



Principals' Use of Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions

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Using Teacher Effectiveness Data for Information-Rich Hiring

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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} The availability of these data could be particularly important in establishing effective hiring practices that create an information-rich hiring process aligned with a comprehensive talent management system.⁴

Findings in this brief emerged from a larger study, *Supporting Principals to Use Teacher Effectiveness Data for Talent Management Decisions*.⁵ Here, we share insights on how the increased presence of comprehensive evaluation and support systems and teacher effectiveness data have influenced how schools and districts hire teachers. Our research in eight school systems sheds light upon:

- How principals are using new teacher effectiveness data in hiring teachers for their schools; and
- Some of the individual and system-level characteristics related to principal use of teacher effectiveness data for hiring.

What We Learned

Few principals use multiple teacher effectiveness measures for hiring. Most principals use common hiring practices: reference checks, demonstration lessons, interviews with the principal or a hiring committee, and reliance on the professional judgment of the principal. However, most principals struggle to incorporate teacher effectiveness data into the hiring process, despite the proliferation and availability of these measures.

Principals vary in how they incorporate new teacher effectiveness measures into hiring practices that are often considered to be information-poor. We categorized principals into three groups—high, moderate, and low users—based on the extent to which they use teacher effectiveness data in hiring (see Figure 1). While all three groups use certain traditional hiring practices, the groups differ in the degree to which they use other forms of data when making hiring decisions.

Figure 1: Categories of principals, based on level of data use in hiring practices

HIGH USERS	MODERATE USERS	LOW USERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Consistently incorporate teacher effectiveness data into hiring decisionsActively seek out or require candidates to provide effectiveness dataEvaluate demonstration lessons using observation rubric tied to the system's teacher evaluation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use effectiveness data inconsistently and only when readily available, rather than actively seeking it or requiring it of candidatesDo not have clear standards to evaluate demonstration lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Predominantly use unstructured interview and reference checks to make hiring decisionsUse demonstration lessons sporadically

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.^{6,7}

High-use principals consistently incorporate teacher effectiveness data into their hiring processes. When they are able to access data such as student-growth indicators or composite teacher evaluation scores, they do so. When these data are not readily available, they ask applicants to bring prior observation data and/or evidence of student achievement with them to interviews. For high users, the demonstration lesson—evaluated using criteria aligned with the system’s observation rubric—is more than a performance of teaching; it also offers important information about the applicant’s planning abilities, pedagogical approaches, interpersonal skills, and ability to be coached and grow within the structure and culture of the school. Rather than relying on their own professional judgment to determine whether a candidate was successful in a demonstration lesson, high-use principals systematically evaluate the candidate’s demonstration performance in a more transparent and open manner.

Moderate-use principals rely on many of the same general practices as high users (e.g., interviewing and demonstration lessons), but teacher effectiveness data play an inconsistent role in the process. These principals do not discount effectiveness data, but they do not seek it out on their own, nor do they require applicants to provide this information.

Low-use principals have not incorporated teacher effectiveness data into their hiring practices, despite working in districts that have adopted multi-measure evaluation systems. For low users, the hiring process is dominated by reference checks, interviews, and occasionally, demonstration lessons. When low users require demonstration lessons, it is because they are most interested in observing how applicants respond to the school’s students and environment. They are interested in whether the prospective hire will be able to communicate with, relate to, and/or manage the student population they will be assigned to teach. According to low-use principals, one never really knows whether a teacher will be a good hire until they are hired and “in the building.” This view contrasts with that of high-use principals, who systematically evaluate demonstration lessons to gauge the candidate’s abilities before making an offer.

While we identified numerous data practices that high-use principals incorporate into their hiring processes, it should be noted that high users were in the minority in our study. The majority of principals with whom we spoke fell into the moderate- and low-use categories. Despite the proliferation of teacher effectiveness measures in our study sites, many principals were struggling to incorporate these data into the hiring process or not doing so at all.

