



Shawn Page

Using Teacher Effectiveness Data for Teacher Support and Professional Development

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LEARNING FROM THE PRINCIPAL OF White Station Middle School

INTRODUCTION

This case study is part of the *Supporting Principals to Use Teacher Effectiveness Measures for Talent Management Decisions* study, in which we interviewed principals and central/home office personnel in eight urban school systems to understand principals' use of teacher effectiveness measures for making talent management decisions. From our interviews, we identified four principals who stood out as visible and active users of multiple types of teacher effectiveness measures in multiple areas of talent management decisionmaking, including teacher hiring, course assignments, contract renewal/nonrenewal, and teacher support.

Two of these exceptional principals work in what we have identified as low-constraint systems—those that provide widely accessible data to principals, support and develop a culture of data use, and set clear data use expectations. One exceptional principal is from a high-constraint system, where substantial barriers to data use exist. The other exceptional principal was drawn from a medium-constraint system, which facilitates principals' data use in some ways but also includes some barriers to data use.

During November and December 2013, we made two-day visits to the schools of each of the four principals. We conducted detailed interviews with the principals about how they use data for teacher talent management decisions, how they learned to use data effectively, and their ideas for developing other principals' strategic data use skills. In addition, we conducted focus groups with teachers in these principals' schools to understand their perceptions of how the principal uses data for strategic talent management decisions. We also conducted interviews and focus groups with members of school leadership teams to further understand the use of and culture around data in these schools. We include links to video excerpts from these interviews throughout the case studies.

In each case study, we describe the data use and practices of one of these principals. Specifically, we aim to address four key questions:

1. Which types and sources of teacher effectiveness and other data do exceptional data users use, and how do they use these data to make decisions?
2. What types of decisions do exceptional data users make using teacher effectiveness data and other types of data?
3. What supports and barriers do they experience and how do they overcome the barriers?
4. How did expert principals learn to use data effectively?

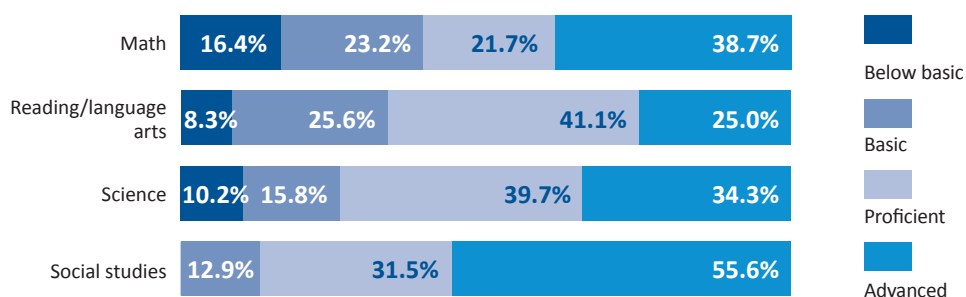
This case study focuses on how Shawn Page, the principal of White Station Middle School in East Memphis, Tennessee, uses teacher effectiveness data to inform his strategy around teacher support and professional development.

Context and Background

Mr. Page received bachelor's and master's degrees in special education from the University of Memphis. He has been an assistant and executive principal in the district for a number of years, including the last three as principal of White Station Middle.

White Station Middle is located in East Memphis and has been recognized as one of the top-performing middle schools in the state. Its optional program—an academic magnet school of choice—has been rated as a National Magnet School of Distinction for the past two school years. To qualify for the magnet program, students must meet certain academic requirements, including standardized test scores at or above the 80th percentile in reading/language arts and math (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Select student achievement characteristics, White Station Middle School, grades 3–8, 2012–13



The school is part of Shelby County Schools, the fourth largest school system in Tennessee, with a population of more than 48,000 students. At the time of this case study, the district included all of the public schools in the county outside the corporate limits of the city of Memphis. (Shelby County Schools merged with the Memphis City Schools system in the 2013–14 school year.) Our larger study revealed a number of barriers to principals’ use of teacher effectiveness data across Shelby County Schools, including:

- A lack of trust in the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) composite score;
- A lack of individual growth measures for teachers of untested grades and subjects;
- A lack of access to data in a centralized, easy-to-use location;
- A lack of time to complete both the teacher observation/feedback cycle and traditional principal duties;
- Hiding ineffective teachers in untested grades and subjects;
- A lack of trust in student perception surveys; and
- A need to focus on the quality of teacher support and professional development.

