



# **Seattle Public Schools The Office of Internal Audit**

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**Internal Audit Report  
Quality of Employee Evaluations**

**September 1, 2011 through August 31, 2012**

Issue Date: December 18, 2012



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**Executive Summary**

**Background Information**

This is a special audit on the quality of employee evaluations that was requested by the Audit and Finance Committee on September 11, 2012. On this date, we presented an audit of Human Resources that contained a finding related to employee evaluations. Specifically, the audit noted that not all employees had a completed evaluation on file, and that there was no way to verify that the completed evaluations were prepared by their prescribed due dates. In response to these findings, the Audit and Finance Committee requested that we expand our scope and evaluate the quality of the evaluations that were completed.

Evaluations for school District employees are mandated by the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28A.150.230), which requires that all staff be evaluated on their performance on an annual basis. Annual evaluations are also required by School Board Policy 5240, which states, "The proper evaluation of staff is an integral part in improving student achievement and the efficiency of district operations." The intent of employee evaluations is to provide constructive feedback and developmental opportunities to employees.

Currently the District has 14 Collective Bargaining Agreements. As a result, there is a minimum of 15 different types of evaluations; at least one for each bargaining unit, and one for the remaining non-represented employees. This audit evaluated evaluations for the following employee groups:

- Teachers
- Principals
- SAEOPS and Paraprofessionals
- Custodians and Grounds
- Child Nutrition Services
- Maintenance
- Non-represented Employees

Each area evaluated is individually described in subsequent sections of this report to highlight their respective procedures and results.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

This audit was completed upon the request and direction of the Audit and Finance Committee on September 11, 2012. District management has the primary responsibility to establish, implement, and monitor internal controls. Internal Audit's function is to assess and test those controls in order to provide reasonable assurance that the controls are adequate and operating effectively. We conducted the audit using due professional care, and we believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions.



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### Audit Objectives

To evaluate the quality of employee evaluations and determine if:

- The evaluations meet the intent of their purpose to provide constructive feedback and developmental opportunities for the employees to grow from their current role to the next promotional opportunity, or to expand the employee's scope. Do the evaluations also provide continuous growth for employees who seek new challenges?
- Does the quality of each evaluation meet the District's criteria and standards provided to the managers and employees via training sessions and online guidance on the intranet? Do the evaluations meet the compliance requirements mandated in each Collective Bargaining Agreement?

### Scope of the Audit

September 1, 2011 through August 31, 2012

### Audit Approach and Methodology

To achieve the audit objectives, we performed the following procedures:

- Planned the audit in cooperation with the Human Resources department, the Facilities Operations' human resources function, and the Child Nutrition Services' human resources function to ensure that we had a strong understanding of the District's employee evaluation process.
- Interviewed District staff knowledgeable of each type of evaluation.
- Analyzed available data to corroborate the information obtained.
- Reviewed all the applicable Collective Bargaining Units for the requirements on evaluations.
- Reviewed all the training materials that were provided to the evaluators to enable them to perform evaluations effectively and uniformly on their employees.
- Reviewed the District's internal compliance requirements, researched OSPI requirements, evaluated State and Federal requirements related to Human Resources, and compared the results with the District's current policies and procedures.
- Performed detailed tests of the objective areas to support our conclusions.
- When necessary, we corroborated the results of our testing with the District's subject matter experts to ensure that our conclusions aligned with the District's expectations and training.



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**Conclusion**

The District is making a good-faith effort to improve the employee evaluation process. Recent years have shown improvements in completion rates, as well as the tools used to evaluate employee performance. We identified numerous employee evaluations that contained constructive feedback and developmental comments; however, we also deemed some employee groups to have less than high quality evaluations. This report also details various instances of noncompliance with District expectations, as well as a lack of clear ownership over the District's employee evaluation process. Additional improvements are necessary to ensure that the District is meeting the intent of School Board Policy 5240, and our report includes recommendations to assist with this process.

*Andrew Medina*

Andrew Medina, CPA, CFE  
Director, Office of Internal Audit



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**Findings and Recommendations**

**Teacher Evaluations**

**Background**

The 2011-2012 school year was unique from the perspective of teacher evaluations since there were two kinds of evaluations in practice. The old Professional Growth Cycle (PGC) evaluations were used to evaluate some teachers, while the new Professional Growth and Evaluation (PG&E) evaluations were phased in for other teachers. Only the new PG&E evaluations will be used for the current 2012-2013 school year. We tested both kinds of evaluations in order to meet our audit objectives, but our recommendations are focused on the new PG&E evaluations that will be in use going forward.