“ *Ideally, I think it would be great if you had a teacher come in and interview in May, and they could go in and teach a class for you. That would be wonderful. But we don’t do that.* **”**

— Low-use principal

“ *[The demo lesson] goes on for about an hour. Then we debrief about that and even if the demo lesson goes well, it could still lead to non-hire depending on how the debrief goes. We like to test that, too, to say, ‘Okay, I’ve got to give them some feedback that’s not all positive and see how they can handle it.’ ... I’m not trying to be too critical, but if they’re combative right then and there, I go, ‘Okay, maybe this isn’t a good fit because we’re going to be doing a lot of this throughout the course of the school year.’* **”**

— High-use principal

Individual and system-level factors lead to a variation in principal use of data. Individual principals—even within a single school system—vary in their awareness of the data available, their perceptions of the validity of the data, and the social networks they are part of that could point them to quality teacher candidates or data sources. For example, some principals report that they know whom to call when they need information or support in cases of within-district transfers. These connections provide sources of information about how to access data that are not easily available or how to interpret and use various data.

Central/home office involvement in recruiting and screening candidates, setting expectations for how principals should make hiring decisions, and establishing processes for holding principals accountable for hiring or analyzing hiring decisions led to greater use of data during the hiring process.

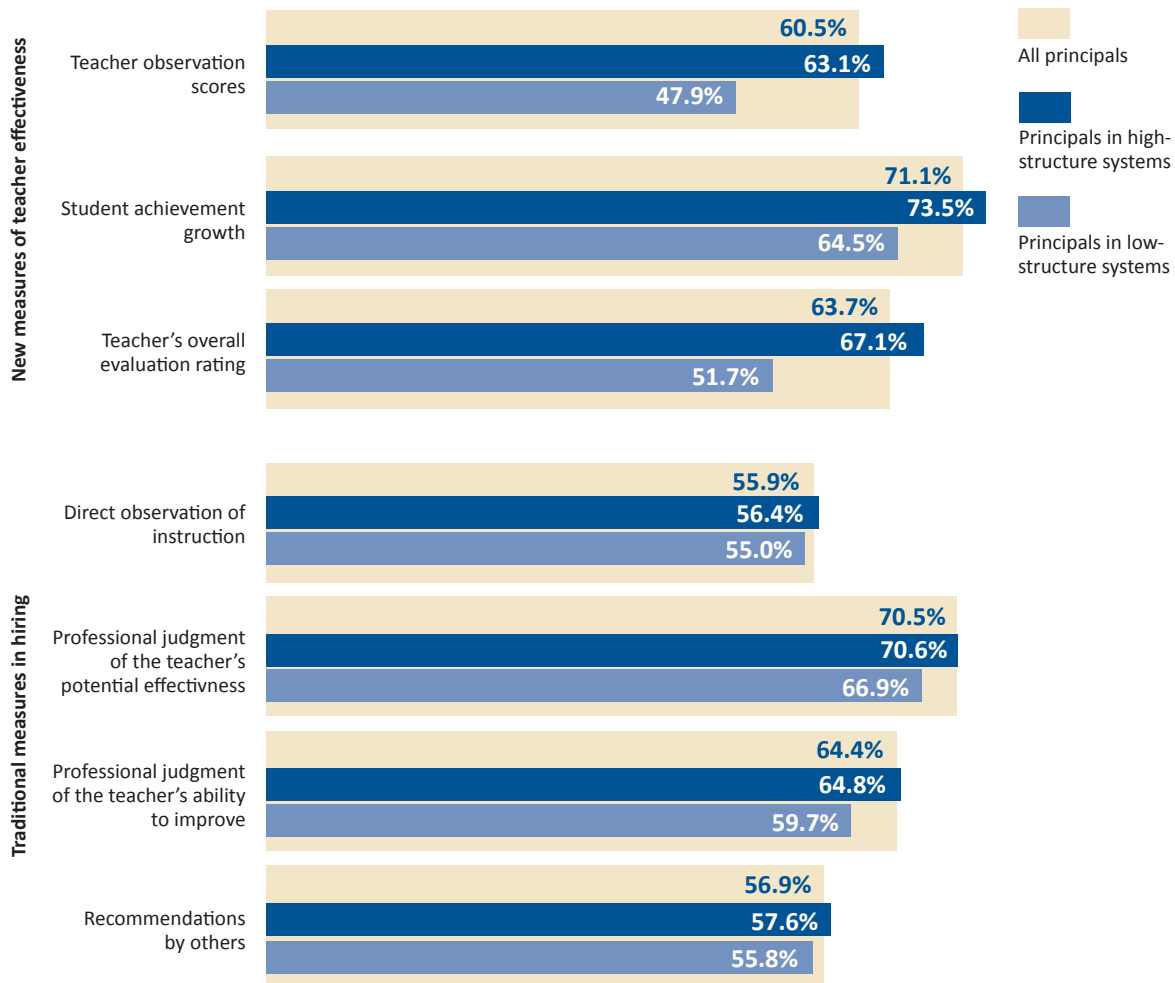
Figure 2: Levels of central/home office involvement in principals’ use of data in hiring processes

