Principals' Approaches to Developing Teacher Quality

Constraints and Opportunities in Hiring, Assigning, Evaluating, and Developing Teachers

Morgaen L. Donaldson   February 2011

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Introduction and summary

There is growing evidence that, of all school resources, teachers have the largest impact on student achievement.[1] Principals arguably play the most important role in ensuring that excellent teaching occurs in their school. How principals hire teachers, assign them to specific positions, evaluate them, and provide growth opportunities for them likely have major ramifications regarding teacher quality. For this reason, New York City, Washington D.C., and numerous other districts have undertaken large reforms to enable principals to hire higher-quality teacher candidates and use teacher evaluations to fire poorly performing instructors and identify and reward exceptional ones. Influential stakeholders such as the Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Aspen Institute have launched human capital initiatives aimed at developing talent in public schools and districts. And states have increased their focus on the work of the principal in large part due to Race to the Top and other funding priorities initiated by the U.S. Department of Education and supported by Congress. Despite this interest from practitioners, grant-makers, and policymakers, there has been little research regarding how principals attempt to raise teacher quality at their school site.

This report provides key findings from a study of 30 principals working in charter and conventional schools in two northeastern states. In doing so, it aims to inform policymakers regarding how principals could exert a more positive influence on teacher quality.

This report focuses on the following questions:

1. What influenced how these principals carried out the tasks of hiring, assigning, evaluating, and providing professional development to teachers?
2. What constraints and opportunities affected the ways in which they carried out these tasks?
3. Do the ways in which principals carried out hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development differ by context?

Overall, three key findings emerge from this research.

- **First, principals in the sample reported more latitude on some human capital functions than others.** Specifically, they reported having more freedom to expand teachers' skills through professional development or induction than to hire, assign, evaluate, or dismiss teachers. Principals described constraints on their ability to perform the latter that ranged from economic influences and cultural barriers to interpersonal challenges and contractual limitations.

- **Second, some principals felt more constrained than others in their efforts to hire, assign, evaluate, dismiss, and develop teachers.** Interestingly, charter school principals as a whole did not report substantially fewer constraints on their ability to carry out these human capital processes. In fact, principals who reported fewer barriers included both charter and conventional school leaders.

- **Third, whether charter or conventional, schools that were smaller, enrolled elementary students, exhibited a strong identity according to principals, and were supported in key ways by their districts seemed to offer principals fewer barriers to conducting these important human capital processes.** Often these factors were intertwined such that principals of schools that exhibited all of these characteristics reported the fewest barriers to making key decisions regarding teacher quality and leaders of schools featuring none of them reported substantial obstacles to this important work.

These findings suggest that policymakers would be wise to address four major barriers to principals' ability to improve teaching quality in their schools:

- Economic influences
- Contractual limitations
- Interpersonal challenges
- Cultural impediments

Additionally, policymakers should address:

- **Rethinking resources for professional development and teacher compensation.** State and district policymakers should consider supporting bonuses and salary increments to help attract and retain teachers to remote regions, hard-to-staff schools, and shortage assignments. They should also improve the quality

of professional development and reduce its dependence on unreliable funding sources. This may involve rethinking the way districts and schools currently use professional development dollars.

- **Decreasing contractual limitations to raising teacher quality.** State and district policymakers should work with union leaders to ensure that seniority does not govern important personnel decisions at the expense of other important considerations such as the quality of a teacher's instruction. This change should be balanced by the introduction of greater career opportunities and rewards for individuals who have dedicated their life's work to teaching. They should also work to ensure that teacher evaluation systems reflect teachers' typical instruction.

- **Reducing cultural and interpersonal impediments to efforts to raise teaching quality.** Policymakers should address principal preparation and in-service training to ensure that principals develop an ability to act strategically as human capital managers. In particular, principals need to develop vital skills in how to assess instruction and communicate effectively regarding instructional quality.

The report is organized as follows: It begins by grounding the study in select research findings. It then describes the methods employed to identify the sample and collect and analyze data. It then presents the study's findings regarding hiring and assignment; evaluation and dismissal; and professional development and induction. It concludes by discussing these findings and laying out implications of this research that policymakers might consider.

Background

Research has shown that school leaders' impact on student achievement is second only to teachers of all school resources.[2] This finding and others in a similar vein led Kenneth Leithwood and his colleagues to conclude:

> *As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school success-fully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation.[3]*

Building teacher capacity is critical to raising student achievement, and principals are well positioned to do this work because of their role in hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development. Research suggests, however, that principals' success in raising teacher quality through these human capital functions varies. For example:

- Research conducted by Dale Ballou, for instance, suggests that principals tend to hire less effective teachers from a given applicant pool while other research, including work by Donald Boyd and colleagues, finds that principals hire teachers who are more effective.[4]

- Principals in low-income schools tend to assign new teachers difficult assignments (multiple grades at the elementary level or multiple subjects at the secondary level) and these teachers are more likely to leave their school than those with less difficult assignments.[5]

