiate their own position and worth within a school (Bernard 2015, Goddard 2004, and Martin 2014). The evaluation process should help define and develop teachers rather than lead them to “negotiate their performer/conductor and educator selves” (Bernard 2015). While that statement applies directly to music teachers, it can be expanded to fit any specialist area. A constant statement that appears in Mitchell’s study is the need to be evaluated by an expert in the specialist’s field. When this is not done, data can easily be misinterpreted and misused (Mitchell 2015). Value-added evaluation methods, popular as of late, have been found less effective to specialists and require an overhauled system more applicable to special teachers (Ambarwangi 2015 & Ryan 2016). This method takes student test scores from a previous year and compares them to the end of year scores of the current year to show the effectiveness of a teacher. In terms of the specialist, whose subjects are not tested by the state, this is not the most effective measure.

Rater Error

Rater Error is a term often used in the human resources field. “Because of the sensitive nature of performance evaluations, agencies have a responsibility to train their raters” (Pynes, 584). Across the country, various school officials are also performance raters. However, there are many rater errors that may be going on without the raters even knowing about it. Without proper training in rating techniques and the knowledge of these potential biases, raters may continually be making unfair assessments in their work.

A rater error is when the rater is evaluating based on “human judgment, which is subject to error. Personal biases need to be removed from the rating process” (Pynes, 583). A list of common rater errors was presented in the book, *Human Resource Management: For public and nonprofit organizations*. The more likely errors within a school system include:

Halo Effect: Rating an employee excellent in one quality, which in turn influences the rater to give that employee a similar rating or higher-than-deserved rating on other qualities.

Logic Error: A rater confuses one performance dimension with another and then incorrectly rates the dimension because of the misunderstanding.

Horns Effect: Rating an employee as needing improvement in one aspect of performance, which in turn influences the rater to give that employee a similar rating or lower-than-deserved rating on other performance dimensions.

Lenient rating: Rating consistently higher than the expected norm or average; being overly loose in rating performance qualities.

Latest Behavior: Rating influenced by the most recent behavior.

Initial impression: Rating based on first impressions.

Spillover Effect: Allowing past performance appraisal ratings to unjustly influence current ratings.

Same as me: Giving the rate a rating higher than deserved because the person has qualities or characteristics similar to those of the rater.

Different from me: Giving the rate a rating lower than deserved because the person has qualities or characteristics dissimilar to the rater (pgs. 584-586).

These typical rater errors are important for any evaluator to be aware of. Raters should check themselves every so often to see if they are being true and honest in their evaluations of everyone they evaluate.

Conclusion

Some researchers have been trying to tackle the concept of leadership models, charter schools and teacher evaluation. Some have tried to even delve into the world of arts teacher evaluation systems. It is evident that more research needs to be done and methods need to change. Not one study fully confirmed that a specific method worked and all employees were happy with it. In the absence of adequate research on the topic, and without proven methods of evaluation for specialists, it is safe to conclude that the evaluation of specialists does not receive nearly as much scrutiny as the evaluation for general education teacher. This may mean that specialists will tend to be evaluated by the same rubrics as their peers in classrooms, or it may mean that their evaluations are subject to the whims of their individual supervisors or schools, rather than by consistent, appropriate, and effective standards.

It may be necessary for specialist teachers to take a leadership role in advocating for more study of evaluation techniques that are specific to their fields. As more special teachers speak up and research is completed as to what methods of evaluation are deemed truly effective, only then can we hope to increase the field of study and create an evaluation tool which not only aims but succeeds in providing a clear development path to improve teaching success.

CHAPTER 1: NATIONAL HERITAGE ACADEMY'S LEADERSHIP MODEL

National Heritage Academies is a charter school. As such, it has a leadership model that reflects a business-like structure. The hierarchy of employees is as such:

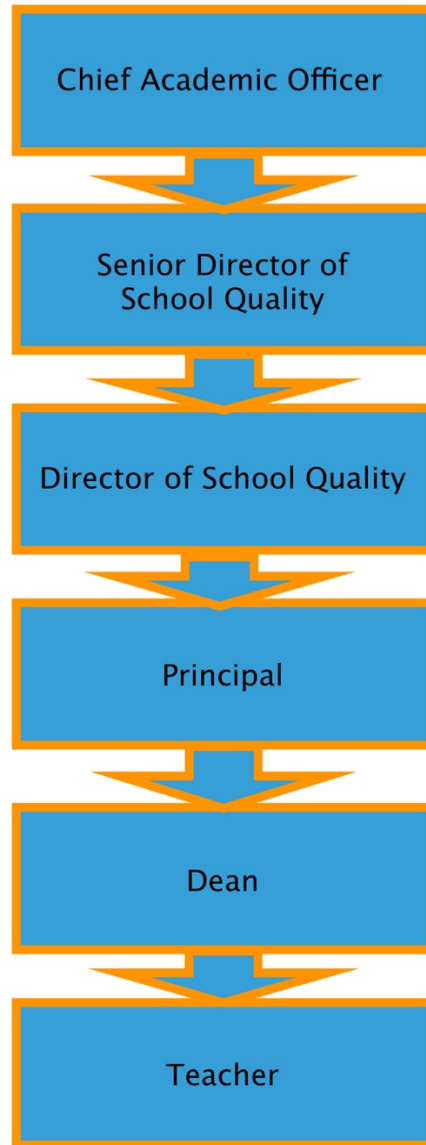


Figure 1: NHA Organizational Chart

At the school level, teachers, deans and principals are the important players. At times, a principal may help supervise staff as well as their deans or solely supervise their deans. The typical method is for deans to supervise all of the staff. The minimum for any dean is anyone in their immediate field. A K-2 dean for instance will supervise at minimum all of the K-2 teachers. However, any teacher or staff member that does not fit neatly into a defined Dean title, K-2, 3-5, special education, etc., will be split among all of the deans on staff. Any specialists including: music, art, physical education, foreign language, paraprofessionals, school aides and any other job is given a randomly selected dean. It is important to note that some schools have chosen one dean to oversee all specials, while another takes all paraprofessionals to keep the groups of teachers together under one dean, for better cohesiveness for those teams.

For any teaching staff, the standard supervisor and meeting schedule has been that the dean and teacher have a once a week one-on-one meeting called an O3. As the school year begins, the dean will also observe the teacher teaching once a week so that they have information and feedback to provide to the teacher at the O3. Twice a year, there will be full class observations for 45 minutes each which are formalized following the Classroom Framework.

The Classroom Framework is a set of standards set forth by NHA that all teachers strive to meet. The Classroom Framework has four key components: Classroom Culture, Planning, Teaching and Assessing. There are set indicators in each section that a teacher must meet in order to move to the next indicator. Indicators are divided into grading

areas: Ineffective, Developing, Effective, and Exemplary. The goal is to move through all indicators and end up in the exemplary category.

Twice a year, deans pull together these indicators and along with the 45 minute observations to create a full evaluation, which both parties present, discuss and sign.

Leadership Perspective

As a part of this study, I interviewed academic leaders from Brooklyn Dreams Charter School. The same set of questions were presented to each leader, with ample time allowed for their responses. Once complete, all responses were transcribed and recorded. The positions interviewed included a principal and two deans. At NHA schools, deans are equivalent to assistant principals. To provide anonymity, the responses are mixed and each leader will be referred to as Leader 1(L1), Leader 2(L2) and Leader 3 (L3).

Of the 3 leaders interviewed, range of experience with NHA ranged from 11 months to 10 years. All three of the leaders were new to their positions within the last academic year (2015-2016). I understand this rate of leadership turnover to be typical, but was not allowed access to the official rate-count for the company. If true, this could be a large factor in the effectiveness of leaders for NHA. Longevity and relationship building is a key factor in providing successful support, which can only occur with time and stability.

Over the course of the 2015-2016 school year, each leader had at least one specials teacher assigned to them. None of the leaders had any expertise or training in the specials subject(s) they were supervising.

When asked to explain NHA's process for supporting and evaluating teachers, answers were fairly consistent across the board. All teachers are observed early in the year using the Classroom Framework as a guide. The supervisor identifies the teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Using differentiation, some teachers require constant weekly meetings and observations while others may be provided even more frequent observations and continual coaching. Some teachers are able to work on a less frequent meeting and observation schedule. L1 stated, "If it's a strength, you'll definitely encourage the teacher to keep doing that. But if it's a weakness, that needs coaching."

L2 also included:

"So if a teacher is strong...we're able to provide more enrichment type of activities...Contrary, if we see teachers that are operating at a bit of a deficit and need some growth or have some growth areas, then we provide that type of support systematically. And then if we feel they need more support, we intensify the type of supports and the frequency at which that occurs."

From observations of this system play out over various years, it does not seem as consistent from supervisor to supervisor. Many factors play into the effectiveness of the supervisor including training, prior educational systems, and additional workload.

If the leader was hired prior to the school year starting, then they received at least one training on how to utilize the Classroom Framework. For the three interviewed, this was the case for only one leader. As time went on, and the

school year concluded, all three administrators did attend leadership training over the summer of 2016 in preparation for the following school year. There was no formal training to makeup for missed information for late or mid-year hired leaders. To assist all first and second year leaders, a mentor leader is provided for any potential ongoing questions by phone and email as time allows throughout the year.

When I asked the leaders if they had any difficulties using the Classroom Framework, responses varied. For L1, the issues are more about figuring out specific “look-fors,” specific identifiable actions that meet the requirements of an indicator. “I have my own, but as a team, we’ve not even touched on it.” L2 felt as though the process was “very detailed” and “at some point, felt like we were going through the motions.” L3 felt as though the framework “lends itself to a lot of personal interpretation. So we end up observing 4 at a time, so we could have an in-sync idea of how to rate a teacher.”

Based on these responses, there needs to be more consistent and on-going training for how to utilize the classroom framework equally for all teachers. There was no set standard guidance for what to look for when rating a teacher. One supervisor may have a completely different take than another, which could drastically change the course and career of the teacher they are supervising.

