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Less
The ~~Non~~-Stressful
Evaluation

A brief explanation of the California State
Standards for Teachers

A heads up on what to expect when you get evaluated,
and some tips on how to pass with flying colors.

By Sam Rangel

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Less

The ~~Non~~ Stressful Evaluation

I just received my official evaluation this year. This is where I sit down with my principal and go over what she saw when she came into my class and observed me as I gave a lesson.

In my school, I am officially evaluated every **other** year. I used to get all nervous when the administrator would walk in to conduct the evaluation, but not anymore.

Well, maybe a little. At least I don't get tongue-tied or start sweating like I used to.

For those of you new to teaching or preparing to become a teacher, **you're going to have to deal with the official evaluations.** These are what administrators use to either recommend that you continue working at that school or to document why you won't be asked to return next year.

As of now, once you've completed two years as a probationary teacher, you become tenured. That is, you can't be fired without a long drawn out process which most administrators aren't willing to go through.

There is a movement, however, to eliminate tenure for teachers, making them have to earn their position every year. They're trying to get rid of lousy teachers more easily. **I have my opinions about this, but that's for another e-book.**

As part of the evaluation process, I had to come up with two professional growth goals that I turned in to my principal at the beginning of the year in our pre-observation meeting.

Here are the goals that I submitted this year:

1. To use email to make more positive student recognition more consistently.

and

2. To become more proficient with the new computerized student records program to better monitor and assess the progress of my students.

These are two goals that I've noticed that I'm a little weak in. **I'm pretty good at contacting parents, but most of the time, if not all of the time, it's because the student is being a knucklehead in my class.** What I've always wanted to do is make more positive contacts, but up until recently, it's been something that I've always put off. Now that most parents have email, I can send off small messages to recognize those kids who are doing well. **We all like to have our work appreciated. Our good students need a little pat on the back sometimes too.** I love it when I get a note from my son's teacher telling me that he's did something good. It's a reflection on me. That is why I've decided to focus on this year. I'm still working on it. I'm improving, but I can do better.

The other goal is to learn this new computerized program we have. I started teaching back before they had computers in the classroom. Now everything is computerized, so we are doing our attendance, posting grades, compiling test data, all on this new computer program. I want to become an expert on it. I'm almost there too. Teachers come to me when they have questions. **Most of the time, I know the answer.**

So, if you're a new teacher, what are some goals that you would include in your pre-observation meeting?

Here are some goals that I would have put down when I started. (By the way, when I started, there was no accountability for teachers. I was given a classroom, a textbook, and left alone. Times are a lot different now.)

1. Collaborate more with experienced teachers to come up with different ways to deliver the content.
2. Better meet the needs of my students with learning disabilities, students who are English learners, etc.
3. Take an online course to improve my knowledge of my subject matter.
4. Make more parent contact.
5. Create a journal of my experiences in the class, documenting what worked and what didn't. This could be in a form of an online blog.
6. Improve my use of technology in the classroom, incorporating PowerPoint, streaming video, Internet, email, etc.

What other professional goals would you add to this list?

My Objective

What I'd like to do in this e-book is dissect my evaluation, and explain what you can expect when you go through the process. In the beginning, it can be a little intimidating. Basically, you're being graded. It can be kind of stressful when the principal walks in your room with a clipboard and sits in the back of the room. I'll try and share what I've learned over the years, and hopefully give you some tips to make it not so scary.

Even though I've been through a million of these observations, **it's still a little stressful to have to sit down with your superior and talk about your job performance.**

In the beginning of my career, most of the focus was on keeping my class engaged and on task. Now that I'm in my 23rd year of teaching, however, I'm focusing on fine tuning my teaching skills, and although I'm at that point in my career where I'm confident with my abilities, there is always room for improvement.

This year, the evaluation process has become a little more detailed. **Administrators are required to evaluate teachers based on some state standards that have been created.**

In the following pages, I want to take these standards and discuss how you as a new teacher can find more success in meeting these goals. I am the first to admit, however, that I don't know all the answers.

