Gloria Waite

LEARNING FROM THE PRINCIPAL OF

West Tampa Elementary 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 multiple interviews and focus groups with teachers in these principals' schools to understand their perceptions of how the principals use 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 teacher effectiveness and other data effectively?

This case study presents the work of Gloria Waite, the principal at West Tampa Elementary School in Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) in Florida, and her approach to using teacher effectiveness data for teacher support and development.

Context and Background

Ms. Waite is in her third year as principal at West Tampa Elementary, having previously served as principal for slightly less than three years at another school. West Tampa Elementary has a population of 500 prekindergarten to fifth grade students and faces a number of challenges. Ninety-six percent of its students are nonwhite, including approximately 70 percent Hispanic students, and 98 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, up from 90 percent five years ago. After receiving a "D" rating on Florida's school accountability scale in 2004, the school worked to improve and achieved a grade of "A" in 2011, but it showed a substantial dip in performance during the 2011–12 school year. That year, only 34 percent of the school's students performed at a satisfactory level in math on standardized achievement tests, and only 36 percent read at a satisfactory level or higher. Its low reading scores placed West Tampa Elementary on a list of schools that new state legislation required to offer an extra hour of reading instruction beyond the normal school day for the 2012–13 school year. Although the school improved enough to avoid this requirement in the 2013–14 school year, the designation—and the increased workload and lower morale that came with it—resulted in unusually high staff turnover in the summer of 2013.

West Tampa Elementary has a regular instructional staff of approximately 30 teachers. As a high-poverty school with a large number of students who need special services, West Tampa Elementary also supplements its regular instructional staff with numerous resource teachers, special education and intervention specialists, and instructional coaches. The school also has a psychologist, a social worker, and a guidance professional on site, all of whom are members of the school's leadership team, as are the school's reading coaches, the math resource specialist, and the assistant principal, Mr. Murphy.

Use of student and teacher data is central to the work of Ms. Waite and the other school leaders. At weekly meetings, Ms. Waite and her leadership team dive into student- and grade-level data, including formative and state assessments, to track school needs and identify where resources should be focused. This emphasis on student and classroom support dovetails with a focus on supporting and developing the school's teachers. Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy draw on a variety of data sources to assist them in investing in this key area of talent management. This case study details examples of the ways in which West Tampa Elementary's school leaders use teacher effectiveness data to provide support to teachers and monitor their growth and development.

Key Practices in Action

In HCPS, the backbone for data-driven talent management decisions is the district's teacher evaluation system, which combines student growth data (as measured by test scores) with numerous in-person observations—using the Danielson framework—by multiple highly trained and consistently calibrated raters. Both central office leaders and principals clearly express that the main goal of the evaluation system is to provide teachers with feedback, targeted professional development, and other types of support.

To make these evaluation data manageable and useful for decisionmaking, Ms. Waite has developed a data sheet tool that summarizes the key data from teacher observations (see Figure 1). The data sheet allows the observer (Ms. Waite or Mr. Murphy) to identify areas from the observation rubric in which the teacher needs to improve or focus on and includes space to note specific strategies, resources, and expectations for growth and development. This data sheet works as a roadmap; Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy use it not only to identify areas of need—which they then can target with resources (such as a coach) or professional development—but also to highlight a teacher's strengths, which then can be drawn upon as a resource for another teacher who may need help in that area. These records of teachers' strengths and needs are coupled with deep analysis of benchmark data to see which teachers are making gains and who is using effective strategies that can be shared in grade-level teams or professional learning communities (PLCs). Ms. Waite describes the tool as follows:

> *This year, I developed a data sheet and basically this particular sheet I just share with my assistant principal because it does have each of my teachers listed. I indicate how many formal and informal [observations] are required, and then we develop a calendar so that we are completing the observation cycles as well as giving the feedback. We're noting what areas are rated as* progressing *or* requires action. *We are able to look at the trends again in grade levels across the school, also indicating the next steps so that either one of us could go into the classrooms and see if those next steps are being implemented or not. This is really a communication tool.*

▶ **Click here to watch a video about using observation data in the teacher evaluation process.**