**PGC Evaluations**

In the case of the PGC evaluations, we did not have any readily available training materials. We based our judgment on the expectation stated in the collective bargaining agreement. During our testing we noted that the PGC evaluations did contain constructive feedback and developmental comments, but that the process itself was not an effective tool in providing the educators with holistic feedback on class room practices, instruction, and professional growth. This has been addressed by implementing the new PG&E system, which will be in practice from 2012-2013 onward.

**PG&E Evaluations**

PG&E Evaluations are based on the Charlotte Danielson Framework. The framework has four domains on which the District's teachers are evaluated. The training provided to the principals on the PG&E evaluations clearly communicated and encouraged them to use the language/characteristics stated in the Charlotte Danielson rubric to support the ratings awarded to the teachers. The principals were also trained to include strong evidence and observations to support their evaluations. This new evaluation methodology is supported by the State and adopted by the District. In the 2011-2012 school year, there were 971 evaluations completed under the PG&E format. Going forward, all certificated teachers will be evaluated under the PG&E system.

The title and purpose of the four PG&E domains are briefly described as follows:

- **Planning and Preparation:** This domain describes the critical, behind-the-scenes work of organizing for classroom instruction. Even though our District has an established curriculum, teachers put considerable effort into transforming that curriculum so it is accessible to their students. That effort includes having a deep knowledge of the content itself and designing instruction that is appropriate to the diverse learners in any given class. There are six components under this domain.
  
- **Classroom Environment:** This domain is a critical aspect of teacher's skill in promoting learning. The Danielson philosophy states that students cannot concentrate on academic content if they do not feel comfortable in the classroom. If the atmosphere is negative, if the students fear ridicule, or if the environment is chaotic, no one, neither students nor teachers, can focus on learning. Although this domain does not deal with instructional



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skills, its components make the teacher's exercise of instructional skills possible. There are five components that support this domain.

- **Instruction:** This domain evaluates the critical interactive work that teachers undertake when they bring complex content to life for their students. The heart of this domain is engaging students in learning. All other aspects of the Danielson framework serve the purpose of engagement, because it is engagement that ensures learning. However, the other components of this domain also play an important supporting role in promoting learning. Teachers must provide clear directions and explanations, and their work is enhanced through the skillful use of questioning and discussion, and through the integration of assessment strategies into instruction. There are five components that support this domain.
- **Professional Responsibilities:** This domain and the Planning and Preparation domain represent behind-the-scenes work associated with teaching. Through their skill in this domain, teachers demonstrate their commitment to high ethical and professional standards and seek to improve their practice. Teachers are evaluated for professionalism in this domain.

The domains and their components are evaluated as either: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or innovative, with the following guidelines:

- A rating of unsatisfactory on any component within a domain will result in an overall rating of "unsatisfactory" on that domain.
- To demonstrate proficiency in any domain, staff must score "proficient" or above in at least four components within that domain and basic in the other components.
- To demonstrate innovation in any domain, staff must score "innovative" in at least four components within that domain and "proficient" in the other components.

### **PG&E Finding**

All of the PG&E evaluations tested appeared to meet the intent of employee evaluations by providing detailed constructive feedback and developmental opportunities. However, we did note an exception to the reference material regarding the statements used to support the individual ratings. We noted instances where, based on the reference material, the evidence documented in the evaluation was supportive of a proficient rating, but that the employee was actually rated innovative. For example, one of the components states that a teacher will be noted innovative only if the principal/evaluator, during an observation, notes that, "Standards of conduct are clear to all students and appear to have been developed with student participation." During our testing, we noted instances where the actual language in the evaluation states, "Standards of conduct are clear to all students." Based on the reference material available, this statement only supports a proficient rating because the evaluator did not specifically state that the standards of conduct were developed with student participation. The line of distinction between the innovative and proficient ratings is blurry because the exact verbiage called for in the reference framework was not used.



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**PG&E Recommendations**

This year the PG&E system will be phased in fully to evaluate all teachers. In order to establish clear expectations, we recommend that the District train evaluators to justify ratings precisely as mentioned in Danielson Framework rubric and support those ratings with strong claims, evidence, interpretation, and judgment. The training provided to principals should clearly identify the types of statements necessary to support the individual ratings.