Despite these constraints in the district, Mr. Page has capitalized on the system’s strengths to facilitate data use, and he relies heavily upon data in his decisionmaking processes at White Station Middle.

Key Practices in Action

Mr. Page is described by his teachers and fellow administrators as “a data guy.” A prime example of this characteristic is visible on his bookshelf, where a three-inch binder labeled “TVAAS” is prominently displayed. In this binder, Mr. Page records each teacher’s Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System scores from previous years, which he routinely reviews to identify individual and school-level patterns of instructional strengths and weaknesses. In addition, he requires each teacher and student in the school to carry a data binder that tracks personal goals and includes formative and summative assessment information. Importantly, in our conversations with Mr. Page, it became clear that he views data holistically and longitudinally, often using multiple years and multiple sources of data to inform his decisionmaking. He explains:

“It’s not supposed to be you’re looking just for parts; you’re supposed to look at the whole, and that’s why there are multiple measures. ... You cannot just look at one year. You have to look at multiple years. I shared with you I have a teacher that’s been a level 5 teacher for a number of years. ... She dropped to a [level] 1. That is not someone that I would immediately put on a growth plan. I would have a conversation with [her]... ‘Why do you think you had such a significant drop?’... She reflected. She has a plan of action. She’s now doing different things and I’ve seen some of them in action, so that teacher I did not make a growth plan for.”



[Click here to watch a video about using multiple teacher effectiveness measures over time.](#)

With respect to Mr. Page’s data use process, his leadership team extols his ability to break down tasks, analyze what needs to be done, and take necessary action. Moreover, Mr. Page is a recognized leader in the district, participating in a number of initiatives, including the development of the observation rubric currently used in the system. Perhaps it is because of this participation in district-level initiatives that Mr. Page is able to look beyond strategies that influence the outcome of the end-of-year state standardized tests and see, in the words of one of his administrative team members, “the big picture and what needs to happen five years down the road.”

One teacher summarizes Mr. Page’s successful approach to building a culture of data use at White Station Middle:

“ I think it starts with administration and that comes down. ... When you have administrators that have the ability to look at data and see what’s needed and make it useful ... , then when you have administrators that are supportive and stand behind you no matter what, that creates an attitude and a climate that makes the teachers want to do well. Then it just channels down. ”

One of Mr. Page’s greatest strengths is his ability to identify and target support and professional development at the school, grade, and individual levels. Importantly, he believes that every teacher can improve with the right tools and structures. He summarizes his attitude:

“ I think that the most correct mindset to [have] is that everybody can improve and give them the tools to improve. ... You need to have systems in place for all teachers to be successful, not just struggling teachers. You need to have good procedures and processes in place. You have to clearly communicate your academic expectations. You have to provide different tools for teachers and a different setup for everybody. ... I think that’s the most important thing: that you have structures in place that everybody implements, and that’s the expectation at your side. ”

Mr. Page uses teacher effectiveness data to identify and support struggling teachers, such as by:

- Establishing processes for his team to review data on an ongoing basis; and
- Differentiating support and targeting professional development to teachers who are struggling.

REVIEWING DATA ON AN ONGOING BASIS TO IDENTIFY WHO NEEDS SUPPORT

Like other effective school leaders, Mr. Page relies heavily on weekly meetings with his Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to review teacher data to identify areas of needed support and professional development. Although a part of these meetings must be spent addressing administrative matters (e.g., student discipline, bus scheduling, and school budget), the ILT tries to focus on teacher observations and instructional improvement. Importantly, the team spends time calibrating the TEM instructional rubric to make sure that they are rating teachers consistently. One member of the ILT notes:

“ In our [ILT] meetings, we often sit around the table and say, ‘Okay, so let’s look at collaborative grouping. What does a 5 look like to you?’ ... We actually describe exactly what we expect to see when we walk in the classroom so that we all have the same expectations. In the last meeting we had, we actually pulled up a teacher’s observation and looked at the evidence that was scripted. Then [we] took a poll at the table based on just this evidence, just this one indicator. ‘I’d give it a 3, I’d give it a 4, I’d give it a 3, I’d give it a 4.’ While we’re within one number, we’re aligned—we’re fine. Now, if you say 5 and she says 1, that’s a problem. We need to talk about it. But every time we’ve done that, we’ve been aligned with the outcome. ”

In addition, the ILT often uses a tool in the district’s data system—Rubric Explorer—to examine teacher performance on the observation rubric. For example, in a meeting we observed, the ILT used Rubric Explorer to:

- 1. Examine overall teacher performance by TEM indicator.** For each rubric indicator (for example, questioning), the ILT examined the number of teachers rated at a given effectiveness rating, focusing on teachers who were rated below or significantly below expectations. More specifically, for each teacher who fell in the ineffective range, Mr. Page would ask questions, such as: *Who observed Ms. Jones? Why did she receive a 1? What current support is she receiving? What can we do to further support Ms. Jones?* In each case, the ILT then would decide on a plan of action.
- 2. Discuss individual teacher’s observation scores.** After reviewing schoolwide performance on TEM indicators, Mr. Page used Rubric Explorer to examine individual observation schedules to ensure that each teacher would have the required number of observations before the end of the first semester. While performing this largely administrative function, Mr. Page also continued to address individual teacher needs. For example, throughout this process, he directed the discussion toward getting struggling teachers “Common Core-ready” with specific professional development suggestions and plans of action.
- 3. Norm with outside observers.** Throughout this meeting, Mr. Page closely examined the scores given by an outside, district-level observer to ensure that they were aligned with scores given by an ILT member.

Central to the success of these practices is the tiered coaching model (a new districtwide initiative) that the ILT uses to help struggling teachers. First, the ILT discusses using learning coaches, lead teachers, and master teachers from within the building for support. In addition, they often look to outside support and professional development from the district. One member of the ILT describes the process this way:

“We make sure that we have a lot of support for the teachers. We have the master teacher, our lead teacher, [school-based] learning coaches. We have the pit crew come in from the district. They are getting double-whammied, sometimes triple-whammied. They have all this support, and that is just within the building. Then we can send them out to go to outside professional development. ... [They have a] tremendous amount of support.”

To make strategic and effective use of these levels of support available to his teaching staff, Mr. Page uses data for teacher support and professional development.

DIFFERENTIATING SUPPORT AND TARGETING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Page is an exemplary user of multiple forms of teacher effectiveness data over multiple years. As he explains, “I strongly believe as an administrator that you don’t look at one data point. You don’t look at one data set, you look at multiple years. I really think to be fair to a teacher, you need to look at at least two years.” That is how he realized one 7th grade English teacher (to whom we will refer by the pseudonym “Ms. Smith”) was struggling with her teaching.

It began last school year, when Mr. Page reviewed his binder of TVAAS scores and “start[ed] seeing issues arise with [her] value-added scores, where there’s a pattern of ... not performing well.” The concern over Ms. Smith’s weak value-added pattern was heightened when she started receiving scores of 2 on her observations and a composite evaluation score that categorized her as a “Level 1” teacher. These multiple data points propelled Mr. Page to action to take the first steps to provide targeted support to Ms. Smith:

“Last year this teacher met every week or every other week and had a conference with me or one of my lead teachers, my instructional facilitator. I’m just not seeing the changes, so the question would be ‘What do you do?’ ... Last year based on observations she got a lot of 2s, and we had a lot of concerns so I immediately called the district coach; we immediately started meeting with her every other week. We gave her explicit steps to follow. The coach, who is supposed to be an exemplary teacher, has worked with her, came in very frequently, checked on her instruction. We wrote a very detailed growth plan.”



[Click here](#) to watch a video about providing targeted supports to struggling teachers.

