

# THE LEADER'S GUIDE TO WORKING WITH UNDERPERFORMING TEACHERS

Overcoming Marginal Teaching and Getting Results



**SALLY J. ZEPEDA**

An **Eye On Education** Book

ROUTLEDGE

# The Leader's Guide to Working with Underperforming Teachers

Under increasing pressure in the face of teacher evaluation systems and accountability measures, schools must focus on those teachers who exhibit marginal to incompetent teaching behaviors in their classrooms. This book is a vital resource for educational leaders who are responsible for instructional programs and teacher evaluation. Zepeda's tried-and-true strategies will help you take the necessary steps to support and mentor struggling teachers by detecting underperformance, developing strategies to help teachers, engaging in difficult conversations to enact plans of improvement, and following legal requirements. The practical tools found in this book will help teachers improve their instruction, assessment, classroom management, and teamwork.

**Sally J. Zepeda** is Professor of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia, where she teaches courses in instructional supervision, professional development, teacher evaluation, and school improvement.

**Other Eye On Education Books Available from Routledge**  
([www.routledge.com/eyeoneducation](http://www.routledge.com/eyeoneducation))

**Job-Embedded Professional Development: Support, Collaboration, and Learning in Schools**  
Sally J. Zepeda

**The Principal as Instructional Leader: A Practical Handbook, 3rd Edition**  
Sally J. Zepeda

**Informal Classroom Observations on the Go: Feedback, Discussion, and Reflection, 3rd Edition**  
Sally J. Zepeda

**7 Ways to Transform the Lives of Wounded Students**  
Joe Hendershott

**Five Critical Leadership Practices: The Secret to High-Performing Schools**  
Ruth C. Ash and Pat H. Hodge

**Mentoring is a Verb: Strategies for Improving College and Career Readiness**  
Russ Olwell

**How to Make Data Work: A Guide for Educational Leaders**  
Jenny Grant Rankin

**A School Leader's Guide to Implementing the Common Core: Inclusive Practices for All Students**  
Gloria Campbell-Whatley, Dawson Hancock, and David M. Dunaway

**Hiring the Best Staff for Your School: How to Use Narrative to Improve Your Recruiting Process**  
Rick Jetter

**What Connected Educators Do Differently**  
Todd Whitaker, Jeffrey Zoul, and Jimmy Casas

**BRAVO Principal! Building Relationships with Actions that Value Others, 2nd Edition**  
Sandra Harris

**Creating Safe Schools: A Guide for School Leaders, Teachers, Counselors, and Parents**  
Franklin P. Schargel

**Get Organized! Time Management for School Leaders, 2nd Edition**  
Frank Buck

# **The Leader's Guide to Working with Underperforming Teachers**

---

Overcoming Marginal Teaching and  
Getting Results

*Sally J. Zepeda*

First published 2016  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2016 Taylor & Francis

The right of Sally J. Zepeda to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Names: Zepeda, Sally J., 1956– author.

Title: The leader's guide to working with underperforming teachers : overcoming marginal teaching and getting results / Sally J. Zepeda.

Description: New York, NY : Routledge, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015037835 | ISBN 9781138855779 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781138855786 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781315720135 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Teachers – Rating of. | Teacher effectiveness. | Performance standards. | Mentoring in education. | Educational leadership.

Classification: LCC LB2838 .Z47 2016 | DDC 371.14/4–dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015037835>

ISBN: 978-1-138-85577-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-85578-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-72013-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Optima

by HWA Text and Data Management, London



# Contents

<i>Meet the Author</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvi
<b>1 Framing the Issues About Underperforming Teachers</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Purpose of the Book—Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?</i>	1
<i>Thorny Issue on the Use of Terms</i>	2
<i>The Range of Teaching</i>	3
Variation in Teaching Skill Ranges	5
<i>The Context of Accountability and Teachers</i>	5
No Child Left Behind	6
Race to the Top and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Waiver	6
<i>Teacher Quality and Teacher Effectiveness</i>	7
Teacher Quality	7
Teacher Effectiveness	8
<i>The New Work of Principals and Assistant Principals</i>	8
Finding the Time	9
Engaging Stakeholders in Framing the Vision for Teaching and a Common Definition of Good Teaching	9
It's All About Conversations and Relationships	10
Vigorously Challenging Underperformance in and Out of the Classroom	11

