

PROMOTING QUALITY INSTRUCTION: TEACHER EVALUATION OR TEACHER COLLABORATION?



Dedicated, highly effective teachers play an important role in guaranteeing that all students receive the best possible education. Other school factors (e.g., leadership, curriculum, collaboration) are also significant, while non-school factors, including family income, health, mobility, hunger and stress, account for two-thirds of variation in student achievement.¹ Instead of seeking solutions for these social issues, government at all levels, the business community and corporate media have turned their attention to teachers.

Teachers or Teaching?

There are two approaches to promoting instructional quality: focus on teachers or focus on teaching. Currently, U.S. education policy focuses on teachers; get the best people into teaching, regularly evaluate them and eliminate those teachers with low ratings (sometimes after remediation efforts). There is no research to indicate that this approach advances instructional quality.

The other approach focuses on pedagogy. This approach makes development of instructional practices part of every teacher's job. It draws on collaborative planning, professional devel-

opment, regular lesson observations, shared analysis, reflection and lesson revisions to create systemic advancement in the level of classroom instruction. Research supports this approach to advancing instructional quality.²

This teaching approach also leads to a natural accountability system. Collaborative teacher groups investigate student growth through common assessments and analyze variations in assessment results by classroom. Teachers whose classes consistently produce low averages receive assistance in the form of classroom observations, targeted feedback and peer mentoring. Most teachers, who are in the profession because they want to advance student learning, will improve their teaching practices based on this feedback and further collaboration. For the small percentage of teachers who do not change, it is appropriate for unions and school districts to develop a mutually agreed upon dismissal process.

Race to the Top

The teacher evaluation systems imposed through the Race to the Top (RttT) competition rely on the false premise that the way to improve the overall level of teaching, and hence student achievement, is to fire "bad" teachers and financially reward excellent ones. The most dramatic current example is Washington, D.C., where 166 teachers (4% of the workforce) were fired based on "an unreliable statistical methodology for linking test scores to individual teachers"³ and another 2% were fired for certification issues. Another 730 (17%) are next in line.⁴ A study which used a computer model to determine what percent of first year teachers would have to be fired to make a significant difference in student test scores came up with an astonishing number: 80%!⁵ Wouldn't it make more sense to implement an approach that relied on teacher reflection and collaborative planning to improve classroom practices?



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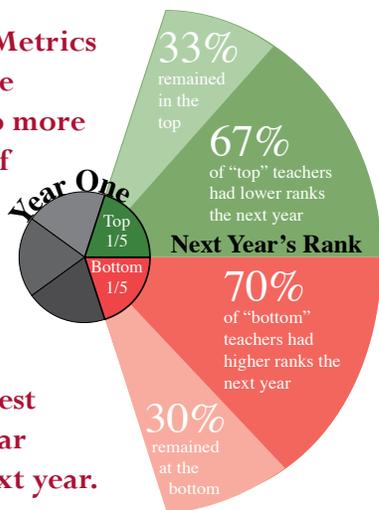
Illinois Performance Evaluation Reform Act

Illinois wrote its new teacher evaluation law with RttT mandates in mind and set up an evaluation system to “adequately distinguish between effective and ineffective teachers and principals”⁶. There is nothing in the law about professional development to keep effective teachers current and improve the teaching quality of those who do not meet standards. The CTU believes that this exclusion from the law should be addressed in the evaluation system that will be put into place in CPS.

The Illinois Performance Evaluation Reform Act, requires teacher ratings derived from classroom observations, attendance, planning, classroom management, subject matter competency and student growth. CPS is developing a “Teaching for Learning Framework” to guide classroom observations. The CTU advocates for a valid, reliable, research-based framework which incorporates extensive training. A reliable framework is one whose results can be repeated consistently, independent of the particular evaluator. A valid framework is one that actually measures effective teaching. A good framework will aid teachers in self-reflection and support collaborative teacher groups working to improve instruction. It will not primarily be for purposes of rating teachers.

Student Growth and Value Added

Inconsistent Metrics Don't Improve Education. No more than a third of teachers whose “value added” scores were in either the highest or lowest 20% saw similar results the next year.



Student growth is the other factor that RttT, state law, and CPS expect to be a major part of teacher evaluation. CTU sees student growth as central to our profession and recognizes many authentic measures of

student growth including (but not limited to) pre- and post-tests, attendance calculations and portfolios of work over time. It is also possible to measure student growth indirectly, by looking at factors related to positive student outcomes. For example, the Consortium on Chicago School Research found

five essential supports that are predictive of student growth: leadership, parent and community ties, professional capacity of the faculty, student centered learning climate, and instructional guidance.⁷

“Value Added” is the model preferred by CPS and many other schools districts because even though it is not a reliable measure of student growth, it is easy to quantify. CPS already uses this model for its school Remediation and Probation policy and in the Teacher Advancement Program. It will use this metric to determine merit pay in the \$35 million teacher evaluation Teacher Incentive Fund grant the federal government recently awarded them. Value Added compares the test score growth of students in one school relative to average test score growth of students in the whole district. This method determines school rankings as either average, above average or below average.

