

MEA • Voice

Teacher Evaluation in Michigan

- ☐ Highly Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Minimally Effective
- ☒ **Ineffective**



INSIDE: **FUND OUR SCHOOLS**

Editor's Notebook

In my third year of teaching in 1999, I felt confident enough in my classroom management skills—and inspired by reading and learning I did at an amazing four-week summer institute I attended—that I decided to try something new. It did not go well.

In fact, that initiative failed so badly on its first day that I referred a couple of my eighth graders to the dean of students for repeated misbehavior. They received lunch detention.

I cried after school, convinced I would never become the teacher I wished to be. What saved me that day was the kindness, friendship and professionalism of three department colleagues, who reinforced my wounded confidence and gave me ideas for how to restructure and try again.

Later I ran into the principal, who'd heard about the referrals and asked, "What happened?"

I told her. I hadn't provided enough structure to the activity to avoid off-task behavior. Today after additional years of teaching, I have a much more nuanced sense of what went wrong. But she met me where I was and encouraged me in my reflection.

The point is I wasn't afraid in that environment to talk about struggles. I was lifted up.

My coworkers and I were friends who brainstormed and commiserated and shared materials with each other. My building administrator was an adept instructional leader who understood that good teaching evolves from strong relationships, careful thought, discovery, and revision.

Over my teaching career, not every administrator I encountered possessed her skill set. But I share that memory to say I'm not sure how comfortable I would be if placed back in that same situation under conditions prevalent in today's schools in Michigan.

This month's cover story reveals some effects of fundamental legislative changes made to teacher tenure and evaluation over the past eight years. Since 2011, state lawmakers have created a system that pits teachers against each other and makes evaluation as much a weapon as a tool.

In a few school districts and ISD's, professional learning groups have been created to improve the one-size-fits-all observation tools mandated by the state. But those efforts are scattered and do not address all of the problems.

Too many educators report the system has reduced collaboration and lowered morale. Many say the changes have done harm and worsened Michigan's teacher losses. Even research funded by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has called the changes into question.

"The system is clearly broken," concluded one MDE grant-funded study published in October 2017 by researchers at Northern Michigan University, whose survey included administrators.

Politicians like to talk about "accountability" for schools and educators without taking much stock of their own. They need to listen to understand how to fix the mess they created.

—Brenda Ortega, editor

QUOTABLES

"That doesn't fix the problem."

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, speaking about third-grade retention at an *M-Live* Citizen Roundtable in March after submitting her budget proposal to the Legislature. Read more about Whitmer's plan to deliver additional resources to public schools in Michigan, starting on page 22.

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Number of students who attend schools staffed with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker, according to a study released in March by the American Civil Liberties Union. The ACLU report noted research has shown school-based mental health services improve attendance, graduation rates, and academic achievement, while data suggest police presence in schools lowers test scores and college enrollment rates and increases middle school discipline rates.

QUOTABLES

"It just seems like emotional and financial burnout are inevitable."

Unnamed Michigan educator in the 2019 Launch Michigan Statewide Educator Survey conducted in January. Read more about findings from the survey of nearly 17,000 school employees and administrators starting on page 9.

Who Will Listen to Educators?

Only 25 percent of all Michigan educators—and just 20 percent of teachers—would recommend a career in education to a young person they know, according to results from Launch Michigan’s 2019 Statewide Educator Survey.

The top driver of dissatisfaction in their profession? Seventy-two percent say it’s “lack of support from policy-makers and politicians.”

“Teaching is a calling and a noble profession,” one survey participant said in an open-ended response.

“The constant criticism from media and politicians is difficult. Not appreciated, valued or respected.”

About 12 percent of nearly 17,000 educators who completed the online survey in February say they will exit the profession in the next two to three years—in addition to another 10 percent preparing to retire. Large class sizes, constraints on professional autonomy, and lack of appreciation most influence people’s desire to leave.

“I can’t emphasize enough the reason I will probably leave the field of education (the only thing I ever wanted to do) is more paperwork, less pay, less support,” one respondent said. “I’ve never before dreaded each day!”

