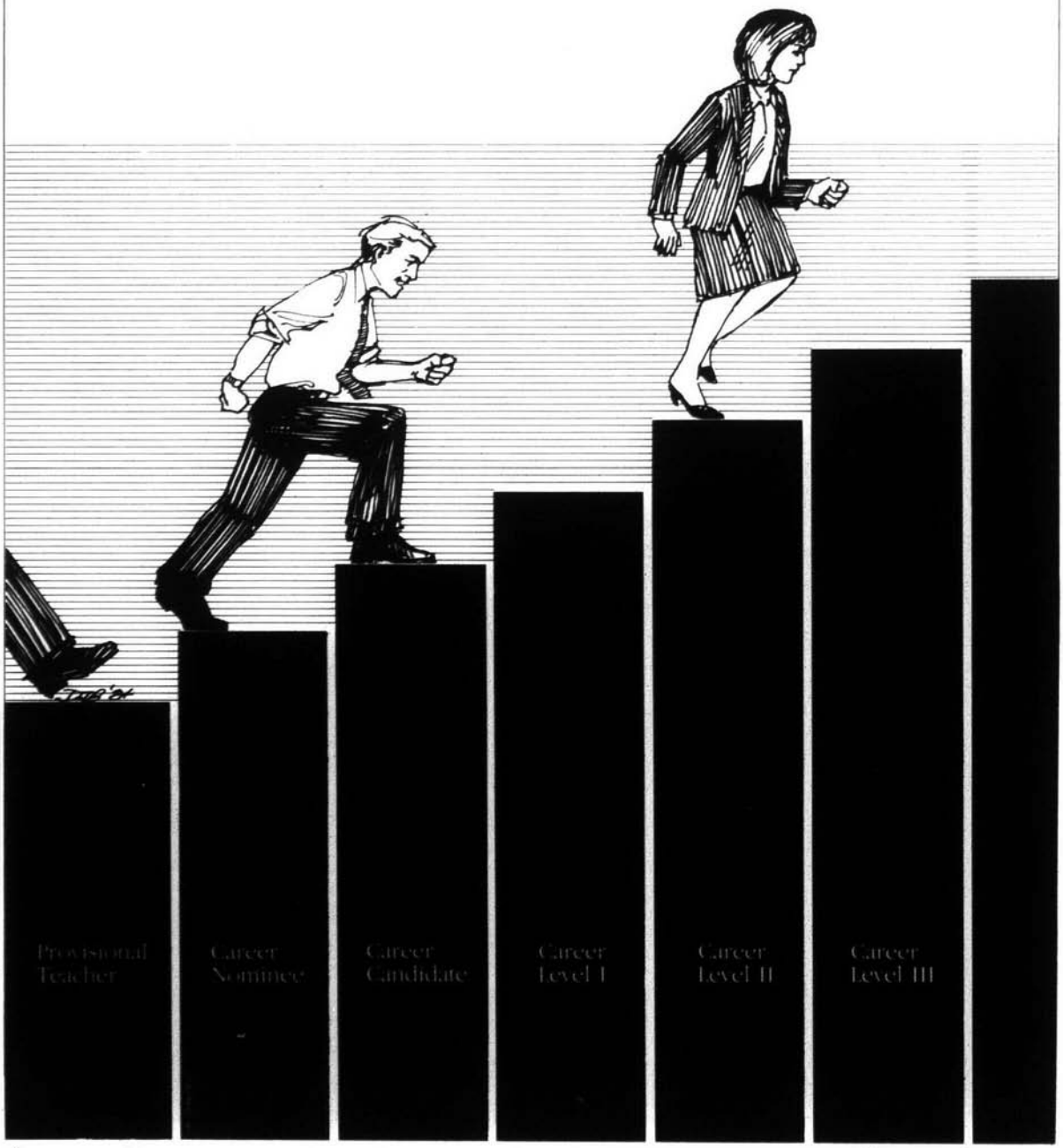
The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Teacher Career Development Program



PHILLIP C. SCHLECHTY, ANNE W. JOSLIN, SARAH E. LEAK, AND ROBERT C. HANES

Effective training, evaluation, and incentives are key aspects of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's six-level career ladder program.

