



Principals' Use of Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions

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New Teacher Evaluation Systems Change the Role of the Principal

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There is growing recognition that schools need to be more strategic in how they manage their primary resource, teachers. Investment in measuring effective teaching—including value-added estimates, teacher observations, and student surveys¹—has increased the availability of data to make teacher talent management decisions.^{2,3} Principals in many school districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) are required to use these new data to evaluate teachers, but many also use the measures to inform decisions in areas such as teacher support, hiring, assignment, and contract renewal.

Findings in this brief emerged from a larger study, *Supporting Principals to Use Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions*.⁴ Here, we focus on how the principal's role has changed in light of the collection and availability of these new teacher effectiveness data. Our research in eight urban school systems generated insights on:

- The ways in which the new role of the principal may benefit teachers and schools; and
- The challenges faced by principals as they meet new expectations set by teacher evaluation systems.

What We Learned

New types of teacher effectiveness data affect how principals approach their work.

In systems that have invested in rigorous teacher evaluation and feedback systems, the principal's instructional leadership role is changing. Teacher evaluation policies in general, and teacher observation systems in particular, mandate that principals observe teachers regularly and with the use of specified, instructional rubrics. Furthermore, these new systems provide principals with rich new sources of data to inform decisions, and principals place great value on those data. Their role in collecting and making use of these data is changing how principals work and how they relate to their teachers.

Principals provide regular, structured feedback to teachers. Principals are spending more time in classrooms, and this time investment is permitting them to provide specific, targeted teacher feedback based on particular indicators of an instructional rubric. The frequency of teacher feedback and its connection to specific, observed instructional routines stand in stark contrast to principals' more typical role around instruction, which often involves no more than brief classroom walkthroughs and little, if any, teacher feedback.

Principals experience overwhelming demands on their time.

Principals repeatedly describe the time burden of preparing for and conducting observations, scripting notes, and holding follow-up conversations with teachers—on top of meeting all of the traditional expectations of the job. Disjointed data systems compound this challenge for principals, as they often have to turn to multiple data systems and websites to find and analyze teacher effectiveness data. Many find these additional tasks very difficult to manage. Principals often compensate by taking work home, extending their hours into the evenings and weekends, or delegating work to others. The consistency with which we heard, as one principal described it, that “it's almost like it takes two people” calls into question the sustainability of the new role of the principal.

“The benefit of the new evaluation system is it pinpoints exactly the next step for the teacher to grow. And that's a huge benefit to the teachers, because it doesn't leave it up to, ‘Well, I think maybe you should do this next.’ It's this whole continuum, so if I'm in ‘developing,’ this is the criteria to get to ‘effective.’ Now I know exactly what I need to do. And that's very beneficial to the teachers ... and I think it helps drive our conversation. ... The feedback is more beneficial to the teachers.”

— Principal

Methodology

As part of a larger study on principals' use of teacher effectiveness data for talent management decisions, we conducted research in six urban school districts and two CMOs during the 2012–13 school year. The sites have been or currently are engaged in developing new and varied measures of teacher effectiveness (e.g., teacher observations/appraisals, value-added or growth measures, and student surveys). We conducted more than 100 semi-structured interviews with central/home office personnel at the sites. Next, within each system, we selected a

sample of schools that represented different age groups (i.e., elementary, middle, and high) and achievement levels (i.e., low and high) and conducted 76 semi-structured interviews with principals from these schools.

We also conducted principal surveys in four of the six public school districts and the two CMOs. Online surveys were distributed to all principals by email between September and November 2013. A total of 795 principals responded to these surveys, representing an overall response rate of 82 percent.⁵

Principals believe they are less visible throughout the school. Time spent conducting observations in classrooms means less time on other, more visible tasks. Principals recognize the paradox of spending more time with teachers and students during observation duties, yet being less visible than ever. Principals worry that they are missing important school events and activities and know less about what is going on in their school as a result. For example, they are concerned that they spend less time in the school lunchroom and walking through the hallways, thus missing critical time to informally interact with students and teachers.