So here we go...

State Standard for Teachers #1: Engaging and supporting all students in learning

Under this standard, there are six subcategories:

1.1 Using knowledge of students to engage them in learning

1.2 Connecting learning to students' prior knowledge, backgrounds, life experiences, and interests

1.3 Connecting subject matter to meaningful, real-life contexts

1.4 Using a variety of instructional strategies, resources, and technologies to meet students' diverse learning needs.

1.5 Promoting critical thinking through inquiry, problem solving, and reflection, and

1.6 Monitoring student learning and adjusting instruction while teaching

In each of these subcategories, I was given a score of U- Unsatisfactory, E - Emerging, P - Proficient, or A - Advanced.

Thankfully, I was given either a P or an A in each of them.

The whole point of this standard is to encourage the teacher to get to know their students, and use this knowledge to make the information more relevant and engaging. I've said it before, anyone can teach from the textbook. It's easy to teach from the textbook. **The only problem with teaching from the textbook is that you're not taking the students' prior knowledge, background, life experiences or interest into account to make that information interesting for the student.** Why? Because the textbook doesn't know your students. It's written for the typical student, and you probably don't have any "typical" students in your classroom.

What I tell all my student teachers is to read the textbook to find out what the kids have to know. Then, use the students' experiences to make that information relevant.

For example, when I teach about the American Revolution, I tell my students that the colonies and England were once one country, but then the colonies declared their independence, and after a war, they won the right to be their own country. The students have to know this, but explaining how this happened isn't really relevant to 8th graders until I compare it to something that they can understand.

I tell them that it's like when a boy and a girl start dating. **Now I have their attention.**

In the beginning, things are beautiful. He calls her every evening. They spend all day at school together. At the end of each call, she tells him, "***You hang up first.***" Then he says, "***No you hang up first.***" They'll spend the next 30 minutes **not** hanging up first.

Then little things start happening that begin to strain the relationship. He'll stop calling every night. She'll start talking to other boys. **He'll hang up first.**

Eventually, the relationship will end in a break up.

That's when I connect it with the "break up" of England and the colonies. Little events (The Stamp Act, The Tea Act, The Boston Massacre, The Boston Tea Party, The Coercive Acts, The Battle of Lexington and Concord) eventually led up to American Independence.

This is how you engage your students - connecting the content with their personal lives.

This will satisfy standards 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3.

I make sure to remind them that dating in the 8th grade is a bad idea.

Standard 1.4 can be met by including PowerPoint, the LCD projector or an overhead projector, streaming videos, etc. to your lessons. **Again, your goal is to engage students.** It's difficult to do this with just the textbook.

Standard 1.5 can be met by adding a question and answer element to your lesson. This should be part of any quality lesson plan, but as the teacher, you need to make sure that some of the questions are the kind that force students to think a little. Asking guessing questions or yes/no questions is good too, because you can get more students involved. It's easy to guess. **Your goal, however, should be to stretch their minds a little with higher-level thinking questions.**

Standard 1.6 can be met by just listening to the students. If there a lot of questions or blank stares, it's probably because your lesson was beyond their level of understanding. **You have to be willing to stop and start from the beginning.** I've seen too many of my student teachers rush through a lesson just so they can finish it before the period ends, without even checking to see if the students were getting it.

This first set of standards is basically asking the question: **Is my lesson connecting the content with the students' lives?**

If you center your lessons around what's important to the students, then you'll have more of their attention and they'll be more engaged.

I heard someone once say, "***Students who are engaged in the lesson are students who are learning.***"

I agree.

State Standard for Teachers #2: Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning

Standard 2.1 Promoting social development and responsibility within a caring community where each student is treated fairly and respectfully

Standard 2.1 has to do with the safety of the class. You as the teacher are the person responsible for making your classroom a place where students are free to express themselves and to take risks. For example, I like having my students present in front of the class whenever we have a project due. One of the things I make sure to start each presentation session with is a short lecture on respect. **I tell my students that there will be no inappropriate laughing, no negative comments, and if I have to interrupt the presenter to tell someone to be quiet, then it's an automatic detention.** Also, even if the presentation is garbage, I always compliment the student when he/she is finished. I never use sarcasm or in any way belittle the student. Neither do I allow other students to disrespect my presenters. Eighth graders are notorious for their cruelty to each other. I do not allow that in my class.

