The Impact of Effective Teachers and Principals

Accelerating Student Performance by Focusing On What Matters Most in Our Schools

July 2010
What matters most when it comes to increasing student achievement?
Small class sizes? Whether a child lives in poverty?
A fair and equitable state school finance formula?

While the above, and much more, play a role in raising student achievement, teacher and principal effectiveness has a greater impact on student learning than any other factor in a school system.

Studies across the nation demonstrate the impact of teacher and principal effectiveness in increasing student performance:

- In Texas, the increase student test scores can be traced to a teacher's effectiveness and it is 20 times more likely to improve student achievement any other variable; and
- In Los Angeles schools, the difference between the performance of a student assigned to a top-quartile teacher rather than a bottom-quartile teacher averaged 10 percentile points on a standardized math test; and
- In North Carolina, a strong teacher in a classroom has 14 times the impact on student achievement as decreasing the class size by five students.

Great schools cannot exist without great teachers and principals. In order to accelerate student performance states must enact policies and procedures that attract, recruit, retain, develop, compensate, and promote the best possible talent in our classrooms. As displayed in Figure 1 by The New Teacher Project, effective teachers and principals are supported by a comprehensive human capital system working in concert to optimize the supply of quality teachers and principals, and manage their effectiveness.

How to enact these foundational policies is a source of debate. Yet, one thing is certain, the status quo approach to developing effective teacher and principal corps can no longer continue. Not only does the achievement of future generations

**Figure 1:** Education leaders must use clear evaluations of teacher effectiveness to inform decisions at each step of the human capital continuum.

*Source: The New Teacher Project*
depend on a high-quality teachers and principals, but the Obama Administration is giving federal grant awards to support states that change their human capital practices to create conditions in which students receive the high-quality classroom instruction and school leadership that they deserve.

**Teacher Effectiveness in Washington**

Recent efforts to grade Washington state on its teacher quality policies paint a mixed picture. In a report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Center for American Progress, “Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Innovation,” Washington received an “A” grade for a 21st-century teaching force. The authors commended the state for requiring incoming teachers to take a basic skills test, assessing high school teachers on content knowledge, and requiring graduates of alternative route programs to demonstrate content knowledge. But the annual State Teacher Policy Yearbook, published by the National Council on Teacher Quality, gave Washington a “D+” for its efforts in 2009 – down from a “C-” the year before. The authors praised Washington for its requirement of annual evaluations for all teachers, but faulted the state for not linking tenure and evaluation decisions to objective evidence of teacher effectiveness and for lacking an efficient termination process for ineffective teachers.

Furthermore, the state’s Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) forecasts that Washington will need more than 460 math and 400 science teachers – above current rates of production – to fill current shortages and to implement the new course requirements in math and science. Given this, developing a high-quality recruitment program designed to attract, retain and develop effective teachers is crucial in Washington.

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) confirms this supply problem in Boosting the Supply and Effectiveness of Washington’s STEM Teachers, its recent study on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) instruction in Washington. The report, which was based on teacher, principal and administrator surveys in three leading school districts and on analyses of state policy, finds that many administrators, particularly in high-poverty schools, are unsatisfied with the quality of math and science instruction in their schools because of the limited pool of talent. Indeed, one district’s low-poverty schools had three times as many applicants for high school science positions as did its high-poverty schools.

Washington’s student achievement gap will continue to increase without concrete action. As states vie for federal dollars they are proposing key reforms to implement stronger teacher evaluation and tenure policies. States such as Florida, Louisiana and Tennessee have enacted legislation that requires 50 percent of a teacher and principal’s evaluation to be based on student academic achievement, as defined by growth in standardized test scores or other objective measures. In Washington, data from The New Teacher Project (TNTP) study, Boosting the Supply and Effectiveness of Washington’s STEM Teachers, identified that 70 percent of teachers and administrators believe that the current evaluation process does not provide meaningful feedback or identify professional development and only 46 percent of teachers indicating that their evaluation helps improve their instruction. As other states have revamped their evaluation process to include student growth data as a means to providing teachers with more impactful data, and in some cases, used the evaluations for major decisions such as tenure, compensation, promotion, or dismissal, Washington state trails behind despite data indicating that teachers seek this type of evaluation structure.