<b>2</b>	<b>Teacher Evaluation in a Nutshell</b>	<b>14</b>
	<i>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Race to the Top</i>	15
	No Child Left Behind	16
	Race to the Top	16
	Race to the Top and the Changing Landscape of Teacher Evaluation	17
	<i>Teacher Evaluation—The Basics</i>	18
	Formative and Summative Tug-of-War	19
	Value-Added Measures	21
	Getting Teacher Evaluation Right	24
	<i>Supervision That Supports Teachers</i>	24
	What’s Your Supervisory Approach?	25
	Responses to Working with Underperforming Teachers	26
	<i>Professional Development That Embraces Adult Learning</i>	26
	Research and Best Practices Related to High-Quality Professional Learning	27
	Job-Embedded Learning	29
<b>3</b>	<b>Making the Commitment to Effective Teaching</b>	<b>32</b>
	<i>Effective Teachers</i>	33
	What Is an Effective Teacher?	33
	Effective Teaching and Learning in Classrooms	34
	<i>Teacher Evaluation Frameworks—Connections to Effective Teaching</i>	34
	Domains Within Frameworks	35
	Contextualizing System Perspectives on Teacher Effectiveness and Effective Teaching	37
	<i>Committing to Effective Teaching</i>	38
	Conversations and Involvement as Process Guides	38
	The Question That Guided the Work	39
	System-Wide Focus	39
	<i>Rubrics</i>	46
<b>4</b>	<b>Underperforming Teachers In and Out of the Classroom</b>	<b>51</b>
	<i>Characteristics of Underperformance</i>	52
	Underperformance Inside the Classroom	53
	Underperformance Outside the Classroom	54
	<i>Causes of Underperforming Teachers</i>	54

---

Sources of Evidence	57
Repeating History	58
<i>What Causes Teachers to Underperform?</i>	59
Entitlement—But I Am Deserving...	59
A Generational Thing	62
Demographic Trends	63
<i>The Leader's Response to Underperforming Teachers</i>	65
Responses to Working with Underperforming Teachers	66
<i>The Teacher's Response to Being Identified as an Underperformer</i>	67
Disbelief	68
Denial	70
Anger	70
Resistance	70
Relief	71
<b>5 Conversations Needed to Work with Underperforming Teachers</b>	<b>74</b>
<i>Approaching Opportunities and Challenges Inherent in Conversations</i>	75
Opportunities and Challenges	75
<i>Unpacking Types of Conversations</i>	77
Conversation Types	78
Using Questions Wisely	79
<i>Creating the Conditions for Conversations</i>	79
School Culture	80
School Climate	81
Norms	81
Trust, Respect, and Civility	82
Presence	82
<i>Getting Ready for Difficult Conversations</i>	82
Preparing for the Conversation	83
Helpful Suggestions to Guide a Difficult Conversation	86
<i>Key Communication Strategies for Working with Underperforming Teachers</i>	86
Characteristics of Feedback	86
Saving Face	90



<b>6</b>	<b>Improvement Planning with the Underperforming Teacher</b>	<b>94</b>
	<i>Framework for Plan of Improvement</i>	96
	<i>Ratcheting Consequences</i>	96
	<i>Plans of Improvement</i>	98
	<i>Intent</i>	98
	<i>Getting to Growth</i>	99
	<i>Meeting a Teacher's Needs</i>	100
	<i>Teacher Involvement in Improvement Planning</i>	100
	<i>Plan of Improvement Framework</i>	101
	<i>Support Personnel and Resources Needed for Plans of Improvement</i>	102
	<i>Monitoring Plans of Improvement</i>	105
	<i>Moving Forward</i>	106
<b>7</b>	<b>The Complexities Leaders Face in Working with Underperforming Teachers</b>	<b>109</b>
	<i>Preparation and Background of the Evaluator</i>	110
	<i>Shifts in Evaluation</i>	111
	<i>Struggles Enacting Evaluation</i>	111
	<i>Psychological Stressors</i>	111
	<i>Role Conflict and Relationships with Teachers</i>	112
	<i>Lack of Support from the Central Office</i>	113
	<i>Perceptions About Present and Past Site Leadership</i>	113
	<i>Organization of Work</i>	114
	<i>School Culture</i>	114
	<i>Time Constraints</i>	115
<b>8</b>	<b>Keeping Classroom Issues out of the Courtroom: Legal Principles for Confronting Underperforming Teachers</b>	<b>118</b>
	<i>Ann Elizabeth Blankenship</i>	
	<i>Introduction</i>	118
	<i>Competence and Incompetence—Legally Defining Elusive Concepts</i>	119
	<i>Why Underperformance Is Overlooked</i>	120
	<i>The Underperforming Teacher</i>	120
	<i>The Incompetent Teacher</i>	121
	<i>Managerial Concerns</i>	122