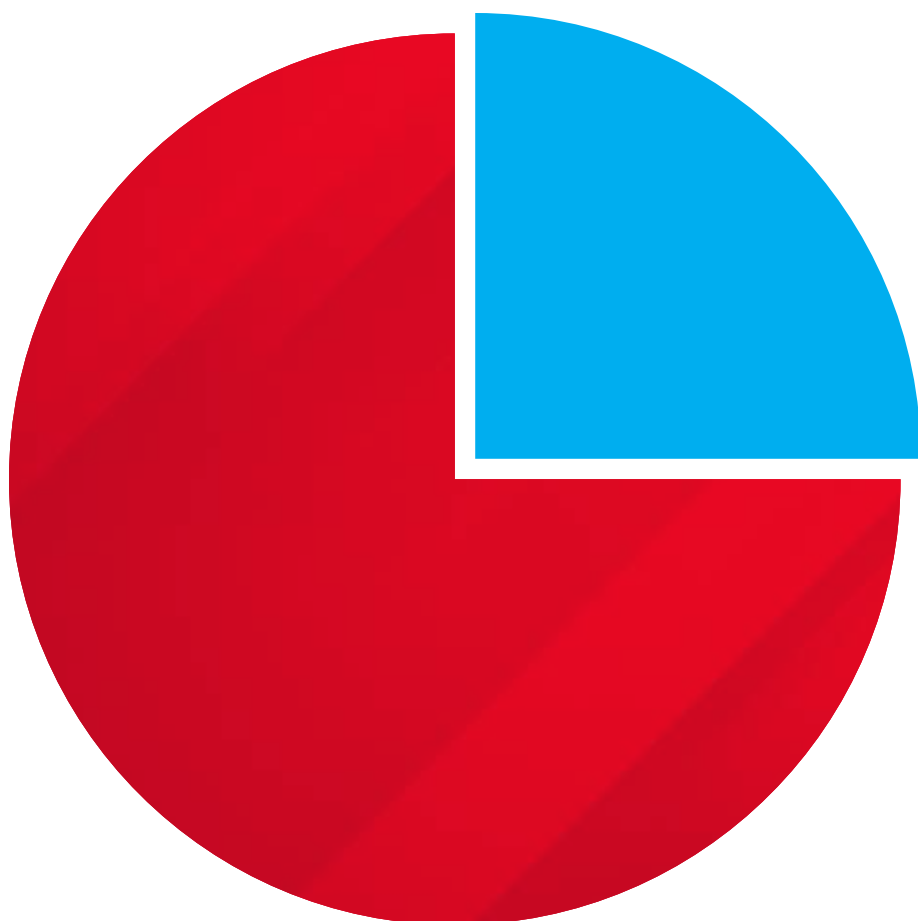
Launch Michigan conducted the survey to inform its efforts to improve education in the state. MEA President Paula Herbart is a co-chair of the diverse group of education, labor, business, philanthropy and civic leaders attempting to find consensus for change.

Survey respondents included teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, counselors, media specialists, other professional ancillary staff, and education support professionals such as custodians, lunch monitors, and secretaries.

After many years of declining state funding, educators see many priorities for improvement. The top three include reducing class sizes, increasing access to quality pre-school, and providing more funding to areas with the greatest student need.

Drill down into the survey’s findings, and it’s easy to see why educators are unhappy, even though a majority report neutral or positive perceptions of the climate at their own school.

- ✓ Too much is invested in state standardized testing. Only one in five educators says the information received from state assessments is worth the cost in time and effort. One in four administrators feels the same way. Asked about the M-STEP in particular, twice as many educators say it is not useful as say it is useful—and among administrators that ratio is three-to-one.
- ✓ Professional development opportunities get poor marks. Just 43 percent of educators report receiving professional learning suggestions tailored to them. A majority called for better quality and quantity of professional development offerings across the board, with larger needs reported for training to meet the needs of all learners and to ad-



Would you recommend education as a career field for young people you know?

Yes 25%

No 75%

Source: Launch Michigan 2019
Statewide Educator Survey

dress behavioral and socio-emotional development issues.

- ✓ Elementary reading mandates have been unsupported. One in four say their school district is not prepared to provide supports to students retained under the third grade reading law. Only one in five believe their district is ready with “substantial” support.

Among educators who work in urban districts—particularly those with high poverty and low per-pupil spending—40 percent say their districts are not prepared to address additional state mandates regarding retention of students next school year.

- ✓ The evaluation system for educators is unfair and unhelpful. Fewer than half believe in the

fairness of tools used to assess their job performance, and just 30 percent of teachers said the new evaluation system adopted in 2015 has helped student learning.