National reports have generated interest in merit pay, career ladders, master teacher plans, improved methods of teacher training, and more effective methods of evaluating teachers. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System in North Carolina anticipated many of the concerns voiced in these reports in 1980, when we began developing a plan subsequently known as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg teacher career development program.[1]

Career Structure

In planning the program, we sought the involvement of those most directly affected—teachers and administrators. What evolved was a career ladder of six levels: provisional teacher, career nominee, career candidate, career level I, career level II, and career level III. Each level requires demonstrated performance of specific competencies before advancement can occur. As teachers move from one level to the next they must be willing to assume added responsibilities, which are related to the overall excellence of *teaching* in the system. A provisional teacher concentrates on classroom instruction and participates in training programs designed for novice teachers. A career nominee continues to perform the functions of the provisional teacher but also participates on task or study committees within the school. Career level I, II, and III teachers assume leadership in areas such as serving as mentors for beginning teachers and participating in program evaluation, staff development, diagnosis and remediation of instructional problems, development of curriculum materials, and the design and implementation of action oriented classroom research. Each function is designed to enhance classroom practice.

The system's primary professional position is career level I. Teachers are awarded tenure at the end of their fourth, fifth, or sixth year when they achieve level I. They are free to choose to go no farther even though the administration may be willing to advance them.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the most crucial aspect of the career development program. If the evaluation procedure does not have integrity, the career ladder proposal cannot succeed. Teachers have been informed of the expectations of job performance at each level. Furthermore, they are assured of feedback on their progress toward meeting these expectations. Both the teacher and the system are to be kept apprised of areas in which further training is necessary, and the system must provide that training.

Each career ladder teacher must have a portfolio of evidence to document successful performance. The portfolio will include, but is not limited to, an Action-Growth (professional improvement) Plan and documenta-



Phillip C. Schlechty is Professor of Education, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Special Assistant to the Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina. Anne W. Joslin is Project Coordinator, Sarah E. Leak is Executive Director of the Metrolina Education Consortium, and Robert C. Hanes is Deputy Superintendent, all with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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tion of success in meeting the expectations in an appropriate time frame. Advisory assessment teams—consisting of the principal, the assistant principal for instruction (explained later), and one or more collegial teachers—will assist, support, and encourage the career ladder teacher in development of and success in achieving the goals of the Action-Growth Plan. Determining success is a function of evaluation.

Out of three basic assumptions about evaluation, three specific principles have emerged. First, the career ladder plan proceeds from the assumption that Berliner (1983) is right when he says teaching can be much improved if we view teachers as managers or executives rather than production line workers. A second assumption is that teachers should not be granted tenure until demonstrating that they routinely carry out classroom tasks in a manner consistent with effective teaching principles. Third, evaluation involves human judgment and human value. Instruments can and should be used in collecting data, but giving meaning and significance to those data is a human activity. Data can be developed objectively, but valuing is necessarily subjective.

Given these three assumptions, three principles emerge.

1. As managers, teachers can and should be held accountable for those things over which managers have control: management results. For example, teachers are accountable for ensuring that classes start on time, that materials are readily available, that students receive immediate corrective feedback, and so on. Teachers are not accountable for test results any more than first line supervisors are accountable for the profits of the corporation. Teachers are accountable for doing those things that research and the state of the art indicate should produce learning. The evaluation instrument (The Carolina Teaching Performance Rating Scale) is directly based on the research on effective teaching and is framed in a manner consistent with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg System's notion of management results.

2. It is assumed that teachers who have arrived at career level I status will already have demonstrated their capability of producing the management results that effective teaching literature indicates they should produce. Therefore, the evaluation of experienced teachers should go beyond seeking evidence that teachers maintain the capacity to produce desired management results (though it should include that) and should emphasize performances that cause them to grow. (In some high technology industries these performances are referred to as "stretch goals.")

3. Teacher evaluation cannot be conducted outside the context of human judgment. Furthermore, the quality of human judgment is much improved when panels of knowledgeable and reasonable persons are asked to collectively render judgments and when these panel judgments are themselves judged and evaluated by yet other panels and other judges.

In summary, the undergirding principle for evaluation in the teacher career development program is:

Multiple evaluations are conducted by numerous individuals employing multiple and explicit criteria over a long period of time.