<i>Due Process Requirements in Evaluation and Termination</i>	123
Due Process	123
Tenured Teachers	123
Probationary Teachers	124
<i>Teacher Evaluations</i>	125
Purpose Versus Use of Teacher Evaluations	125
Ensuring Legality in Evaluation	126
<i>Emerging Legal Issues Associated with Teacher Evaluations, Including Value-Added Models</i>	128
Defamation in General	131
Immunity for Government Employees	131
Avoiding Defamation in Teacher Evaluations	132
Procedures for Tackling Poor Performance	136
<i>Moving Toward Termination</i>	139
 <b>9 The Consequences of Doing Nothing and Making Tough Decisions When All Else Fails</b>	 <b>144</b>
<i>Doing Nothing—Ethical, Moral, Legal, and Financial Consequences</i>	145
Ethical and Moral Issues	145
Legal and Financial Issues	146
<i>Artifacts and Evidence—Pulling the Pieces Together</i>	147
Documentation and Data Sources	148
<i>Analysis of Evidence—Looking for Patterns</i>	148
<i>When All Else Fails ... Moving to Non-Renewal</i>	160
Epilogue: The Case of Mr. Jansky	160
<i>Potential Fallout</i>	161
 <b>10 Final Perspectives</b>	 <b>164</b>
 <i>Index</i>	 168



## Meet the Author

**Sally J. Zepeda**, Ph.D., a former K–12 administrator and teacher, is a professor at the University of Georgia in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy. She teaches courses related to instructional supervision, teacher and leader evaluation, and professional development.

Dr. Zepeda has published numerous articles in such journals as the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*; *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*; *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*; *School Leadership and Management Journal*; *Review of Educational Research*; *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*; *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*; and the *International Journal of Educational Management*. She has also authored, co-authored, or edited more than 25 books including *Job-Embedded Professional Development: Support, Collaboration, and Learning in Schools*, the highly acclaimed third edition of *The Principal as Instructional Leader: A Handbook for Supervisors*, the third edition of *Instructional Supervision: Applying Tools and Concepts*, and the third edition of *Informal Classroom Observations On the Go: Feedback, Discussion, and Reflection* with Routledge.

Dr. Zepeda served for 9 years as the book and audio review column editor for the *Journal of Staff Development* and as chair of the American Education Research Association Supervision SIG. She also serves on the editorial boards for several scholarly and practitioner journals, including the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* and the *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*. Dr. Zepeda is a member of the Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision (COPIS) and a lifetime Fellow in the Foundation for Excellence in Teaching.

In 2005, Dr. Zepeda received the inaugural Master Professor Award from the University Council of Educational Administration. Dr. Zepeda received the 2010 Russell H. Yeany, Jr., Research Award honoring outstanding contributions to research and, in 2011, the Distinguished Research Mentor Award from the University of Georgia. In 2014, Dr. Zepeda (with her co-author) was awarded the Paula Silver Case Award in the *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* (Best Case in 2013).

Dr. Zepeda has worked with many school systems in the United States and overseas, especially the Middle East, to support teacher and leader development. As a system-wide professor-in-residence with the Clarke County School District (Athens, GA), Dr. Zepeda assists with teacher and leader effectiveness initiatives that have included the development of a teacher and leader evaluation system, fidelity studies related to observable practices for teachers and leaders, and other projects related to professional learning for leaders since 2011.



# Preface



## The Approaches Running Throughout This Book

*The Leader's Guide to Working with Underperforming Teachers: Overcoming Marginal Teaching and Getting Results* is written for school and system leaders to approach teacher underperformance primarily in the classroom. If you supervise and evaluate teachers, then this book is for you! Each chapter examines critical areas with which leaders need to be familiar to address teacher underperformance. However, many of the strategies and concepts offered can be applied to the work a leader does with all teachers in the building.

