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George P. Willey

Taylor Independent School District, gwilley@taylorisd.org

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The Perceptions of Teacher Evaluation by Teachers and Campus Administrators in a Suburban Texas District

George P. Willey

Taylor Independent School District

Texas school districts were required to implement a new teacher evaluation system during the 2016-17 school year referred to as the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The development of a new evaluation system began in 2013 and was voluntarily piloted by school districts during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. The system is based upon the revised Texas Teacher Standards that were finalized in 2014 that outline the following broad teaching competencies: lesson planning and pedagogy; knowledge of students and how they learn; content knowledge and expertise, learning environment; data-driven practices and professional development and other work responsibilities (Eaton, 2016). The new system was designed to foster and promote continuous improvement in teaching practice through a combination of administrative observation, teacher goal setting and professional development, as well as analysis of student growth. During the 2017-18 school years, Texas school districts were required to either pilot or fully implement the student growth component of the instrument. By the 2018-19 school year, districts were required to fully implement all aspects of the evaluation system.

The structure of T-TESS can be found in the basis for the application of clinical procedures outlined in various professional literature. Glickman (1990) outlines four steps for observations that include a preconference, observation, analysis and interpretation of the observation, post-conference, and review by both parties of the other four steps prior to repeating the process. School administrators use a three-step process of a pre-conference, observation, and concluding with a post-conference in the T-TESS cycle. Teachers must receive a minimum of one forty-five-minute observation per year by their campus administrator, but additional time spent observing teaching practice is strongly recommended to maximize the benefits of the process. Glickman (1990) suggest that the preconference is essential for both parties to become clear on what will occur during the observation. The post-conference is a venue for the supervisor to discuss findings from the observation and to mutually produce a plan for instructional improvement. This instructional improvement component mirrors the reinforcement and refinement steps that are an integral part of the T-TESS post-conference.

This study examines the perceptions of administrators and teachers related to the implementation of T-TESS in their district. The study utilizes a survey related to the perceptions of teacher evaluation to examine the perceptions of the two groups. The research examines the perceptions of the two groups on teacher evaluation serving as an accurate means of teaching performance and as being primarily focused on improving instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Looney (2011) professes that well-designed evaluation systems aligned with professional improvement opportunities can improve teaching practice and subsequently increase student achievement. She advocated that educational systems must find the appropriate balance between

holding teachers accountable through evaluation and using information gained through the evaluation process for guiding professional development. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the best evaluations are the ones that challenge teacher beliefs about student learning and abilities to achieve desired outcomes.

A public policy necessity exists to evaluate teachers but the best means to do so has historically been up for much debate (Duke, 1995). Different groups such as politicians, teachers, school administrators, and local school boards have different desirable characteristics and expected outcomes from the evaluation process. Issues such as accountability, professional development, and merit pay may lead for a desire for the evaluation process to be structured in conflicting ways. Derrington and Campbell (2018) found that the challenges of design and implementing teacher evaluation exist in countries throughout the world. The authors state that these challenges are compounded for nations as evaluation systems are interconnected with standardized testing.

Hallinger, Heck, and Murphy (2014) used a meta-analysis to create a theory of action fundamental to most current evaluation systems. The authors state that most evaluation systems combine elements of both evaluation and supervision. Evaluation is typically used to make employment decisions or sometimes award merit pay while supervision is most closely associated with providing coaching and feedback. Although the technical implementation of a policy is challenging, the social dimension of a new policy is even more difficult for those involved to implement (Fullan, 2001). Need, clarity, complexity, and practicality are four dimensions that are connected to workers' accepting or rejecting a new policy. Fullan expressed that educators desire to know the rationale for new policies as well require guidance on how to implement new policies within the constructs of their work environment.