Acceptance of the third principle has resulted in a new position within the system—the observer-evaluator, who plays a key role in the success of the career development program. We have 12 observer-evaluators who have received extensive training in how to conduct classroom observations and how to prepare objective, accurate, and detailed assessments of teaching performance. An observation schedule allows for each provisional teacher to be observed three times by three different observer-evaluators during the second semester of employment. These observations are unannounced but scheduled in consultation with the principal. Second year provisional teachers are observed six times, three times in the fall and three times in the spring. Three of these observations will be announced, and three will be unannounced. Three observer-evaluators conduct two observations each. Career candidates (tenured teachers who enter the program) are observed nine times by three different observer-evaluators, six observations in the fall and three in the spring. Three observations will be announced, six unannounced. Immediately following an observation the observer-evaluator must write a report for the teacher's portfolio and give the teacher a personal copy. Furthermore, announced observations are followed by a conference with the teacher. Requests for conferences following unannounced observations will be honored.

The evaluation process is used in part to determine needs of career ladder teachers for the purpose of additional training.

Training

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg teacher career development program assumes that, as an employer, the school system is responsible for developing and maintaining outstanding teachers. It is not enough to identify and reward those teachers who give stellar performances regardless of the support given by the system or the conditions under which they teach. The school

system has a long commitment to staff development and training (see Schlechty, Crowell, and others, 1983). In spite of this commitment, Charlotte-Mecklenburg sometimes suffers the usual staff development problems. For example, staff development is sometimes fragmented; training is perceived to be irrelevant to individual or system needs; and teachers frequently feel that they have little control over the form and substance of what is offered.

Until now, staff development has, for the most part, taken place outside of the context of personnel evaluation. The teacher career development program is designed to change this condition in several ways. First, personnel evaluation is viewed as part of the staff development system. Indeed, good evaluation *is* staff development. Among other things, good evaluation informs those being evaluated about what is expected of them and provides systematic corrective feedback regarding performance. Second, good evaluations can reveal widespread problems that call for more systematic training and support. Finally, skillful evaluations can be used as a basis for assessing the effects and effectiveness of the training and support that is provided.

The teacher career development program calls for training that is based on and derived from evaluations. If a person is having difficulty in meeting an evaluation standard, then some form of training and support must be provided. For example, many beginning teachers will have difficulty in meeting the standards set with regard to knowledge of the effective teaching literature precisely because so few teacher training institutions have built this literature into their preservice programs. Experienced and inexperienced teachers alike will need training and support in the processes and procedures to be used in the evaluation system, since this is their first exposure to the program.

Our Staff Development Center (a former elementary school) has a full-time director and houses a school-sponsored teacher center and four trained psychologists/social workers who staff an employee assistance program. The system also has a computer laboratory and an inservice staff. In addition, the same building provides office space for a multi-agency consortium (The Metrolina Education Consortium), which is legally empowered to (1) offer advanced certification programs specifically tailored to the needs of the system, and (2) in cooperation with participating universities, design and deliver specially tailored advanced degree programs. In addition, each school has an assistant principal for instruction who deals primarily with staff development and training.

These staff development components have been operational for some time. Indeed, the teacher career development program actually grew out of efforts to provide more effective coordination of these diverse staff development components. There is, in fact, nothing new except for the evaluation component and the career ladder. The program has merely identified these successful elements and suggested ways of organizing them to systematically improve the quality of school programs and school performance.

Rewards and Incentives

The reward and incentive system encourages teachers to develop and maintain long-term commitments to exceptional performance in their own classrooms and in their colleagues' classrooms. Given this goal, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg program deliberately emphasizes rewards rather than punishment, as illustrated by the salary schedule. The effect is that highly motivated, talented teachers who stay with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System for 30 years can increase their career earnings by nearly 50 percent over a 30-year period.

Is the plan economically feasible? There is a difference of approximately $17,000 between a teacher's current maximum possible salary and the maximum possible annual salary called for under the new plan. The plan could become expensive, but there are a number of reasons to believe that long-run costs will not be as great as first estimates. For example, opportunities now available within the system for teachers to increase their incomes (for example, to teach workshops or summer school) will be redesigned to permit teachers in career levels I, II, and III to augment their salaries.

Given the qualities that continued excellence requires and the large number of teachers that must be recruited, officials in Charlotte-Mecklenburg believe that more rigorous standards for admitting beginning teachers to the career levels will preclude the need to establish quotas for admission to the higher salaried ranks. Indeed, one motivating force behind the development of this new career structure is the growing evidence that unless fundamental changes are made in the way teachers are trained, evaluated, and rewarded, quality as well as quantity will be lost.