Principals believe they have fewer informal, ongoing interactions in the school. Principals in several school systems note a change in their relationships with teachers, particularly around trust. Some teachers no longer invite them into their classrooms, approach them about problems, or ask for advice for fear they will be evaluated.

“ We were in the last formal evaluation cycle. It took us like an hour and a half to input the evaluations per teacher and I had 82 people. So it was like a nightmare, literally. We were up all day and all night. I mean, I would go to meetings and it was like people were ready to jump off the bridge, because we had these very firm contractual time frames that we have to meet.

— Principal

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“ I have less interaction with students beyond the classroom. I’m interacting with students when I’m in the classroom, but I’m not in the cafeteria as much. I’m not going to the library as much. I’m not in the guidance office as much. There’s no time. There’s no time, because ... you need to focus and then you add in all of the templates, tools, the data to this, to that. Something has to give. It’s just not as much time, where I could go into the cafeteria and give two periods a day, which is almost two hours. I don’t have two hours to give. I may not go into the cafeteria two hours in a week now.

— Principal

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Recommendations

- **Distribute leadership tasks more widely.** School administrators, teacher leaders, and district staff can take on a variety of leadership tasks—such as handling issues with discipline, facilities, or curriculum—to provide the principal with more time to observe teachers and use teacher effectiveness data for talent management decisions.
- **Use multiple leaders for teacher observations, including teacher leaders, district staff, and school-level administrators.** Having multiple observers will reduce the time burden placed on principals and also provide a more holistic picture of teachers' effectiveness.
- **Differentiate teacher observations so that not all teachers are required to be observed every year.** Teachers who routinely demonstrate high levels of effectiveness may not need to be observed as frequently as struggling teachers. Consider a focus on some areas of the rubric, rather than the complete rubric, for some teachers. This type of differentiation will lessen the time demands on the principal and also allow for more targeted support to teachers who need it.
- **Ensure that teacher effectiveness data are easily accessible in a centralized, integrated data system.** Alleviating the need for principals to access data from multiple data systems and websites will reduce the amount of time they spend finding, manipulating, and interpreting data on their own. This will enable principals to more effectively and efficiently use data to make talent management decisions.
- **Improve principal training on how to access and analyze data for talent management decisions.** This will reduce frustration and time spent on data access and analysis. Include training on time management systems, which may also improve principal time use.

I feel like every time I walk in a teacher is like automatically on pins and needles, thinking I'm there in an evaluative capacity. ... I think sometimes teachers are a little hesitant to invite me into the classroom when they're doing some special project because they think I'm coming in in an evaluative role when I just want to see what the kids are up to and interact with them.

— Principal

For more information and additional reports from this study, please see www.principaldatause.org or contact christine.m.neumerski@vanderbilt.edu.

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Endnotes

- 1 See Measures of Effective Teaching Project (2010). *Learning about Teaching: Initial Findings from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project*. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- 2 On the importance of strategic human resource management in schools, see Curtis, R. (2010). Weaving the Pieces Together: A Framework for Managing Human Capital in Schools. In Curtis, R., & Wurtzel, J. (Eds.), *Teaching Talent: A Visionary Framework for Human Capital in Education*, pp. 171–195. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. See also Odden, A. (2011). *Strategic Management of Human Capital in Education*. New York: Routledge Press.
- 3 Talent management decisions include decisions about teacher recruitment, hiring, induction, assignment to classrooms and subjects, evaluation, feedback and support, professional development, leadership responsibilities, and retention.
- 4 See www.principaldatause.org for a full description of this study.
- 5 Additional details on the larger study can be found in Goldring, E. B., Neumerski, C. M., Cannata, M., Drake, T. A., Grissom, J. A., Rubin, M., & Schuermann, P. (2014). *Principals' Use of Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions*. Available at www.principaldatause.org