

2013

The **INSTITUTE** for

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A partnership among Keystone College, King's College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Commonwealth Medical College, University of Scranton, & Wilkes University

TEACHER EVALUATION

In an effort to obtain federal waivers from the US Department of Education, many states are proposing new teacher evaluation systems and applying for federal approval. Many individual districts have already enacted new methods and some tie evaluations to incentive and terminations.

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Introduction

This issue of teacher evaluation was brought forth for the purpose of further defining how the role of teacher evaluation may or may not have an effect, either positive, negative or neutral on our region's success in economic prosperity. The Institute's research paper is written in order to bring stakeholders to a common level of understanding on what is meant by teacher evaluation in Pennsylvania. The paper is not meant to stake a position on the matter, rather, it is meant to pull together the information that exists in a short overview to spark the necessary conversation in our region.

Research shows that the number one indicator of a student's success in school is teacher quality. Over the past decade, consensus has been growing among teachers, administrators, and policy makers that teacher evaluation in the United States must be fixed. In school districts across the country, few teachers are evaluated regularly, and the evaluations that do occur are cursory. Nearly all teachers succeed on these evaluations, and very few teachers are identified as unsatisfactory. These limitations have led to calls for reform, and districts across the country have struggled to develop and implement better evaluation systems. An evaluation system can help increase student learning by monitoring teacher performance and assessing teacher effectiveness.

Teacher Evaluation

Today, many school districts lack a creditable teacher evaluation system. A host of factors are to blame, including: lack of accountability for school performance, staffing practices that strip school systems of incentives to take teacher evaluation seriously, teacher union ambivalence, and public education's practice of using teacher credentials as a proxy for teacher quality. Due to these factors, the teacher evaluation system has been crippled into something that neither displays teacher quality nor student learning.

In a growing effort to recognize and reward teachers for their contributions to students' learning, a number of states and districts are retooling their teacher evaluation systems to incorporate student performance measures. This trend stems from evidence that teacher evaluations and reward structures have not sufficiently distinguished those who are more effective at improving student achievement from those who are not. In addition, evaluation processes approved by the U.S. Department of Education give states waivers from federal mandates. Given strong evidence that teachers are the most important school-based

determinant of student achievement, many education advocates find it increasingly imperative that evaluations measure teachers' effects on student learning.

Types of Evaluation

Standards Based Evaluation

Standards based teacher evaluation represents one strategy for both improving instruction and complying with external stakeholder expectations that teachers are held accountable for their performance. This approach starts with a comprehensive model or description of what teachers should know and what they are able to accomplish, including various standards covering multiple levels of performance defined by detailed rating scales. It typically requires a more intensive collection of evidence, including frequent observations of classroom practices, lesson plans and student work samples, to provide a more complete picture of teacher performance. Standards based teacher evaluation systems provide both incentives and guidance for teachers to change their practices toward the establish standards. But the potential of standards based teacher evaluation to improve student achievement depends on the linkage between practices described by the standards and student learning. Unless teaching according to the standards leads to better student learning, implementing a standards based evaluation system will not contribute to improved student achievement. One type of evidence that would support the case that standards based evaluation can lead to better student learning is the relationship between teaching according to the standards (as measured by the teacher evaluation scores) and value-added measures of student achievement.

Standards based evaluation processes have also been found to predict student learning gains and lend to teacher learning. Such processes include, for example, national board certifications and performance assessments for teacher licensing, as well as district and school-level instruments based on professional teaching standards. Effective systems have developed an integrated set of measures that show what teachers do and what happens as a result. These measures may include evidence of student work and learning, as well as evidence of teacher practices derived from observations, videotapes, lecture notes, and even student surveys.

Such tools are most effective when embedded in systems that support evaluation expertise and well-grounded decisions by ensuring that evaluators are trained, evaluation and feedback are frequent, mentoring and professional development are available, and processes are in place to support due process and timely decision making by an appropriate body. If so, evaluation can become a more useful tool - by deriving accurate information about teachers, providing helpful feedback, and supporting personnel decisions.

Value-Added Modeling

Value-added modeling calculates the value teachers add to their students' achievement based on changes in test scores from year to year and how the students perform compared with others in their grade. Statistical analysis of this data produces teacher rankings. Hundreds of school systems, including those in Chicago, New York and Washington, are already using it to measure school and teacher performance. Though the value-added method is often used to help educators improve their teaching, recently it has become a factor in deciding teacher bonuses, as well as terminations.

Research indicates that value-added measures of student achievement and testing tied to individual teachers should not be used for high-stakes, individual-level decisions, or comparisons across highly dissimilar schools or student populations. Valid interpretations require aggregate-level data and should ensure that background factors—including overall classroom composition—are as similar as possible across groups being compared. In general, such measures should be used only in a low-stakes fashion, when they're part of an integrated analysis of teacher practices.

