



Principals' Use of Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions

August 2014

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“Not Just a Gotcha” Professional Development and Teacher Effectiveness Data

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} In addition to teacher evaluation, the data provide rich information that school leaders can leverage to target professional development and potentially improve overall teacher quality. However, systems need to ensure that adequate supports are available and that principals know how to direct their teachers to these resources. School systems can use data to track teacher growth and evaluate the efficacy of the professional development they offer, too.

Findings in this brief emerged from a larger study, *Supporting Principals to Use Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions*.⁴ Here, we share insights on how the increased presence of comprehensive evaluation systems and teacher effectiveness data influenced school leaders' ability to provide feedback and support to teachers. Our research in eight urban school systems found the following:

- Principals use teacher effectiveness data to *identify strengths and weaknesses* among teachers.
- Principals use teacher effectiveness data to *provide feedback, individualized supports, and group-level professional development* to teachers.
- Principals *regularly encounter barriers* when they try to make use of teacher effectiveness data to shape teachers' professional development opportunities.

What We Learned

Principals rely almost entirely on observation data for professional development decisions.

Principals primarily use rubric-driven observation data, as opposed to other teacher effectiveness measures such as value-added scores, to identify teacher strengths and weaknesses. Some school systems facilitate this process by aligning teacher professional development opportunities with their instructional frameworks and observation rubrics. Others design bundles of support opportunities, all of which are directly aligned with specific indicators on the observation rubrics. For example, principals have a resource list they can consult when they identify patterns of weakness on a skill such as checking for understanding. They can consult this list to direct teachers to specific resources that are available. The most robust of these systems ensures that each skillset is supported by multiple learning opportunities, such as suggested readings, online videos, and workshops offered by the district.

Observation data help principals have constructive teacher feedback conversations.

Well-defined instructional frameworks and observation rubrics enable principals to engage teachers in targeted conversations that are based on objective evidence gathered during observations. The rubrics provide a common language around clear expectations of good instruction. Principals are able to document teacher practice and identify clear, actionable feedback to offer to their teachers. Principals desire training in effective ways to provide feedback to teachers, and when they receive this type of training, they report that it is helpful.

Principals offer teacher support at the school, district, and system levels.

When principals use data to recommend teacher support, many deploy resources within the school—such as master teachers, department heads, and instructional leadership team members—to coach, mentor, and model best practices. Others bring in district-level support personnel to serve as coaches, instructional leaders, and development specialists. Some recommend system-level supports that teachers can pursue outside of school, such as classes and workshops.

“In terms of supporting our teachers, we have the [instructional framework], which is a pretty robust evaluation system for teachers. So what we do as administrators is look at that data to see where is it that our school is lacking. Which indicators in the [instructional framework] do we need to focus on as a school? So if it’s a whole group, you know, if like 80 percent of our teachers are not understanding how to be successful in X, then it’s a whole-school approach.”

— 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 charter management organizations (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 use data to provide both individual and school-level professional development. While teacher effectiveness data is most often used to provide individualized supports, some principals use teacher observation data to identify areas where supports are needed at the department and whole-school levels. This occurs most frequently in school systems that have technological infrastructures that allow principals to query observation results by indicator. By doing so, principals identify areas of the teaching framework in which large numbers of their staff demonstrate a need for help.

BARRIERS TO PRINCIPALS' USE OF DATA FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many principals struggle to offer high-quality teacher professional development. Many principals struggled to identify avenues of support for teachers despite their ability to identify shortcomings in practice. Some systems are working to align the supports they offer with their instructional frameworks, but even in these systems, the quality and efficacy of the supports offered are not known. Additionally, principals were challenged not only to identify resources, but also to monitor teachers' use of the resources and measure whether those resources led to improvement in practice.

Data systems often lack functionality to assist principals' efforts to provide support. Few data systems allow principals to track individual teachers or their entire staff based on scores on specific indicators on the instructional framework. Without such data systems, principals are limited in their abilities to systematically monitor teacher performance, analyze observations across teachers and across time, and identify areas of greatest need. Rarely do data systems allow principals to store observation results, record recommended professional development, track teachers' use of resources, and analyze changes in performance over time.

“After each observation the teachers come in for a post-conference in which we review what we observed ... , what the strengths were, and also what the scores were in each category according to the [system] rubric. And so we identify the areas where he or she was weak according to the rubric. ... We identify what his or her strengths were according to evidence which were aligned with the rubric. ... We use individual observation results and scores to guide teachers to improve in each indicator.”

— Principal

“So in theory, if [the data system] worked well, I should be able to use that information that's there electronically, quickly pick out deficits or needs of areas, and link that to some support, right? School support, department head support, leadership support, or the professional development resources and follow-ups that we do. ... But it's very disjointed.”

— Principal

“A major growth area for us [is] to really be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development that's being delivered.”