In addition to creating the detailed growth plan with explicit steps for Ms. Smith to take toward improvement, Mr. Page required her to turn in a specific form of lesson plan each week. This differentiated lesson planning is another tool Mr. Page has developed within White Station Middle to support potentially struggling teachers. Any teacher scoring a TVAAS score of 1 or 2 must use a far more detailed lesson planning template than teachers who score a 3 or higher. Mr. Page explains:

“ At my school we have a generic template that I make Level 3, 4, [and] 5 teachers fill out. My thing is if you're a Level 3, 4, [or] 5 based on TVAAS composite or individual, I'm not going to make you write ultra-detailed lesson plans, but for teachers that are struggling, they have to do more. ”

Ms. Smith benefited from not only the individual growth plan and differentiated lesson planning template but also the weekly support around the TEM observation rubric that Mr. Page provides to his entire staff. Believing that the district has not always offered adequate guidance on the TEM rubric indicators, he has devoted a substantial amount of time and energy to in-school support on the indicators, including weekly meetings with his teaching staff to review the indicators and to ensure that all teachers have a common understanding of them. He explains:

“ We talk about it every week. ... We define as a school what that [indicator] would look like. [In] another school, that might look different, but in our school, I have given the expectation of what a 3 would look like for differentiation, what a 4 and what a 5 would look like. ... I've actually walked through every single indicator. I've sometimes done it multiple times. ”

In these weekly meetings, the entire staff reviews the TEM rubric together. Mr. Page introduces what the indicator might look like in the classroom, and then the staff meets in teams to discuss how that indicator can be applied to their specific subject areas. During these discussions, Mr. Page moves throughout the room to answer questions and provide feedback. If he does not know what an indicator might look like for a specific subject area (for example, what a 5 would look like in English language arts), then he goes to the district to find appropriate resources and reports back to the team. Teachers find these meetings quite helpful, and as one elaborates:

“ I think all of us, when we saw the rubric, it's just this big, mystical, 'dew sitting in the corn among the clouds' kind of thing, and [Mr. Page] helped us break down and showed us if you focus on this indicator, it supports this one, this one, and this one. If you focus on this, it supports this and this, and here's how you do it—kind of giving us cheat-sheets. And then we've been inspired to go find our own little things. ”

In addition to the weekly faculty meetings focused on understanding how to tailor instruction to the TEM rubric, Ms. Smith continued to receive support via her growth plan. Mr. Page says that “in the growth plan, it would be like I'm giving that teacher very explicit steps to do by the next observation or the next meeting.” As such, he routinely met with Ms. Smith for post-observation conversations to review her progress and suggest next steps. During these meetings, Ms. Smith brought her data binder and a reteaching form that Mr. Page designed to help teachers reflect on their data in ways that enable them to determine how they will reteach particular skills. One teacher describes Mr. Page's implementation of these forms as a type of teacher support: “He makes us look at the data. He makes us identify the skills that we need to reteach and we have to write it down in the exact week ... and what we're doing with it.”

In addition to discussing data in depth and reviewing explicit steps for Ms. Smith to improve on the TEM rubric, Mr. Page has recommended targeted professional development for her through the online professional development system. He explains:

“ I went into Avatar, which is our version of My Learning Plan, and specifically found courses, professional development. Go on this Saturday. This person needed classroom management so we went to the Memphis Education Association Saturday classroom management thing. It was not just from the [professional development] department and the district, but also watching videos or going to other types of presentations geared specifically for the area [in which she] needed to grow. ”

With all of these supports in place, Ms. Smith seemed to improve. As the school learning coach explained, “The observation second semester was stronger because I think [the support] was so targeted. It wasn’t just, ‘Well, go get some [professional development] hours or just sit in this whole-group thing and you’ll be fine.’ It was very individualized.” At the end of the school year, Mr. Page noted significant improvement in Ms. Smith’s performance in the classroom. “After doing all these things with her, when I did walkthroughs or observations, I did see an improvement, which is the whole idea of professional development,” he says. “It’s not to terminate, it’s to improve practice and to get them where they need to be, and if they don’t, then terminate.” He will continue to monitor Ms. Smith’s progress, reviewing her observation data and TVAAS scores when they are released.

