



Summary of “The Effect of Evaluation on Performance: Evidence from Longitudinal Student Achievement Data of Mid-career Teachers,” by Eric S. Taylor and John H. Tyler. March 2011.

Introduction

The focus of the study by Eric S. Taylor of Stanford University and John H. Tyler of Brown University was to determine whether evaluations of mid-career teachers can improve teacher performance during the evaluation period and in the years following. The authors found that quality classroom-based evaluations and measures of performance did lead to statistically significant improvements in performance among mid-career teachers during the year they were being evaluated as well as the following year.

The measures of performance used in the evaluations did not include student achievement data from standardized tests, though the results of a teacher’s evaluation were matched with the prior year’s test scores to gauge improvements in effectiveness. Taylor and Tyler conclude that a well-structured teacher evaluation program, such as Cincinnati’s Teacher Evaluation System (TES) can, on average, improve mid-career teachers’ effectiveness in raising math scores. Students assigned to a teacher during the teachers’ evaluation year scored, on average, 0.062 standard deviations higher in math achievement than students taught by the same teacher before their TES evaluation. Students assigned to a teacher in years following their TES evaluation scored, on average, about 0.11 standard deviations in math achievement above than students taught by the same teacher before the TES process. The authors also found that the teachers who were least skilled benefitted the most from the evaluation process.

Background on TES and Study Methodology

The authors studied mid-career teachers in Cincinnati Public Schools evaluated under CPS’ Teacher Evaluation System (TES), which is based on multiple classroom observations and examples of work products such as lesson plans and family contact logs. Notably, TES does not base evaluations on student test scores because there is no way to identify from this type of data what effective classroom practices are or are not being used. Teachers in TES are observed and evaluated four times a year, three times by a peer evaluator and once by a school administrator. The rubric for classroom observations is modeled off of Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, and teachers are rated on a four point scale: Distinguished, Proficient, Basic and Unsatisfactory. Tenured teachers who receive poor evaluations are placed in a peer assistance program, while teachers with good evaluations are eligible for promotions or additional tenure protection.

TES was implemented in Cincinnati at the start of the 2000–01 school year, so teachers hired before that year were “phased-in” and received their first evaluation under the system in the middle of their career. The authors matched mid-career teachers’ TES scores with their students’ test scores from the prior year in order to evaluate improvements in teacher effectiveness. The study sample included teachers hired between 1993–94 and 1999–2000.

Implications and Policy Considerations



In this study, the authors present evidence that a high-quality evaluation system that incorporates classroom-based observations and measures of student performance other than test scores can improve mid-career teacher performance. These findings suggest that improvement is possible for teachers who have significant experience in the classroom when they are given quality, prescriptive feedback about how to improve their practice. It is important to note that while evaluation scores were matched with student test scores from prior years to gauge baseline effectiveness and improvement over time, the evaluations themselves did not incorporate achievement data (i.e. value-added measures, or VAM). A downside to relying on test scores is that they do not tell us what the teacher is doing, or not doing, right; only that the teacher is effective or ineffective. These findings also suggest that it is not sufficient to simply conduct an evaluation and expect improvements in the teaching force. The components of the evaluation, especially the mechanisms for feedback for the teacher being evaluated, as well as what supports for improvement are provided to the teacher post-evaluation, are crucial. Good evaluations should identify areas for improvement and provide guidance on how to improve; have clearly defined criteria and levels of effectiveness; and incorporate feedback from multiple sources (also known as a 360 degree evaluation).

The findings that mid-career teachers can in fact improve when they are given meaningful feedback raises questions about the widely-held notion that teachers reach a “plateau” in terms of growth in effectiveness after about five years in the classroom. The authors acknowledge that there are significant costs associated with the program, but argue that the benefits of strengthening human capital outweigh the costs. Investing in evaluation systems that provide feedback and mechanisms to support improvement, though costly up front, can improve student achievement, and state and district-level decision-makers should take this into account when making determinations about how to evaluate and support teachers for growth.

That said, the authors do urge caution for districts considering implementing a program of this type. As previously discussed, the costs in terms of dollars and time are significant. TES also did not improve teacher effectiveness in reading. Finally, not all teachers participating in TES will benefit in the same way or to the same degree. The authors only looked at teachers who had been in CPS for five years or more, and so it is difficult to speculate about what the impact of TES might be for teachers who are newer to the profession. . These findings contribute to the field of research about successful teacher evaluation programs, and the authors urge further experimentation with systems to determine what components of evaluation systems accurately measure teacher effectiveness and support teachers’ growth.

For more information on the Cincinnati research: http://hvrld.me/ncte_cincinnati

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