Standard 2.2 Creating physical or virtual learning environments that promote student learning, reflect diversity, and encourage constructive and productive interactions among students

Standard 2.2 is again one of those standards where you consciously evaluate your classroom's environment. Although you may have students with different ability levels, you can't make that obvious in your classroom design. For example, you can't have the Honors students on one side of the room and the students with learning disabilities on the other side. You can't have your groups arranged by ability levels either. What happens is that the students will identify themselves as either smart or dumb. They won't see your good intentions. **They'll only see that they are different, and that will inhibit their ability to learn.** Mixing the different groups in your class may make it more difficult for you, but the point is to do what is best for the students.

Standard 2.3 Establishing and maintaining learning environments that are physically, intellectually, and emotionally safe

Standard 2.3 is again restating what you're trying to do with the first two standards. **You want to make your classroom a place where the student is not going to be treated poorly or without care and concern.** We have to remember, some of our students come from home lives where mom and dad are not caring. **We need to make sure that our classroom is a place where that child will feel safe and cared for.** It may be his/her only true escape.

Standard 2.4 Creating a rigorous learning environment with high expectations and appropriate support for all students

Standard 2.4 just reminds us to make sure that our work is not just busy work. We have to make sure that our students are going to be stretched to higher levels. Having said that, **it would be easy just to give really hard work, but that second part tells me that I need to make sure that the student will have the support to successfully complete that work.** I can't rely on the parents to help the student at home. Many parents don't have the education required to help the student or they don't speak the language or they just aren't there. **I have to make sure that the work is challenging, yet complete-able. (I think I just made up that word.)**

Standard 2.5 Developing, communicating, and maintaining high standards for individual and group behavior

Behavior is a big issue in 8th grade. **Basically, this standard is telling the teacher to make sure that poor behavior is addressed and not encouraged.** It would be nice to be able to eliminate poor behavior, but that's not going to happen. You can, however, make each event a learning experience, by handing out appropriate consequences. You can't let poor behavior continue. Many of my student teachers will just ignore it, and then what happens? Yup, it gets worse. How do you deal with poor behavior, Sam? Well, that's for another e-book.

Standard 2.6 Employing classroom routines, procedures, norms, and supports for positive behavior to ensure a climate in which all students can learn

Standard 2.6 asks the teacher to have structure to the class. **Students need to know what to expect when they come into your room.** I put an agenda on the board, an objective for the day's lesson, and I always start the class the same way: Today in American History. This is like a sponge activity where I go over historic events that happened on that particular day. It's also a place where I celebrate students' birthdays. Your opening routine sets the mood for the rest of the period. I suggest to my student teachers to come up with a 10 minute class starter that stays the same throughout the year. Students need structure, especially in 8th grade. The other part of the standard is having some way to reward students when they do something good. It can be an early to lunch pass, class money, pieces of candy, etc. **Let the kids know that there are rewards for good behavior in your class.**

Standard 2.7 Using instructional time to optimize learning

Standard 2.7 is basically telling the teachers to not waste minutes in the period. Sometimes, a teacher will finish the lesson before the period ends, and will tell the class, "Do something quietly for the next 10 minutes." Don't do this. Always plan extra. I have to admit, I sometimes have extra minutes left, but I always have a mini lesson in my back pocket, just in case. This comes with experience. Eventually, you'll be able to gauge your lessons to the minutes in the period.

State Standard for Teachers #3: Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning

Here are the subcategories:

3.1 Demonstrating knowledge of subject matter, academic content standards, and curriculum frameworks.

Just know your stuff. Find out what standards have to be learned by the students and make sure your lesson plans are pointing in that direction. When I first started, there were no state standards, or at least they weren't as important as they are now. I had to ask my principal, *"What am I supposed to teach?"* Times have changed a lot since then. I'm glad.