The full results of the survey can be read at launchmichigan.org/news. ■



Fear, Mistrust, Frustration



A Look into Michigan's Punishing Teacher Evaluation Experiment

Stories by Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor



MEA member Corey O'Bryan never planned to be a teacher.

A self-proclaimed nerd in high school, he entered Western Michigan University to study engineering—until discovering he wanted to share his love of math and science more than he wished to pursue his childhood dream of designing robotics for military applications.

What he didn't realize then was how much he would come to love working with young people in his role as a math teacher at Loy Norrix High School in Kalamazoo.

"I really fell for the idea of getting to know these kids and learning about their lives, learning what they enjoy, talking about their sports," the 11-year veteran now says. "When

kids stop by my classroom at lunch and they have something tough going on at home, they need to talk. That's something I never expected to enjoy, but it's great to be a sounding board for them."

A few years ago, however, everything changed in a series of events that plunged O'Bryan into what he describes as "a very challenging and dark time."

After eight years of positive job performance evaluations, he received a rating of "minimally effective" in 2016 under the supervision of a new school administrator wielding a new scoring tool implemented in the wake of a sweeping new state law to appraise teacher performance.

"It was devastating," he said. "I was told I'm not a good teacher, I'm failing my kids, and it broke me. People I know might not say this to my face, but a lot of them would probably say I'm not the same person I was five years ago—not as positive, not as happy or cheerful."

O'Bryan submitted a written response to the negative evaluation with evidence to dispute several aspects of his rating. For example, he received a score of zero in "content knowledge," despite his work as the

lead teacher on a team that rewrote the district's Algebra I curriculum.

That zero and others he questioned with supporting documentation came two months before he was granted a Master's degree in mathematics education from WMU with a 3.5 grade-point average.

"I presented the information to my administrator, and I received an email saying it was reviewed by Human Resources as well, but no scores were changed," he said.

The next year he was labeled "ineffective," the lowest score in the evaluation tool's range. The year after that, he moved back up one step to "minimally effective," and the district asked him to resign in exchange for a neutral letter of recommendation, he said.

He thought about leaving the teaching profession but hung on with the support of union leaders and staff, colleagues, and students. "I declined their offer, stuck it out and—well, I'm still here."

At the time of his low ratings, O'Bryan was teaching the most at-risk freshmen taking the lowest-level math courses, including repeat Algebra I classes. Entering students tested below grade level, with some several years behind.

Unfair. Arbitrary. Subjective.

MEA Legal Update: Evaluations and Due Process

It's not over yet, but a seven-year court battle by MEA over a tenured teacher's termination has so far provided some clarity in what's required of school districts before they make a layoff decision based on an educator's evaluation.

In March, the Michigan Supreme Court affirmed a lower court ruling that the case of Summer v. Southfield could go forward. In June 2012, MEA member **Meredith Summer** was laid off from her job teaching middle school social studies after 13 years with Southfield Public Schools.

The lawsuit brought by MEA alleges her "minimally effective" evaluation was tainted by the evaluator's personal bias against her for filing a harassment complaint against a co-worker. The suit also alleges the district violated state law by not sharing timely feedback and providing opportunity to improve.

The court found Summer's layoff to be "arbitrary, capricious, and in bad faith" in contrast to state mandates requiring placements, layoffs and recalls to be based on an evaluation system that is "rigorous, transparent and fair."

"(A) system that observes teachers but gives no feedback and no opportunity to cure any deficiencies clearly fails to abide by these statutory requirements," the unanimous Appeals Court panel said in its first ruling.

The case has been remanded to the Circuit Court, which had dismissed it twice on a technicality.

For Summer, the past seven years have felt like an unending ride on a merry-go-round. She now teaches fifth grade in Detroit Community School District, where a decision this year to give teachers steps on the salary schedule based on experience has helped to stabilize her financially.

But she has suffered as a result of the unfair layoff. Unemployed for a year, she filed for bankruptcy and suffered mental and emotional harm. "It can destroy lives," she said. "Hopefully this (court) decision helps other teachers in the state."

Documenting her work and actions has helped her to advocate for herself, she said. "I know I'm a good teacher. This is not how it should be."

In another win for teachers, a U.S. District Court judge in Michigan found teachers have a property interest in their evaluation ratings and status as effective teachers. The ruling followed a lawsuit filed by MEA on behalf of six member plaintiffs from the Southfield Education Association.