A superior teacher evaluation system has minimal effect if the teachers do not accept the intended outcomes of the process (Davis, Ellett, & Annunziata, 2002). Schmidt and Datnow (2005) state that educational reforms rarely address the emotions of educators and that their professional lives can be enhanced or negatively impacted through new educational policy. The authors explain that teachers typically process reforms through their prior experiences as well as what is logical to them based on their experiences. Therefore, leaders must persuade those who are expected to implement new policies to abandon their past and accept the new which often causes personal apprehension. From a teachers' perspective, Nias (1996) found evaluation to be deeply personal with teachers often defining their self-worth based upon the outcome of their evaluations. Thus, the process is one that results in teachers feeling insecure over the possibility of their being deemed ineffective in the performance of their teaching responsibilities.

Successful policy implementation at the campus level, including the adopted method of teacher evaluation, is based upon leadership behaviors and actions demonstrated by the campus principal (Beerens, 2000). Davis et al. (2002) describe obstacles the principal must navigate as they balance the professional development needs of individual teachers with the organizational needs of holding teachers accountable for creating effective learning environments for all students. Derrington and Campbell (2018) report that the potential consequences of evaluation can also be problematic for principals such as loss of performance pay, contract renewal, or the impact on the working relationship between the campus administration and teachers.

Kimball and Milanowski (2009) found substantial variation in the validity of teacher evaluations performed by twenty-three school leaders. The variations were found to be based upon motivation, skill, and context of the school leaders who were conducting the evaluations. They found that campus administrators had multiple interactions with teachers through such activities as establishing goals, observing instruction, discussing observations, and providing written feedback and that any one of these interactions could impact the validity of the final evaluation. A recommendation for further research into the views and intentions of campus administrators related to teacher evaluation was suggested by the authors.

Problem

Principals and assistant principals play an important role in measuring teaching competency and guiding teachers to use the evaluation process as a means to guide their development and ultimately impacting student learning. Teachers roles during this process is to think about his or her pedagogy as well as to seek individualized professional growth and development. If school administrators do not create an environment in which teachers see that the primary reason for evaluation is to develop their teaching practices, then the intended purpose of the new teacher evaluation system in Texas will not be reached. Derrington and Campbell (2018) state that the complexities associated with campus administrators implementing evaluation systems necessitates a need for further study of their perceptions and experiences.

Legislators and bureaucrats often do not know how policies are perceived and evaluated by those who are expected to implement them. Schmidt and Datnow (2005) indicate that the emotions and perceptions of teachers is an important area of study to understand why some implemented policies meet their desired outcome while many fail. Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) explain how teachers' schema guides their interpretation of new policy often resulting in confusion or misinterpretation of new policies. They also contend that values and emotions impact their perceptions of new policies and lead them toward accepting policies that are aligned with their beliefs and often rejecting policies that lack alignment with the same. Jacob and Lefgren (2008) indicate that campus administrators' evaluations of teachers are often subjective and can be impacted by such things as age relationship between the administrator and teacher, likability, and gender of both parties. They also state the evaluations vary based on the sophistication of the administrator in collecting information during the observation, their first impression of the teacher, and how much they perceive that the teacher will benefit from the results of the evaluation.

Purpose

This study was designed to examine the perceptions of administrators and teachers from one Texas suburban school district who were in the second year of full implementation of T-TESS. Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to survey questions related to their perceptions of the system as related through a policy implementation level (Fullan, 2001) and personal beliefs (Schmidt and Datnow, 2005). Specifically, the research addressed the following questions:

1. How do campus administrators and teachers in the suburban Texas district perceive teacher evaluation as an accurate means of teaching performance?
2. How do campus administrators and teachers in the suburban Texas district perceive teacher evaluation in improving classroom instruction?
3. How do administrators and teachers in the suburban Texas district perceive improving instruction as the primary purpose of teacher evaluation?