**Successful Human Capital Initiatives**

Colleges and universities prepare the majority of teachers, and they will continue to do so. But many states and districts have worked with national organizations to recruit candidates from different backgrounds and majors, including career-changers and college graduates from elite universities who have deep content knowledge but are not education majors. Examples of such programs include Teach for America and The New Teacher Project, which heavily screen their applicants and rely on short (six weeks, for example), intense preparation sessions before their candidates enter classrooms. In some districts, TNTP also works closely with their human resources offices to improve recruitment, screening, and induction of all new hires, regardless of what program they came from.
In Louisiana, one study found that teachers who came through TNTP outperformed graduates of traditional teacher education programs in terms of increasing student achievement. Recruiting also must focus on the next generation of school leaders, with groups such as New Leaders for New Schools filling that niche (see sidebar). In December 2008, Washington’s Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) released a report to the legislature that recommended that the state fund Teacher Residency and Fellowship programs, operated by Teach for America (TFA) or The New Teacher Project (TNTP), with oversight by the PESB.

Legislation passed during Washington’s 2010 legislative session authorizes the PESB to implement alternative teaching preparation programs operated by community colleges and non-higher education providers such as TFA and TNTP.

While these programs cannot fill all vacancies or even the majority, they are one source of talent. In the end, teacher surveys consistently show that low starting salaries and poor or average working conditions are reasons that many undergraduates do not pursue teaching – or why so many teachers leave after a few years in the classroom. Many states have labored to increase their starting salaries, and some, like North Carolina, administer publicly reported teacher working condition surveys to focus administrators’ attention on improving classroom conditions.

Teacher preparation is another area that is receiving renewed scrutiny around the country, with colleges and universities being asked to better align teacher colleges to the needs of districts, particularly urban districts. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in a speech at Columbia University’s Teachers College, noted, “By almost any standard, many if not most of the nation’s 1,450 schools, colleges, and departments of education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom. America’s university-based teacher preparation programs need revolutionary change – not evolutionary tinkering.”

Increasingly, the federal government is asking states to demonstrate how they will publicly report teacher effectiveness by preparation program. The goal is to not only to guide districts in their recruitment, but also to help preparation programs understand how they need to adapt.

Louisiana has established a promising model to link teacher preparation programs and student performance. The Bayou State was the first in the nation to track teacher preparation institutions based on student achievement data linked to their graduates. As a result, teacher preparation programs in the state – whether they are universities or non-traditional

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**Principals for a New Generation**

**The Story of New Leaders for New Schools**

New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), a national nonprofit, provides a pathway for current and former educators to become outstanding principals of urban public schools. NLNS identifies and admits exceptional individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.

Its recruitment is driven primarily by nominations and the application process is highly competitive. A selection committee composed of national and district-based staff members, including former teachers, principals, business executives and superintendents, selects less than seven percent of those who apply. Two-thirds of New Leaders are people of color, ranging from age 26 to 60 and all representing diverse professional backgrounds.

All New Leaders have prior teaching experience, with half coming directly from schools and the others from outside universities, companies, nonprofit organizations and foundations. The salary-loss barrier to enter the profession is minimized because the program is just over a year long and involves a paid, year-long principal residency.

Once selected, the New Leader undergoes an intense summer program of coursework, spends a yearlong residency under a mentor principal, receives ongoing feedback and support from a coach, and, if successful, is placed as principal of an urban school.

New Leaders requires applicants to have K-12 teaching experience, as well as adherence to 10 core principles of belief in students’ capabilities, orientation toward results, and good communication skills, among others. Interest in the program has grown as more states and districts search for qualified principals. Studies are showing that over the nine years of the program, elementary and middle schools led by New Leaders are making academic gains at faster rates than their peers in other schools. Graduation rates are also climbing in high schools led by New Leaders.

programs – can use student outcome data from their graduates to make improvements. Secretary Duncan praised the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for increasing its admissions and graduation requirements after results indicated that graduates were struggling to effectively teach English in the field.\textsuperscript{xii} With a robust state evaluation model that measures student growth and a longitudinal data system that links students to teachers and teachers to their education program, Washington state can make the same comparisons.

A crucial piece of the educator quality puzzle is the evaluation of teachers and principals through an objective measure, like student growth data. One district that has long embraced this notion is the Memphis City Schools. The 105,000-student district applied for and received a grant of nearly $100 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to enact its “Teacher Effectiveness Initiative,” which would re-engineer the districts entire system of teacher induction, promotion, compensation, evaluation and support. This new model would place student progress at the heart of all human capital decisions, as well as provide the city's most highly effective teachers with opportunities to share their skills through new career pathways. There are four components to this model:

1. Implementing a new teacher effectiveness measure, a critical component for evaluating teachers that will bear on decisions regarding tenure, dismissal, compensation and other areas. In Tennessee, a new state law requires that at least 35 percent of evaluations will be based on the state's value-added student growth measure, with another 15 percent coming from an approved list of objective growth measures.

2. Bolstering the numbers of effective teachers in the district through a combination of recruiting high-quality teachers, retaining high-quality teachers and culling low-performing teachers.

3. Improving the support, utilization, and evaluation of teachers. This step involves the creation of a Teacher Talent Office and a modified compensation system.