Leaders were asked, “Do you find observing and supporting specials teachers different from classroom teachers?” L1 stated, “Way different, because I didn’t have that

much knowledge. I asked about the standards...and she went through the curriculum with me.” L2 realized,

“that some of the things that we’re looking for in a specials teacher’s class are not applicable (in the framework). For example, in a music class, I may want to see more hands on and manipulating of materials as opposed to the teacher following the ‘I do, we do, you do’ method.”

L3 reiterated that, “Yes, because lack of knowledge makes it a little bit more difficult to write a true evaluation, because I don’t always know how else a specials teacher could have done it better.” This idea was the major theme. The leader was not a content specialist, therefore was unable to truly support and evaluate the specials teacher due to lack of knowledge around the specific subject matter.

As student populations reach their maximum in NHA school buildings and teachers and administrators move on to other schools or other positions, it is sometimes difficult to keep the same supervisor. A 3rd grade teacher will always have the 3rd grade Dean. But in the case of specials, since there is no one designated administrator for them, they often get divvied up between the deans. It is entirely possible that a specials teacher who is at a school for four years, with the same set of four administrators could have a different supervisor every year. There is no prescribed method of assigning specialist teachers to their supervisors, so principals do so at will.

The final question was if leaders had any additional thoughts or comments on the subject of observing and supporting specials teachers.

For L1, they wanted to emphasize the idea that specials teachers are “academic teachers, so I think it is up to us (leaders), or supervisors who need to realize that they are not separate from the regular teachers, it would help us to help them.” It is important to

realize across all leaders that every teacher who has gone through the years of training as a specialist and holds a state teaching certificate on top of that is very much a teacher.

Keeping that mindset would benefit all involved.

L2 would like to be able to expand upon things already happening along with working towards providing more “differentiated professional development periods” during weekly staff meetings that could meet the specific needs of the specials teacher.

L3 believes “we need to have a specials supervisor who might be very diverse in all of the specials to supervise those teachers. I think I would suggest to have a supervisor to those individuals because it’s a fair game for them.” L3 clearly has identified the need for specialized skills and mindset needed to supervise this group of teachers. While it may be impossible to get a specific supervisor for each individual who is a master at each of the individual subjects, a trained specialist will have a better understanding of the needs of a K-8 teacher who sees 700 students a week versus the 3rd grade teacher who sees only 26.

Analysis

Based on the information provided from these leaders, it is apparent that more needs to be done to support specials teachers. Each leader acknowledged that there is a lack of knowledge in the subjects they are supposed to judge and supervise. Since they, themselves, do not have that knowledge, they are unable to support to the fullest extent possible. It may be easy to identify a problem, such as a lesson did not go well based on

lack of student engagement. But then, what specifically can the teacher do to improve? In the case of art, would there be a better medium to get a concept across that is more engaging? How would the leader know if they do not have the art content knowledge or experience to offer those suggestions and coaching strategies?

All of the leaders have a firm understanding of the Classroom Framework and how it works or is supposed to work, but also see the flaws when it comes to specials teachers. The one-size-fits-all evaluation tool does not actually fit all. The leaders are left to their own devices and time to now have to come up with separate skills, items and “look-fors” in order to provide any sort of fair and accurate evaluation of the specials teacher. The specials teachers have little say in who their supervisor is and how they are paired.

Leaders want stability. Teachers want stability. As it stands, the specials teacher has to take his/her own time to “teach” their subject, standards and curriculum to their own supervisor just to level the field of understanding. When your supervisor is supposed to also be your coach, as is the case in NHA, then it should be a baseline expectation that the coach knows the content of what they are coaching. The need to teach your own subject to your own supervisor should be reversed. This is not an effective cycle that should continue, and the leaders are clearly feeling the constraints in the missing skills.

CHAPTER 2: TEACHER SURVEY RESULTS

A multiple choice and open ended survey was sent out to a round of teachers across the NHA schools in New York State. The purpose of the survey was to get the specials teachers' perspective on how they are observed, supported and evaluated in their buildings. As each school has its own set of specials teachers, the represented subject areas vary.

