

# Professional Growth and Performance Appraisals of School Administrators: A Contemporary Model

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**Abstract:** A sound performance appraisal process for school administrators contains key components in accordance with legislation, board policy and contractual agreements. This paper examines the performance appraisal process for administrators in one Canadian school district that may serve as a guideline for individual educators who are committed with on-going professional development.

There is on-going concern in education today that the evaluation strategies used to evaluate education personnel are insufficient. The discussions tend to focus on the level of effectiveness and suitability of the performance appraisals process (Scriven, 1994; Seyfarth, 2002) School districts are revisiting their policies and procedures in order to revamp and define its goals and objectives in a more concise manner.

In this paper I will explore and describe the school administrator appraisal process currently being implemented in one Canadian school district. The Labrador School District #1 has undergone many changes over the course of ten years due to the restructuring and re-culturing to meet the educational demands in an ongoing era of change and accountability. One of the more current changes is the development of a new performance appraisal system for school administrators and teachers. This paper will briefly explain how the process developed and who participated in its development. The focus will be on only the professional growth and development of the administration rather than on other components.

Few of us need to be persuaded about the contribution we must make as leaders. In education people are continually shifting collaborations of individuals who make performance and change happen. According to Seyfarth (2002) the successful administrator is one who has personal habits, values, trait, and competencies to engender trust and commitment from those who take their direction whereby focus is on improved practices that lead to improved results. In essence we want our administrators to be personally credible and organizationally capable (Begley, 2001). The image of the school administrator's role is in constant transition due to the changing social and political demands on educational institutions. At best, administrators indirectly influence learning outcomes; therefore role-based administrator assessment should focus primarily on social interactions including administrator's own role as evaluator of teachers and others in school (Heck & Glasman, 1993).

Diverse role expectations that create conflicting demands on administrators (i.e., one who provides support and one who evaluates) and varied school contextual settings present obstacles to developing administrator evaluation systems (Cangelosi, 1991). Administrators need strategies that have the capacity to motivate and inspire, providing a sense of purpose and meaning that unite people in a common cause. They should be aware of the key factors for effective schools.

It is generally agreed that effective administrators must be well-organized managers and artistic, passionate leaders. They have two roles – leader and manager. As leader they nurture the vision that express the school's core values; as manager they develop structures and policies that institutionalize that vision (Begley, 2001; Seyfarth, 2002). The evaluation of administrators, like

that of teachers, has two distinct purposes. The first is *formative*, the process that occurs to improve the professional performance of the administrator. The second is *summative*, whereby decisions are made relating to employment. Both have the primary purpose of increasing the effectiveness of individuals in their professional environment by assisting them in their professional growth and reaffirming their competency in their profession (Seyfarth, 2002)

The following section describes the evaluation policy within this Canadian school district and how it supports administrators with their various responsibilities and how they are required to maintain standards of performance (Labrador School Board, 1999). Finally, for purposes of comparing evaluation policies, there is a brief overview of another appraisal model commonly known as Duties-Based Teaching Evaluation Model.

### **Policy Development on Performance Appraisal**

The Performance Appraisal Process was developed over a period of one year with the cooperation of Human Resource Personnel, teachers, administrators, School Councils, and School Board Trustees. Since the school board had recently been re-established as a result of amalgamation and non-denominational infrastructure the schools were following their former appraisal policies. This resulted in a great deal of inconsistency among administrators and teachers within the board due to unclear expectations. Consequently, a revised policy was necessary. This revised policy (as mentioned above) was sent to each school to be implemented in September 1999.

The policy clearly defines the roles of the various players involved in the appraisal process. As part of the appraisal package there is a questionnaire for self-evaluation attached and a questionnaire for teachers to complete on their administrators. The questionnaires are specific in focus and encompass all areas that appraise an administrator's performance, organization capabilities and personal/professional credibility. The Director and Assistant Directors administer the appraisal by talking with the administrator, teachers, parents, and in some cases the students.

The plan is to carefully monitor the policy and to modify it periodically if and when necessary. All appraisers and appraisees are aware of the process in advance; therefore, there should be no surprises. It keeps with the general principles of Hickcox (1990) policy checklist.

### **Professional Appraisal, Growth, and Improvement Component for Administrators**

This component incorporates three distinct sub-components. Each of these are clearly defined in the policy and identified as Appraisal (formative), Growth (formative), and Improvement (summative). The latter is used to work with an administrator to improve performance if a significant weakness has been identified. The following is a brief synopsis of the contents for each component as it applies to probationary and/or tenured administrators. There is a set of criteria outlined in the policy: (Labrador School Board, 1999)

#### *Description of the Performance Appraisal Component (Probationary Administrators)*

The Director or designate initiates with the administrator the development of a growth plan with an explanation of expectations and specific timelines that encompasses a self-assessment exercise which is conducted at the end of September. An initial conference is then scheduled for October to discuss the professional growth plan. The growth plan is then developed and implemented between October and March. In January, a second conference is scheduled to discuss the progress of the administrator concerning his/her growth plan followed by a mid-year report. In March, a summary of the growth plan is presented to the Assistant

Director of Human Resources who reviews the administrator's progress and makes a recommendation to the Director no later than mid-April. If the administrator is in disagreement with the summary report he/she can undergo an appeal process immediately after.

