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## Leary of Information Misuse

# Most Teachers Accept Peer Evaluation

By Jack Kennedy

Most teachers will accept evaluation by their peers even if they don't want them checking in the classroom and are afraid the information might be misused, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln study has found.

There is fear evaluation or teacher ratings will be used only when a school system wants to fire a teacher rather than as a means to improve instruction, said former Humphrey superintendent Duane Miller, 39, who just received his doctorate in educational administration from UNL.

Six of the nine cities first contacted refused to participate in the trial of teacher evaluation by fellow teachers, Humphrey said. One hundred teachers in Syracuse, Raymond Central and Utica districts at all grade levels were evaluated. "In some instances it was the teachers, in others it was the administration" that refused, he said.

Teachers expressed "quite a bit of concern about what they were going to do with this thing," he said, and some feared evaluation would only be a prelude to firing.

Despite its apparent success in the three districts, Humphrey isn't sure peer evaluation of teachers will become widespread in the state.

Dr. David Hutcheson of the UNL Teachers College education administration department

Among findings of the study and a followup questionnaire:

Age was not a factor. Elderly teachers were just as likely to give a new young teacher a high rating as the younger ones were to rate an experienced teacher high.

Teachers declined to evaluate themselves by the same scale, although most agreed their fellow teachers' assessments were accurate. (An average of all scores from the team was used to determine a teacher's overall rating.)

The teachers turned down self-evaluation because "it's just a little like being made to testify against yourself," Miller said. They declined to have the judging teams watch them teach, feeling the presence of

another adult in the room might cause students to over-react.

Such a rating scale could be used in conjunction with merit pay plans, but Miller doubts the value of merit pay. Giving all teachers pay according to the number of points awarded by the team, he said, would be better than merit systems which reward with bonuses those who happen to get to know the principal or superintendent.

Miller and the teachers believe peer judgment is more valuable than evaluation by students who might use the process as a "popularity contest."

After the study Miller recommended that school boards establish definite guidelines for evaluation and how the results will be used, and protect confidentiality. Those were two of the greatest con-

cerns teachers had, he said.

He suggested that after the peer evaluation outside teams not connected with the school could tabulate the results and then discuss with teachers the areas in which they were lowest.

During the study, he noted, some teachers with overall high ratings might score well on factors like ability to maintain discipline, but low on rapport with students.

Teachers told Miller that although they like the idea of peer evaluation they don't want the information used by state agencies in contract disputes.

The State Professional Practices Commission is developing its own evaluation scheme for use in such cases. Miller doesn't think the check by persons out-

side the district will be as valuable as peer judgments.

By using an average of the team scores, Miller said his process avoided "rating down" a teacher just because of personality clashes or a low score in a single area.

He believes administrators should continue to make their teacher judgments, comparing results with the teachers' own views. "A bunch of dead teachers could crucify a dynamic individual" unless administrator evaluations act as a balance, he added.

Teachers like the peer evaluation, he said. His former Humphrey district tried it as a pilot last year and will do it again. Whether many other Nebraska systems will follow is doubtful, he said.



Duane Miller . . . evaluation causes concern.

worked with Miller on the study.

His biggest concern, Hutcheson said in an interview with Miller, is that teachers tended to take the doctoral candidate's list of suggested criteria for evaluation verbatim without coming up with their own. Most factors on the list refer to personal characteristics ("he gets along with other teachers or students well") rather than teaching techniques. "I thought they'd be more creative," the professor said.

But there are no criteria yet to measure good teaching on such a checklist, Miller said. He questions whether teaching quality can be judged by subjective methods.

In each district teams of teachers evaluated a single teacher. Administrators were made aware of the result but were not in on selection of criteria or the evaluation itself.