In his ruling, Judge David Lawson said because of their property interest, teachers in the state have a constitutional right to due process in personnel decisions involving reductions in force—meaning an adequate hearing is required before a school board makes a personnel decision.

The case involved six teachers laid off after the district consolidated two high schools into one. The six teachers applied for positions in the consolidated school but were not awarded positions despite having evaluation ratings higher than some of the retained teachers.

"It was an innovative legal strategy to go into federal court and make this argument that these individuals were deprived of a property right without due process of law," said MEA General Counsel Lisa Harrison. "It's another opportunity we have for advocacy."



He worked hard, often with the help of a special education co-teacher in the room, he said. Together they sorted students into variable small groupings based on individual needs. He spent hours grading students' work on a daily basis to assess understanding and engagement.

He developed a spreadsheet to track student grades and shared it with other teachers who wanted to use it. And he saw some kids increase two grade levels in math in one 12-week semester, including some who reached grade level.

He believes standardized test scores played an outsized role in his evaluations. "Because of the low pass rate in our most at-risk student population for math, I assume that is the administration's primary cause for focusing on my evaluation and my teaching."

He doesn't claim to be perfect. Like most educators, O'Bryan wants to develop new and better strategies for engaging students who are disinterested or discouraged in his subject, who are often dealing with other struggles in their lives.

He's made changes in behavior management at his supervisor's recommendation, which haven't moved the needle on his score. "I feel like our current system is all about identifying failings versus building on successes."

Now he's sharing his story—despite fears about doing so—to try to right a wrong. "I think my anxiety is not as big of a concern as fixing this problem that we have with this current evaluation system," he said.

DEEP DISSATISFACTION with the four-year-old statewide teacher evaluation system in Michigan



Demoralizing. Destructive.

crosses geographic and socioeconomic lines.

Interviews with two dozen educators who agreed to talk for this story, plus opinion surveys and conversations among MEA leaders and members over three years, reveal an evaluation system that has lowered morale and raised fears without improving teaching and learning.

School districts span a continuum in approaches to the system's mandates—and in their willingness or capacity to address issues arising from its implementation in 2015. However, repeated educator perceptions of the changes echo across the state.

Unfair. Arbitrary. Subjective. Demoralizing. Destructive.



MEA member **Claire Reid**, a first-year special education teacher, raised the issue with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at a meet-and-greet event at her elementary school in Grand Rapids last month, and she received backup from co-workers in the room.

Reid teaches in a self-contained K-3 classroom for students with emotional impairments, but she's judged on the same rubric used to evaluate someone teaching high school physics or middle school language arts.

"Evaluations are so important, and I want to grow and become better, but I feel frustrated that it might not

be accurate because I'm evaluated against standards that I can't achieve," Reid told the governor. "That hurts my standing in the district for things I have no control over."

Seated nearby, 20-year elementary teacher Jennifer Thayer agreed. "We wouldn't label our students ineffective or minimally effective to help them learn and grow. It breaks your spirit, and yet we come in every day and give 110 percent to our children."

Reid added that other new educators who recently graduated from university with her are voicing the same complaints about evaluations. "I think it deters a lot of new teachers from coming into the profession, and it also contributes to the high rate of younger teachers quitting."

"Older ones, too," a colleague remarked.

A more experienced special education teacher joined in to say she received a "minimally effective" rating in her 24th year of teaching after building-wide student test scores were included in her evaluation for youngsters she doesn't even teach. "That was quite a shock," she said.

Another long-time teacher echoed the others: "This evaluation system is not accurately reflecting the very hard work we are doing. I think it's such a significant piece of what's happening in this state right now with people leaving the classroom. It's scary, and we need to fix it."

Whitmer listened to the concerns and responded, "It's clear that for a number of years now the philosophy in Lansing has been punitive and undermining and not supportive, for political reasons and not necessarily for what's in the best interest of our kids."

"I really do love my job, but the paperwork and the stigma placed upon our profession by legislators is hard to handle. I hope that someday society will return the honorable mantle that was once bestowed upon our profession. I don't want to be society's scapegoat any longer."

Anonymous, middle school science teacher, 18 years

We have a lot of work to do on a number of fronts, Whitmer said, adding it will be a challenge to solve every problem in divided government. "But there's no doubt that building up morale is critically important among the ranks of our educators."

As Whitmer prepared to appoint a council of educators to offer expert insight on policy matters, Republicans control the state House and Senate. However, the party split narrowed to three votes in both chambers and several educators won seats in last November's General Election.

