

Determining Teacher Effectiveness

National Comprehensive Center on Teacher Quality

Teachers are central to any effort to improve instruction. Yet not all teachers are effective. According to a recent survey, nearly 60% of teachers say they work with a few teachers who are simply going through the motions, failing to do a good job. More than 1 in 5 teachers would describe “more than a few” or “quite a large number” of their colleagues in this way (Coggshall, Ott, Behrstock, & Lasagna, 2009). Regular and consistent assessment of teacher skill and knowledge at various points along the educator’s career continuum will result in sound hiring and performance management decisions, needs-based professional development, and data to support opportunities for career growth. But determining teacher effectiveness is no easy task. It first requires a thorough understanding of what an effective teacher does and the competencies needed to carry out these tasks. The process should also take into account the specialized roles and context of teachers. For example, does an effective teacher look different at the elementary and high school level? Do teachers serving in a consultant capacity, such as those who teach special education or English language learners, require a different or additional set of skills to be considered effective?

Defining effectiveness also requires using valid and reliable tools for assessing whether an individual teacher possesses these competencies. Students’ standardized test scores, particularly value-added test scores, represent one approach to measuring teacher effectiveness. Although test scores are currently under-utilized as a measure of teacher effectiveness, the research is clear that test scores should not be the sole means of determining teacher effectiveness. Policies that require and establish multiple, reliable measures (i.e. performance observations, evaluation of classroom artifacts, and/or portfolio and student/parent evaluations) contribute to a solid, comprehensive approach to determining whether a teacher is highly effective.

Finally, determining teacher effectiveness requires deciding what to do with the information gathered in order to improve the quality of instruction for students. Districts should contemplate whether this information can or should be used to make personnel and compensation decisions, to inform professional development, and/or to identify teacher leaders.

Action Principles

For District

1. Determine what skills and knowledge an effective teacher must possess.
2. Determine what outcomes an effective teacher must produce.
3. Determine if the context and role in which teachers work require that additional competencies be identified.
4. Develop a comprehensive system, including multiple valid and reliable tools, and regular assessments for determining whether a teacher possesses the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies.
5. Establish clear outcomes for identified levels of effectiveness, from remediation, to professional development, to positive incentives.
6. Involve teachers in the process of defining teacher effectiveness.

References and Resources

- Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center. (2007). *Tennessee study on teacher effectiveness and teacher equity*. Retrieved from http://www.edvantia.org/publications/arccwebinar/TNStudy_041007.html
- Dwyer, C., (Ed.). (2007). *America’s challenge: Effective teachers for at-risk schools and students*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/NCCTQBiennialReport.php>
- Coggshall, J., Ott, A., Behrstock, E., & Lasagna, M. (2009). *Supporting teacher effectiveness: The view from Generation Y*. Naperville, IL and New York: Learning Point Associates and Public Agenda. Retrieved from <http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/Oct29WhatWorksPresentation.pdf>

- Coggsall, J. G. (2007). *Communication framework for measuring teacher quality and effectiveness: Bringing coherence to the conversation*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from [www.http://www.tqsource.org/communicationFramework.php](http://www.tqsource.org/communicationFramework.php)
- Fenlon, A. (2008). Hiring an effective special education teacher: Know what to look for and ask in the selection process. *Principal*, 88(2), 24-27. Retrieved from <http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2008/N-Dp24.pdf>
- Goe, L., Bell, C., & Little, O. (2008). *Approaches to evaluating teacher effectiveness: A research synthesis*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/teacherEffectiveness.php>
- Goe, L. (2008). *Tips & tools, key issue: Using value-added models to identify and support highly effective teachers*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from <http://www2.tqsource.org/strategies/het/UsingValueAddedModels.pdf>
- Goe, L. & Croft, A. (2009). *Methods of evaluating teacher effectiveness*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from http://www.tqsource.org/publications/RestoPractice_EvaluatingTeacherEffectiveness.pdf
- Little, O., Goe, L., & Bell, C. (2009). *A practical guide to evaluating teacher effectiveness*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from at <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/practicalGuide.php>
- Mathers, C., Oliva, M., & Laine, S. (2008). *Improving instruction through effective teacher evaluation: Options for states and districts*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved from <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/February2008Brief.pdf>