3.2 Applying knowledge of student development and proficiencies to ensure student understanding of subject matter

Find out about how your students learn. **Not all students learn the same way.** This is what they teach you in college. Use that information to design your lessons, so you can reach more of your students. Some students in your class have learning disabilities. Make sure you can identify them and give them the necessary support to ensure that they have access to the content.

3.3 Organizing curriculum to facilitate student understanding of the subject matter

Just don't wing it. This standard keeps teachers from just showing up without a lesson plan. There are teachers out there, believe it or not, who don't lesson plan. They come into class, and tell the students, *"Read pages 50-53 in your book; do the questions in the back, and don't bother me."* This is a sub plan, not a lesson plan for a teacher who wants to make their class in any way remarkable.

3.4 Utilizing instructional strategies that are appropriate to the subject matter

You can't teach a history lesson the same way you teach a math lesson. In history class, you can make use of stories to get your message across. In math, you may need to use a lot of guided practice. **This standard just**

tells the teacher to modify their instructional strategies to match the content. This is an easy one.

3.5 Using and adapting resources, technologies, and standards-aligned instructional materials, including adopted materials, to make subject matter accessible to all students

I think the key word here is ***“adapting.”*** As teachers, we are all given the basic resources – textbooks, overhead projectors, LCD projectors, computers, workbooks, etc. You as a teacher have to evaluate which resource is going to work best for your students. **Try to use as many different resources as you can, and then you can determine which resources work best in getting your subject matter across.**

3.6 Addressing the needs of English learners and students with special needs to provide equitable access to the content

This is one that is close to my heart. I have a close connection with students who are English learners and students with special needs. More and more, as school budgets continue shrinking, these students will be included in the general education classes. They won't be pulled out of your rooms and placed in specialized classes anymore. **It will be the responsibility of the teacher to make their lessons accessible to all students, including these students with special needs.** I have to admit, it makes it a little difficult to teach a class with different learning levels, but again, I never said teaching was easy. Often times, you'll have an aide who will provide extra support to these students, but sometimes you won't. **Your lesson plan has to have a component that addresses the needs of these students.** Does that mean that you water down the lesson? **No.** You just teach it in a way that is easier to access. There are many techniques that you can use to do this. **What are these techniques, Sam? Again, that's for another e-book.**

State Standard for Teachers #4: Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for All Students

Standard 4.1: Using knowledge of students' academic readiness, language proficiency, cultural background, and individual development to plan instruction

Basically this standard subcategory asks that the teacher to **see the class as individuals instead of as group**. This is difficult sometimes, especially when planning. **You want to make a lesson plan that is one-size-fits-all, but you can't**. You have to understand that there are going to be students who don't learn like most kids do. **Your lesson plan has to make adjustments for students who have learning disabilities, language deficiencies, or other limitations.**

Standard 4.2: Establishing and articulating goals for student learning

Here is another goal that tells the teacher to have some kind of direction to their lesson. What is the objective of today's lesson plan? Once you figure that out, then you have to make sure that you let your students know what that goal is. Have a section on your white board that has your objective posted. **If the principal walks in and asks one of your students what their learning that day, will your student be able to answer the question?**

Standard 4.3: Developing and sequencing long-term and short-term instructional plans to support student learning

Does today's lesson connect with tomorrow's lesson? Next week's lesson? There has to be some kind organization and flow to what you're teaching the students. **You have to open up your master calendar, and figure out what you're teaching each week, each month, each quarter.** This is a no-brainer, and after you've been teaching the same subject for a while, it happens automatically.