- A recent New Teacher Project study in twelve districts in four states indicated that principals gave the vast majority of teachers they evaluated the highest rating possible and rarely dismiss even those who are rated "unsatisfactory."[6] Professional development's track record is similarly lackluster, demonstrating little impact on student achievement unless it is provided in substantial depth.[7]

- Research underscores a number of factors that can constrain principals' decisions regarding human capital development. Some research suggests that collective bargaining agreements limit principals' ability to hire the teachers they want and match them with appropriate class assignments.[8] Other research, however, suggests that teachers' contracts are less restrictive when it comes to hiring and assigning teachers than previous research suggests.[9] Studies have highlighted a number of reasons for principals' poor execution of teacher evaluation, including lack of training and little oversight.[10]

Although each of these decision points—teacher hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development—has been examined in discrete studies, this study is one of a handful to examine how individual principals approach all of these critical decisions.[11] This study sheds light on how principals' actions influence human capital development within their schools. The primary aim of this study is to investigate how a sample of principals make decisions regarding teacher workforce development and the extent to which their experiences differ by context.

This study is based on in-depth interviews with 30 principals in two northeastern states that differ in terms of union strength and teacher quality policy. Both states have been recognized for their efforts to improve teaching and learning. One state is noted for its strong union presence while the other state has been lauded as a forerunner in creating state policies that are aimed at increasing teaching quality. Approximately one-fourth of the sample is charter school principals.

Methods

We conducted qualitative, in-person interviews with 30 principals in two adjacent northeastern states. Key features of the sample are displayed in Table 1. Both states in the sample have demonstrated a commitment to raising teacher quality and State A has arguably been at the national forefront of this effort for 30 years. The states differ in the general strength of teachers' unions with state B being a particularly strong union setting. The states also differ in terms of the presence of charter schools and other choice programs. State B's charter schools grant teachers tenure while State A's vary: some schools do and others do not. These contextual factors make these states particularly suited to this study.

We identified the largest public school districts in each state and several smaller districts within the same teacher labor market. We sought to recruit at least two principals per district with three to four schools in each of the three largest cities in the sample. We attempted to recruit a balance of elementary and secondary principals and leaders of higher- and lower-performing schools. Additionally, we sought to recruit principals of charter schools located within or near the largest districts in the study. Charter school principals constitute 23.3 percent of the sample. Six principals work in suburban districts; 16 individuals work in urban settings; six principals work in urban-suburban settings; and two principals lead schools in rural areas.

All proper names in this paper are pseudonyms. We wanted the principals to speak candidly about how they work to develop teacher quality within their schools. Given the sensitivity of this topic and the potential implications for the principals' continued employment, we felt it important to mask their identities.

TABLE 1
Who we interviewed

Features of the sample

	District*	Level	Charter	Race	Gender
State A					
Urban	Essex	Elementary		Latina	Female
Urban	Essex	Elementary		White	Male
Urban	Essex	Middle	X	White	Male
Urban	Essex	K-8		White	Male
Urban	Essex	K-8		African American	Female
Urban-suburban	Heightstown	High School		African American	Male
Urban-suburban	Heightstown	Elementary		White	Female
Suburban	Nemeth	Elementary		White	Female
Suburban	Nemeth	High School		White	Male
Suburban	Canterbury	Middle		White	Male
Urban	Hillvale	Middle	X	White	Male
Urban	Hillvale	Elementary		African American	Female
Urban	Hillvale	High School		White	Male
Urban	Hillvale	High School		White	Female
Urban	Hillvale	Elementary	X	Asian	Female
Urban-suburban	Bowersett	High School		White	Female
Urban-suburban	Westview	Elementary		African American	Female
Urban-suburban	Westview	Elementary		White	Female
Urban-suburban	Oakton	Middle	X	White	Female
Urban	Norwood	K-8	X	Latina	Female
Suburban	Gloucester	Middle		White	Female
Rural	Causeway	K-6		White	Male
State B					
Urban	Preston	Middle		White	Female
Urban	Preston	Middle		White	Female
Urban	Preston	High School		White	Male
Suburban	Clearview	Elementary		White	Female
Suburban	Clearview	Elementary		White	Female
Urban	Guilford	K-8	X	White	Female
Urban	Guilford	K-8	X	White	Male
Rural	Perryville	High School		White	Female

*All proper names are pseudonyms; for charters, "district" designates the city in which the charter school is located.

Findings

Principals described distinct approaches to hiring and assignment; evaluation and dismissal; and professional development and induction. Each is described in the sections that follow.

Hiring and assignment

How did the principals conceive of and carry out hiring and assignment?

When we asked principals how they bolstered teacher quality within their schools, they often cited hiring as a primary mechanism to achieve this outcome. Asked how she develops teacher quality within her school, a principal of a conventional elementary school in State A said, "Making sure you have the right people through the hiring process—that's where it all starts."