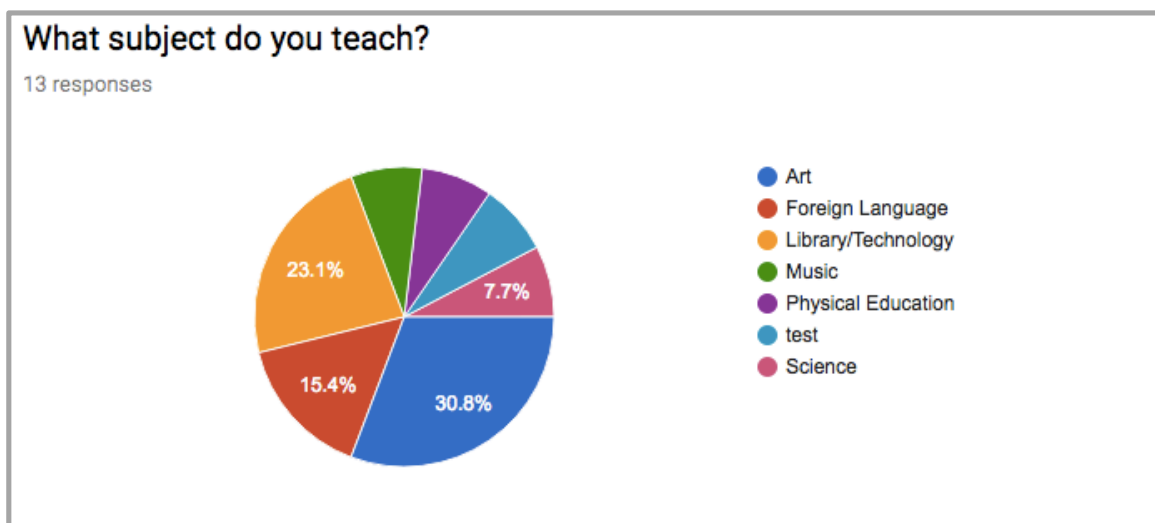


Figure 2: Subject Taught

Consistency in the observation and feedback cycle was looked at and the results show that there is no consistency. While feedback was almost always given, the length of time it took to receive that information spanned anywhere from a few seconds to a month. This study did not look into methods of communicating feedback.

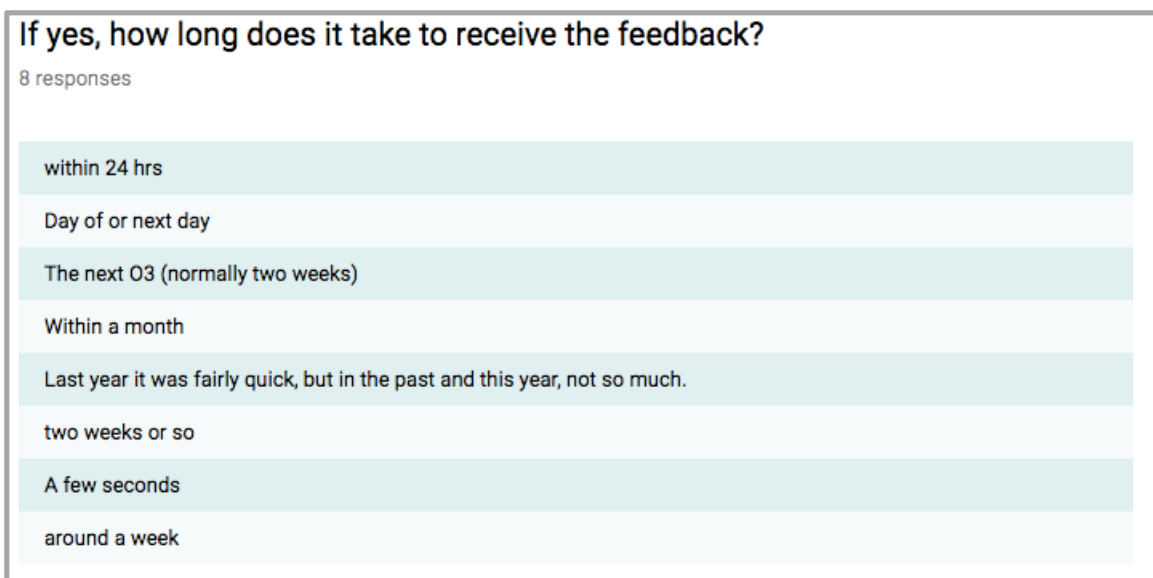


Figure 3: How long does it take to receive feedback?

When asked if the teacher's supervisor had an expertise in their subject area, 81.1% of the 11 respondents said "No," 9.1% said "I don't know" and 9.1% of the respondents said "Yes." The teachers were then asked if their supervisor ever discussed curriculum planning and objectives with them. It is common practice for deans and grade-level classroom teachers to have extensive conversations about the standards used to teach, what curricular tools will be used, how they are implemented and how the objectives will line up for the year. This extensive conversation then leads to grade level teachers being able to create their own pacing calendars for the school year to determine when certain topics will be taught and tested, often a data point that is measured during observations. The responses to this question for specials teacher are as follows:

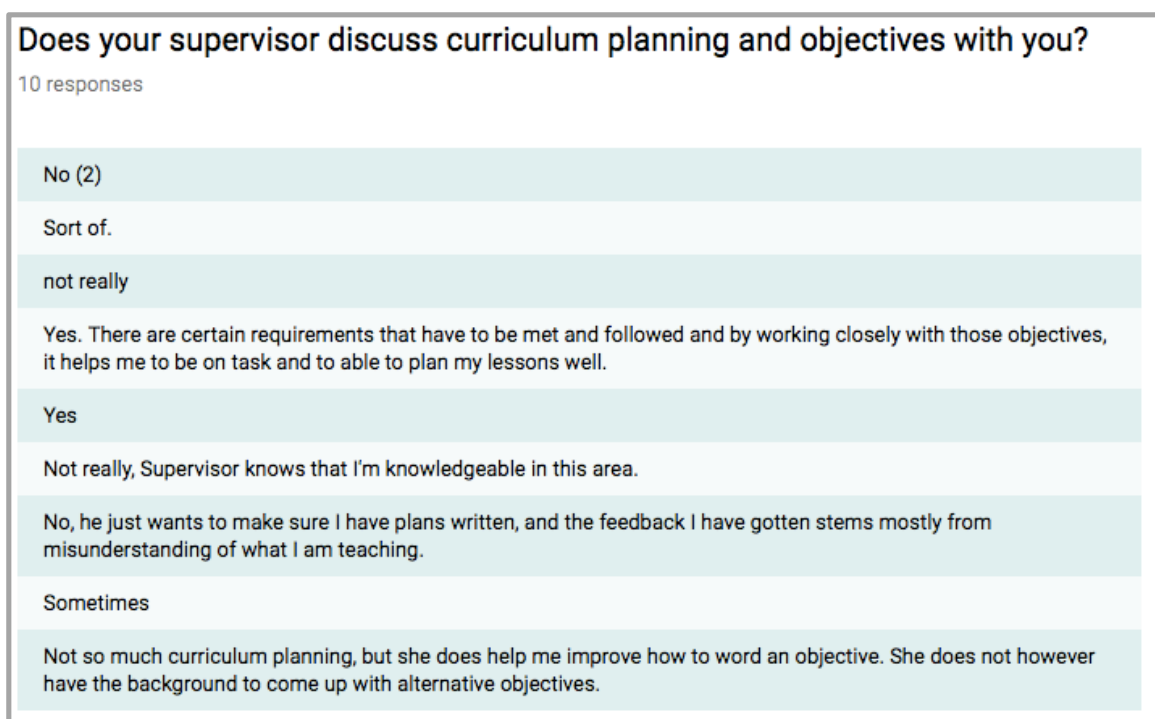


Figure 4: Curriculum Planning

With the majority of the responses on the negative side, the question should then be considered of how leaders are grading specials teachers on the Classroom Framework, which has specific sections on curriculum planning and teaching if that content is never discussed. What are the expectations on both ends, teacher and supervisor, for making sure that these discussions occur to provide the best support possible?

Classroom Framework

As the main evaluation source, the Classroom Framework is the master guide as to how to be an exemplary teacher. As it currently stands, the same framework is used for every teacher across NHA. Attitudes toward the framework were varied. While some specials teachers felt that, yes, it was a useful tool that reflected practices for their

subject, others had the opposite opinion. Specials teachers were asked, “Do you think the Classroom Framework, observations, and O3s have helped you improve your skills as a specials teacher?” Here are the results:

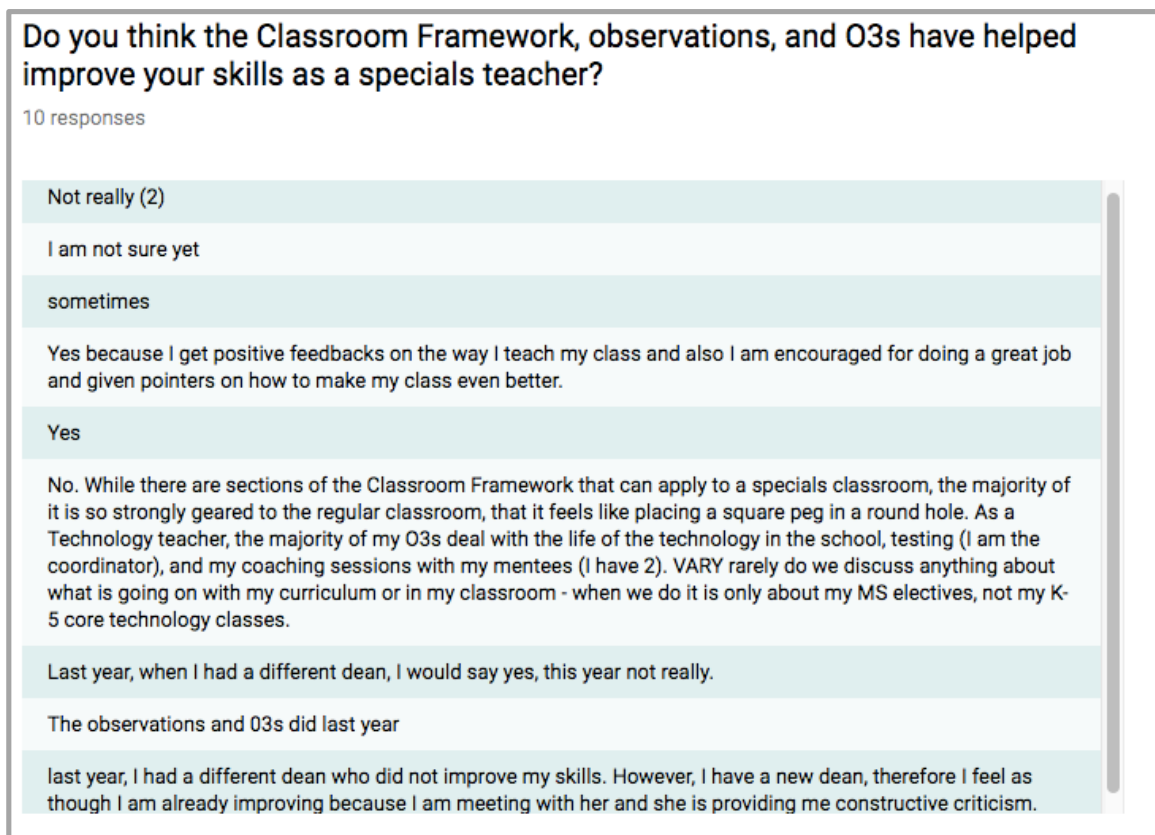


Figure 5: Does the Classroom Framework Help?

