

# EDITORIALS



## Expanding educators' evaluations ensures enriched edification

W **Zoe Ljubic**  
Editor in Chief

Have you ever sat through a class when your teacher was being evaluated by an administrator and wondered why (s)he is acting differently and why the usual classroom atmosphere and style of teaching have changed 180 degrees?

According to Principal Kaine Osburn, teachers at Niles Township District 219 are observed regularly—from four times per year for first year teachers to once every few years for tenured staff. Osburn said that administrators look for a variety of skills employed in instruction, classroom and school environment and professionalism. That makes sense. However, such observations have a downside. After sitting through a few classes in which teachers are being observed, I can speak on behalf of many students when I say that such evaluations often become “dog and pony shows.”

Each time an administrator arrives, teachers tend to shift from running class the “normal” way. All of a sudden, students feel a decided shift in tone. Why is this? Do teachers feel that their instruction is not good enough, so that they must put on a facade designed to please the administrator, regardless of whether or not the theatrical presentation truly reflects their style or philosophy?

I mean no disrespect to teachers or administrators in calling this a “dog and pony show.” However, the radical shift that often occurs for evaluations bring into question why teacher evaluations occur in the first place.

Don't get me wrong. Teachers should be evaluated. In fact, they should be evaluated more than just a few times a year. These evaluations should occur multiple times throughout the year, possibly even on an unscheduled basis. It is the school's duty to ensure each teacher is equipped to teach effectively. More importantly, it is the teachers' and administrators' shared responsibility to make sure students are receiving the best education possible. However, if teachers put on a “show” during their evaluations, the evaluation process becomes pointless. Isn't there a better way?

President of the North Suburban Teachers' Union (and North English teacher) Dan Montgomery thinks so. Montgomery feels that teachers are not evaluated enough, that all too often, untenured teachers are retained or dismissed based on incomplete or artificial evidence. Currently, Montgomery and other district teachers are advocating a program that would promote accurate, positive evaluations. This program, used by the Toledo, OH, public schools, trains veteran teachers to become consultants. These consultants are assigned to a group of untenured or at-risk teachers. These consultants observe the teachers dozens of times throughout the year. They work with the same teachers each time, and according to Montgomery, they know the teachers better than any administrator or even the teachers' union-sanctioned mentors. After each observation, the consultants report back to a panel of administrators and discuss if this teacher is capable to continue teaching.

Based on Montgomery's explanation, it seems to me that that adopting the Toledo method for teacher evaluations would produce three positive benefits:

One, multiple observations by supportive colleagues would reduce the ominous nature and pressure of a few, do-or-die administrative observations, perhaps inducing teachers to continue to maintain their daily routines. If remediation is required, a colleague, not an administrator with hiring or firing power, would make suggestions that would be seen not as criticism but as strategies for improvement. Those teachers who can and do act on those suggestions would be adequately prepared for their administrative visits and will not feel compelled to put on an inauthentic “performance.” Those who can't or won't make changes probably don't belong in the classroom.

Two, the students in those classes would not have to adjust to a complete change in classroom management. In researching this column, I conducted an anonymous survey of students; 100 percent of them found classes featuring teacher evaluations to be a waste of time. Each time they see an administrator, they know that they will do something different in class.

Three, the consultants would reduce the number of observations already overtaxed administrators must conduct. After spending an entire day with Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Anne Roloff for a Day in the Life feature, I saw firsthand how busy directors are. They sit in meetings and run from building to building all day. These consultants will save them time and relieve a lot of stress.

Teacher evaluations are something the school must do. Why not make it efficient and effective not only for administrators and teachers, but for students. It is completely normal for teachers to become nervous when administrators evaluate them. By employing the Toledo plan to evaluate, to observe and to help remediate teachers, providing what Montgomery calls “real, deep mentoring,” everyone would benefit. The school would be staffed with the best teachers, who feel comfortable displaying their talent in the manner in which students are accustomed to seeing it on a daily basis, with nary a dog or pony anywhere in sight.

## Hard copy newspapers must embrace inevitable



Rexly  
W **Penaflores II**  
Managing Editor

A few weeks ago, one of Seattle's two newspapers, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, printed its last issue. A week prior, the *Rocky Mountain News*, one of Denver's two dailies, succumbed to the same fate. Although the *Post-Intelligencer* is currently the most highly circulated newspaper in the country to go Internet-only, it seems only a matter of time before other—and larger—periodicals follow suit and fall prey to the fast-paced, highly technological world in which we live.