Significance

Looney (2011) states the importance of teacher quality on student learning warrants more research on the implementation of teacher evaluation systems. Policymakers view change in teacher evaluation as a means to improve the performance of public schools. Schmidt and Datnow (2005) suggest that teachers typically support reforms that are aligned with their beliefs and resist reforms that threaten their vested interests or inherent beliefs. Derrington and Campbell (2018) describe how principals' perceptions can impede how educational policy, such as teacher evaluation, is implemented. Understanding campus administrators and teachers' perceptions related to the evaluation process will inform and assist district leadership in designing future training to better prepare campus administrators and teachers in meeting the intended outcomes of the new state-adopted teacher evaluation system.

Methods, Data Sources, and Analysis

This exploratory study was designed to investigate the perceptions of campus administrators and teachers who work in a suburban Texas school district, with particular focus on the formal evaluation and appraisal process they experience as educators. Questions were designed to assess participants' perceptions of the evaluation policy (Fullan, 2001) and how teacher evaluation can improve teacher quality (Looney, 2011).

The data collection consisted of a survey delivered to all teachers (N=585) and all campus administrators (N=65) at the beginning of their first semester of the 2017-18 school year at the host suburban Texas school district. The survey gathered certain demographic data such as gender, ethnicity, and years of experience, followed by thirteen questions related to the evaluation process, and concluded with an open-ended response section where teachers and administrators could share general perceptions on the teacher evaluation process.

Instrumentation

The survey utilized for this study consisted of fourteen questions in which both teachers and administrators were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale and was piloted with a convenience sample of prospective school administrators enrolled in a principal preparation program. Feedback from the pilot group was used to make slight narrative revision to the survey questions prior to administration to the teachers and administrators in the suburban Texas district. The electronic survey was administered through email communication from the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction to the candidates on September 18, 2017. Another request was sent by the Assistant Superintendent to campus administrators and teachers on September 28, 2017. Of the 65 surveys distributed to campus administrators, 28 were

completed, for a response rate of 43.08%. Of the 585 surveys distributed to teachers, 340 were completed, for a response rate of 58.12%. Three of the fourteen survey questions that were asked to both campus administrators and teachers were used for this study. Those questions were as follows:

- 1) Teacher evaluation is an accurate assessment of teaching performance.
- 2) Improving instruction is the primary purpose of teacher evaluation.
- 3) The teacher evaluation system used in my district is improving classroom instruction.

Data Analysis

As this is an exploratory study, simple descriptive statistics were sufficient to document the administrators' and teachers' initial perceptions of the aspects queried by the survey questions. Calculating the means and standard deviations of responses for each question provided a framework to understanding the perceptions of both groups. Emergent themes were identified though further exploration of the available data.

Findings

The data from the survey was analyzed to determine if differences existed in the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the three questions. The means and standard deviations for the two groups were calculated for both groups on each of the three questions.

Survey Question #1 The first survey question asked administrators and teachers, 'Teacher evaluation is an accurate assessment of teaching performance.' The mean response from administrators was 3.86 with a standard deviation of .71. The mean response from teachers was 3.24 with a standard deviation of .98. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Teacher Evaluation is an Accurate Assessment of Teaching Performance

	Mean	SD
Campus Administrators	3.86	.71
Teachers	3.24	.98

The response to this question results in a difference in the mean of .62 between the two groups as well as a larger standard deviation within the teacher responses. Such a response reflects a less favorable perception of teacher evaluation being an accurate measurement of teaching performance held by teachers as well as a larger variation of responses from within the group. These results are highlight by 20.6% of the teachers responding 'Strongly Disagree' or 'Disagree' to this question while only 3.6% of administrators responding in this manner.

Survey Question #2. The second survey question asked administrators and teachers, 'Improving instruction is the primary purpose of teacher evaluation.' The mean response from administrators was 4.29 with a standard deviation of .76. The mean response from teachers was 3.88 with a standard deviation of .97. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Improving Instruction is the Primary Purpose of Teacher Evaluation

	Mean	SD
Campus Administrators	4.29	.76
Teachers	3.88	.97

The response to this question results in a difference in the mean of .41 between the two groups as well as a larger standard deviation within the teacher responses. Such a response reflects a less favorable perception of improving instruction as being the primary purpose of teacher evaluation held by teachers as well as a larger variation of responses from within the group. These results are highlighted by 8.8% of the teachers responding ‘Strongly Disagree’ or ‘Disagree’ to this question while only 3.6% of administrators responding in this manner.