From the 10 responses given, there is a division of whether or not the Classroom Framework helped or not. Respondents who elaborated more on their experience show various opinions based on who their supervisor is or was. If the Classroom Framework is meant to be a completely standardized tool, the evidence here does not support that in practice. A larger study would be needed to truly determine where the rater errors are coming from, whether from the supervisor or the tool itself.

Specials teachers were also asked, “Is there a part of the observation/evaluation process that has impeded your growth as a specials teacher?” Responses show:

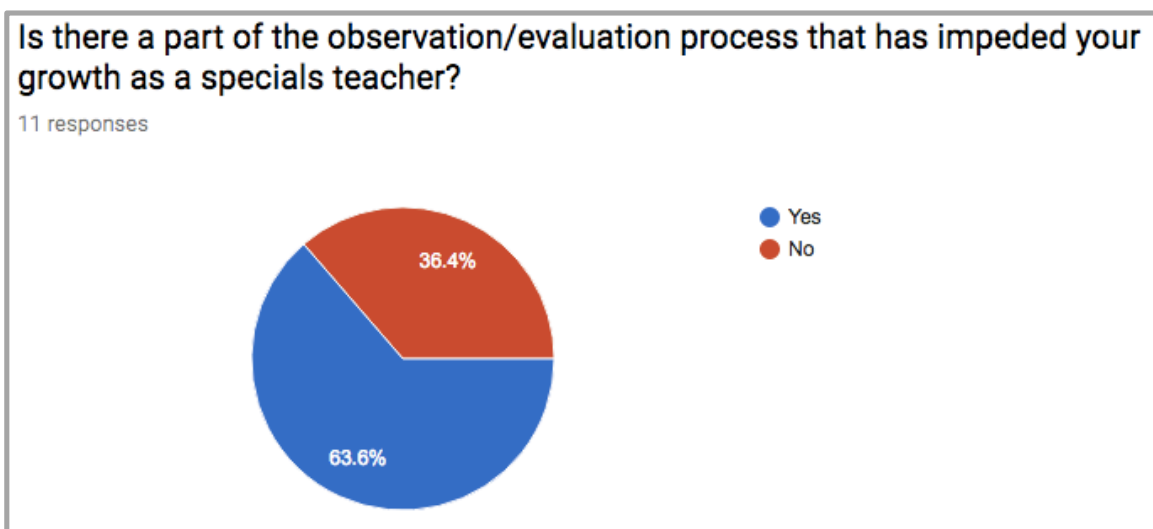


Figure 6: Has the observation/evaluation impeded growth?

If the teachers' response was yes, they were asked to elaborate.

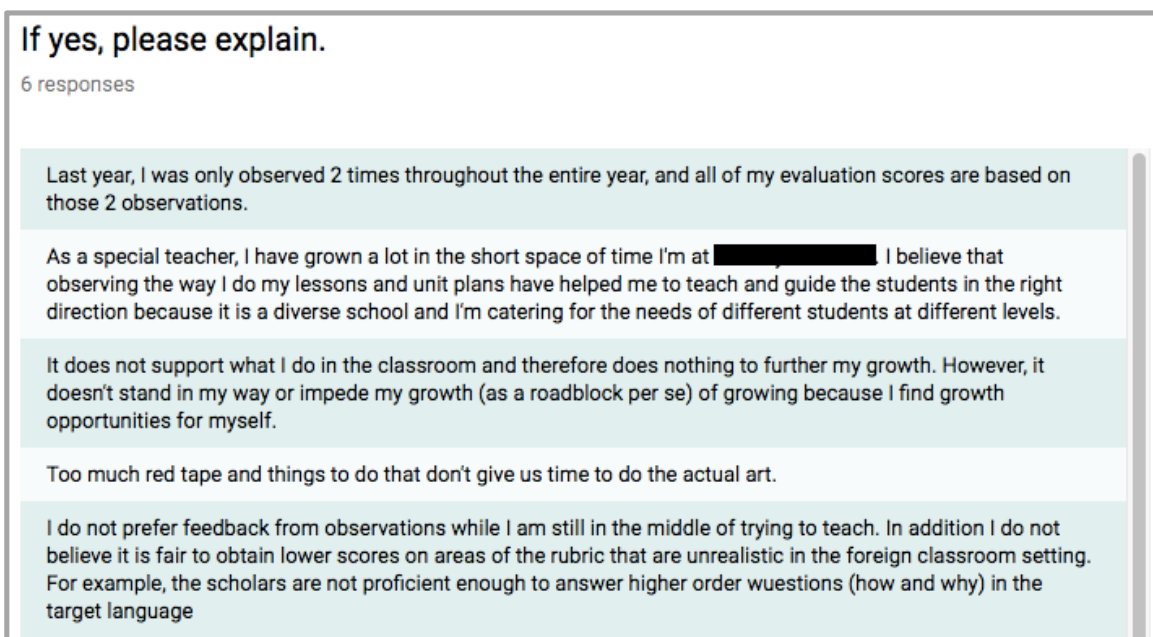


Figure 7: Impeding growth explanation.