Overall, principals discussed the importance of:

- Hiring by committee
- Favoring candidates who "like kids"
- Recognizing the limitations of interviews
- Hiring student teachers or substitutes

Additionally, they identified the following constraints on their ability to hire and assign as they wished:

- A limited supply of skilled candidates
- Excessive centralization of hiring
- Seniority due to contract or custom
- Certification

Choosing the right candidates

Across the interviews, principals emphasized the importance of assessing a teacher's fit with their particular school. In some cases, mostly in the conventional schools, principals conducted the hiring alone. One urban-suburban elementary principal in State A said "I read the resumes very carefully. There are hundreds and hundreds of resumes sitting at central office and so I look for certain things and I sort of use a rubric. I do like good grammar and I don't like typos…that's where I start."

In most cases, however, principals described hiring through committees composed of teachers and administrators. Some saw involving others, especially teachers, as a way to increase the likelihood of making good hiring decisions. Asked what helped her hire strong candidates, an urban-suburban middle school principal in State A responded, "I think the committee approach is a valid approach, so you can all come to the table with similar expectations but different backgrounds and different lenses."

Principals generally agreed that their number one requirement of teacher candidates was authentic care for children. A principal of a conventional elementary school in an urban-suburban setting in State A said, "I really have always felt that in elementary school I try to get a read on [whether] a person likes kids. Because you really can teach an elementary school teacher everything they need to know about the process, but you can't make people like kids." A genuine interest in children was important even at the secondary level. One urban high school principal in the same state spoke for nearly all the participants in the sample in saying that candidates needed "a love of children."

Beyond this, principals looked for different qualities in teacher candidates. A principal of a conventional, suburban elementary school in State A explained: "Obviously if they've had more teaching experience then that gets rated even higher." In contrast, a principal of a conventional elementary school in a State A urban district said, "I elect to take Teach For America candidates." She explained that these teachers, "have a passion for teaching" and added "It says a lot about one's character in getting involved in Teach For America, so that's an asset, they're new, they're eager to learn."

Many of the principals noted the limitations of interviews as the sole mechanism to make hiring decisions. One principal spoke for almost all the participants in saying, "You just can't determine much from interviews. You've got to watch them with the kids." Many principals supplemented interviews with some opportunity to watch candidates teach, whether through demonstration lessons or a more extended, authentic window into their instruction.

Accordingly, a strategy nearly all the principals used was hiring a known entity, most often a student teacher or long-term substitute who had worked in their building previously. A principal in a State B charter school said, "I hired three teachers that are in their third year now and they came to me because they were in long-term sub positions and I had a good chance to look at them daily and see what they were doing." One principal in a suburban elementary school in State B concurred: "I've learned that sometimes someone can have the best interview in the whole wide world, but if you don't really know them—there is much to be said I feel for giving your blood, sweat, and tears to a community. I'm much more inclined to hire a long-term sub that worked hard for me."

Charter school principals, citing the specialized emphasis of their schools, said it was particularly important to recruit selectively for teachers. A principal of an elementary charter school in State A said, "I have been more into recruitment than interviewing blindly. The last two years I have been able to recruit three teachers that I actually worked with" in her previous position in a conventional school. She explained that these candidates had experience integrating arts into academic curricula, which was a focus of the charter school. A principal of a charter middle school in the same state described her approach to raising teacher quality: "Primarily it's hiring the right teachers. Now for a charter that means teachers that are innovative, that are self-directed, that have this sort of intrinsic desire to be part of an experimental education setting." She further explained, "My most recent hires are grads of X University …these young people are coming out I think really strong and really motivated…I have had much more success hiring new people right out of school or recently out of school rather than people that have worked in other schools because this is such a unique setting. So we can kind of mold them and have them learn the '[school name] Way' right up front."

Another principal of a charter school, in this case an urban middle school in State A, that emphasized the importance of frank feedback on teaching said that this played a critical role in the hiring process at his secondary school. He said that a demonstration lesson was an important part of the hiring process, explaining: "Even if it was the best lesson ever, I'm going to find a couple ways you could have raised the bar and give those as feedback in addition to praise" to see how the candidate reacted. He explained: "We want people that have that mindset of welcoming feedback." This principal was as interested in how the candidate responded to the critical feedback as how he or she taught the demonstration lesson.

Some principals emphasized the hiring process as an opportunity to communicate their school's norms and expectations for teachers. One principal of a charter

elementary school in State B said that his school, "make[s] it clear that it's hard work" to be a teacher in that setting. A principal of a high-achieving urban elementary school in State A said:

> If you come on board at this school, you know that you're going to do more than the traditional elementary school in this district just because if you want to be number one you can't do the same things that everybody else does where you get the same results. That mentality—no excuses mentality—we work hard here. We say that in the interview: 'Are you ready for a challenge, a true challenge? Are you going to be working within the contractual realms of the [contract]? You think you can come to work at 7:52 and leave at 2:45? We won't get any results.'

Assigning teachers where they are most needed

Once principals hired teachers, they faced the decision of how to assign them to classes. In a few extreme cases, all in State B, principals said that provisions in the teachers' contract enabled veteran teachers to claim open positions and they had, in the words of two principals, "no control" over who ends up teaching what course. At the opposite end of the spectrum, one urban high school principal in State A said "I play the complete role" regarding teacher assignment. Most principals reported that they had considerable power in this regard, but few of them moved teachers around with any regularity.