Figure 1: Observation data sheet tool (example)

	Needed Formals	Formal-Waite	Formal-Murphy	Needed Informals	Informal-Waite	Informal-Murphy	Areas Rated P or RA	Next Steps
Prekindergarten								
	1			1				
	1			2				
	1			2				
	1			1				
Kindergarten								
	1			2				
	1			2				
	1			2				
	1			1				
	1			1				
1st grade								
	1			2				
	1			1				
	1			2				
	1			2				
	1			1				

Importantly, Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy use the data from the spreadsheet to assess teacher strengths and needs at the individual, grade-level team, and school levels, which allows them to deploy professional development resources at the appropriate scale. As Ms. Waite explains:

> This year we've kind of refined our data collection of teacher observation data. We've looked at the trends across the school to develop school-level [professional development] and then we look at grade levels. We look at individual classrooms and provide that support because my ultimate goal is for my teachers to be successful, so my students are successful. Whatever it takes to keep them moving forward is what we want to do. For example, my first year here at West Tampa, walking through the classrooms I noticed that focusing on the objective of the lesson was a huge concern, as well as instructional planning. We did a lot with working with teams, setting up times where they had support with instructional planning, pulling in the resources that they needed in order to plan effectively, as well as watching video tapes on effective lessons where the objective of the lesson was communicated. [I even modeled] for my staff through a training or a meeting what were effective means to present instruction. [We are] looking holistically [at] what are the greatest needs and then filtering down to the individual.

Click here to watch a video about using observation data for teacher professional development.

The data sheet tool also helps Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy monitor individual teachers' engagement with the suggested supports and resources. For example, Ms. Waite can log in to the district data system to see whether a teacher has participated in a suggested professional development session and then follow up with the teacher in the next observation feedback conversation to see which supports have been accessed and how they are helping the teacher.

She also strategically uses school-based resources and time to support teacher development and learning in ways that are closely aligned with the observation rubric. Full faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, and PLC meetings are seen as opportunities for teacher development that supplement district workshops or trainings. Teachers also work with instructional coaches and resource specialists to improve instruction. Importantly, use of school-based resources changes when needs change, as signaled by teacher observations and student assessment data. For example, instructional coaches are deployed to the classrooms where data indicate they can have the greatest impact in working with specific teachers or on specific areas of instruction. This data-driven approach to instructional coaching contrasts with one in which coaches are allocated simply on the basis of particular characteristics, such as to all novice teachers.

Strategies for Success

Ms. Waite implements five overarching strategies in using teacher effectiveness data to support her teaching staff:

1. Develop and sustain a culture of trust around teacher evaluation and data use.

2. Make productive use of time to support teacher growth.

3. Consistently provide constructive feedback.

4. Strategically deploy resources for support.

5. Monitor for continuous improvement.

STRATEGY #1:
Develop and Sustain a Culture of Trust Around Teacher Evaluation and Data Use

Ms. Waite has successfully built a culture of trust surrounding teacher effectiveness data in her school. A key part of building this trust has been the creation of a "firewall" around teachers' observation data. Only the principal and assistant principal have access to the evaluation scores from the observation rubric, and they are careful in how teachers' observation data are discussed with school resource personnel, even as those resource personnel are deployed to work with specific teachers or on specific instructional areas. Mr. Murphy describes how he and Ms. Waite discuss observation data with coaches and resource teachers:

> *We don't share out observation data with them at all. We definitely discuss with them trends, but we're not going to name specific teachers. We might say, 'In this grade level this is what we need to see more of.' We'll go in there and try to highlight it, as will they.*

Teachers know that their evaluation scores are held in confidence, which increases their comfort with the evaluation system and helps them feel open to opportunities for professional learning. Teachers sense that they can ask for support from the instructional coaches; they can try out and practice new approaches in their classrooms with someone who will not be evaluating them. Moreover, the support personnel are very comfortable with not having the evaluation scores; when the principal asks the coaches to work with a teacher or group of teachers, she focuses on areas of need—not the rubric scores or personalities of individual teachers.