Last year, I did not receive constructive criticism. I only got positive, even though I am not complaining about that. I wasn't sure what I could have improved on. At a past charter school, my superiors really hindered my growth as a specials teacher. They did not make me feel important or make me feel like I was doing a good job, when they also had zero experience in the arts. At NHA, I feel more appreciated and less micromanaged. While I know that my dean's do not know my field of expertise, I am happy that they trust me with the art curriculum. I feel as though this year with a new dean, she will challenge me in classroom management and lesson planning, however she has mentioned that she's going with my lead on the subject and the standards that I am covering in my classes.

Figure 8: Impeding growth explanation continued.

Based on these explanations, there are strong opinions on why the Classroom Framework is potentially impeding a specials teachers' own growth. The overtone of the supervisor using the tool effectively or not is a continuing factor. Year-to-year growth was inconsistent from job switching or supervisor changes. It is important to note that the only mention of support around the curriculum or subject was that the teacher was given trust and autonomy to "lead."

As a final statement on the classroom framework, specials teachers were asked if there was a part of the process or framework they would like to see change. With a majority "yes" answer, here are some of the reasons for that change:

Answer1: Make it more subject related

Answer2: I would love to see all specials have their own classroom framework that speaks directly to the special nature of their content. Some states / districts have gone to this to ensure that their teachers are being graded fairly and accurately on what they actually do.

Answer3: Would like to be evaluated on overall duties.

Many of the other answers were of a similar nature, especially in reference to making the framework subject specific and including all aspects of the particular specials teacher role in their evaluation.

Specials teachers were given a final opportunity for commenting on the entire process. A few took that opportunity to share these thoughts:

Answer1: The most support specials teachers get is from their content leaders at regionals. There are no curriculum coaches that come to visit, model, help (like for all other subjects). I would love to see our content leaders be true curriculum coaches and have the ability to travel to all the schools they help support and work with / coach the specials teachers.

Answer2: There is not enough support, and this year there are not enough observations for an accurate evaluation to take place.

Answer3: I see a lot of new teachers not being supported and feeling overwhelmed. I also feel that the evaluation process in the past has been inconsistent. I also feel as though it would be nice to stay with one dean and not be switched around. Especially if it works.

Conclusion

It is evident from the results and data, that the majority of specials teachers feel under-supervised and under supported, with supervisors who do not fully understand their subject. The specials teachers polled support that claim, with 81.1% of them definitively having a supervisor without any expertise or content knowledge in their subject. While they may have a great relationship with their dean, it is not necessarily translating into a great professional coaching environment. It is common practice for the specials teacher to have a dean that does not study, understand or know how to support their individual subject area. As a result, these teachers are left to their own devices. Every teacher in the building has the opportunity to be coached to improve their craft and skills in the classroom. Praising and positive relationships are great for morale, but without specific constructive criticism, the teacher will have little growth.

The Classroom Framework was built and rolled out in a fashion that made it look like a step-by-step guide for how to be exemplary teacher, but the steps are geared towards the grade-level classroom teachers. Some steps and indicators are not needed while others are missing that would follow certain subject criteria and positions. Based on the classroom framework, the band director gets no credit for being able to manage and direct a band of 100, or credit for their methods of instrument and music organization, cleaning and handling. The art teacher who puts on multiple afterschool shows has nowhere to receive credit for those. The library/technology teacher gets no credit on the Classroom Framework for also being the IT support in the entire building, nor for maintaining the collection of books and other media.

Nowhere on the framework does it account for the limited timing that specials teachers have to deal with. An average classroom teacher who gets 90 minutes a day to teach English Language Arts has 450 minutes a week. The specials teacher who on average sees a class once a week for 45 minutes would then take 10 weeks to cover the same amount of material. That is the average number of weeks in a quarter. Currently, the framework does not reflect disparities in instructional time. It would be beneficial for the Classroom Framework to be able to reflect the amount of instructional time in real life for each teacher in relation to student learning.

CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION

Responses from both leaders and teachers revealed similar concerns. First, it is evident that both the leaders and specials teachers have similar feelings. Leaders want a rubric, or classroom framework, that they can more easily work with and know exactly what they are looking for when they walk into an observation. Specials teachers want a rubric that speaks directly to their subject and takes in all the considerations of their position so they know exactly what they are being evaluated on.

Leaders and specials teachers want there to be an equal understanding of curriculum and instruction. Most leaders feel inadequate for not having the content knowledge and are therefore unable to support to the best of their abilities; and specials teachers feel as though they have to use their precious one-on-one meeting time teaching and coaching their supervisor, when they are the ones there for support and coaching. Furthermore, teachers want to be evaluated on all aspects of their jobs, not just the time spent in front a class, band, or sports team.