All principals said that teaching assignments should be made based on student needs and teachers' curricular and pedagogical strengths. Several added that collaboration and grade-level team makeup should also factor into assignment decisions. In almost all cases, principals said they solicited teacher input before they made assignments.

Many principals clearly stated that assigning teachers was their prerogative. One urban-suburban secondary school principal in State A spoke for almost all the principals in the sample in saying "Principals do have the right to move teachers." Another principal in State A made switching teachers' assignments a key part of his strategy for turning around the low-performing, urban elementary school he had been appointed to lead. This principal had been a union steward as a teacher so he knew the teachers' contract well: "You have to give them their placement a week before school ends. You have to give it to them in writing. You have to give them a preference sheet [on which to place their preferred course assignments]." Once the teachers fill out the sheet, he said, "You can look at it if you want but the contract reads that whatever you feel is in the best interest of the school will prevail."

Two principals had reassigned teachers to reinvigorate them or send a warning. One principal of an urban elementary school in State A said, "I reassigned one of my veteran teachers. She used to teach first grade forever. I reassigned her to second grade, new room, everything. Where she was in the room for about 20-something years, same room. You know it was just stagnant. I moved her room hoping that she would weed out some of the mess and learn a new curriculum. I think it was one year in that position and she became more cognizant of her deficiencies. Has she arrived yet? No. Making progress? Yes." She added when she reassigned the teacher, "I think she then knew that I was serious about some of the feedback that I gave her." Another elementary principal in a nearby urban-suburban district expressed a similar approach, noting, "I have changed grade levels to sort of shape people up."

While noting that assigning teachers was their right, most principals said it was a decision that they did not make lightly. Reassigning teachers, especially when the new assignment differed substantially from the prior one, could directly jeopardize teachers' effectiveness. Principals noted that it could also demoralize teachers. The principal in the low-performing school described above said that when he switched teachers' assignments he "met with every single teacher. I told them exactly what their placement was going to be…I let them vent any frustration that they had." A charter middle school principal in State A explained that she took teachers' course preferences seriously while making assignments with students' interests in mind: "I want them [teachers] to be happy in what they are teaching. I want them to teach what they want to teach. So I definitely listen to them but in the end I need to do what's right for the kids in the school and the budget."

Although they were entitled to do so, few principals changed teachers' assignments with any regularity. One State A urban-suburban elementary principal said, "We don't shake things up a lot. I think if you did just for the sake of shaking things up, you'd end up with a lot of grievances. And for the most part, there is no real reason to do it." The principal continued to explain that if things seemed to be working, there was little reason to alter teachers' assignments.

What constrained these principals' approaches to teacher hiring and assignment?

Principals reported four major constraints to their ability to hire high-quality teachers and assign teachers to appropriate classes. One constraint many principals noted was a limited supply of skilled candidates. A second constraint the prin-

cipals identified was what they perceived to be excessive centralization of hiring. A third constraint to both hiring and assignment was seniority, either enshrined in teachers' contracts or established through long-standing custom. A fourth constraint to assignment, noted mostly by charter school principals, was certification.

Many principals identified a limited supply of qualified candidates as a key constraint to hiring. This was particularly problematic for principals of schools in more sparsely populated regions and for all schools regarding shortage areas. The principal of the rural high school in State B noted that few candidates applied to positions at her school because "Some people don't want to drive this far into the country." Her school's remoteness was compounded by its relative poverty, as she explained: "I know there are two history teachers who have 10 years of experience and would love to come here [but] I don't think we are going to be able to afford them."

A principal of a large, urban middle school in the same state also cited supply as a barrier to hiring strong candidates. She said about urban schools: "they're tough to work with." She elaborated: "You'll get this candidate pool and you're thinking 'This is not good. I cannot go with any of these—we'll have to start again.' And that's how we ended up with a teacher being emergency certified for math because none of the candidates were appropriate."

A second constraint on principals' opportunity to hire that State B administrators noted in particular was a centralized approach to this human capital function. A principal in a large, urban high school in State B said that his district oversaw hiring, leaving him "little or no control" over this important process. He elaborated: "I am told when the interviews will take place…I am invited to be part of the [hiring] team, if I can make it, and I'm asked to get some parent input. There's usually six to eight people on a team including two or three of my people and the rest of the people are central office people."

This principal explained how district-based hiring weakened the hiring process:

> It's not just about the [teaching] credential; the credential is a great starting point. But there's a whole personality component, there's a whole element of socio-emotional connection that you feel with the people during interview processes that you can't get if you're not part of the culture, and usually most of the people that are making decisions about who comes into my building are not a part of my culture everyday… dealing with the relationships, dealing with the struggles, dealing with the parents, as well as the people who are in the building.

A principal of a large, suburban middle school in the same state also cited bureaucratic constraints on hiring. She recounted, "I had over 300 applications for this one position. You have to interview every resident of this town," a tremendous undertaking, before offering the position to an applicant.