4. Improving the context for teaching, including deepening principal leadership capacity, improving school culture, and developing new technology systems.

These four goals reinforce each other and allow Memphis to rethink its teacher pipeline. In addition, the city’s teachers union was involved in developing the initiative.

### A Comprehensive Approach to Addressing Human Capital Challenges

The Obama Administration’s 2011 budget request seeks to raise education spending by $3.5 billion overall with much of the budget dedicated to continuing and expanding the grant programs created under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These programs are focused on five major policy areas—one of which is effective teaching and leadership.

It will take political will, intense collaboration, and resources to change practices in Washington state related to teacher quality. This will mean working closely with those who will be most affected by the changes – district leaders, administrators, and teachers – and ensuring that underlying data and assessment systems allow the types of measurements that new teacher-quality policies require.

### Specifically, implementing the following policies will significantly increase the quality and impact of teachers and principals in increasing student achievement.

**Revamp principals’ and teachers’ evaluations to include student growth as a significant measure**

Teachers often note that their evaluations do not provide them with enough information or support to improve. Student achievement should never be the sole criterion of an evaluation – but to ignore this data completely de-values a teacher’s impact.

As part of Washington’s recent mandate through Senate bill 6696, the state will require districts to implement a new teacher evaluation system by 2013-14. To prepare for this, and learn from best practices in other districts, the state is launching a series of “pilot districts” that are capable of exploring different evaluation models. Districts participating in the pilot program are in an excellent position to advance the state’s evaluation system to one that is truly robust and comprehensive by including a in the model a significant measure of student growth data.

By piloting an evaluation model with student growth data as a significant factor, the state will be much more likely to adopt a statewide model that will...
advance teacher and principal effectiveness. This means scaling up models that highlight targeted professional development for teachers and principals that have been identified as ineffective and for best practices by teachers and principals to be replicated and scaled throughout the state.

**Include evaluations and student growth indicators in key human capital decisions**

School districts rarely make decisions about their teachers and principals – hiring, placement, transfers, layoffs, compensation, and tenure – based on effectiveness. More often, these decisions are made based on seniority or other factors. A revamped evaluation system, along with training for principals on how to use it, should ground these decisions in student growth as the primary factor. Washington policymakers should take advantage of current federal funding opportunities to propose innovative ways to use teacher and principal effectiveness data to inform (as defined by growth in student academic achievement, as opposed to absolute performance) decisions such as compensation, tenure, promotion, or dismissal.

**Expand alternate routes to attract talent into education leadership positions.**

Colleges of education are the major provider of principals, but they do not have to be the only ones. There is emerging evidence that principals who come from non-traditional preparation programs have a significant impact on student achievement. Washington should expand its alternative route programs to include programs that develop principals, not just teachers. Alternative route principal preparation programs can attract qualified applicants, place them in a rigorous pre-service program, and enable them to become certified to fill the next generation of principalships.

**Require districts to conduct annual evaluations and better monitor these evaluations**

Teachers are evaluated every year for their first four years, and at least once every three years after. This is not enough to gauge effectiveness. Instead, the state should require districts to conduct annual evaluations of all teachers and principals. Furthermore, Washington requires administrators to be trained in evaluation procedures, but not on an ongoing basis. In addition, there is no requirement that districts monitor principals’ evaluations of teachers to ensure accuracy, fairness, and consistency. This must change.

**Evaluate teacher preparation institutions**

Washington’s longitudinal data system is capable of connecting student achievement to individual teachers and their teacher preparation institutions; yet the state has not built out its data system to enable this link. Student achievement data linked to preparation institutions should be publicly reported. High-performing programs should be expanded, while low-performing programs should be eliminated.

**Implement a common statewide evaluation model**

The state passed legislation during the 2010 session that creates a new, four-tiered evaluation model. This is a significant improvement on the model the state has been using which since 1975 and only has two ratings—satisfactory or unsatisfactory. While the state is considering adopting a common statewide evaluation model, each of the 295 districts will be able to implement their own evaluation system. This will make teacher and principal effectiveness comparisons from district-to-district difficult.

Highly-effective teachers and principals make a fundamental difference in children’s lives. Recruiting, inducting, supporting, and promoting talented teachers and principals can be achieved through policies that thoughtfully measure the impact they have, help them improve, and foster preparation programs that help them succeed. Taken collectively, the changes outlined in this document can put Washington at the forefront of preparing the next generation of teachers.

**Sources:**


xi. Ibid.
About Partnership for Learning

Partnership for Learning is an independent, statewide nonprofit organization that communicates about Washington State’s school improvement efforts and the need to better prepare ALL of our high school graduates for the demands of today’s global society.

www.partnership4learning.org