Concerns with Evaluation Models

There are many concerns regarding assessment programs, including the focus on end of year testing, which narrows curriculum to just those subjects that are tested. This works to eliminate the non-tested subject - such as art, music, etc. Research has shown that no model thus far developed can adequately account for all of these factors.

Additionally, if the compensation system bases rewards on the percentage of students who reach a certain level of proficiency/attainment, teachers in the lowest performing schools will be less likely to earn performance awards, even if their students make significant gains during the year. Performance pay structured in this way creates a powerful disincentive for teachers to work in schools that serve students who are most in need of highly effective teachers.

New Teacher Evaluation Models

In recent years, several states have changed their teacher evaluation models to focus more on student achievement. Below are three examples.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania recently passed House Bill 1980, which implements a statewide, comprehensive teacher evaluation system. This is a requirement for applying for federal waivers. The proposed Pennsylvania evaluation system includes student performance and observation. Under this bill, student growth will comprise 50% of an educator's overall score. The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and growth data from the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) must be used together to form a complete picture of student growth and proficiency over an academic year. The proposed Pennsylvania evaluation format is:

- 50% student academic achievement and growth data
- 50% teacher planning, preparation, classroom environment, instructions, and professional responsibilities

Florida

In 2011, the state of Florida implemented a new teacher evaluation system. The system included the following provisions:

- at least 50% of a teacher evaluation must be based on student gain in achievement;
- teachers who rate as unsatisfactory for two consecutive years within a three year period face termination; and
- testing is one measure of student gains

Teachers are rated on the following scale 1 = highly effective; 2 = effective; 3 = needs improvement and 4 = unsatisfactory.

Illinois

Legislation passed in 2010 that requires school districts to design and implement performance evaluation systems that assess teachers' professional practice and incorporate measures of student growth. School districts and the state must ensure that the performance evaluation systems are valid and reliable and help teachers to improve student outcomes. According to the Illinois Department of Education, the new evaluation systems will combine many measures of student growth and professional practices. Descriptions of professional excellence will be clear.

Teachers are rated using a four-level summative performance rating:

- Excellent
- Proficient
- Needs Improvement
- Unsatisfactory

Incentives

The Teacher Incentive Fund, a grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) supports efforts to develop and implement performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools. In 2012, eighteen states received funding. According to DOE, goals include improving student achievement by increasing teacher and principal effectiveness; reforming teacher and principal compensation systems so that teachers and principals are rewarded for increases in student achievement; increasing the number of effective educators who teach poor, minority, and disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff subjects; and creating sustainable performance-based compensation systems. Performance-based compensation systems must consider gains in student academic achievement, as well as classroom evaluations conducted multiple times during each school year, among other factors, and provide educators with incentives to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles.

Recruiting

Recruiting quality teachers is of the utmost importance. Every school has a different set of strengths and challenges, and recruitment strategies must take those into consideration. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality has identified four areas where recruitment strategies are vital, as detailed below.

STEM Teachers

A STEM teacher is one who teaches in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In K–12 education, most STEM teachers instruct mathematics and science classes, which continue to be critical shortage areas. Below are several strategies districts can use to recruit STEM teachers.

- Gather and analyze data to inform the design and implementation of recruitment initiatives.
- Build strong and sustainable relationships with institutions of higher education.
- Develop differentiated pay systems, and create financial incentives to attract prospective mathematics and science teachers.
- Provide prospective teachers adequate information about teaching opportunities across districts, schools, and communities.
- Develop multiple entry points into teaching for nontraditional mathematics and science teacher candidates.
- Provide high-quality induction and professional development experiences to attract and retain teachers.

Urban/Rural Teachers

Teacher shortages are essentially a problem of distribution. According to recent studies, the hardest to find teachers are those who are both qualified and willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools, including those in highly urban and rural areas— especially schools serving minority or low-income students. In addition, recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers are intertwined; it's not enough to attract these teachers if concurrent steps are not taken to keep them. Schools need help in building their capacity to attract and maintain a highly qualified teaching staff. Recruitment strategies for urban and rural school districts include:

- Providing incentives and policies to redistribute the teacher workforce.
 - Restructuring teacher pay to encourage the voluntary redistribution of the teacher workforce.
 - Awarding scholarships and forgivable loans to those who teach in geographical shortage areas.
- Improving working conditions for teachers in urban and rural schools.
 - Supporting new teachers.
 - Supporting school leaders so they can support teachers.
 - Creating professional learning communities and career ladders for teachers.
- Partnering with institutions of higher education to prepare teachers for urban and rural school settings.
- Developing high-quality alternative certification programs.
- Encouraging members of these communities to go into teaching.
- Improving hiring practices.
- Creating partnerships to address out-of-school issues that affect recruitment and retention.
 - Providing housing assistance.
 - Providing reimbursement for moving expenses.
 - Promoting business partnerships.