A third constraint on principals' ability to hire and assign strong candidates was seniority. State B principals were again more likely to note this constraint, although some State A principals identified it as well. Principals wanted to hire the best person for the open position. They reported that sometimes seniority rules, either formally enshrined in the teachers' collective bargaining agreement or informally integrated into district norms, allowed veteran teachers within the district the first claim on open positions. In some cases, these rules gave senior teachers the right to claim the position of any more-junior teachers with the same certification in their school.

In some places, principals decried their lack of authority in making teaching assignments. This was particularly the case in urban districts in State B. The principal of a large, urban high school in this state recounted, "The union and the system that they have in this district about how teachers bid on jobs…It really takes the power away from me, the administrator, to have any say in who comes into the building." He elaborated: "The hiring and assignment process is largely based on seniority. People bid into and out of my building without my control. The positions that are left over after the teacher pool are filled by central office, so I have no control…" He further described the process by which teachers selected course assignments by giving the following example:

> AP English 12—that's the most academic group, very successful. This is a small class of 10 to 15 students. The most senior person would take that regardless of whether or not they had AP training, or if they were a good educator…but just because they were older and they had been in the school longer.

As a result, the last classes chosen, "the career, ninth grade classes" in the words of the principal, are assigned to teachers who are new to the building and have very low seniority.

Another principal in the same state but in a large, suburban elementary school described having little control over the assignment process. In her district, senior teachers who lost their positions due to program cuts or enrollment declines could displace newer teachers with the same certification. She further explained, "You have no control.":

[T]hose [new] teachers are laid off and they are not called back until the 11th hour after the job fair. So say I have a stellar teacher in fourth grade, she is laid off, and I have worked with her now, I have got her on my bus… she has done all my professional development, sunk my heart and soul into this particular teacher. Now I have had her for four years, she is laid off, what happens, her job goes up… and you pray.

She further explained that relatively new teachers who were laid off and then hired back had very low seniority "so they are still going to be bumped around" for "seven, eight years."

Additionally, one of the charter schools in State A had been founded by one of the national teachers unions. The teachers' collective bargaining agreement in this school restricted the principal's ability to assign teachers. The principal stated, "There is actually a spot in the contract that says you can't assign somebody in a grade level that's too distinct from [their] existing grade level. And that came about because a prior director had done that, had taken somebody that was in… maybe first [grade] and put them in fourth [grade]." She further compared working as an administrator in her current charter school to her prior position: "I think I had more freedoms in my prior, conventional school as far as personnel and staffing."

The principals located the source of seniority's power not only in teachers' contracts but also in district norms. A principal of a charter school in State B that was not unionized said that seniority could still play a role in assignment decisions, saying, "Seniority might be a factor. All things being equal, a more senior teacher who has been here longer would have the first shot at an opening if we thought that teacher was just as good as anybody else."

Another principal of an urban-suburban elementary school in State A said that the assistant superintendent in his district had recently clarified that while seniority had been playing the decisive role in hiring, this was not contractually required:

[A] year or two ago, we had a discussion with the assistant superintendent and she said… seniority doesn't give you the right to get a transfer. So if somebody wanted to transfer to here … it doesn't matter if you have more seniority. It's the best person for the job. So, for a long time it was just—'Oh, the elementary people were just taking people from other schools because they had seniority.' There was no question about it if they wanted to transfer in. Now it doesn't work that way. Now you can say, I don't want that teacher—I want this one. And this one is a better fit for these reasons—and we've been pretty successful about that. I think there was a misinterpretation of the language for a long time.

In this case and others, seniority's influence had exceeded its contractual basis.

Principals noted some relaxation of strict seniority in recent years. The high school principal in the rural district in State B said the superintendent had made curtailing privileges based on seniority a priority. She said, "The superintendent is being very clear…that seniority is no longer going to be the key. The key determining factor [in assignments] is going to be who is best qualified."

Charter school principals mentioned a fourth constraint on principals' ability to assign teachers to appropriate courses: certification. Sometimes they lacked applicants with proper certification. One principal in State B explained:

> *You are always struggling with that, because in this charter school, which is a smaller school… you have needs that the larger districts don't have to address— a half-time Spanish position, a 60 percent PE position. So the certification can be a pain because you can often find people who are better at those jobs than the applicants [with certification] but you can't hire them because they don't have the certification.*

Another charter middle school principal contrasted the barrier of certification to hiring and assignment in State A with a neighboring state where he used to work:

> *I'll see really strong teachers but say they're certified out-of-state and there might be some concern… will their certification transfer to state A quickly enough. That's unfortunate, you know? Even in [neighboring state]—in the charter schools there—there's more leeway and we were able to hire really strong college grads… these sort of Teach for America types and if they can pass the equivalent of the Praxis tests then they can teach in the classroom in the charter school. And that just really opened up the pool.*

In summary, most principals reported some degree of authority over teacher hiring and assignment in their buildings. Principals generally reported using hiring as one of their preferred levers to increase teacher quality in their buildings. Principals were less apt to discuss assignment as a lever they frequently employed to increase teacher quality. Although in some cases contractual or certification limitations constrained principals' decisions, tradition and culture seemed to be a considerable impediment to making more deliberate and careful matches between teachers and their course assignments.