Building trust around the use of data is just part of an overall culture of trust and respect between teachers and leaders that Ms. Waite works hard to cultivate. Ms. Waite is clear that she appreciates all the work her teachers do and that she wants to be held to the same standards to which they are held so that they understand that she is working right along with them to improve student learning:

> [It's important] that people understand that you truly are there to help them to be successful because you know it's going to impact student learning. I did a lot of team-building activities since I've been here which helps build that trust. … I attend trainings. When we have site-based training, I'm there, I'm a participant. I've heard comments from teachers: 'Wow, she was just like us sitting in on the training.' Then last year, we did Teach Like a Champion as one of our faculty trainings … and then I took some of those things learned and implemented [them] into my staff meetings for them, really modeling, 'How can we continuously improve?' I also, last year, told my teachers, 'Okay, I'm going to present this training, and I want you to think about the rubric, and I want you to think about how you would rate me. What are my areas of strength, what are my areas where I can improve?' … I think it takes you risking, taking a risk of yourself. It was hard for me. 'All right, you evaluate me,' and I put up my objective just like we've been working on, and I try to really model that, and that's what they did, too. … Just making the connections to what all of us are doing, that we can all continue to grow, that helps to move up eventually.

Click here to watch a video about developing trust.

STRATEGY #2:
Make Productive Use of Time to Support Teacher Growth

At West Tampa Elementary, team meetings, faculty meetings, and PLCs are used to support teacher development. Faculty meetings, which take place every Tuesday afternoon, are used for in-house professional development on topics that emerge from analysis of data. These sessions often are presented by Ms. Waite or teachers whom she has identified as engaging in a particular practice or approach that may be useful to others. One particularly impactful use of faculty meeting time is showing video of certain teachers' instruction so that colleagues can see and discuss what is happening and how it is aligned with the expectations for high-quality instruction outlined in the district's instructional rubric. This kind of professional development allows teachers to celebrate excellence and also address difficulties that other teachers may be experiencing. According to Ms. Waite:

> "Sometimes I will arrange for a teacher to go in and observe another teacher. Of course, I'm going to choose the teacher who is doing something effectively, but I'm trying to expand that. Just last week or the week before, I actually was in the classroom and observed one of my new teachers conducting a data chart. ... It was just so powerful. I grabbed my resource teacher, and I'm like, 'We have to put this into your training on Tuesday. How can we do it?' She went in and videotaped it, and then we showed our staff. ... That's one of the things I want to continue to do is to really try to spotlight different people's strengths—because every single teacher has something that they really shine in—and try to build on that strength to make them that total accomplished teacher."

Trainings in faculty meetings get everyone on the same page about approaches to school instructional goals. In their observations during the previous school year, Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy noticed that many teachers were not putting their lesson objectives on the board, which they saw as a "red flag." To respond to this issue, they took a creative approach, as Ms. Waite recounts:

> "We actually went in and took pictures of some examples of how the teachers have [objectives written]. We did a couple of small groups that went in to visit other classrooms to see it [and that] really highlighted what we saw. We actually started this year with those photos to get everyone back in the mindset of, 'This is what we're doing,' and we took the objective a step further this year and added [training on] the Essential Question. ... Then we actually took Essential Questions from the classrooms, and we didn't say who contributed, just that they were [from our school], and [we asked teachers], 'Which ones are well written, and how can we improve those that are not?' They had to evaluate Essential Questions that were written by staff."

Teachers also work together and plan in grade-level teams and PLCs. Ms. Waite and her teachers have clear expectations for how this time is used. Ms. Waite developed a PLC process where each PLC team leader writes a summary of the meeting's focus, discussion, next steps, and supports and resources needed. This summary is emailed to Ms. Waite, who uses it to understand what is happening in the PLCs, to ascertain whether there are common themes across the teams, and to receive requests for resources or supports from each PLC.

