School Effectiveness

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There has been a recent push towards improving school effectiveness due to No Child Left Behind. Naturally, the first place to look when estimating a school's effectiveness is providing a more rigorous method of measuring teacher effectiveness. However, most schools are focusing on statistics while not taking into consideration such as focusing on such factors as cultural differences, parental support or racial divide. To develop, reward, and retain great teachers, school systems first must know how to identify them. (Kane, McCafrey, Miller, Staiger) Researchers recommend that policy makers use data from multiple sources when attempting to make decisions that have high stakes consequences. (Gallagher, Rabinowitz, Ghangly) The problem is that reliable data varies across state, district, and even schools. There are different levels of data, ranging from 1 to 3. Level one data is that which is gathered from standardized tests and the like, while level 3 data is gathered from personal observation of the teacher and interviews or surveys from parents and teachers etc. The suggested levels for use by policy makers are level 1 indicators. But the question is, how can final test scores be a good indicator when measuring teacher who work in very disadvantaged areas but their kids are taking the same tests as kids from very affluent areas? With a focus on test scores rather than direct observation of teaching practice, there is an obvious disservice to teachers.

One way of doing this properly is creating a base score from which students can be compared. In one study teacher effectiveness is measured using a hierarchical linear model. Students final scores are measured against their
previous scores and mixed in an equation using the teachers years of experience to obtain an effectiveness score. While the results of the study need to be further replicated, there was some indicators of high, medium and low performing classrooms, and some stability in measurement. This is a good indicator of the reliability of this method after further exploration. (Munoz, Prather, Stronge)

Statistical data when evaluating teacher effectiveness is important. Surveys of student and/or parent perception are perhaps not a great indicator. Coaching is related to teaching in many ways. In a study done on rugby players and their perception of coaching effectiveness, the coaches scored average or below ratings. (Broodryk, VanDer Berg) Were all of these coaches bad coaches? Were the athletes affected by personal bias? How do you get good data from students that is now clouded by such factors as whether or not a teacher has written up a student?

Of course I agree that the current teacher evaluation system is inadequate. Great teaching goes unrecognized while poor teaching goes unaddressed. (New Teacher Project) The challenge is figuring out how to accomplish this that does not attack the very teachers they are trying to evaluate. One obvious and important factor in teacher effectiveness is class size, but a study on "the widget" effect, that issue is discounted as non-important because reducing class size is impractical.

Before administrators can truly judge teacher effectiveness, teachers need to be given a fair chance to show their value. This means several things,
including a reduction in class size, avoidance of student/parental bias, and a continued focus on direct observation rather than an over reliance on unfair test scores. Sadly these issues are being ignored in most of the literature I can find.
References


