

Teachers' Perceptions and the MET Project

Introduction

A teacher has more impact on student learning than any other factor controlled by school systems, including class size, school size and the quality of after-school programs—or even which school a student is attending¹—but currently, there is no agreement among education stakeholders about how to identify and measure effective teaching. In an effort to improve the quality of information about teaching effectiveness, in the fall of 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the two-year Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project to rigorously develop and test multiple measures of teacher effectiveness.

As part of the project, partners from more than a dozen reputable academic, non-profit and for-profit organizations are collecting and analyzing data collected during the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years from over 3,000 teacher volunteers and their classrooms across Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Dallas Independent School District, Denver Public Schools, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Memphis City Schools and the New York City Department of Education. Teachers and classrooms in Pittsburgh Public Schools are also participating in the project by helping researchers with early-stage development and testing of the effectiveness measures before they are tested in the other MET project districts.

The project's data is collected across five critical research areas:

1. Student achievement gains on state standardized assessments and supplemental assessments designed

to measure higher-order conceptual thinking

2. Classroom observations and teacher reflections
3. Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge
4. Student perceptions of the classroom instructional environment
5. Teachers' perceptions of working conditions and instructional support at their schools

A close analysis of each of these will help establish which teaching practices, skills, and knowledge positively impact student learning. This paper seeks to define and explain how teachers' perceptions of working conditions factor into the MET project.

About Teachers' Perceptions of Working Conditions and Instructional Support at Their Schools

Recent research conducted by Professor Helen Ladd of Duke University tells us that understanding and improving teaching conditions can result in stronger teacher recruitment programs, improved teacher motivation, enhanced teacher retention, and, ultimately, increased student achievement.² Teachers participating in the MET project will be surveyed using the Teaching & Learning Conditions Survey designed by the New Teacher Center, a national non-profit organization dedicated to researching teacher effectiveness. The survey was pioneered in 2002 in North Carolina and has since been adapted and administered in over ten states. The anonymous,

¹ Steven G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain, "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (March 2005), pages 417–458. <http://edpro.stanford.edu/Hanushek/admin/pages/files/uploads/teachers.econometrica.pdf>

² Helen F. Ladd, "Teachers' Perceptions of their Working Conditions: How Predictive of Policy-Relevant Outcomes?" (August 2009). http://www.newteachercenter.org/pdfs/Ladd-TWC_perceptions.pdf

web-based survey asks teachers about critical teaching conditions at their schools including facilities and resources; time; managing student conduct; school leadership; teacher leadership; professional development; instructional practices and supports; new teacher support; and community engagement and support. Teachers are prompted to react to statements like: “The physical environment of classrooms in this school supports teaching and learning”; “The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient”; “School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom”; “The faculty and leadership have a shared vision”; and “Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.”

Enhancing effective teaching is a shared responsibility. The survey asks teachers to report on the conditions most likely to foster their professional growth. While the existing evidence suggests a connection between working conditions and student performance, the MET project will test these findings and suggest ways to best utilize the feedback from instruments like the Working Conditions Survey.

About The New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center (NTC) is a national organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. NTC strengthens school communities through proven mentoring and professional development programs, online learning environments, policy advocacy and research. Since 1998, the NTC has served over 49,000 teachers and 5,000 mentors, and has touched millions of students across America.

Since 2008, more than 415,000 Teaching and Learning Conditions Surveys have been submitted. NTC has produced more than 10,000 school-level data reports. Clients in 2008-2010 include Alabama, Colorado, Fairfax County (Va.), Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Vermont, and West Virginia. NTC is currently under contract to administer a statewide survey in spring 2011 in Kentucky and Tennessee, which included the survey in its winning Race to the Top application. For more information about the teacher perceptions study component and the Teaching & Learning Conditions Survey, call the New Teacher Center at 919-806-2200 or visit <http://www.newteachercenter.org/tlcsurvey/index.php>.

About the Measures of Effective Teaching Project

The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project seeks to develop an array of measures that will be viewed by teachers, unions, administrators and policymakers as reliable and credible indicators of effective teaching. By determining exactly what measures predict the biggest student achievement gains, the MET project will give teachers the feedback (including exemplary practices) they need to improve. In addition, a greater understanding about which teaching practices, skills, and knowledge positively impact student learning will allow states and districts to develop teacher evaluation systems that will help strengthen all aspects of teaching—from recruitment through retention.

The MET project has enrolled over 3,000 teachers from a number of school districts around the country and is gathering a variety of data, including videotaped teacher observations, student surveys, teacher surveys and supplemental student assessments, and represents a real opportunity for teachers to inform the national discussion on education reform, in order to determine which measures are most strongly correlated with high levels of student achievement. The MET project's final findings will be shared broadly at the project's conclusion in winter 2011-2012.

For more information about the MET project, please visit www.METproject.org or send an email to info@METproject.org.

Note: The inclusion of a given research protocol, tool or rubric in the MET project is not an endorsement by either the MET project or its partners of that protocol, tool or rubric. In many cases, the research instruments included in the MET project are still being tested and do not yet have verified results associated with them. Other protocols, tools and rubrics similar or equivalent to those used in the MET project may exist.

In addition, selection of a given academic, non-profit or for-profit organization to participate in the MET project does not constitute an endorsement by the MET project of that organization. Other organizations may exist who do work that is similar or equivalent to the work done by the organizations participating in the MET project.