Standard 4.4: Planning instruction that incorporates appropriate strategies to meet the learning needs of all students

The key words here are "appropriate strategies." This is what separates the great teacher from the good teacher. There are teachers who use traditional teaching strategies to get the content across to the students, and

there are teachers who consider the make up of their classroom and develop non-traditional strategies to accomplish the same thing. These non-traditional strategies are what keep the students, especially the non-typical students, engaged in the lesson. I tell my student teachers: **Take the content, consider your students, then create a lesson plan that incorporates a new way to teach that content.** Don't rely on how you were taught. Don't copy what other teachers have done. **Create something new.** The "appropriate strategy" is the one that allows every student to learn what you're teaching. This takes innovation. **Innovation is hard work sometimes.**

Standard 4.5: Adapting instructional plans and curricular materials to meet the assessed learning needs of all students

What are the assessed learning needs of your students? You will have students in your class who have been tested for one reason or another, and you'll have that data available to you. Some students have been assessed as having different learning abilities. These students should be part of the case load of a resource specialist or another person who is considered the case carrier for these students. **Consulting with the case carrier of these students is extremely important to finding out how best to reach these students with the content.** I'm the first to admit that I was lost when I was told that my classroom was going to have students who were identified as special education students included in it. The first thing I did was talk to the Resource Specialist teacher to find out what part of my lesson I needed to modify in order to reach them. **It was tough for some teachers to make changes to their lesson plans after years of doing things their way, but you have to do what's best for kids – all kids.**

State Standard for Teachers #5: Assessing Students for Learning

Standard 5.1: Applying knowledge of the purposes, characteristics, and uses of different types of assessments

What kinds of assessments are you using in your classroom to determine if your students are learning or not?

In my history class, the main form of assessment is the test at the end of each section. I also use other ways to assess my students. As a teacher, you have to show that you are using a variety of assessment methods such as reports, projects, oral presentations, etc. **Again, don't rely on the tests at the back of the chapter.** Create your own assessments. Make them specific to your students. **You may even have to make several different kinds of tests depending on the learning levels of your students.**

Standard 5.2: Collecting and analyzing assessment data from a variety of sources to inform instruction

What other data is available on your students? I know your students who are designated special education will have data in their records that you can use when creating your lesson plan. It's important that you do a little research and find out at what level your students are. Again, it's a little work, but it will make your lessons more effective.

Standard 5.3: Reviewing data, both individually and with colleagues, to monitor student learning

This standard asks the teacher to review the information gathered from the assessments and then meet with fellow teachers to better monitor students. Although this is important, I found this standard a little difficult to meet, especially with the limited time we are given to collaborate with our colleagues. **We meet at lunch and we discuss those students who are giving us headaches or who are failing badly, but to go over assessment data for each child is asking a little too much.** I'm not saying to ignore this standard, but I don't think it is a

realistic goal to place on teachers, especially if they have over 160 students like I do.

Standard 5.4: Using assessment data to establish learning goals and to plan, differentiate, and modify instruction

Here is where you focus on a specific group of students who need differentiation and modification in their instruction. Normally these are your students with diagnosed learning disabilities, but you will find that there will be students in your class who have learning disabilities that have not been diagnosed yet. It's up to you to request that the Resource Specialist take a look into assessing these students so that they can get the support they need to succeed. Once you have this data, you can better create your lesson plan.

Standard 5.5 Involving all students in self-assessment, goal setting, and monitoring progress

Here is where I found that I needed to improve. I don't return graded assignments back to the students as quickly as I should. I grade the papers, then I place them in a cupboard to pass back, but unfortunately, since it's out of sight..., well you know. Getting student work back to them in a timely manner is important for them to see where they need to improve. They need to see what they need to change for the next project or assignment. This is one of those "Duh!" lessons. Most students don't even read my comments or ask why they didn't get an "A," but for those students who want to do better, getting their work back to them quickly is essential. This standard also calls for the teacher to sit down with each student and discuss their goals and to monitor their progress. I agree that it's important, but finding time to do this is difficult – not impossible – just difficult.

Standard 5.6 Using available technologies to assist in assessment, analysis, and communication of student learning

The computer has become a great tool for checking and monitoring the progress of a student. It's great to be able to see what kind of grades a student received in 6th and 7th grade with just a click of a mouse. This standard just asks the teacher to keep up with the newest technology and utilize it to make your lessons more effective.

