



Allen Kay, marketing consultant to TeachersCount
Allen is CEO of Corey Kay & Partners advertising and one of the most awarded Creative Directors in advertising. The agency gained its reputation by putting companies on the map. Virgin Atlantic Airways, Comedy Central and Celebrity Cruises are among them. Allen is a Graduate Board Member of the AdCouncil and AAAA (American Association of Advertising Agencies), where, when Chairman of their New York Board of Governors, he created the annual "Unthinkable Ideas" new media conference. Allen was a founding member of America's Promise—Colin Powell's alliance for youth, spent eleven years on the steering committee of ABNY (Association for a Better New York), is a Director of YES, Inc. (Youth Education through Sports), and is a member of the Advisory Board of PENCIL, an organization that works to improve New York City's public schools. Allen also served for many years as a consultant to the Marketing Board of the New York Philharmonic. The "Write Your Own Ticket" program was one of his many contributions.

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Teacher Evaluation and Assessment

Answers by [Anthony Cody](#) and [David B. Cohen](#)

1. What are some of the problems with current teacher evaluation practices?

Anthony Cody: Time is a big factor. Recent surveys of principals have revealed they have inadequate time for observing and evaluating their teachers. My experience as Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) coach supports this because over the course of two years I saw dozens of evaluations that were incomplete. Many of these teachers should have been enrolled in PAR, and might have wound up being terminated, but their principals did not have the time to follow through.

This also reflects another weakness of our practice - that evaluation is the sole responsibility of a few site administrators, and is primarily used as a means of eliminating "bad" teachers. Evaluation tends to occur in the form of a few isolated observations, with little connection to the professional growth of most teachers.

David Cohen: We also see that the tools and training for evaluation are rather uneven. Too many evaluators are going into classrooms armed with checklists that aren't nearly up to the task of capturing the complexity of what they might observe. And it's not just the materials, but the evaluators themselves who need development. I'm fortunate to work in a district where secondary school teachers are mostly evaluated by a fellow teacher serving as the instructional supervisor. Unlike traditional department chairs, these teachers have had some additional training in conducting evaluations. It's a long-standing and popular practice at this point, with the added benefit of providing teachers with evaluators who know the subject matter. If your principal used to teach English, and you're the AP physics instructor helping students with the calculus involved in their lab work, there seems to be an inherent limitation in that evaluative relationship.

2. What improvements would we see in your ideal evaluation system?

AC: We may be able to get beyond the time crunch for the principal if we re-imagine evaluation as something more positive, more collaborative and more integrated with professional culture at a school site.

DC: This is a shift in mindset: let's appeal to the best in professional educators. I've never met a teacher who didn't want to be effective in the classroom. But we know that in order to maximize effectiveness, we need the opportunity to analyze and reflect on our work, and use that process to improve. The current pace of teaching, and the student loads for secondary school teachers in particular, present huge obstacles to that kind of work: when you're trying to monitor and manage the learning of 150 students or more, you're in survival mode too often. If more schools would build in time for careful study of our own work, collaboration with colleagues and guidance by teacher leaders and administrators, we'd be far ahead of current practices. I'm certain we'd end up talking more about students' learning and achievement, which goes a long way towards solving other issues in the classroom (like classroom management) without letting those issues consume you.

3. Why do teachers resist the use of student performance in teacher evaluations?

DC: "Student performance" in a subject should be properly understood as a measurement of various skills and knowledge, with that measurement being derived from a variety of assessments offered multiple times. Teacher evaluations aren't set up properly to include or examine enough evidence regarding student performance - they're not even close - but if they were, that resistance might fade.

AC: Student performance has recently been defined almost entirely as test scores. Teachers resist the use of test scores as a means of measuring their performance for several important reasons.

1. Under NCLB teachers are expected to produce rising scores year after year, and there is little recognition that other factors affect student performance - such as family issues, language barriers, and poverty and neighborhood violence.
2. Even statisticians using the most sophisticated forms of Value Added measurements warn that conclusions should not be drawn at the level of individual teacher because the sample size is very small. In practice teachers are aware that one year you may get a class that really gels, and moves ahead well, and another year you may have a more difficult group.

3. Test scores only measure student learning in narrow dimensions. We are seeing many of our schools engage in test preparation to boost scores, and we want to move away from this. Teachers are much less resistant to the use of student performance when we can move towards more authentic assessments - portfolios, projects, and performance-based assessments.

4. Teachers are afraid that emphasizing the performance of individual teachers' students on tests will result in competition rather than collaboration. We want to promote teachers working together to improve learning, so we have to be sure we do not put them in competition.