*Professional Growth Component (Tenured Administrators)*

The process is set within the context of the school's improvement plan and the district's strategic plan. At the same time, it permits the administrator to establish personal and professional growth objectives. In this component tenured administrators may form a support group (elements of a team/support growth plan are outlined in the document) to carry out this stage in a collegial manner. The purpose and intent of the professional growth plan are clearly defined in the document. It encompasses the same as above with slightly different timelines

*Performance Improvement Component (Tenured and Probationary Administrators)*

The main objective in this component is to ensure acceptable standards of performance and conduct as well as to foster professional growth. For the majority of administrators, after the probationary period, the growth and development process will continue in a less formal mode. However, there may be administrators whose performance may be considered less than satisfactory and may require significant improvement. The performance improvement component involves two phases: (see table below)

*Phase 1. Significant improvement is required (when major deficiencies appear either during the regular professional growth cycle, or at any time)*

*Phase 2. Unsatisfactory performance (initiated after major deficiencies have been addressed in Phase 1 and performance continues to require major improvement)*

Phase 1	Phase 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Notification from the Director in writing</li> <li>b. Criteria for improvement</li> <li>c. Conference</li> <li>d. Improvement plan</li> <li>e. Implementation plan</li> <li>f. Evaluation of progress (Due process)</li> <li>g. Decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Notification from Director and Assistant Director in writing</li> <li>b. Criteria for improvement</li> <li>c. Improvement plan</li> <li>d. Implementation plan</li> <li>e. Evaluation of progress (Due progress)</li> <li>f. Decision</li> <li>g. Director's evaluation/recommendation</li> </ul>

**A Brief Comparison: Duties-Based Teaching Evaluation**

While not necessarily endorsing one model over the other it is important to compare contemporary models to determine similarities and differences. It also becomes important to adopt and replicate components from one and use in the other if it can improve levels of effectiveness. Scriven (1994) asserts that the Duties-Based Teaching Evaluation (DBTE) model

is another comprehensive policy that certainly provided some breakthrough in evaluation. It addresses many purposes of appraisals that need addressing. However, unlike the Labrador District policy, DBTE is deficient in the area of peer evaluation. It does not have a peer evaluation component whereas the Labrador appraisal model encourages peer feedback by encouraging team evaluations among its administrators as a means to learn from each other and promote professional growth. DBTE is unique in that it defines the duties of teachers and administrators in a list that was compiled by several thousand educators whereas the Labrador model was designed by a single group of educators and other stakeholders who did a needs assessment surveys strictly within that region. The validity of this model lies within the mutual understanding of contracting parties. It specifies minimum to excellent standards. However, the DBTE model does not place any emphasis on style, only on skill whereas the Labrador model supports and encourages administrative style and skill development. Style and skill are essential components of any model of evaluation. It would be interesting to see how administrators could look past style to get to performance. Nevertheless, the DBTE model fits well with the current policy of administrator appraisal in the Labrador District in that the fit with culture and prior experience are taken into account.

The administrators in the Labrador School District, according to its administrator policy for appraisal (1999), are evaluated regularly based on a list of criteria that sets standards for all administrative evaluations. Unfortunately, many of the appraisers in a general sense, who are delegated administrator appraisals have been removed from the realities of what school administrators face daily. Seyfarth (2002) argues that the background and experience of the appraiser have such an enormous impact on quality of performance appraisals. Even when criteria are defined it takes some level of expertise to recognize and appreciate it. There is a great deal of training necessary for someone outside the profession, or who have been away from the daily activities of schools for awhile, before they could realistically be expected to play a useful role in the appraisal process.

The DBTE is without doubt a more intense and thorough assessment process. The time factor to conduct such an appraisal could pose problems unless directors of education shuffle their priorities. With the policy in the Labrador School District that is precisely what must happen in order to effectively conduct the appraisal as outlined. Fortunately this policy is a priority that is board-wide accepted and seen as being workable. Presently (2003), while there have been changes in the education infrastructure of the Labrador School Board (i.e., school closures, amalgamation of schools, downsizing of central office administrators, administrator transfers), much remains to be examined to determine whether this new performance appraisal model has had any impact on the leadership development and practice of school administrators in the areas of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors as well as on student achievement.

### **Conclusion and Research Implications**

The perfect evaluation schema seems impossible to create but it is an ideal that school districts can work toward and constantly improve. There are many similarities and some differences between the DBTE and the Labrador School District Model for Administrator Appraisal protocols. Both models assure the public of accountability. The current performance appraisal document encourages all administrators to turn their aspirations into actions. The process allows them to assess their personal and organizational strengths and weaknesses as well as goals and directions. It assists them with time management and allocation of resources, which in turn will strengthen their schools. Building the performance management system where

organization behaviors are expected and accounted for is critical (Drucker, 1996). School districts need to see performance goals become realities, not just wishes.

Further research is required on contemporary models of performance appraisal systems of school administrators to determine the impact on student achievement. Additionally, it would be seem appropriate to examine the performance appraisal systems currently in place with the Miami-Dade Public School District and Broward County Public School District in Florida to determine whether or not these performance appraisal systems have any effect on the level of leadership effectiveness of practicing school administrators.

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