Newspapers have been forced online because they have lost their place as the number one source of news. According to [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org), in 1996, 50 percent of people cited the newspaper as their primary news source. In 2006, the percentage of people reading the newspaper dropped to 40 percent. The cold, hard fact is that most people do not read the newspaper anymore. Television—particularly cable news organs such as CNN, Fox News or MSNBC—has risen to the status of world's most popular form of disseminating information. I, myself, the managing editor of a print publication, will attest that I would rather watch CNN than read the *Chicago Tribune*. While television is currently the major form of communication on the planet, in tech-savvy countries, it threatens to be overwhelmed by another big rival—the Internet.

If I had a dollar for every time a student in this school used the Internet, I would be richer than Bill Gates. The World Wide Web has become something we cannot live without. It provides, our e-mail, Facebook™ accounts and—most important—news. Even as I open my e-mail, I am greeted with a homepage that tells me the latest news. Why read a newspaper in the local café when I can read about the news online and check my e-mail at the same time? Today's society is all about multitasking. My iPhone™ allows me not only to call people and update my Facebook™ account; it also lets me keep up with the news, read a book electronically, check the NCAA tournament scores, et al. My phone features an application with the online version of *The New York Times*, and it is very comfortable for me to be on the go and have the news

right at my fingertips. It has become a Herculean task actually to relax in a chair and read the paper when there are papers to be typed and homework to be done.

*The Post-Intelligencer's* switch to the Internet is not the first time a newspaper has been put online. *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* have websites that give readers all the news that is in their newspapers. Even the publication you now read no doubt will go online-only in the next few years. Right now, we recycle almost 800 copies of *West Word* per month. That is a huge waste of money.

Which brings me to my next point: while we may lament the passing of hard copy newspapers, there is a major advantage to the Internet-only movement: it saves paper. I suppose it could be argued that trees are renewable resources while the electricity that powers the Web comes from non-renewable sources. However, one look at the swollen recycling bin in room 3160 each month provides compelling visual evidence to the contrary.

*The Post-Intelligencer* merely embraced the inevitable, something that the Tribune Company, the conglomerate that owns the Chicago Cubs, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, among other media outlets, has not—yet, although their recent filing for bankruptcy might have issued a wakeup call at the

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Tribune Tower. Because of its commitment to revenue-depleting hard copy newspapers—such as they currently are (have you seen the *Trib* lately?)—the Tribune Company might need to lay off thousands of workers. Some have blamed the Tribune Company's financial problems on the economy (or the Cubs' bloated salaries), but much of the cause is that people just don't buy newspapers anymore. Furthermore, when was the last time a major print newspaper had a “scoop” (journalismese for a breaking story) that was not investigative? How could they, when the story probably was featured on its own website or CNN six hours previous?

Like the abacus, the typewriter and the rotary phone, the hard copy newspaper had its era of pride and glory, but cable television and the Internet have taken over news media. If traditional print newspapers do not keep up with current technology and switch to fully online media, they will soon fall into bankruptcy like the Tribsters and/or ultimately become extinct.

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*West Word* is a student-produced newspaper published monthly during the school year. Editorials represent the general view of the staff; otherwise, commentary pieces and columns reflect the views of the individual writer and not necessarily *West Word*. Replies to pieces from *West Word* are strongly encouraged as are letters to the editor reflecting the views of the school community. This correspondence can be delivered to *West Word*, located in room 3160. Letters may also be mailed to *West Word*, 5701 Oakton, Skokie, IL, 60077 or submitted to [westword219@yahoo.com](mailto:westword219@yahoo.com). Where noted, pictures courtesy of MCT Information Services are used with permission.



# WestWord

## west opinions

### Summer reading: necessary component for improvement

#### Editorial

Among the issues hotly debated among staff and students here at West, an important one is the question of whether students should be assigned reading during their annual vacation. *West Word* believes that because the pros of such assignments heavily outweigh the cons, summer reading should continue to be employed by English teachers.

Oftentimes, many students find that over summer break, they lose some capacity to focus on literature and their studies. However, if students are assigned to read at least one book over the break, they will experience at least some level of intellectual stimulation. They will be able to practice and retain the analytical

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and rhetorical skills that they have learned throughout the previous school year, holding them intact for the upcoming one.