4. What are the benefits of improved evaluation if tenured teachers are almost impossible to remove?

AC: We need to look at the reasons districts have trouble removing teachers. As I indicated, many principals lack the time to complete solid evaluations. If evaluation were more integrated into the professional life of the school, this could relieve some of this burden on principals and allow the staff to step up to deal with teachers unwilling or unable to improve.

DC: For those few teachers who really need to be removed, effective evaluation programs would give clearer feedback about how teachers fall short, and provide a stronger rationale for releasing them if they don't improve. But I think there's a far greater benefit in keeping more teachers from ever reaching that point. We're talking about a means to support teacher growth and improvement at every stage of their careers.

5. How does teacher evaluation fit in with current reform efforts?

DC: In almost every way! Pick your reform. To improve teacher training, we should be introducing these analytical and reflective approaches to teaching practices, and it would be great to tell new teachers that they can expect similar analysis and reflection on the job. The idea of teacher residencies, especially in urban schools, would smooth out the transition into a teaching career, and we can see where this type of ongoing evaluation would fit well in a residency program. We also see more schools going to distributed leadership and professional learning communities, which would help immensely with the implementation of new evaluation approaches. Those evaluations would also give you a better idea of who should be taking on what roles. I think this type of collegial, growth-oriented evaluation is well-suited to small schools, which is another direction for high school reform in particular. And of course, anyone talking about performance pay should be offering a valid and effective measure of "performance" - which certainly suggests the need for innovative evaluations.

AC: I think most reforms these days begin with an emphasis on teacher quality. However, often this is reduced to the ability to increase test scores. We know the highest quality teaching is much more complex, and strong teaching standards embody many qualities beyond test scores. So I would argue that you could place teacher evaluation in the center of a solid approach to reform, in that it allows us to focus on exactly what we mean by teacher quality, and then build practices to identify and support growth towards those goals.

6. What is the role of teacher evaluation in elevating teacher quality? Should we have performance pay to reward teachers with the best evaluations?

AC: Teacher evaluations should be able to identify teachers performing at the highest levels, as well as those not serving their students well. Every teacher should have an idea where they are on this continuum, and should have a community of colleagues to help them improve. Teacher evaluation can be a part of this ongoing process. We should reward teachers who have demonstrated the highest level of performance, as well as those who assume leadership duties and serve as mentors or curriculum leaders.

DC: I think we'd find many more teachers on board with performance pay if it's available to all teachers. Some arbitrary cutoff point used to distribute a small pool of money to the "best teachers" will result in much more harm than good. Instead, use stronger evaluations to recognize and validate outstanding teaching, and use performance pay to reward teachers who are redefining the job by doing more for their schools or districts.

7. How has NCLB affected teacher evaluation?

AC: NCLB has intensified the level of fear on the part of the classroom teacher. By setting unrealistic expectations, and then punishing schools that did not meet them, NCLB has created a climate of fear surrounding educational reform. Even now the discussion is driven by the need to "get rid of bad teachers," as if that was the heart of our problems. I work in Oakland, where we have a turnover rate of around 20% a year. We have some teachers that do not belong in the classroom, but we need to be much more focused on keeping the good ones we are losing. In order to do that, we need to build a climate of trust and collaboration among teachers and administrators.

DC: It's still shocking to me that NCLB was passed in to law carrying the requirement to

meet an impossible goal. So, under considerable pressure to meet that impossible goal, some schools have actually improved - and have still been labeled "failing." And many other schools have gotten worse by adopting scripted curricula that dictate what teachers will do each minute and each day, regardless of the actual students. These scripts generally aim to generate the most growth from the students with the most room for statistically significant gains, and by their very nature will leave behind lots of children, especially at the highest and lowest skill levels. So how do you effectively evaluate a teacher in those circumstances? You can only monitor their adherence to a policy that was decided outside the context of their classroom and without consideration of the individual children in that class.

About Anthony Cody

Anthony Cody is a National Board certified teacher who taught middle school science and math in Oakland, California, for 18 years. He now works as a coach leading a group of science teacher mentors in his district. He is a member of the [Teacher Leaders Network](#), and has a blog, [Living in Dialogue](#), at Teacher Magazine.

About David B. Cohen

David B. Cohen has been teaching English for nearly 15 years, and currently is both a teacher and academic advisor at Palo Alto High School. He is a National Board Certified Teacher and also a member of the [Teacher Leaders Network](#). Along with Anthony Cody, David is helping to start a new leadership network called Accomplished California Teachers, which has been studying and writing about issues of teacher evaluation and compensation in California.



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