	CANDIDATE SCREENING	EXPECTATIONS FOR HOW PRINCIPALS SHOULD MAKE HIRING DECISIONS	PROCESSES FOR HOLDING PRINCIPALS ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIRING DECISIONS
HIGH-STRUCTURE SYSTEMS	Use centralized screening procedures aligned to their teacher evaluation system	Have systemwide expectations for hiring or a culture of data use	Monitor hiring decisions and take action if central/home office staff become concerned that a principal is not making quality hiring decisions
LOW-STRUCTURE SYSTEMS	Limit centralized screening to a credential and background check	Give principals little guidance on how to make hiring decisions	Do not hold principals accountable for hiring decisions

We used the survey data to investigate the relationship between central/home office involvement in these three areas and principal reliance on teacher effectiveness data in hiring (see Figure 2). Using the qualitative data, we categorized the six school systems as high- or low-structure systems based on their centralized practices in these three areas. We then compared principals from high- and low-structure systems, looking at their survey responses about the importance of various types of information in their hiring decisions. Figure 3 reports the percentage of principals who rated various measures as very important in their hiring, assuming they had access to data on these measures. Overall, principals across all of the systems rate both new measures of teacher effectiveness and traditional hiring measures as very important, with achievement growth measures and the principal’s professional judgment of the teacher’s effectiveness as the most important and direct observation of instruction and recommendation by others as less important. While principals rated all information as very important in their hiring, principals in high-structure systems tended to rate the new teacher effectiveness measures as more important than did principals in low-structure systems.

“ Now that we have the whole [evaluation] rubric and data report, I require teachers to bring their [evaluation] data reports to the interview. And I also ask them to bring [value-added] data ... [and] their writing scores. And I ask the teachers to bring me a copy of their [students’ state test] scores from the previous year so I can see what their track records are. ”
 — High-use principal

Figure 3: Percentage of principals who rated various measures as very important in teacher hiring decisions



“ I have not asked for that [data on previous performance]. That would be one that we could possibly use, because that would tell how well they’ve done with the group of students that they had previously. We haven’t used that, but that’s a good one. ”

— Low-use principal

Recommendations

- **Ensure that effectiveness data of internal transfer applicants, including the overall composite and individual components, are readily available to principals.** Require external applicants to provide some evidence of effectiveness in their application. Alleviate the need for principals to wait until after hiring to know a teacher’s evaluation ratings.
- **Screen all applicants through the central/home office using a rubric aligned with the evaluation framework to ensure competency and fit with the mission of the district/CMO.** Enable principals to focus their energy on applicants who meet a basic competency threshold to determine the best match for their particular school. Focus attention of the human resources personnel and principals on aspects of teaching that are valued, supported, and rewarded by the school system.
- **Ensure that all teaching candidates who have been identified from the screened pool perform a demonstration lesson and are observed and given feedback.** Ensure that observation and feedback are evidence-based and aligned with the teacher evaluation system. This process should mirror formal observations performed in the system. This gives the principal vital data on how candidates stack up against the evaluation framework and how they respond to feedback around that evaluation. From the candidate’s point of view, this process provides insight into the professional culture and expectations at the school.
- **Train principals to identify indicators of potential effectiveness in teacher candidates.** Align hiring protocols with the teacher evaluation framework. Provide training materials and ongoing supports for principals.
- **Compare data obtained from the hiring process—including initial screening ratings, applicant preparation, demographics, and demonstration lesson ratings—to outcomes (e.g., teacher effectiveness ratings over the first three years and retention) to ensure high-quality hiring processes.** Offer support to principals who hire greater numbers of teachers with low effectiveness.

For more information and additional reports from this study, please see www.principaldatause.org or contact marisa.cannata@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 For a description of how the traditional hiring process is an information-poor process, see Liu, E., & Johnson, S. M. (2006). New teachers’ experiences of hiring: Late, rushed, and information-poor. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42, 324–360.
- 5 See www.principaldatause.org for a full description of this study.
- 6 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
- 7 Due to variation in item-level response rates, between 698 and 703 principals responded to the survey questions about data use in hiring.