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**Principal Evaluations**

**Background**

Seattle Public Schools is divided into five regions. In total there are six Executive Directors supervising these regions. It is the responsibility of the Executive Directors to evaluate the school leaders. The current principal evaluation was new to the District for the 2011-2012 school year, and will be revised again for the 2012-2013 school year in order to comply with Senate Bill 6696. The Collective Bargaining Agreement for principals expires in June 2013, and evaluations will be renegotiated in the new agreement.

The principal evaluations contain the following eight domains:

- Domain 1: Creating a culture conducive to continuous improvement for students and staff
- Domain 2: Ensuring school safety by establishing a comprehensive safe schools plan
- Domain 3: Planning with data to lead, implement, and evaluate for improvement of student achievement
- Domain 4: Aligning curriculum with instruction and various assessments
- Domain 5: Improving instruction by monitoring, assisting, and evaluating staff implementation of the school improvement plan
- Domain 6: Managing resources, both human and fiscal, to accomplish student achievement goals
- Domain 7: Engaging communities to communicate and partner with school community members to promote student learning
- Domain 8: Demonstrate a commitment to closing the achievement gap

The principal evaluations for the 2011-2012 school year were based on the Seattle Public Schools Principal Standards for Performance document. This document was a combination of the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) framework and other relevant sources that helped in identifying 26 components that were aligned with the eight domains mentioned above. There were four ratings that could be awarded to a principal: unsatisfactory (lowest), basic, proficient, and innovative (highest). The Principal Standards for Performance document had clear definitions to support each rating, and the evaluators used these definitions to support their rating based on their evidence and observations.

Unlike other District employees, principal salaries do not increase based upon a structured salary schedule. Instead, principal salary increases are directly tied to the ratings they receive for each domain in their evaluation. As indicated above, principals are evaluated on eight domains, and each domain is rated as unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or innovative. An innovative rating carries a value of \$250 on every domain and a proficient rating carries a value of \$100 on every domain. The basic and unsatisfactory ratings do not carry any monetary value. A principal that is rated innovative in all domains would receive the maximum salary increase of \$2,000 (\$250 x 8). Currently there is no max-out provision on this increase.

**Finding**

We noted consistency by the evaluators in using the Seattle Public Schools Principal Standards for Performance framework to differentiate the ratings awarded to the employees, and every rating was properly supported by a claim, evidence, interpretation, and judgment. There were no concerns related to the quality of constructive feedback and development opportunities.



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We did note that, based on the year-end principal evaluations completed, 2% of the domains were rated basic, 65% were rated proficient, and 33% were rated innovative. Our testing included year-end evaluations only, and did not include any mid-year evaluations. Principals that did not receive a year-end evaluation because they retired, resigned, or were terminated mid-year, were not included in the data. This data highlights that the District did not have a District-wide calibration process in place for the 2011-2012 school year to ensure that the overall evaluation ratings result in a fair representation of the District as a whole. These elevated ratings could potentially take the competitive edge away from the employee evaluation system

**Recommendation**

We recommend that the District devise a plan to establish a strong calibration process among the regions to ensure that school leaders are measured against high expectations that are consistent across the District. A strong calibration process will bring out the positive qualities of the school leaders, and help establish a uniform evaluation culture in the organization.



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**SAEOP and Paraprofessional Evaluations**

**Background**

This was the first year that the SAEOP and Paraprofessionals employees were evaluated on a comprehensive evaluation basis. Previously, the evaluation was a one-page form with a rating of satisfactory or unsatisfactory, along with a space for comments. Currently there are eight criteria for SAEOPs and nine criteria for Paraprofessionals, with four possible ratings: excellent, strong, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory. It is the responsibility of the managers who have SAEOP and Paraprofessional employees to evaluate those employees on a timely basis.

Per the SAEOP and Paraprofessional evaluation document, there are two ways these employees can receive an overall excellent rating:

- They had seven out of eight (SAEOP), or eight out of nine (Paraprofessional), competencies rated “Excellent.”
  
- They had five out of eight (SAEOP), or five out of nine (Paraprofessional), competencies rated “Excellent,” and they were engaged in a goal setting process with their evaluator.