BACK IN 2011, a GOP-dominated Legislature passed and Gov. Rick Snyder signed into law PA 173, which made it easier to dismiss teachers and barred school districts from making seniority or tenure status a main factor in layoff decisions.

PA 173 mandated that school districts base personnel decisions on retaining effective teachers and required annual evaluations for all educators, although it was not entirely clear how the new system would work.

Studies suggest the changes bro

Veteran Teacher: 'At the wrong place at the wrong time'

Jason Stidham has lived every educator's nightmare. A high school English teacher for 20 years, he was laid off last June—despite his “Effective” rating—when his Michigan district needed to make staffing cuts.

His evaluation score was two-one-hundredths of a point lower than a newer, younger colleague, and suddenly, “My district was no longer obligated to honor the commitment it made to me, although I had honored mine since 1998.”

He had done everything right—earned a Master's degree, continued developing professionally, applied what he learned to help his students—but it hadn't made a difference. “I was teaching at the wrong place at the wrong time,” he wrote in an essay about the experience.

Stidham believes the subjectivity of the state-required evaluation tool cost him his job. For example, his planning score dropped from 4 (highly effective) to 2 (minimally effective) in one year.

“What happened between those two scores? I have no idea. There was no conversation.”

He knows administrators have struggled to find time to fulfill the many requirements of the system mandated by law in 2015. But the lack of feedback was extremely frustrating, he said.

He could have gone in and pressed the issue, but “I didn't want to be the squeaky wheel. I didn't want to be the person arguing over a point, and unfortunately that backfired on me.”

Stidham applied for dozens of jobs over several months before accepting a position teaching in a STEM program with an emergency certificate while he works on a permanent credential.

Read Stidham's moving essay about his struggles, and his plea to lawmakers to “ensure the consequences of their decisions are beneficial rather than crippling,” at mea.org/jason-stidham.



A commission was established to make recommendations on a system that would incorporate student growth as a measure. That report led to an evaluation law passed in 2015 which mandated requirements and penalties of a statewide system for rating teachers' effectiveness.

Under the 2015 evaluation law, starting in 2015-16, school administrators were required to choose one of four state-approved observation tools and to make student growth measures account for 25 percent of

a teacher's score, a figure that rose to 40 percent this year.

By 2016, 44 states across the country had implemented similar high-stakes teacher evaluation reforms—many mixing complicated calculations of student test score data, along with ratings from observation rubrics, into evaluation scores.

Since then, several states have moved away from using student test scores to rank educator effectiveness out of concern over the data's reliability. In January, new Demo-

cratic majorities in the New York Legislature made the use of state test scores in evaluations optional, following several years of public backlash.

On a much larger scale, widespread research in recent years has questioned the efficacy of the new systems overall. In fact, last June the foundation driving the changes since 2009 released findings from a six-year study showing little evidence of improvements to teaching and learning.

By last October, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—which funded nearly 40 percent of that \$575 million teacher evaluation experiment in three large school districts and a charter school consortium—announced it was moving on to different education-related priorities.

Matt Kraft, a Brown University researcher who has studied teacher evaluation, told *Chalkbeat* the districts involved in the Gates Foundation study “were very well poised to have high-quality implementation. That speaks to the actual package of reforms being limited in its potential.”

Kraft was lead researcher in a study released in 2018 which found the supply of new teachers was reduced in states that eliminated tenure protections and adopted high-stakes evaluation systems, aggravating shortages in hard-to-staff subject areas and urban and rural schools.

“In our effort to move towards a better direction, were the costs larger than the benefits? That's quite possible,” Kraft told *Chalkbeat*.

FEAR REIGNS as the overriding effect of Michigan's changes to teacher evaluation, especially because PA 173 removed educator voices from the process by making

might more harm than good.



procedures for hiring, evaluation, lay-off, recall, and discipline prohibited subjects of bargaining, educators say.

Many of those interviewed said the resulting imbalance of power has made teachers subject to the whims of administrators free to demand extra unpaid duties and to define the particulars of what good teaching practice looks like.



From his conversations with MEA leaders across the state, **Rick Vincent**—president of the Reeths-Puffer Education Association in Muskegon—considers the changes to teacher tenure and evaluation a major cause of Michigan's higher-than-average teacher attrition rate.