By examining the table of contents, the reader will see that the areas within the book follow a progression that ranges *from* detecting underperformance, developing strategies to support teachers, and engaging in difficult conversations to enacting plans of improvement, following legal requirements and, if all else fails, compassionately and courageously pointing to the exit sign on the door. Teacher evaluation has changed dramatically in the past few years; however, the intents have remained the same—teacher effectiveness, growth, and development are the foundation for all efforts. These critical areas underscore that school leaders are responsible not only for the school program but also, more pointedly, for ensuring that every student is taught by a competent teacher.

The concepts and skills are presented to help the leader bolster instructional capacity and effective teaching and work with a teacher whose performance stalls the needle from moving forward to student growth, blemishes the instructional program, and thwarts the efforts to meet school improvement targets associated with being accountable for student learning. A brief sketch is provided as an advanced organizer for delving more deeply into areas within the chapters that target key concepts, skills, and approaches.



## **What's Inside the Chapters?**

### ***Chapter 1: Framing the Issues About Underperforming Teachers***

The range of teacher performance is examined as are the complexities teachers and leaders experience with ratcheting accountability for student success. A brief overview of teacher quality and teacher effectiveness is offered. The chapter concludes with an examination of the new work of school leaders who must now be in a position to assess and proactively address sub-par teaching.

### ***Chapter 2: Teacher Evaluation in a Nutshell***

Teacher evaluation is fundamentally different given the focus on teacher quality, ratcheting accountability, and federal and state policies and waivers (e.g., federal Race to the Top program) that now govern these systems. The complexities of value-added measures are examined, as are the types of supervision and professional development needed to support teachers—all teachers, but especially those who are underperforming.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) was signed into law in December, 2015 and does not mandate teacher or leader evaluations; instead, ESSA leaves the policies related to the evaluation of teachers and leaders to the discretion of the states and removes the requirement that they use standardized test results to evaluate teachers. The shifts in power now situate states as the major decision makers in matters related to teacher and leader evaluation.

### ***Chapter 3: Making the Commitment to Effective Teaching***

The assessment of teaching is at the center of teacher evaluation systems, and this chapter examines the relationship between teacher performance standards and the instructional practices that give life to the standards and support the assessment of teaching. The chapter highlights common teacher evaluation frameworks as well as the commitment needed to ensure effective teaching in every classroom every day.

## ***Chapter 4: Underperforming Teachers In and Out of the Classroom***

Marginal performance can be detected in and out of the classroom. Cues for uncovering underperformance as well as possible causes are examined. This chapter helps to prepare the leader to respond to underperformance and then examines some possible responses from teachers once underperformance is brought to their attention.

## ***Chapter 5: Conversations Needed to Work with Underperforming Teachers***

Conversations are essential for engaging all teachers in the talk about teaching and learning. Effective leaders create the conditions for having open conversations, even the difficult ones, with teachers. This chapter outlines key strategies for preparing for difficult conversations as well as strategies to ensure that momentum for improvement is created.

## ***Chapter 6: Improvement Planning with the Underperforming Teacher***

Moving a teacher into a plan of improvement necessitates having formal conversations, creating written documentation, and ensuring key personnel and resources are available to support teachers who need to improve in the classroom. Monitoring the formal plan of improvement is essential.

## ***Chapter 7: The Complexities Leaders Face in Working with Underperforming Teachers***

Leaders who work with underperforming teachers face complexities related to new teacher evaluation systems, experience psychological stressors, and find that time on task is often diluted by the organizational patterns found in the work of leading a school. School culture is examined as a backdrop for the work principals must do while supporting underperforming teachers.

## ***Chapter 8: Keeping Classroom Issues Out of the Courtroom: Legal Principles for Supervisors Confronting Underperforming Teachers***

Such legal principles as due process, issues surrounding value-added measures, and teacher evaluation, the basics of documentation related to the plan of improvement, and movement toward non-renewal or termination are examined so as to help the leader keep key principles in mind while working with underperforming teachers.

## ***Chapter 9: The Consequences of Doing Nothing and Making Tough Decisions When All Else Fails***

Making tough decisions—namely, whether an underperforming teacher has made enough progress to (1) come off the plan of improvement, (2) extend the plan of improvement based on progress, or (3) move toward non-renewal—are examined in this chapter. The leader is led through pulling together artifacts and evidence and analyzing and looking for patterns related to teacher performance. Issues related to the fallout from decisions a leader makes are examined.