**Finding**

Overall, we noted that the evaluation criteria were supported by evidence to justify the ratings awarded to the employees. The managers have put in strong efforts to perform the evaluations in accordance to the job description of the employees, and the evaluations are meeting the intent of providing quality feedback and development opportunities.

We also noted that 12% of the evaluations examined contained exceptions regarding the required goal setting process for employees that were awarded an overall “Excellent” rating. Their evaluations consisted of a combination of strong ratings and excellent ratings that resulted in an overall excellent rating. However, the evaluation form clearly contains a requirement that the employee should be engaged in a goal setting process to qualify for an overall “Excellent” rating. We did not notice any evidence supporting the goal setting requirement.

**Recommendation**

We recommend that the District train the evaluators on the new evaluation process so that they are fully aware of the criteria and goal-setting requirements to be in compliance with District expectations.



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**Custodian and Grounds Evaluations**

**Background**

Each custodian and grounds employee is evaluated based on their position descriptions. There are five possible ratings: exceptional, strong, average, below average, and unsatisfactory. Each rating has a description attached to it to help head custodians and their supervisors determine an appropriate rating. Custodian and grounds evaluations are done once a year by May 31. The Collective Bargaining Agreement prohibits an employee from being rated lower than their previous year's evaluation, unless the employee is given advance notice that their performance must improve in order to maintain their previous evaluation rating. The Agreement also requires an employee to be rated satisfactory or better, or successfully complete a work improvement plan, in order to be eligible for a salary increment. Every evaluation that is done by a head custodian or lead gardener is submitted to the supervisor before it is discussed with the employee. The supervisor calibrates the ratings with the head custodian/lead gardener before it is presented to the employee.

**Finding**

We noted that the evaluations are well-tailored to the custodian job description, but that a different rating document does not exist for grounds employees. The guidance provided to evaluators explaining the different descriptions and expectations of each criterion is specific to custodians, resulting in an evaluation document that is tailored for custodians but not grounds employees.

We also noted that the evaluation form only requires a checkmark to complete, and that there is no space below each criterion to cite evidence or provide comments related to the employee's performance. The evaluation form only has one place to provide comments. Most of the comments noted were brief and did not contain constructive feedback or developmental opportunities. We did not note any evidence of observations to support the ratings, and school principals are not requested to provide input during the evaluation process.

**Recommendations**

We recommend that the District:

- Establish a separate rating document for grounds employees.
- Revisit the evaluation forms to allow for more comments related to the employee's developmental opportunities, and establish an expectation for the evaluator to provide evidence to support the employee's ratings.
- Consider soliciting principal feedback during the evaluation process for the custodians assigned to schools.



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**Child Nutrition Services Evaluations**

**Background**

Each Child Nutrition Services employee is evaluated based on their positions. The evaluations are performed for every employee by their immediate supervisor and calibrated with their regional supervisors. There are nine criteria in the evaluation process, which are tailored to the job descriptions, and rated on a scale of one to five depending on the employee's performance. The Collective Bargaining Agreement requires an employee to be rated satisfactory or better, or successfully complete a work improvement plan, in order to be eligible for a salary increment.

**Finding**

During our review we noted that the evaluations are tailored to the job descriptions; however, they do not include any growth goals for the employees. Our testing revealed that the evaluations do not provide the employees with effective feedback to develop and move on to next step. We also noted that the current calibration process is limited to the respective region, and is not performed District-wide.

**Recommendations**

We recommend that the District provide training to Child Nutrition Services evaluators so that they can mentor their employees to develop and advance to the next step. We also recommend that the District consider implementing a uniform calibration process for every region. A strong calibration process will provide consistency to all Child Nutrition Services employees, and highlight the positive qualities the department desires.



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**Maintenance Evaluations**

**Background**

There are currently six Collective Bargaining Agreements that fall under the maintenance category. Our review was limited to the two trades that have the highest number of employees: International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 46 and Plumbers and Pipefitters, Local 32. Currently maintenance is divided into three regions: North, South and Central. Each region has a general foreman who reports to one senior foreman.

Each maintenance employee is evaluated based on their position. Evaluations have a rating of one through five. A rating of five is exceptional performance and one is unsatisfactory performance. If an employee receives a one rating or a five rating, an explanation is required to justify that rating. There are five domains, and each domain has criteria ranging from one to six. In the end, all the ratings are added together and divided by the number of criteria (25). Five is the highest ranking an employee can get and three (average) is the threshold for receiving a performance improvement plan. Anytime there is a ranking of three or below, there should be written evidence indicating that the employee is on performance improvement plan. The current evaluation form for maintenance employees contains a space for comments after each domain, followed by spaces to document recommendations for special training and employee comments.