Mr. Page sums up his approach to using data to provide teacher support and professional development as follows:

“ You have to receive meaningful support. ... Meeting weekly or biweekly with that teacher, reviewing lesson plans, reviewing the instructional strategies, asking those questions [about] how you’re differentiating and how you’re meeting student needs. Also providing good-quality professional development where there’s an actual live person that they can see, which is the best of the highest, all the way to low-level [professional development], which is watching a video. ... The big improvements that I’ve seen with staff ... it’s really working intensely with a high-quality teacher providing very detailed explicit feedback, literally, ‘You need to do this at this point in the lesson. These are the types of questions you need to ask. These are the assessments that you need to give.’ I have seen practices improved when it’s that explicit and direct. ”

Strategies for Success

In sum, Mr. Page's exemplary practices of using data for talent management decisionmaking and supporting and developing teachers are based on three main strategies:

1. Create a culture of data use, where teachers and school leaders are expected to use data holistically and longitudinally to make decisions.
2. Establish rigorous norming procedures and ensure that teachers develop a sound understanding of the classroom observation rubric.
3. Develop processes and procedures for systematically using data, including using district data systems and leveraging ILT meetings for data use conversations.

Critical to the success of each of these strategies is Mr. Page's ability to distribute leadership tasks to both internal and external personnel.

STRATEGY #1: Create a Culture of Longitudinal and Holistic Data Use

Mr. Page has successfully developed a culture where teachers and school leaders examine multiple data points on teacher effectiveness over time to inform their decisions. For example, when value-added measures become available in the summer, Mr. Page combines current and previous years of TVAAS data to see which teachers may need extra support throughout the year. This includes teachers with low performance ratings as well as effective teachers whose performance shows a decline over time.

Having examined trends in the data, he then deploys a series of in-school supports for struggling teachers. These supports may include the assignment of a peer mentor, coaching from lead teachers and master teachers, and targeted professional development. Mr. Page then carefully monitors each support through classroom observations, walkthroughs, and biweekly meetings with mentors and coaches. If additional support is needed, he sources external help from district personnel. Throughout the process, he places teachers who continue to struggle on a growth plan.

The goal of this strategy is to gather a body of evidence and a holistic picture of teaching practice. In the cases where the evidence seems to be contradictory—for example, a case where value-added scores are low but classroom observations scores are high—Mr. Page and his team have full confidence that over time all of the evidence will speak to the same underlying measure of effectiveness.

STRATEGY #2: Establish Rigorous Norming Procedures

Mr. Page takes advantage of opportunities at ILT and faculty meetings to ensure that school leaders and teachers understand the TEM classroom observation rubric. He and the school leaders examine past observations by multiple raters to determine the consistency of scores. He also takes time to norm around a particular indicator, with each member providing justification for their scores. When an outside evaluator has observed teachers, Mr. Page and the ILT also verify that their scores align with those given by the external observer.

With teachers, Mr. Page spends part of each faculty meeting reviewing specific examples of practices that distinguish Level 3, 4, and 5 teaching for a particular rubric indicator. He also allows time for dialogue and discussion among teacher teams and between teachers and school leaders. If teachers have a question regarding a specific indicator that he cannot answer, Mr. Page draws upon expertise from the district level.

STRATEGY #3: Develop Processes and Procedures for Systematically Using Data

Finally, Mr. Page has developed a clear set of processes and procedures for systematically using data. Central to this work is his use of district data systems, particularly Rubric Explorer, to monitor the teacher evaluation process and intervene with supports for struggling teachers. He often begins weekly ILT meetings with conversations around the observation process, using Rubric Explorer to talk about specific teachers who have scored in the ineffective range. In faculty meetings, Mr. Page also examines benchmark data and has even developed his own reteaching form to help teachers use data to drive their instruction. As one teacher says:

“*Mr. Page will do a PowerPoint after each [benchmark] test ... at a faculty meeting. He goes through all of it and talks about the strengths and the weaknesses of each grade level, then as a whole, as a school. ... And it drives teaching because they'll look at it and say, 'OK, I need to reteach this.'*”

By creating a culture of holistic and longitudinal data use, establishing rigorous norming procedures, and developing processes and procedures for systematically using data, Mr. Page has developed an exemplary process for evaluating and supporting teachers.

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 Neumerski, C. M., Cannata, M., Goldring, E. B., Drake, T. A., Grissom, J. A., Rubin, M., & Schuermann, P. (2014). *Memphis City Schools/Shelby County Schools: Insights for More Strategic Data Use*. Available at www.principaldatause.org