— Central office staff member

Other barriers also are common. Principals often lack time, skills, and financial resources to design support, incentivize staff to attend professional development that is not required by their contract, or bring in outside experts. In some systems, a lack of principal autonomy was an issue; centralized professional development programs hinder the ability of school leaders to develop customized professional development opportunities for their staff based on needs identified through teacher effectiveness data.

Principals want continued support to improve their ability to provide feedback and professional development to teachers.⁶

We asked principals to identify areas related to professional development in which they desired more support. Their responses mirror the findings we have outlined in this brief (see Figure 1). Approximately two-thirds of all respondents indicated a moderate to strong desire for more support in each of the following areas:

- Identifying teacher-specific professional development from teacher effectiveness data
- Identifying schoolwide professional development from teacher effectiveness data
- Using teacher effectiveness data to identify teachers' strengths and needs
- Discussing teacher effectiveness data with teachers

“ Training was very helpful because now with the new observation tool you’re going to have to have fierce conversations. It could be an excellent teacher that you’ve worked with for years, but maybe the lesson was not so great. So you’re going to have to be able to tell that teacher, ‘Listen, this was not a great lesson,’ and explain why, and of course they might be that person with a strong personality. So definitely having that [training] gave me the techniques to really kind of handle that. ”

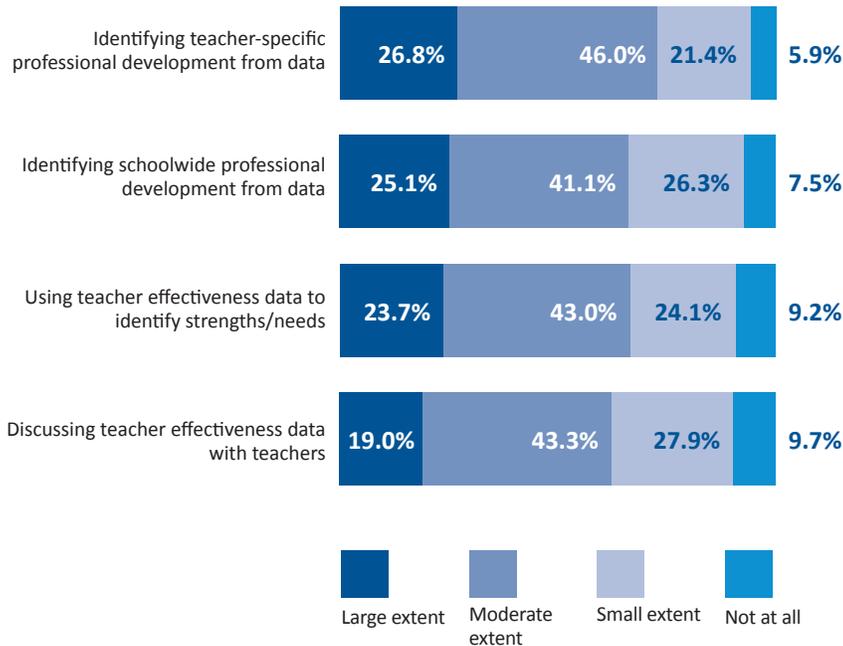
— Principal

“ I just think being able to know what kind of professional development to offer my staff when they are having trouble ... is the biggest thing for me—what to tell them specifically. ”

— Principal



Figure 1: Extent to which principals would like more support or training on teacher effectiveness data use for providing professional development



[What] we did with principals this summer was we had a session on creating your professional development plan for your school. ... [Principals] brought in their teacher summary reports, their student achievement data, and we did an actual hands-on workshop where they mapped out what would [professional development] look like for a year in a school, having all these observation summaries at our fingertips.

— Central office staff member



We looked at the data last year ... the designing assessments and what you're going to do with the assessments afterwards. Our teachers scored low in that. The year before, the teachers had scored low [on] question and discussion. So we did a lot of that stuff last year. This year we're talking more about assessments, and what do they look like, and what are you going to do with them. You can't just teach something and keep going; you've got to assess and then look at, 'This group of kids got it, this group of kids didn't.' So we're focusing on that. So we do look at that data piece for teachers.

— Principal

Recommendations

- **Train and support principals to have honest, clear, and sometimes difficult conversations about teacher performance.** Provide ongoing training on how to provide teacher feedback that can be seen as an opportunity for growth, not a “gotcha.”
- **Develop data systems that enable principals to store, access, and analyze teacher observations scores over time.**
- **Develop teacher professional development resources that align with specific indicators on the instructional framework or rubric.** Ensure that principals are aware of the full range of district-provided supports. Ensure that the focus is on high-quality professional development approaches and opportunities for teachers.
- **Ensure that principals can track teachers’ participation in professional development opportunities.**
- **Monitor teachers’ use of professional development resources, ask participants for feedback, and track professional growth over time.**
- **Ensure that principals have the autonomy to use data from their own school to design schoolwide professional development plans.**

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

Funding for this project was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the sponsor.

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
- 6 These findings draw directly upon findings completed by principals in six of the eight school systems in our study.