**Finding**

The evaluations are performed by the senior foreman, who receives verbal feedback from the general foremen. During our testing we noted that the evaluations do not contain evidence to support an employee's rating, or feedback that would enable the employee to qualify for a future promotion or growth opportunity. Since the evaluations are not completed by the employee's immediate supervisor, they predominantly contained generic comments rather than specific examples or observations.

**Recommendation**

We recommend that the District revisit the current process and consider effective and direct feedback from the immediate general foreman to the employees. The ratings awarded should be supported by strong evidence and observation. We also recommend that the District implement a goal-setting process for the employees to enhance their trade skills.



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**Non-Represented Evaluations**

**Background**

The non-represented employee evaluation format consists of three major components:

- **Smart goals:** These are tailored to the nature of the work performed by any individual employee of the District. These goals state specific objectives that are clear to both the employee and manager. They should be measurable, observable, attainable, and realistic, and they should be mutually agreed upon at the beginning of the review period. This is an interactive process, and both the employee and manager provide an evaluation of each smart goal. Each employee will have four or five smart goals to be evaluated.
- **District-wide core competencies:** There are a total of five core competencies that apply to all non-represented employees.
- **Other relevant competencies:** These are additional competencies that are specific to the employee's job description. Most job descriptions contain four or five additional competencies.

There are five ratings for non-represented employees; outstanding is the highest and unsatisfactory is the lowest. The current requirement for the non-represented evaluations is for both the employee and the manager to evaluate all of the smart goals and all of the competencies individually. The employee and manager both have to rate each smart goal and each competency, and they both have to provide comments justifying each individual rating.

**Finding**

Overall, the non-represented employee evaluations contain constructive feedback and developmental comments to adequately meet the intent of having employee evaluations. However, we noted many cases (40%) in which the competencies were either evaluated in one summary paragraph, or were not addressed at all. The smart goals were evaluated as required, but the competencies were not evaluated individually. Even though the comments were deemed to be constructive and beneficial to the employee, these evaluations did not comply with the District's procedures.

**Recommendation**

We recommend that the District revisit the non-represented evaluation process to ensure that it is the most efficient method of evaluating non-represented employee performance. Training should also be provided to ensure that both employees and managers understand the evaluation process along with the expectations for properly completing the evaluation form.



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**Summary Finding and Recommendation**

**Summary Finding**

Throughout the course of our audit, we noted that there is no clear ownership over the effectiveness of the District's evaluation process. The Human Resources Department collects completed evaluations, and makes relevant forms and reference material available, but they are not responsible for monitoring the quality of evaluations. The District employs staff members that are subject matter experts for their respective employee groups, but there is no one person or team that is responsible for overseeing the overall evaluation process.

**Summary Recommendation**

Maintaining an effective employee evaluation system is an ongoing process that cannot be accomplished simply by implementing one-time corrective action procedures. We recommend that the District identify and appoint clear ownership of employee evaluations in order to ensure ongoing accountability and effectiveness of the entire employee evaluation process. Clear sponsorship of the program will also ensure that the individual employee groups receive evaluations that support the holistic goals and priorities of the District.



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**Management Response**

*We thank our Internal Auditors for assessing the quality of our employee evaluations.*

*Employees are the most important resource in carrying out the District's mission of educating students. The periodic evaluation of an employee's performance is key component to help our school district continually improve as well as hold itself accountable. In the last several years, the District has improved the performance evaluation processes and tools for the various employee groups including principals, teachers, classified staff and non-represented employees. Such improvements have led to an increased completion rate of performance evaluations throughout the District. This audit report is timely as it will aid the District as it changes its focus from the technical improvements to focus on the quality of performance evaluations completed.*

*The executive leadership team concurs with the audit findings and will take action to implement the recommendations of the Internal Auditor in order to improve the quality of the performance evaluations. Such actions will include, but not limited to, identify and clarify the shared ownership of the performance evaluation process, evaluate the usefulness of existing evaluation tools, evaluate collective bargaining agreements to ensure alignment with the evaluations process, and provide training to various levels of staff to ensure district wide calibration as well as a clear understanding of the requirements.*