STRATEGY #3:
Consistently Provide Constructive Feedback

Ms. Waite strives to provide feedback that everyone in the building can understand and considers helpful and appropriate. Teachers noted that Ms. Waite focused on positive feedback and emphasized appreciation for performance that was high quality or showing improvement. This feedback is grounded in data, says Ms. Waite:

> *Basically, we go in and observe all of our new teachers … and they get feedback now, before we go on break, of how they are doing, if there is a concern, if they haven't been informed before, because some may start out great, and then you keep looking at their data, and it's declining, so you've got to give that feedback. 'This is what I'm noticing. These are the concerns that I have.'*

▶ **Click here to watch a video about teacher feedback for ongoing development.**

Although the evaluation system used in HCPS gives principals a high degree of autonomy in teacher contract renewal and dismissal, Ms. Waite makes clear that the focus of observations and evaluations is support, feedback, and teacher improvement:

> *There shouldn't be surprise at the end. It is a continuous observation feedback, meaning, I would say monthly, just to keep you informed of what I'm seeing or not seeing. Again, providing as much support in order to make you successful as I can, but also ensuring that you are taking ownership of that as well, but definitely more visible in the classroom, more visits, more time spent, because that's a big decision too. … I want to make sure that I have provided as much as I can to support the teacher.*

Both Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy describe an approach to teacher feedback that emphasizes teacher reflection. In feedback conversations following observations, Ms. Waite first asks teachers about their own impressions of their performance—the strengths and areas of need they demonstrated. She then talks with them about the strengths she saw and moves toward areas of focus. Rather than presenting a laundry list of areas for improvement, she works with teachers to prioritize areas for growth and development and then clearly articulates sources of support and resources, both inside and outside the school. As she describes the process:

> *I try to give the feedback, for the most part, in a nondirective form. … I think my feedback approach has evolved over time to be a little bit more collaborative. I think that's a big piece of it, making the feedback more collaborative and putting in that reflective piece: 'What did you think about this? What happened when you did this?' I think [it's] designing the questions to really get to the heart of what was really happening, … providing the questioning, the scaffold of support. Just like we do with our students. … 'Well, what did you see ... because this is what I saw the students doing. Did you see the same thing?*

Tell me about that.' Really getting them to share more and have that opportunity to reflect more, instead of me just saying, 'This didn't happen, or that didn't happen.' Working with them to provide the support where I might say, 'Let me come in and see the difference, or invite me in when you're ready to do this.' Really pushing that idea of, 'I want us all to continue to grow, and my job is to support you in that growth, because it's going to help our kids.'

STRATEGY #4:
Strategically Deploy Resources for Support

Leaders at West Tampa Elementary have a clear focus on deploying resources where they are needed, based on data rather than on a formula or the idea that all teachers get equal resources (such as an aide for a set amount of time). Ms. Waite is strategic about suggesting specific supports and in-school opportunities for teachers to grow and develop. Using her benchmark data and observation data, she can align the expertise of teachers with the needs of students and the appropriate resources. As Mr. Murphy describes the targeting of resource teachers and other supports:

> *We maximize those resources throughout the day looking at the data where they're needed—not being equitable amongst the teachers but being equitable amongst the students—and looking at and just taking a holistic approach. … We basically break down the data, but we do incorporate the strength of the teacher. If the teacher is really, really strong in math, we might not incorporate a math resource even though the students in that classroom might need more math assistance, because we do feel that that teacher's strengths are going to carry the weight and do the job.*

Coaches and resource teachers are an important part of classroom teacher support. Ms. Waite describes how resources are deployed to support a particular teacher:

> *[One] step could be attending a particular training and then implementing the strategies learned in the classroom within a month or so, depending on when the training is offered. They could be completing a cycle for the reading coach, focused on maybe question and discussion or focused on communicating the objective. It could be planning with one of the reading coaches or the math resource or district resource teacher for planning a lesson focused on a particular strand based on student data. It's all going to be determined based upon the observation and what is noted there.*

STRATEGY #5:
Monitor for Continuous Improvement

Ms. Waite and her leadership team aim to provide each teacher with the supports he or she needs for instructional improvement, but they also collaborate with teachers to ensure that teachers have ownership over their own professional growth. Each teacher has an individual professional development plan to guide their professional development choices. Ms. Waite monitors teachers' professional development investments throughout the year and sets expectations that teachers choose professional development that will help them meet their goals:

> *You definitely look at patterns of growth. When I pull a teacher's data—our district does take our observation data, and put it out on a chart, so you can see each formal and informal [observation] side by side—that gives a good timeline for progression. If you look across someone's observation data and you see progressing, accomplished, progressing, accomplished, progressing, you know that they haven't necessarily got a solid foundation, but if you see maybe progressing, progressing, accomplished, accomplished, accomplished, there's the trends up or it could be the other way. Definitely looking at trends over time as well as what you have done as a teacher to improve your practice. That in-service record is huge. I pull that up online for teachers. … 'Here, these are all the things that I'm providing to you, or my reading coach, or my math resource. What are you doing in addition?'*

For low-performing teachers on formal action plans, which detail expectations for teacher improvement, this monitoring is even more focused because the expectations for teacher investment are higher. Ms. Waite explains:

> *"I look to see, what are they doing about it? If you look at an in-service record and you see no trainings have been attended … well, what can we do? What can we provide support for? Then, of course, you're going to do a lot of observations and meetings. We also have support for our tenured teachers that are not performing as well, and that processes by developing an action plan, which involves a lot of support as well: meeting with them four times a year to talk about the specific areas to really focus on, [saying,] 'Here are some strategies.' The teachers involved in that process, they are giving input and making it their plan because they need to own it in order to move, to become more effective or not.*

Beyond simply monitoring professional development choices, Ms. Waite also pays attention to implementation of what is learned through training or support as she observes instruction in classrooms. When asked how she would monitor whether a teacher who is working with a reading coach is implementing recommended strategies, Ms. Waite responds:

> *That is done through follow-up, walkthroughs, and it could be an informal, it could just be a pop-in. It's also done though talking with, for example, in this case, a reading coach. 'What have you focused on this week? What support? What are you seeing?' We have a lot of discussions. I spend a lot of time with my resource personnel because I know they're putting into action a lot of what we need to happen at our school. ... Again, having this [data] tool between me and the assistant principal, it allows him to be able to see too what the next steps are. I also look at ... what the next steps are from the peers. Like maybe after they had a peer observation, then I complete an observation. If I see that they've implemented the next steps, I'll let them know. 'Wow, they really saw growth. Because your peer gave you the suggestion and this is what you did and this is the result of it.' Or vice versa: 'I see that this was the next step and we still need to work on that next step.' I think also bringing attention to those areas helps the teachers to be more accountable and wanting to follow through with those actions.*

This last point, about helping teachers take ownership of their own support, was a consistent theme throughout our time at West Tampa Elementary. Assistant principal Mr. Murphy explains how the focus on observation and support has developed so that teachers are able to be proactive in soliciting support for themselves:

> *I will say I think it's helped the teachers say, 'You know, I think I need more help in this.' ... When they are doing more reflecting with that rubric and saying, 'You know, I'm really kind of struggling in this.' There are some teachers that ... are like, 'I'm developing in this or progressing in this, and I want to get to this level. How do I do that?' They'll just specifically ask you, directly ask you. Depending on what it is and what the content area is, you know, you partner them up with a reading coach or some sort of training—those next steps. They're starting to drill down to specific teaching characteristics and traits more so than in the past.*

Leaders at West Tampa Elementary have become effective users of data to support both students and teachers and have excelled particularly in the use of teacher effectiveness data to provide teachers with useful feedback and support for their own improvement. Ms. Waite and her leadership team make use of tracking sheets to monitor teachers' strengths and weaknesses in classroom observations, which they then use to identify schoolwide professional development needs and to strategically target professional development, coaching, and other resources to specific teachers and in areas where those resources can be most effective. Ms. Waite has worked hard with her leadership team to build a culture of data use that guides professional learning at faculty meetings, in PLCs, and in individualized professional development opportunities. Ms. Waite and Mr. Murphy promote this culture with their approach to teacher feedback, which emphasizes teacher reflection and ownership of both their successes and areas of need. The school's effective support system is further enhanced by the leaders' practice of monitoring how teachers act on their professional development investments and implement what they learn in the classroom as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

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

Endnotes

1 See Florida Department of Education School Accountability Reports. Available at http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/reports/index.asp