Special Education Teachers

Qualified special education teachers have a strong foundation in pedagogy and are experts in the characteristics of students with disabilities. They have successfully completed relevant supervised field and clinical experiences, are adept in the skills of their respective specialty, and have passed the certification or licensure exam attesting to their fundamental and specific knowledge. Unfortunately, there is a critical shortage of qualified special education teachers. The shortage is even more pronounced in urban and rural areas. Recruitment strategies for special education teachers include:

- Providing contingency-based financial incentives.

- Developing multiple pathways to the profession.
- Designing programs for paraprofessionals to become certified teachers.
- Building strong partnerships with institutions of higher education.
- Increasing diversity and cultural competence in the field.
- Implementing comprehensive strategies to retain special education teachers.

English Language Learners (ELL) Teachers

Districts across the country are struggling to find enough teachers who are qualified to teach English language learners. This is a complicated challenge because ELL teachers must meet not only the highly qualified requirements for all teachers under the No Child Left Behind Act, but also the requirement for additional training specific to the needs of ELL's. Moreover, that training depends on the program model used within the school district. In order to meet this significant challenge, districts must broaden their current recruitment efforts and cast a wider net in order to recruit a larger pool of highly qualified teachers for ELL's. As the numbers of ELL's continue to grow across a range of districts, education leaders must develop creative and comprehensive recruitment strategies, which may be linked to preparation programs, in order to ensure that all ELL's in the district are served by highly qualified teachers. Recruitment strategies for ELL teachers include:

- Recruiting teachers who are familiar with the language and culture of ELL's.
- Training general education teachers to work with ELL's.
- Recruiting paraeducators into training programs to become certified teachers of ELL's.
- Developing alternative certification programs.
- Recruiting educators globally.
 - participate in foreign teacher exchange programs.
 - Recruiting foreign-born and culturally diverse candidates into teacher preparation programs.
- Targeting financial incentives.

Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers

The four major factors that contribute to the problem of teacher retention are:

1. Salaries
2. Working conditions
3. Preparation
4. Mentoring support in the early years of teaching

Many college students and teachers believe that low wages make teacher retention very difficult. Since every state is complex, it will take an array of solutions to help support the high needs areas. An analysis of the national Schools and Staffing Survey results helped determine what factors influence new teachers to stay in their jobs; the following information was concluded after two surveys were given to 600 new teachers in five states across the U.S. As per the survey, three key sources of support for new teachers include:

1. An informative hiring process that helps ensure a good fit between the candidate and the teaching position.
2. Assignment of a well-trained and well-matched mentor.
3. A well-defined, standards based curriculum that provides teachers with strong guidance and gives them sufficient flexibility in the classroom.

Conclusion

Effective teacher evaluation and recruitment are imperative to improving school success and teacher quality. States should carefully review their current systems of evaluation and recruitment and conduct research strategies that will work best for their particular set of issues. No matter what type of assessment program or recruitment strategy is decided upon, their pilot models should test programs before they are implemented. This would ensure that the assessment program it is the right type for the specific area in which it is being implemented. After all, these programs are for the benefit of the children and of the teachers.

On February 28, 2013, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania applied for a federal government waiver from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal education mandates that would have allowed the Commonwealth to develop curriculum, teacher assessments tied to student improvement and plans catered to their localities.

The waivers must include reforms that implement college and career ready standards; develop systems for low performing schools and schools with achievement gaps that improve accountability; and develop and implement a teacher assessment program that works to improve teacher and student performance. The Department of Education indicated that the teacher assessment portion of a state's plan is the key to securing the waiver.

"If the states' drafted plans are approved, they will:

- *Set performance goals to graduate students from high school who are prepared for college and careers. They will no longer be required to meet NCLB deadlines in 2014 "based on arbitrary methods of proficiency.*
- *Design interventions that are catered to the needs of their localities, versus the federal "one-size-fits-all" remedies.*
- *Be able to measure school progress using multiple measures, instead of just test scores*
- *Have more flexibility in how Title I funding is spent."*

States can enact legislation to deal with teachers that do not meet goals or districts can formulate their own policies. The most important factor is that based on a state's approved plan school funding is not tied only to test scores. At the time of completion of this report, the Commonwealth was waiting for approval of its waiver plan.

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