



Do Teacher Effect Estimates Persist When Teachers Move to Schools with Different Socioeconomic Environments?

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In “Do Teacher Effect Estimates Persist When Teachers Move to Schools with Different Socioeconomic Environments?”—a paper presented at the February 2008 National Center on Performance Incentives research to policy conference—Sanders, Wright, and Langevin describe how teacher effectiveness outcomes are consistent when teachers switch between schools serving different student populations. They recommend that policy makers use high-quality teacher effectiveness measures to determine which teachers should be incentivized to either move to, or remain in, schools serving high-needs student populations.

Challenge of Recruiting and Retaining Highly Effective Teachers

Recent research confirms that teachers are the single most important determinant of a student’s schooling experience and academic outcomes. Inequitable distribution of quality teachers is a prominent finding in many academic journals and policy reports. Students in schools with large concentrations of economically disadvantaged and minority students are less likely to receive the same level of classroom instructional quality as students in other schools. The passage of No Child Left Behind legislation has increased the emphasis on teacher quality by requiring states to report on the number of teachers not

meeting highly qualified status and to develop policies ensuring that highly qualified teachers are not disproportionately allocated among public schools.

The teacher labor market presents several challenges to those trying to increase the supply of highly effective teachers and weaken the association between teacher quality and the socioeconomic status of students at a school. Recent evidence indicates that prospective teachers most likely to raise student achievement are highly diverse on observable characteristics such as years of experience, type of teaching certificate held, highest degree earned, and licensing exam performance. Second, there is a relatively low concentration of highly effective teachers in subject areas such as mathematics, science, and special education, across all schools and districts, regardless of students’ socioeconomic status. Additionally, while high-needs districts might have highly effective teacher applicants, the time-consuming and bureaucratic nature of human resource practices impairs those districts’ ability to hire applicants in a timely manner. Finally, the conventional single salary schedule pays all classroom teachers on the basis of educational background and years of experience, which limits districts’ ability to attract and retain effective teachers.

Policy Responses to Recruit and Retain Highly Effective Teachers

The current context has prompted policy makers to develop strategies for incentivizing highly effective teachers to either move to, or remain in, high-needs schools. Such efforts have included performance-based, recruitment, and retention incentives. Policy makers hope these efforts will encourage highly effective teachers to accept and/or keep jobs in high-needs schools while simultaneously encouraging less-effective teachers to either improve or exit the system.

A key challenge to these policy efforts has been the lack of quantitative research on whether teachers produce comparable student outcomes when they move to a school with students of a different socioeconomic status than in their previous school. Sanders and his coauthors' report starts to fill that gap. Using the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) as the measure of teacher effectiveness, they estimate the impact an individual teacher has on the academic progress of his/her students in various school environments.

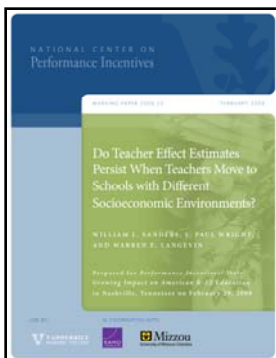
Research Findings

A positive, statistically significant estimate on teacher effectiveness was found when teachers moved from high-poverty to lower-poverty schools.

An even more striking finding is that a teacher's measure of effectiveness is highly related before and after a transition between schools with students of different socioeconomic status, whether the move is from a low- to high-poverty school or from a high- to low-poverty school. This positive relationship is even stronger in the second year following a teacher's transition, most likely as the result of teachers' adjustment to new surroundings and new students. The authors conclude that teacher effectiveness is, to a large extent, a characteristic that remains with the teacher rather than being attributable to the school environment in which the teacher is employed.

Conclusion

These findings can inform policy makers as they develop strategies to incentivize highly effective teachers to either move to, or remain in, schools with the greatest student academic needs. The authors recommend that policy makers use value-added measures of teacher effectiveness to determine whether teachers should be offered an incentive to move to high-needs schools. Teachers selected based on value-added results are more likely to be effective in facilitating academic growth for students after moving to a new school than teachers selected by traditional credentials (i.e., years of experience, level of education).



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