Evaluation and dismissal

How did the principals conceive of and carry out teacher evaluation?

Principals in our sample conceived of evaluation as serving two main purposes: first, to improve instruction and, second, to identify poorly performing teachers for intervention, and, potentially, dismissal. One principal spoke for all the principals in the sample, saying that the primary purpose of evaluation in his school was "To help [teachers] become the best teachers they can be." The secondary purpose, he added, was "to make the very important decision whether to renew for non-tenured teachers and to do whatever else you need to do with the nonperforming teachers." Many principals in the sample felt that evaluation did not regularly achieve either of these purposes, however.

Principals identified the following constraints on their ability to evaluate teachers effectively and move to dismiss persistent underperformers:

- Time
- A limited opportunity to observe and document representative teaching
- Inadequate observation instruments
- School culture

Helping teachers improve their practice

Principals generally agreed that a main purpose of teacher evaluation was to improve teachers' practice. However, one high school principal in an urban-sub-urban State A district articulated a sentiment shared by almost all the principals in saying, "I think the *intended* [his emphasis] purpose of evaluations—which is to look at teaching and to look at learning and to make it better—is a really good purpose. But I don't know—I don't think that's how it's shaking out."

In fact, almost all principals in the sample decried the staged nature of formal evaluation. Several principals called evaluation a "dog and pony show" and noted that they were able to gauge teachers' instruction—and help them improve—more through their informal observations than their formal ones.

A few principals had to some extent relinquished hopes for using formal evaluation procedures to improve instruction. One urban middle school principal in State B said: "I personally don't really put too much value in that formal process. I think that a person can write a good lesson plan and put on a good show for one

lesson and it has nothing to do with what kind of teacher they are." Noting that she "was not always certain everyone gets something out of it" another principal who worked in an urban-suburban State A elementary school saw the evaluation process primarily as a way to "give teachers a pat on the back" unless their instruction was truly inadequate.

Many principals, however, emphasized the importance of evaluation. One suburban State A middle school principal explained, "It's the last thing to get done when it should be the first thing." Principals reported in a few cases that evaluation contributed to improved teaching and learning. One elementary school principal in an urban State A district had a substantial background in observation and instructional improvement; she noted that in her school "evaluation drives the learning process." Two other principals who worked in a suburban State B district that had committed considerable time and resources to improving its evaluation system noted that evaluation resulted in instructional improvement in their schools.

Lastly, three charter school principals, all in the same charter network in State A, reported that evaluation improved teaching and learning. Principals in these settings reported that evaluation was tightly linked with coaching. Moreover, principals explained that there was no distinction between "formal" and "informal" observations in these schools; they could draw on all observations, which were as frequent as weekly, in crafting teachers' annual evaluations. One principal explained:

> *We are constantly in and out of classrooms… observing instruction, giving feedback to teachers—informally and formally—meeting with teachers regularly. Some teachers we meet with on a daily basis. Some teachers we meet with weekly. Some bi-weekly, depending on where they are in their instruction.*

Evaluation in these schools was also more frequent for all teachers. Regardless of experience level, teachers in these principals' schools were evaluated once a year.

Identifying and addressing poorly performing teachers

Consistent with their view that evaluation was much less powerful in their schools than it could have been, principals reported that evaluation had little impact on teachers' continued employment. In fact, few principals of schools where teachers received tenure reported dismissing a tenured teacher and some participants reported that they had never dismissed any teacher, tenured or not.

For example, when asked whether he had dismissed any teachers, one principal of a suburban high school in State A replied "Haven't had to, no. We've certainly dealt with some issues but by and large, we've had teachers who have been willing to work on what they needed to, maybe go for some additional coursework to get their stuff together, go see other colleagues. So, no, I haven't had to do that. We've counseled teachers out, you know? We've had teachers switch from school to school to give them a fresh start and everything else."

Principals across the sample said that teachers in jeopardy of losing their jobs often resigned before they were dismissed. One urban-suburban high school principal in State B explained that he had put five teachers on improvement plans in his nine-year administrative career. "Four out of five of those got much better, much better. The fifth one, I terminated because he didn't get better—had no desire to get better—and was just bad to begin with." Even though this person was not tenured, the principal said the union tried to fight his recommendation to dismiss that teacher. He said that "I had enough evidence on him and I guess he got to a point where he asked them, 'Well, can I resign before I'm fired?' And I said, 'I don't care what you do with him—as long as he doesn't come back here I'm fine. My job is to remove him from here and to replace him with somebody better.' So I don't even know what they did—but my recommendation was to terminate him."

Principals said that evaluation had more impact on nontenured teachers' employment than it did on that of tenured teachers. This is because nontenured teachers are considered for renewal each year, while tenured teachers receive an ongoing contract. An administrator must amass a much more detailed and robust body of evidence to dismiss a tenured teacher than that required to nonrenew a nontenured teacher. In State A teachers may obtain tenure after working for four years in the state while teachers in State B may achieve tenure after three years of teaching.