## ***Chapter 10: Final Perspectives***

The book ends by highlighting key takeaways from the chapters, focusing attention on the work of the leader.





# Acknowledgments

Many people work behind the scenes when an author writes a book, and the work includes such tasks as proofing pages to ensure all references are present and searching libraries for the latest and greatest articles, chapters, and books to support the development of ideas and concepts. Atakan Ata, a research assistant and doctoral student in educational administration and policy at the University of Georgia was relentless in supporting efforts to meet deadlines. Atakan's work ethic is nothing less than spectacular. Tayler Rae Brinson also supported this effort through her eye to detail. Both Atakan and Tayler Rae pitched in so I could make the words flow.

Professor Tim Rowland (University of East Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk) provided insight and led me to the right sources at the right time to further my understandings about politeness theory and face-saving acts.

Dr. Muhammad Akram, an assistant professor at University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan, was generous with his time and efforts, leading me to resources about teacher effectiveness and self-assessment.

Dr. Ann Blankenship wrote Chapter 8 in this book, given her expertise in school law. Dr. Blankenship's contribution filled a need for an authoritative examination of the legal issues school leaders might face in working with underperforming teachers.

No book is ever complete without the thoughtful and reflective insights provided by the reviewers, whose wisdom was apparent in their critical but constructive feedback to the book prospectus. I am indebted to their goodwill and keen insights.

A very special acknowledgment goes to my colleagues in the Clarke County School District (Athens, GA) who provided counsel when translations from research and theory to practice were needed. Dr. Philip D. Lanoue,

superintendent of the Clarke County School District and the 2015 American Association of School Administrators National Superintendent of the Year, openly gave of his time, shared resources, and engendered the belief that a book with recency for leaders to support underperforming teachers was needed in the field. Thanks always, Phil, for your impressive intellect and poignant feedback. Dr. Sherri Freeman, associate superintendent for human resources, was always willing to offer sage counsel when needed.

I am humbled by the many conversations over the years with Dr. Noris Price, superintendent of Baldwin County Schools, Dr. Wanda Creel, superintendent of Gainesville City School System, Dr. Selena Blankenship, principal of Hilsman Middle School, Dr. Robbie Hooker, principal of Clarke Central High School, Dr. Brad Bowling, principal of Westside Middle School, and countless other building and central office leaders who always took the time to listen to my ideas and challenge my thinking and who weren't afraid to tell me I had to go back to the proverbial drawing board when I did not get things right. I will always cherish these and future conversations.

A special thanks to Lisa Wolf who was always by my side, never wavering in her good thoughts and willingness to drop everything when I needed help. Mian Shafiq, my personal trainer, kept me sparring in the boxing ring at 6:00 A.M. so I could then go home and focus my writing. Gains!

Heather Jarrow, editor with the Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, brought clarity of purpose, a strong work ethic, and her goodwill throughout all aspects of getting the book to final form. Heather's feedback on the "almost" final draft of this manuscript was invaluable. The organization and attention to detail provided by Karen Adler, editorial assistant in education, always came at the right time. Really behind the scenes, the production team consisting of Katharine Atherton with the Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, and John Hodgson, Holly Knapp, Laurence Eastham, and Lois Hall at HWA left no detail unattended. Thank you.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 1

## Framing the Issues About Underperforming Teachers

### *In this chapter...*

- Purpose of the Book—Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?
- Thorny Issue on the Use of Terms
- The Range of Teaching
- The Context of Accountability and Teachers
- Teacher Quality and Teacher Effectiveness
- The New Work of Principals and Assistant Principals

### **Purpose of the Book—Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?**

The structure and information in this book serve as a bridge between research and practice to help leaders create the “right” conditions for the conversations that are critical in developing a broad range of skills that signal effective teaching. The work of principals and other leaders now must center more fully on the instructional program that is played out in every classroom filled with children who deserve competent, caring, and effective teachers.

Everyone suffers with an underperforming teacher. Students receive sub-par teaching, fellow teachers don’t like walking the halls in which an underperforming teacher is assigned, and parents are concerned when their child is assigned to an underperforming teacher’s classroom. Administrators have to answer the call to do something about the underperforming teachers in their buildings. More