"I cannot tell you the feeling of fear that people have when the handle of their classroom door rattles, and they think, *Oh, no—somebody is coming in to do that evaluation thing to me,*" Vincent said.

It's not surprising, he added, given that a 25-year career in education can be ended by an evaluation score less than one point lower than a colleague's rating—even if both teachers are labeled "effective."

"If that happens to me, I lose my house," Vincent said. "It's crushing to people."

In addition to educators leaving the field, the number of new teaching credentials issued in Michigan dropped by 62 percent from 2004-2016, and enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped 40 percent from 2011-2015.

Vincent attributes the problems to "insidious job creep," which he defines as the loss of educator autonomy, increased workloads, and dismissal of educators' high level of knowledge and skill. For that reason, he and others say they're compelled to speak out in defense of their profession.

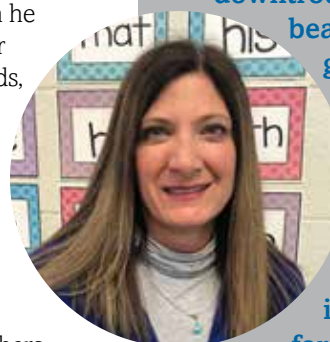
"The number-one question teachers are asking other teachers across the state is 'When can you go?' As in—When can you retire and hopefully still have some of yourself left?" Vincent said.

This year's increase in the percentage of student test scores in teacher evaluations—from 25 to 40—has further ratcheted up the tension among educators.

MEA member **Ellissa Lauer** laments the time she must spend teaching her Wyoming kindergarteners how to use a computer and type on a keyboard to complete online math testing three times per year.

The youngsters are just learning numbers and counting, she said. Many speak English as a second language. She has found her students score markedly better taking the same test with paper and pencil.

"They're going to tell me I'm a bad teacher because this data that I have no control over is ineffective? It doesn't guide my instruction. It's strictly for evaluation purposes."



"You feel like a constant failure, like nothing you do is enough, that you will never be a stellar teacher in anybody else's eyes because it's unattainable. But even though you feel downtrodden and beaten, you still get up every morning and you put on that teacher face, because you have 25 souls in front of you for whom you are their hope."

Ellissa Lauer, kindergarten teacher, 25 years

Issues around testing do not disappear as students get older, many teachers point out. Students in grades 3-11 are required to undergo M-STEP testing that many educators consider flawed and grade-inappropriate. And the consequences for results only apply to teachers—not test takers.

One MEA leader from an economically disadvantaged area said eighth-grade teachers in his district collected their own data over the past two years—marking the time taken by each student on various sections of the M-STEP test, which spreads over many hours across several days.

Their findings, along with a survey of student attitudes, documented the significant number of students who completed sections of the state

Professional craft is not checked

Find Help from MEA

MEA tools and training can assist members in navigating the teacher evaluation system.

A training cadre is available to visit local associations to deliver the latest information about the law's requirements and specific state-approved tools used by local districts, and to provide access to Michigan Department of Education resources related to evaluation.

The training includes methods for educators to take ownership of their evaluations and ensure they are utilizing and documenting best practices in their classrooms.

"It's become apparent that the teacher has to be proactive in ensuring they can demonstrate and document good practice, because it isn't something that necessarily will be observed in the 10 minutes that the administrator is in the room," said UniServ Director Tammy Daenzer, the lead trainer in the cadre.

In addition, the training emphasizes the need for union leaders and members to establish a collaborative work group or professional issues committee that brings both sides together for dialogue between teachers and administrators.

"A professional issues committee gives teachers a voice in the process to make the system more transparent and consistent," Daenzer said.

In Romeo, the local union has created a new position of "Evaluation Liaison" to mediate communication between educators and district administration, said Jen Raicevich, a math and science teacher and building representative who has taken on the role.

"My main job is to make sure the communication between administration and staff is clear and not interpreted... in any way that is different than intended," Raicevich said. "I have helped teachers feel empowered to have a dialogue about evaluations with their evaluator."

For more information or to schedule an evaluation training, contact your local MEA field office.

assessments in a fraction of time allotted or admitted skipping the five-paragraph essay.

"We have so little control over external factors," said the teacher, who asked not to be identified. "My job is about more than a test score."

OBSERVATION TOOLS approved for use by the state have created their own concerns among educators, especially their tendency to reduce complex pedagogy to a checklist removed from meaningful context and open to subjectivity in ratings from one administrator to another.