Principals in our sample reported that evaluation led to the nonrenewal of nontenured teachers more frequently than it resulted in the dismissal of tenured instructors. Some principals reported nonrenewing a small number of nontenured teachers. Two principals in the same suburban State A district both recounted stories about nontenured teachers being dismissed based on their evaluation results. One estimated that one nontenured teacher was nonrenewed every year in her school.

Several principals in State A said that there was a growing movement in their school system for principals to use their relative freedom to nonrenew nontenured teachers. One suburban middle school principal said "In our building—last

year was the first time I went to a [nonrenewal] hearing. Prior to that, we've coached people out." Another suburban high school principal said his district had amended the form they provided to nontenured teachers to notify them regarding whether or not their contract would be renewed for the upcoming school year. He recalled, "That form used to say 'I do' or 'I do not' recommend for contract renewal and now we've added a category that says, 'I recommend with reservations.' It does not change any standing within the law…but it gives us a chance to really have a frank discussion and say, 'You really have to prove yourself.'"

Similarly, another principal in the same district said that the superintendent had put new pressure on principals to nonrenew nontenured teachers: "Four years ago—the standards in the district changed. The superintendent was very clear that tenure was not taken for granted in that the demands were much higher." As a result, she said, "I had to let a special-ed teacher go last year who was on the edge…she had a maternity leave and I knew that I wasn't getting the best picture. I asked for an extension [from the district to make a recommendation regarding tenure] and was told no because I'd seen good performance and then I saw her go downhill that last year."

In contrast to conventional schools in either state, in several of the charter schools in State A principals reported a higher incidence of dismissal stemming from evaluations. There was no tenure and no collective bargaining agreement in these settings. One urban middle school principal explained, "We had two cases of nonrenewal—where we did not renew the position—their contracts for the coming school year. I think it's important for us to do that as a charter school because we don't have a collective bargaining unit with teachers. We do have leeway to do that and it's one of the biggest differences, I think—while we have more autonomy and more freedom, you know—more ability to make change." This past year, which was the school's first, this principal had nonrenewed the contracts of two teachers on a staff of five. Notably, in State B, teachers in the charter schools had tenure and principals did not report dismissing or nonrenewing as many teachers.

What constrained these principals' approaches to teacher evaluation and dismissal?

Participants identified many factors that they felt limited their ability and opportunity to carry out rigorous and meaningful evaluations of teachers. These included time, a limited opportunity to observe and document representative teaching, inadequate observation instruments, and school culture.

Time

All individuals in the sample noted that they lacked sufficient time to complete high-quality evaluations. One high school principal in an urban-suburban State A district described the volume of demands on his time:

> *Time is a constraint—and time is a constraint only because… I put the clipboard in my hand, I head up to B210 and between here and B210, something happens, whether it's "Can I talk to you for a minute?"—whether it's, "You've got a phone call from the central office."—whether it's a parent downstairs who is pretty irate and doesn't want to see the assistant principal, only wants to talk to you—or at central office, "The superintendent needs you to call right away."—Anything could happen. You've got a bomb scare, you've got a fire alarm that's been pulled—so any of these things can happen.*

The sheer number of teachers who needed to be observed limited some participants' ability to provide in-depth feedback or observe classrooms for more than the minimum amount of time required. Several principals reported that they were expected to evaluate 20 teachers each year as well as paraprofessionals, administrative assistants, guidance counselors, and custodians.

In other cases, competing priorities limited principals' opportunity to observe and provide feedback to teachers. In one case, a principal and assistant spent eight school days at professional development, limiting their ability to be in classrooms. In another case, special education requirements prevented a principal from spending enough time on evaluation.

Even in a charter school in State B where the principal identified few obstacles to robust evaluation, he noted: "I think it is a weak part of the process. As hard as we work on it, I do think that teacher evaluation is not generally well done. And, I think the problem is that it is so labor intensive. If you really want to help someone you have to be in there a lot."

Limited opportunity to observe and evaluate representative teaching

Another limitation many principals cited was their lack of opportunity to observe what they considered to be representative teaching. As noted above, principals said that the scheduled nature of formal observations led teachers to teach in ways that the principals felt did not represent their typical instruction. Many principals also noted that, after tenure, teachers were required to be observed rarely or not at all. Most principals in State A said they rarely observed tenured teachers, since

such observations were optional. Instead, they reviewed portfolios that these teachers prepared. For example, one suburban middle school principal said:

> *In a more perfect world, there would be more opportunity for more classroom observation and feedback. Our—the system that our district has for teacher evaluation is limited with respect to classroom observation. As a matter of fact, a tenured teacher does not have to be observed—it's strictly two conferences, one for goal-setting, a mid-year check in and an end of the year evaluation without a formal observation.*

Many principals said that they would have preferred to observe tenured teachers more often but that there were reasons not to do so. Speaking of observing tenured teachers, the same principal stated, "I'll be honest—logistically, it's easier for me not to do it because of the amount of paperwork that is generated."