The Role of Present Teachers

For teachers who enter the school system for 1984–85, participation in the proposed program will be mandatory. Present teachers will have an option. For existing teachers, the proposed structure is viewed as an alternative career structure in which they may or may not choose to participate. Furthermore, teachers who opt for the new system will be assured that if they fail to qualify, they will lose nothing (salary, tenure, or job assignment) as long as their performance meets current expectations. In brief, the system provides options. It does not replace current conditions or threaten teachers with new demands. However, current teachers who choose the new system must demonstrate the same skills that teachers new to the system will be required to demonstrate. They will also participate in a more rigorous system of evaluation and training.

Planning and Communication

The program's initial planning had included scheduling 35 specific planning tasks and devising strategies for

accomplishing them between February 1983 and July 1988. To perform these functions and keep the channels of communication open, we created a three-pronged committee structure composed of:

1. A systemwide advisory steering committee consisting of those most affected by or concerned with the plan, including the Deputy Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel Services, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Staff Development, the Director of Staff Development, the Dean of the School of Education at UNC-Charlotte, the Director of the Metrolina Education Consortium, and the presidents of the three local teacher organizations (North Carolina Association of Educators, American Federation of Teachers, and Classroom Teachers Association). Through procedures designed to ensure that those persons selected would be perceived by their peers as being representative, six additional teachers, four principals, and two area superintendents were also appointed to the committee.

2. A liaison committee of six to 11 members in each of the system's 102 schools.

3. A temporary staff to link the activity initiated by the advisory steering committee to the school-based committees.

The role of the advisory steering committee was crucial. Its primary functions were:

- To provide overall direction to the planning and development of the teacher career development program.
- To serve as a communication conduit regarding the program's direction and progress for the various constituencies affected by the program.
- To solicit reaction and support from the people and offices whose help would be essential to the program's success.
- To advise the superintendent on the direction the program should take and suggest alternative strategies for dealing with problems and issues that would continue to arise.

The liaison committees informed faculties of progress and provided reactions and suggestions to the steering committee's proposals. These committees worked closely with the temporary staff, which served to facilitate understanding between the steering committee and the liaison committees.

Ownership by Everyone Involved

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg teacher career development program has received widespread favorable publicity in local and national media. Implicit in the success of the program, however, is ownership by the local school system, the school board, and the community. The broad-based committee that originally studied the idea of merit pay and eventually rejected it in favor of a career ladder included representatives from many constituencies, including those from higher education, the business community, the board of education, the PTA, presidents of three local teacher organizations (NCAE, AFT, CTA), other teachers, and school administrators. This broad-based involvement from the beginning, along with cooperative planning throughout, has been vital. The career ladder mandates many changes in training, evaluation, salary structure, and tenure.

Between June 1982 and January 1983, Superintendent Jay M. Robinson, members of his staff, and the board of education studied the recommendations of the Merit Pay Study Committee. Based on this review, they developed a proposed salary structure and career structure that they felt would be professionally, economically, and politically feasible and defensible.

On January 25, 1983, Robinson presented the proposed salary structure along with a series of related recommendations to the board of education. In addition, he sought permission to seek special state legislation to produce needed changes in the state tenure law so that it would be consistent with the committee's recommendation of awarding tenure on a variable time span. His recommendations were endorsed unanimously by the board. (Special exemption bills were passed by the legislature on May 20, 1983.) The board members indicated their willingness to take any actions necessary for the continuing development of the plan.

In addition to support from the local board of education and local teacher leaders, various local business leaders have publicly indicated their support of the project. North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt supports the project, as does State Superintendent of Public Instruction A. Craig Phillips.

Conclusion

Under the teacher career development program, 150 tenured teachers are beginning the 1984–85 school year as career candidates. All teachers new to the system who have not been previously awarded tenure by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (approximately 300) are beginning the year as provisional teachers. Governor Hunt's address on the final orientation day praised the career candidates' efforts but reminded them, "If it [the teacher career development program] doesn't work in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, I don't think it's going to work anywhere else in this state or this country."[2]□

[1]Descriptions of this program were previously published in *Popular Government* (Winter 1984) and were also included in a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, New Orleans (April 1984).

[2]S. Hidlay, "Optimism Overtakes Even a Critic of Career Step Plan," *The Charlotte Observer*, August 18, 1984.

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