Survey Question #3. The third survey question asked administrators and teachers, ‘The teacher evaluation system in my district is improving classroom instruction.’ The mean response from administrators was 4.07 with a standard deviation of .60. The mean response from teachers was 3.51 with a standard deviation of 1.01. (See Table 3).

Table 3. The Teacher Evaluation System is Improving Classroom Instruction

	Mean	SD
Campus Administrators	4.07	.60
Teachers	3.51	1.01

The response to this question results in a difference in the mean of .56 between the two groups as well as a larger standard deviation within the teacher responses. Such a response reflects a less favorable perception of the teacher evaluation system of improving classroom instruction held by teachers as well as a larger variation of responses from within the group. These results are highlighted by 13.8% of the teachers responding ‘Strongly Disagree’ or ‘Disagree’ to this question while only 3.6% of administrators responding in this manner.

Conclusions

The evaluation of teachers is a major component of the instructional leadership responsibilities of campus administrators in Texas. It is important that both administrators and teachers view the process as one that is focused on improving teaching practice which will ultimately result in improved student performance. From the results of this survey, it is apparent that administrators share a more favorable view of the teacher evaluation process as being an accurate measure of teaching performance, as being primarily focused on improving instruction, and improving classroom instruction. Furthermore, the calculation of the standard deviation on each of these questions indicates that there is a larger variation in the views of teachers than administrators on each of these questions. In the open-ended response section, one teacher commented “The evaluation in the past has been used in such a negative way, to help fire teachers, that many teachers still see it in a negative manner. In order for evaluations to be effective, I believe that the evaluation process must be used in a constructive way. The evaluation must be able to help grow not punish the teacher, and it must also take into consideration all the things teachers do for students.” Such a statement is aligned that teacher evaluation is typically viewed as a means to make employment decisions (Hallinger et al., 2014).

This view is contrasted by one administrator who commented “This instrument is a great coaching model to assist teachers with instruction and the delivery of the instructions. When a teacher is not performing at the proficient level, it is difficult to use this as an instrument for teacher in need of assistance.”

The data also represents a favorable view by both groups of the process being focused on improving instruction. The data is aligned with research which indicates that a quality evaluation system can improve teaching practice (Looney, 2011). This data is a positive indicator that the evaluation system is meeting the intended outcomes of the new policy as intended by the Texas Education Agency in the suburban district. This point is supported by one campus administrator’s comment “My teachers' attitude will be more positive as they begin to see that it is designed to improve instruction and is that it is not "once and done". Instead, there actually is an opportunity to grow through walkthroughs and feedback. That falls on quality communication and follow through from my end.”. This point is further supported by a teacher who commented “If done properly, teacher evaluation is good, and I see the benefits”.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to collect perceptions of the new state-approved evaluation system at the beginning of its second year of full implementation. Derrington and Campbell (2018) advocated for further research into the manner in which teacher evaluation is implemented at the campus level due to the expectations such as market-based principles being applied to public schools. The authors stated that in the end the effectiveness of the implementation of teacher evaluation must be reviewed within the context of the unique inter-workings that exist within individual school settings. An initial reflection on these responses yields three recommended paths for further explanation by the suburban Texas district to uncover the basis for the differences in perceptions of the evaluation system. Do teachers espouse lower perceptions on these three questions because 1) they perceive a disconnect between administrative views of effective practice; 2) there is a lack of trust between the two groups; and/or 3) teachers do not fully understand the intent of the T-TESS evaluation system? It is recommended that these questions be explored through an ad hoc committee consisting of campus administrators and teachers representing all campuses in the suburban Texas district.

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