Standard 5.7 Using assessment information to share timely and comprehensible feedback with students and their families

Keep the parents in the loop when it comes to the progress of their child. Again, this is an area where I need to work on. I need to get the graded assignments, tests, and projects back to the students as soon as possible, so they can take it home to their parents. I also need to input grades into the computer on a more timely basis. The parents can now go online and see their child's grades in my class. How will they know how their child is doing if I'm not posting them when I should? **Keep parents updated on how their child is doing. Do this as often as you can.**

State Standard for Teachers #6: Developing as a Professional Educator

This standard really can't be observed in a classroom. My principal used our post-observation meeting to ask me about this.

Here are the subcategories:

Standard 6.1: Reflecting on teaching practice in support of student learning

After every lesson, you have to ask yourself, ***“What worked? What didn't work?”*** You'll know if a lesson bombs, and trust me, there will be lessons that you spend hours preparing, and when it comes time to implement it, it will fail miserably. Don't get down on yourself. It's part of the learning process. **Find out why it didn't work, and adjust your plan accordingly.**

Standard 6.2: Establishing professional goals and engaging in continuous and purposeful professional growth and development

I think the main goal for the first year teachers is to survive the first year. After that, you should start looking to become the best teacher you can be. That will probably include additional course work or attending conferences or learning from a mentor teacher. **I thought I was an amazing teacher my first year. Now I look back and realize how much I didn't know.** Keep learning.

Standard 6.3: Collaborating with colleagues and the broader professional community to support teacher and student learning

Again, if you want to grow and be a better teacher, you can't be an island. There are so many opportunities to collaborate now, especially online, that there is no excuse **not** to grow. Reading this e-book is a sign that you are looking to become a better teacher. Don't stop.

Standard 6.4: Working with families to support student learning

This is an area where teachers struggle. It's not easy to connect with families like we would like. There are time constraints, scheduling conflicts, etc. that prevent us from including the family in the learning process. Back to school nights help, but once or twice a year is not enough to really create that connection we need. **An attempt, however, must be made to involve the family.** The use of email or agendas that require parent signature can help to keep the lines of communication open.

Standard 6.5: Engaging local communities in support of the instructional program

Keep an eye out for community organizations that offer help to schools. This is a tough goal to accomplish, especially for new teachers. Even more experienced teachers find it difficult to find time to connect with the community. **There are groups out there, however, like the fire department, museums, libraries, that will come in and give short presentations to your students.** This year, I met this goal by putting on the [5K Run for Gage](#) event. Even though it wasn't related to my history class, it did bring in several community groups in an event that taught my students a lesson on giving back.

Standard 6.6: Managing professional responsibilities to maintain motivation and commitment to all students

Just do your job. Don't let your other responsibilities – family, a second job, your softball league, etc. get in the way of what you're being paid to do. I know family comes first, but if dropping your child off at daycare means that you get to school late, you're going to be given poor marks on your evaluation.

Standard 6.7: Demonstrating professional responsibility, integrity, and ethical conduct

I wish I could say that all teachers meet this goal, but unfortunately, I can't. **You're going to meet teachers who have little or no integrity.** They will lie to save their own skin. They'll throw anybody, even you, under the bus. They'll be involved in activities outside of school that are not ethical, and they'll discuss it around the lunch table like there's nothing wrong with it. Don't be like them. **Teaching, unfortunately, is not as respected as it used to be. It is, however, still an honorable profession.** We need to defend this honor with our actions.

Well, there you have it.

I hope that by going over the state standards for teaching, I've been able to make that evaluation day that's coming a little less scary.

I would appreciate any comments, questions, or even criticisms about what I've discussed.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this e-book, and don't forget to stop by my website:
SuccessInTheClassroom.com for more practical tips and strategies for new teachers and student teachers.

Until next time, here's to lots of Success in the Classroom!

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