The art of teaching does not lend itself to one-size-fits-all measurements, said MEA member **Bill Julian**, who teaches business and social studies and serves as a Google-certified technology consultant for Traverse City Area Public Schools.

"The evaluators are looking at their computer and whether they can check a box or not, and if those things aren't apparent at the exact time someone's evaluating, you're not going to get credit for it," Julian said.

"It's frustrating, because you're doing other good things in the classroom which may not be on the checklist, and we also don't get credit for that."

Time spent planning to meet dozens of criteria on a checklist in two 20-minute observations and various unannounced visits per year shifts teachers' thinking away from improvement goals rooted in content and students' needs, said Farmington High School English teacher Megan Ake.

Additional hours are required to gather student data and fill out paperwork to document work, she said. "We go from 'Here's what I need to do to drive instruction,' to 'How is this going to look on my evaluation?' It doesn't feel organic."

Plymouth High School chemistry teacher Scott Milam agrees. The MEA member was named 2018 Michigan Science Teacher of the

"We don't need to think about this every day. We need to think about our content. We need to think about kids. That's where our energies should be spent. We've got to stand up to legislators and say, 'You need to listen, because this is hurting kids.'"



Bill Julian,
business/social
studies teacher and
technology consultant,
15 years

Checklists. We are not data sets.



Year, but he has not yet achieved “Highly Effective” status in his district.

The inflexibility of the system’s goal-setting and observation tools do not nurture true reflection, he said. Teaching a high school advanced science class requires different approaches than a middle school required core class, or music class, physical education, or special education.

“There’s so much discrepancy when I look at the rubric, I often think, *This isn’t actually appropriate for my class. This doesn’t fit.*”

The observation tool turns teachers into “point chasers,” Milam said, a quality most educators discourage in students because it takes focus away from learning. “I don’t know any of my colleagues who say this has helped them become a better teacher. It’s just really frustrating.”

Many of those interviewed said a big problem lies in the dichotomy between the stated intent of evaluations—to coach teachers in the challenges of developing a highly complex craft—versus using evaluations to sort and rank employees for disciplinary and job placement purposes.

For that reason, the system ultimately rewards compliance and discourages risk-taking to the detriment of innovation and growth, educators say.

“Staff is reluctant to try new things, disagree with the principal, ask a question or make a move that might count against them,” said **Lisa Sutton**, an instructional coach and Kalamazoo Education Association President. “How do you improve when you’re running scared?”

Absent tenure protections and bargaining and grievance rights, the system also discourages teacher

collaboration—which research shows actually does help educators to grow in their practice, along with high-quality, targeted professional development.

Even Charlotte Danielson, whose research on teacher effectiveness evolved into an eponymous evaluation tool used in Michigan and other states, has questioned the distilling of professional craft to “numbers, ratings, and rankings” as evaluation reform has done nationwide.

“I’m deeply troubled by the transformation of teaching from a complex profession requiring nuanced judgment to the performance of certain behaviors that can be ticked off on a checklist,” the author of *Framework for Teaching* wrote in *Education Week*.

“In fact, I (and many others in the academic and policy communities) believe it’s time for a major rethinking of how we structure teacher evaluation to ensure that teachers, as professionals, can benefit from numerous opportunities to continually refine their craft.”

Danielson’s critical commentary appeared in April 2016—a few weeks before Kalamazoo’s Corey O’Bryan received his first negative evaluation, which was formulated using the

“I would like to see conversations where there’s time given to teachers to be able to make improvements without fear of losing their job. I want teachers to feel like they have the time and the permission to work hard and make mistakes and try again. We don’t feel like we have that. It’s do it this way, or you’re done.”



Lisa Sutton, instructional coach and teacher, 18 years

Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching. Three years later, he’s still rebuilding his confidence.

“I hear from some of the union reps that my story is empowering and helping out other people dealing with similar circumstances,” he said. “If I can help someone else stick with teaching because that’s what they love to do, then I made the right choice by pushing through.” ■

Act Now to Change Student Growth Percentage

MEA lobbyists have been pushing for changes to the state’s evaluation law for more than a year. As of press time, **House Bill 4221** and **Senate Bill 122** were under consideration in the state Legislature. The measures would return the percentage of an educator’s annual evaluation that is tied to student growth measures to 25 percent from 40 percent. Please take time to contact your lawmakers and urge them to pass this long overdue legislation, using our convenient Action Network page at tinyurl.com/eval-letters.