Problems with Using Value Added for Teacher Evaluation

Currently, Value Added could only be used to evaluate a minority of teachers: those in grades or subjects with state tests. If CPS evaluates teachers the way they have schools, based on relative Value Added scores, then no matter how well teachers perform, some will always be “below average.” A recent study⁸ by the federal government’s National Center for Education Evaluation, pointed out many flaws in Value Added. The most glaring is that if only one school year and one measure of student growth is used, teachers will be misclassified at least 35% of the time. Even after three years, Value Added will misclassify teachers 25% of the time. The report recommends that this metric never be used for high stakes decisions, such as whether a teacher keeps her job or gets paid more or less money than others.

Even if value added measures were not flawed, basing teacher evaluation heavily on student test scores does not take into account teacher and student creativity, critical thinking, the ability to develop conclusions based on complex information, and other attributes highly valued in college, society, and America’s workforce. These attributes are not easily measured by standardized tests. A constant turnover of teachers, which this model creates through dismissals of “low-performing” teachers, is expensive and creates instability. Students and the district would be better

served if CPS were to create a teacher evaluation system that sought to promote excellence and professional growth in teaching among all teachers, rather than to fire teachers with weaknesses before any attempt is made to provide professional development to help those teachers improve their practice.

Proven Effective

The benefits of standards-based professional development (PD), where groups of teachers support, reflect, observe each other teach, share ideas and push each other to become better have been proven effective time and again. Research shows that sustained and intensive professional learning for teachers can boost student achievement by 21 percentile points.⁹ A standards-based PD model posits that the overwhelming majority of teachers can learn to better serve their students, contribute to professional learning communities and strengthen the art of teaching. As for the few truly unsatisfactory teachers, school systems can provide individualized remediation and, if that is not successful, remove them from the system. Rather than make professional development central to teacher improvement and evaluation as it should be, current CPS proposals for teacher evaluation institutionalize ranking and sorting. They include professional development as an after thought, and then, only to support new teachers or those with presumed pedagogical difficulties. If the goal is for all students and teachers to be “proficient” or “excellent” (the top two state evaluation ratings), that goal is unattainable if half the students or teachers are “below average” by definition. Students should be judged on their mastery of objectives, not how they perform in relation to other students. Teachers should be judged similarly.

International Evidence Supports Teacher-Driven Professional Development

Countries with high levels of student achievement invest heavily in professional learning and include time for teacher development and collaboration during the school day. In Japan, teachers meet daily to plan lessons collaboratively and discuss the best ways to teach particular topics to their students. This process continues with the observation and reflection of each other’s lessons,



leading to further insights for future planning and teaching and to expert implementation.¹⁰ In Finland, where standardized tests are rare, schools emphasize teacher self-evaluation. Most Finnish schools have annual discussions between school leaders and teachers to review progress toward teacher goal attainment and set further goals in line with the needs of the school.¹¹ Japanese and Finnish students are some of the best educated in the world, while in Chicago, half of the high school students drop out. In CPS, collaborative professional growth and peer mentoring are not favored practices, but they should be.

An international study on teacher evaluation conducted by the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation found: “An effective, fair and reliable evaluation scheme requires teachers’ overall acceptance and appropriation of the system. Developing a comprehensive approach ... is critical to conciliate the demands for educational quality, the enhancement of teaching practices through professional development, and the recognition of teacher knowledge, skills and competencies.”¹²

Systemic Professional Development

One possible model for professional development/teacher evaluation is the system developed by the Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools in conjunction with the local teachers union. This system takes as its starting point six standards for teacher performance, based on the

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standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Montgomery County uses a multi-year evaluation process that incorporates professional growth, continual reflection on goals and progress meeting those goals as well as collegial interaction. Formal evaluations are designed to provide qualitative feedback to teachers and include a mandatory post conference. If the teacher is to receive a substandard rating, she must be observed by multiple people. A program of peer support for new teachers and teachers needing extra help is incorporated into the system. Professional development has its basis in a collaborative learning culture among teachers in each school, integrating individual growth plans into school plans, and making student outcomes an important part of the system.¹³

CTU believes that it is in the best interest of students and most fair to teachers for CTU and CPS to negotiate and jointly develop a dynamic, research-based system of professional development, teacher evaluation, and teacher remediation, for the purpose of promoting instructional quality. CTU would be happy to recommend appropriate starting points for this collaborative process, founded on the positions outlined in this paper. ■

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The Illinois "Performance Evaluation Reform Act" (PERA) mandates teacher evaluation policies and timelines. CPS is required to implement a new evaluation model in half of its schools by September, 2012 (the other half will start in September 2013). A "significant factor" of the evaluation must be student growth. CTU will advocate for inclusion of multiple measures of student growth in the evaluation plan. However, presently the law allows CPS to use only one measure, if they choose to do so.

CTU and CPS have 90 days to agree on a teacher evaluation system (other districts in Illinois have 180 days). As of February 1, 2011, negotiations had not yet begun. If agreement is not reached within the 90 days, CPS can implement what PERA refers to as "its last best proposal". All other Illinois districts are required to implement the state's model evaluation plan if talks break down. CTU will mobilize members and supporters to fight this inequity and demand a fair evaluation plan.

In January of 2011, a coalition of business groups*, with ties to Rahm Emanuel, proposed that legislators use not-yet-developed teacher evaluation models to determine certification, tenure, lay-offs and pay. The CTU, Illinois Federation of Teachers and Illinois Education Association created a counter-proposal, "Accountability for All", to oppose the business coalition's anti-student, anti-teacher proposals. For the latest information on these proposals, go to ctunet.com.

* Stand for Children, Illinois Business Roundtable, Advance Illinois, Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago.

Notes

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