Another advantage of summer reading is that it allows students and teachers to start the new school year up and running. If a book is chosen that efficiently lays the foundation for the curriculum of that class, students will have an increased understanding of ethos of the class itself, not to mention that they will be better prepared to approach the curriculum.

Throughout the school year, many students find that because of their heavy workload, they are unable to focus on their English books. Short on time, they often become flustered and may not even finish the book. Unfortunately many end up relying on Spark

Notes or other summaries to get through the class. If nothing else, the luxury of having two and one-half months to read one book will ensure that at least that one book will be read from cover to cover each year.

Many may argue that the summer is a time for the students to relax and to detach themselves from the heavy workload that they encounter during the school year. However, one book is not going to hinder significantly the summer-long relaxation period. As long as students are not forced into reading rhetorically complex works or weighty tomes of several hundred pages (which is never the case), it will not be a serious burden on them. In fact, many students may find the sheer act of reading leisurely a relaxing enterprise in and of itself. If students find that reading over the summer is enjoyable, it may even motivate them to read more books on their own—or at least finish the ones that they are assigned during the school year.

However, some improvements can be made to increase student acceptance of the summer assignment. Perhaps the teachers can give numerous choices for appropriate books to read. If there is a variety, students will feel that they have a voice on what they wish to spend their time and thus enjoy the reading.

We are all aware of the importance of reading on a daily basis, especially for students. Reading positively affects one's writing skills, vocabulary and facility with the language as well as all other areas of academics. It is vital that students take every opportunity they can get for building and improving their reading ability. Summer offers a vast amount of time for students to expand their skills. This precious time should not be wasted by any means.

*West Word* believes that it will be highly beneficial to continue to assign summer reading to students, as it will allow them to continue expanding their academic skills during this period of academic inactivity.



### Recycling efforts hampered by lack of consideration



**Naomi Prale**  
Around Town Editor

Over the past few decades, many Americans have taken a strong interest in helping to preserve the environment. It has come to the attention of the world that the Earth is filling up with waste, and many people take precautions to help save the crumbling environment.

People find other methods of transportation instead of driving in cars; they take a bus, carpool, walk or bike to their destination. Energy saving bulbs have become popular in homes. Perhaps most important, millions of people recycle materials that can be reused in other forms.

West has done its part to help preserve the green environment fading before our very eyes. The Recycling Club, sponsored by ELL teaching assistant Tatyanna Gulak, has taken on the responsibility of collecting and organizing the recycled materials. The Recycling Club has worked very hard to create an organized system that recycles paper, bottles, cans and cardboard eight times each semester.

In just one 42-minute period, the club empties the recycling

bins and cardboard boxes into huge gondolas that carry all of the recyclable materials, and drag them outside to the recycling trucks.

The Recycling Club works enormously hard to do all of this in such a short time frame. Unfortunately, they get little help from the student body. Niles West as an institution may be taking a giant leap toward preserving the environment, but many individuals fail to respect and appreciate all of the hard work that the Recycling Club does for us.

The biggest problem with the recycling system is that people throw non-recyclable materials into the recycling bins. This is inexcusable and disrespectful to the Recycling Club. Candy wrappers, chip bags, gum and other non-recyclable materials make up just some of the things have been found in these blue bins. The members of the club must pick through the bins and put all of the trash into the cans designated for that purpose.

Picking trash out of the bins is disgusting and wastes time out of the mere 42-minute period that our recyclers have to go around the whole school. If students can learn how to combat global warming, how to comprehend trigonometry and how to analyze literature, surely they can figure out how to throw garbage into a trash receptacle and recyclables into the recycling bins.

Some math and science teachers have created cardboard lids with slots on top that only allow paper to pass through to the bin. This should be unnecessary. It takes no more effort to put trash in its proper place—usually the recycling bins and garbage cans are side by side. To do otherwise is a sign of disrespect to the Recycling Club, the Niles West community and the environment.

### Should Niles West require summer reading for all students?

#### Faculty



Susan Arcus

**Absolutely, every kid should be reading, no matter what year (s)he is in.**

#### Senior



Angie David

**Yes, because it gives students the opportunity of reading a good book that they otherwise might not have read.**

#### Junior



Alexa Edinburgh

**Yes, because the reading keeps us prepared for the books next year.**

#### Sophomore



John Purdiman

**No, because no one would read. People have better things to do over the summer.**

#### Freshman



Michael Nissan

**Yes, it keeps the students sharp because they are doing something during the summer.**