

## Parent Surveys in Teacher Evaluation

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Evaluation and assessment are again hot topics in education circles, this time as it pertains to teacher performance. And it seems that more stakeholders want in on the process. Parents in particular want to have an opportunity to participate.



At a recent board meeting, there were questions about the availability of parent surveys regarding teacher performance. Many believe such surveys provide a vehicle for parents to express their opinions anonymously. Perhaps anonymity has its merits, but what opportunity does the teacher then have to respond? If parents communicated with the teacher directly, their opinions of the teacher's performance may change as a result of receiving answers to their questions. Could it be that, while holding teachers accountable for their performance, there would be no accountability for those whose opinions are expressed in the survey process? Opinions are important to understand perception, but when one's livelihood is at stake, should not the evaluation of individuals be based on actual fact and not opinion? The instructions given in Scripture, found in Matthew 18, provide an opportunity to share factual information as well as to clarify situations that may change perceptions.

I found the following information interesting and useful.

In the *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 1989, Volume 2, Number 3, pages 239-249, Kenneth D. Peterson in his article "Parent Surveys for School Teacher Evaluation" makes his case for parent surveys:

One problem identified in present practice is that principals have sparse systematic information about teachers because of inadequate time and opportunity to collect data. Another problem comes from the sociological tension of teachers and their supervisors (Lortie 1975): their dependence on one another often results in biased reporting by principals.

In a 2003 article in the same journal, Volume 17, Number 4, pages 317-330, Peterson, along with three co-authors, Christine Wahlquist, Julie Esparza Brown, and Swapna Mukhopadhyay shared the results of a study regarding parent surveys.

This study analyzed the responses of parents to 12 survey items concerning teacher performance in 201 classrooms. The surveys were used as part of an innovative teacher evaluation program in which teachers elected to include parent feedback as one objective data source for annual review. In this study three factors emerged as important concerns for parents: humane treatment of students, support for pupil learning, and effective communication and collaboration with parents.

The following is a sample of a parent survey based on Kenneth D. Peterson study.

( [www.teacherevaluation.net/FORMS/parentsurvey.html](http://www.teacherevaluation.net/FORMS/parentsurvey.html))

Teacher's name \_\_\_\_\_

Your child's teacher asked for a survey of parents to make the class the best it can be. Please circle the following responses that describe your experience with the teacher. No individual parents will be identified with these survey forms. Thank you for helping!

Did you ask the teacher for: Did the teacher give you:

- |  |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|
| 1. An overview of class content & goals? | Yes / No | Yes / No |
| 2. Description of student's progress?    | Yes / No | Yes / No |
| 3. Ideas for home support of learning?   | Yes / No | Yes / No |

For each of the following, circle the number that best describes your opinion: Somewhat, yes, no

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Did your child know what was expected in this class?                                     | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. Was the classroom work the right difficulty for your child?                              | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. Did the teacher treat your child with respect, care, and knowledge of child's needs?     | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. Were you satisfied with your child's overall school experience provided by this teacher? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Do you have any comments for the teacher?

While this survey is somewhat poorly put together, it gives an idea of the kinds of questions asked.

Charlotte Danielson and Thomas L McGreal in their book *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*, page 51, share the following observations:

Evaluation systems that incorporate the perspectives of others, in addition to a teacher's direct supervisor, are called 360-degree systems. Such systems are based on the idea that an educator's skill may be seen from several different perspectives and that it should be exemplary (or at least adequate) from all those different angles. Used extensively in the business world, this approach has much to offer educational evaluation as well, with formal evaluations supplemented by, for example, observations from colleagues on a teaching team or on a curriculum committee, or parent or student surveys

Just as teachers, office staff, and cafeteria workers see aspects of a principal's performance that might not be visible to the superintendent of schools (the

principal's supervisor), students, parents, and colleagues can provide evidence of a teacher's performance that a principal might never witness.

Here is the caution statement that affirms the accountability issue raised earlier.

If districts or schools use such feedback, however, the designers of the evaluation system need to exercise caution so that such information is valid and not compromised by personality differences, favouritism, or other irrelevant matters.

To conclude this discussion paper, here is one final caution from the authors of *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*:

Surveys can offer highly valuable insights into a teacher's performance, and they can provide feedback to teacher that is unavailable from any other source. Because they are based on perception, however, evaluators should not consider parent and student surveys as entirely reliable sources of evidence. At their best, they can be used for formative feedback and to supplement other indicators of teacher performance.

Sources:

Danielson, Charlotte, Mc Greal Thomas L., *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*

Peterson, Kenneth D., *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 1989, Volume 2, Number 3, pages 239-249

Peterson, Kenneth D., Wahlquist, Christine, Brown Esparza, Julie, Mukhopadhyay, Swapna, *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education* 2003, Volume 17, Number4, pages 317-330