

## ASSESSING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Understanding why some teachers have a greater impact on improving student performance could significantly improve the learning experience for all students. Determining what is effective teaching, and how to measure teacher effectiveness, presents a challenge and opportunity for policymakers to effectively measure teacher performance<sup>i</sup>.

Effective teaching is defined by improved student learning<sup>ii</sup>, but there is significant disagreement on just how to measure teacher effectiveness and how to use those measurements to improve teaching. Much of the policy debate centers on using test scores to implement merit pay or to fire teachers, but those strategies alone will not improve teacher performance on a large scale<sup>iii</sup>. One recent report describes the treatment of teachers as being akin to “widgets;” that school districts tend to assume classroom effectiveness is the same from teacher to teacher, thus these districts are not engaged with student needs or efforts to improve instructional effectiveness.<sup>iv</sup>

Research indicates four categories of teacher quality indicators—teacher qualifications, teacher characteristics, teacher practices and teacher effectiveness<sup>v</sup>. But within these categories there is significant room for subjective views and impact, and in particular, there is a lack of consensus on how to evaluate teacher effectiveness. Evaluating teacher effectiveness cannot be one size fits all.<sup>vi</sup>

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act put a national emphasis on certification and licensing. While there may be differences in knowledge or skills between the certified and uncertified, research indicates that these differences are not pronounced enough to be picked up in student achievement gains. However studies do show that while full certification can be positive, emergency certification can have a negative impact on student outcomes<sup>vii</sup>. Additionally, strong teacher qualifications tend to be positively matched with student characteristics that are known to contribute to high achievement. This can lead to overestimates of teacher impact, and causes teachers to seem more or less effective based on the characteristics of their students.

Putting a high value on teacher evaluations is a relatively new trend.<sup>viii</sup> When done right, teacher evaluations identify and measure the instructional strategies, professional behaviors, and delivery of content knowledge that enable learning. Effectiveness data can enhance professional development, strengthen evaluations, and refine accountability policies to reward and encourage student learning.

Schools are often indifferent to instructional effectiveness—except when it comes time to remove a teacher. Further confounding the effort to assess teacher effectiveness, evaluation systems fail to differentiate performance among teachers. Excellent teachers often are not recognized or rewarded, chronically low-performing teachers get weaker, and the wide majority of teachers performing at moderate levels do not get the support they need to improve as professionals<sup>ix</sup>.

As a correlating concern, the United States is not currently participating in benchmarking student outcomes or classroom practices against international peers<sup>x</sup>. As a result, American schools may curtail and even undermine efforts to become more globally competitive, and to adapt innovations from other countries for education reform efforts.

## Select Recommendations for Improving Teacher Effectiveness

- Adopt a comprehensive performance evaluation system that fairly, accurately and credibly differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement<sup>xi</sup>.
- Train administrators and other evaluators in the teacher performance evaluation system and hold them accountable for using it effectively<sup>xii</sup>. Enhance data systems so student data can be tied to teacher data in ways that produce effectiveness measures on a large scale<sup>xiii</sup>.
- Integrate the performance evaluation system with critical policies and functions such as teacher assignment, professional development, compensation, retention and dismissal<sup>xiv</sup>.
- The U.S. should commit to meaningful participation in major international benchmarking opportunities, with periodic oversight hearings regarding America's international education performance, efforts underway to learn from other nations' success and application of international practices that can benefit the U.S. education system<sup>xv</sup>.
- Both non-tenured and tenured teachers should receive frequent evaluations—with multiple observations by multiple and diverse evaluators part of each evaluation<sup>xvi</sup>.

<sup>i</sup> National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2008) [Improving Instruction through Effective Teacher Evaluation](#).

<sup>ii</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009) [Measuring and Improving the Effectiveness of High School Teachers](#).

<sup>iii</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009) [Measuring and Improving the Effectiveness of High School Teachers](#).

<sup>iv</sup> The New Teacher Project. (2009) The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. <http://widgeteffect.org/>.

<sup>v</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009) [Measuring and Improving the Effectiveness of High School Teachers](#).

<sup>vi</sup> National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2008) [Teacher Quality and Student Achievement](#).

<sup>vii</sup> National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2008) [Teacher Quality and Student Achievement](#).

<sup>viii</sup> National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2008) [Improving Instruction through Effective Teacher Evaluation](#).

<sup>ix</sup> The New Teacher Project. (2009) The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. <http://widgeteffect.org/>.

<sup>x</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009) [Short Sighted: How America's Lack of Attention to International Education Studies Impedes Improvement](#).

<sup>xi</sup> The New Teacher Project. (2009) The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. <http://widgeteffect.org/>.

<sup>xii</sup> The New Teacher Project. (2009) The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. <http://widgeteffect.org/>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009) [Measuring and Improving the Effectiveness of High School Teachers](#).

<sup>xiv</sup> The New Teacher Project. (2009) The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. <http://widgeteffect.org/>.

<sup>xv</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009) [Short Sighted: How America's Lack of Attention to International Education Studies Impedes Improvement](#).

<sup>xvi</sup> National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2008) [Improving Instruction through Effective Teacher Evaluation](#).