When given the time to just comment, leaders were forthright with the the need for an additional role either within each school, across multiple schools, or at the organizational level that will help evaluate and support specials teachers. The leaders envisioned a supervisor who has been in that situation before and understands the “umbrella” aspects and issues and nuances it takes to teach a specials subject, all while maintaining a high standard of rigor and expectations for the students.

Teachers are looking for equality in their evaluations and feedback. While there were certainly some in the survey who were happy with the system in place, that seems to only be the case when given adequate one-on-one meeting time to establish a personal system of support. Based on the number of responses looking for something more, feedback turn-around time can be key. Currently, there is no standardized time limit set for providing feedback, and the teachers responses above indicate a need for more consistent and responsive feedback.

Suggestions for the future

In order for the Classroom Framework to be truly effective, three additional pieces would be necessary. First, there would need to be some specific guidance given towards the framework for each individual special subject built from individuals with expertise in that subject. A committee would be needed for each subject area to help create appropriate guidance towards the Classroom Framework. This guidance document could be created to give those specific “look-fors” for each indicator as it applies to the specific subject being evaluated.

Second, the framework should be flexible from the supervisor’s perspective. If an indicator flat out is not applicable to the teacher, then the supervisor should have the option to “opt out” of that indicator at the click of a button, making it no longer an issue. Along the same lines, supervisors should have the opportunity to also add in a necessary indicator that may be specific to a subject such as the many extra duties outlined above.

The third and most important piece that would be critical to any roll-out is proper training and follow-through on implementation. Once the guidance documents are created and available for supervisor use, every supervisor in the organization would need to know how to access them and how to use them. It would then be the responsibility of the building leaders (principal and DSQ) to check in that these more accurate rubrics are being used. Just as a grade-level teacher may be observed with a group of leaders to help standardize rating practices, the proper rubric should be available for a co-observation of any specials teacher.

At the School Level

Each Director of School Quality can set a precedent for their principals and deans for timely feedback. This is something very small and measurable with results that can be seen and take effect immediately. Schools can also consider adding a Dean of Specials or if they have a Dean of School Culture, combine the position. This would free-up deans who specialize in classroom and special education to focus on what they know best. It would also allow the new dean to focus on the teachers who have received the least amount of support for curriculum, and yet have the most direct impact on school culture, since they potentially see every student in the building every week and every year those students remain in the school.

At the Regional Level

A new dean position may not be possible in all schools, but more job-specific oversight is needed. Another option would be to add a specials supervisor for each region to specifically support the specials teacher subjects. Where content leaders are not able to leave their buildings, as they still have their own teaching responsibilities, this new position could help coordinate those leaders. The regional specialist leader would visit each school on a rotating basis, providing targeted help and support where it is needed and help standardize the curricula of each school for their specials classes. Duties would also include providing much-needed dean training, to ensure proper oversight of the specials teachers is being followed at the building level.

At the Organizational Level

There has been a lot of talk from the interviews and survey data around the Classroom Framework. Based on the data, would be highly productive for the organization at large to review the framework as it pertains to each specials area. Again, content leaders should consider providing guidance documents for each subject and follow-through on implementation of those documents.

Specialist teachers also have a strong need for physical support at the organizational level. There is no one person whose passion and goal is to support specials curriculum. A Curriculum and Instruction position dedicated to specials is highly suggested. This individual could help oversee and develop the guidance

documents and bring all regional supervisors and content leaders together and ensure all professional development has an aspect attached to it that is specific to specials teaching.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

This research was small-scale based on the limitations of the area and number of people available. While the numbers are small, the data speaks loud and clear. There is a systemic lack of support for specials teachers at National Heritage Academies. This is not for lack of trying on behalf of the leadership, but the way the system is currently built. NHA is not alone in its leadership model of using non-specialist evaluators to evaluate their specials teachers; most schools follow this practice. Having stated that, although the practice may be the norm, NHA does tend to be on the brink of education policy and lead the way for changes that help teacher retention.

With that in mind, more research on the subject would make a vital difference. Are other charter schools having the same problem? Is there a school district out there that has solved this issue? Where are they? Who are they and can there be a case study done? Does the location of the school affect this problem or is it nondiscriminatory? None of these subjects were discussed in this paper, but are food for thought.

Teacher evaluations have come under a great amount of controversy, partly because of their limitations. Classroom teachers only work with students one year at a time in most academic settings. This creates issues involving measuring the impact the classroom teacher has on a student. Specials teachers, in contrast, will see students from the beginning of their time in a school to the day they move up or graduate. It is equally difficult to evaluate a specials teacher over the course of a year, but a strong group of

specials teachers can have a significant impact over the course of three, or five, or 10 years.

With schools, teachers, and administrators under constant evaluation, the forward progress of a school depends on stability. Stability in a school is the product consistent, administrative structure, low teacher turnover, and ultimately a specials staff that can track student progress over time. Without adequate support, specials teachers cannot serve that function, and without strong systems in place, administrators cannot provide that support.

Both school leaders and specials teachers have a vital interest in creating the strongest system of support possible. Most parents and administrators will agree that these teachers provide invaluable instruction. The question moving forward is whether schools will accept the status quo and allow specials to further fall behind their general education peers or make the necessary adjustments to support and retain a vibrant faculty of specials instructors.

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