For principals in the urban, State B district, only formal observations could factor into the evaluation report. One middle school principal described how this limited the information she included in these reports:

> *I think sometimes a happen-by is far more telling than the 'Now I'm coming in. You pick the period' … and then they put on this big dog and pony show and that's what you can comment on when the rest of the time they are sitting at their desk … I want to be able to say any time I walk in it can be part of the evaluation.*

Notably, leaders of other schools, both unionized and nonunionized, did not report being constrained in when they observed or what they could include in summative evaluation reports. They could observe *any* time and include *any* information they gathered about a teacher's instruction in her evaluation; unlike the principal in the settings described above, their comments were not constrained to a discrete formal evaluation session. These principals talked about incorporating information from walk-throughs and brief drop-ins that their counterparts in other settings struggled to include in summative evaluations.

Inadequate instruments

A third limiting factor was the evaluation instruments. Few principals felt their district's instrument, the tool that they used to evaluate teaching, was adequate. One middle school principal in State A, for example, said her suburban district's tool was "too bulky, too cumbersome, too much paperwork." The observation instrument was quite long, in her view, and she wanted something that was "simple and user friendly" in contrast.

Another principal of an urban middle school in State B emphasized the limited quality of her district's tool for evaluation. When asked what she thought of it, the principal said, "I think it is awful [laughs] I don't think that it taps into the heart of [teaching] …this needs some significant work."

Another type of complaint the principals voiced concerned the binary nature of many evaluation tools. One high school principal in State A explained that his urban-suburban district's tool offered only two ratings—"meets standard" and "does not meet standard." He noted, "The document doesn't give me a latitude to rate somebody unsatisfactory because the standards are so low in the document. So unless a teacher has done something pretty egregious, they are satisfactory… A better document is going to get you a greater number of unsatisfactories—a better document will give you a true reflection of what's going on. But you are restrained by the document itself."

He added:

> So you are stuck with—there are ten [objectives]—well, they met them on six. Does he now meet standard or not meet standard because it's most of them—but it's more than half, it's not less than half—so what do I do? So it's written in such a way, that you go—you throw your hands up, you kind of—you grit your teeth and you turn your head and you hold your nose and you go… "Meets standard"—you have no other choice. Because then, it's a grieveable situation—now I've got to prove to you, point by point, why you're not [meeting standard]."

The result, according to this principal, is "You have to be awful …not to meet standard."

Another limitation of the evaluation instruments cited by principals concerned how the results were used. One principal of an urban middle school in State B noted how the form forced her to "play a game" with her evaluations. "As a new teacher you may not be meeting the standard, but that may be OK. But, if the superintendent sees too many x's in that column he may not renew." A second principal in the same district said she had evaluated a teacher and noted in his evaluation report that he had areas to improve. Later she learned that this teacher was not rehired because he had the two scores on his evaluation. "I did not know that that was how the process would work," she noted. When asked about the district's decision she said, "I would have liked to give him a chance." This was his first year, and she had some sympathy for him and thought he might be able to improve. "There definitely was hope," she said.

School culture

School culture seemed to limit the robustness of evaluations in some cases. Several principals noted, for example, that nothing prohibited them from observing tenured teachers, but standard practice discouraged it. For example, one principal in State B discussed evaluating tenured teachers, which happened every three years in her district. She reported, "You can do essentially as many formative [evaluations] as you need to to get to a summative… but the general rule is you don't do more than two." It is important to note that in adhering to this "general rule" and conducting no more than two formative evaluations, this principal reinforced the strength of this norm while also limiting the robustness of her own evaluations. While school culture might impede principals' ability to conduct high-quality evaluation, principals also played a substantial role in shaping that culture.

Several principals discussed the interpersonal difficulties of evaluating teachers. One State A charter school principal said that denying a teacher tenure could be interpersonally challenging: "[I]n education, being kind of a humanistic field, I think it's very hard to make those kinds of decisions of not granting tenure, there's all these emotions and feelings and relationships that make it very difficult."

Another charter principal (in State B) concurred:

> Generally speaking, if someone isn't impressing us by the end of the first year, it's better to let them go. And the problem is that they may be okay… and you say, "Well, you know, after another year, they are probably going to be fine." But another year goes by and they are the same and then they've been with you two years and they've made all kinds of friends and you like them and someone babysits their kids and then it becomes very difficult.

Several principals referred to their hesitation to critique teachers through the evaluation process. One principal in a State B middle school stressed that teachers "have to respect your position, but kind of like you as a person at the same time… I don't know that we got to that, but I think that's huge."

Interestingly—and importantly—a State B charter school principal emphasized both the cultural constraints on how evaluation played out in his school and his role in creating this culture. After noting that his school did not have union barriers or district mandates, he spoke about evaluation: "I think we need to be reminded that there are no constraints and if we fail to do a good job then it's our own fault."

A few principals cited factors that helped them make evaluation more meaningful. In the one district in the sample that is known throughout State B for its comprehensive evaluation system, principals reported comparatively fewer barriers to high-quality evaluation. In fact, they cited only time.

Similarly, in the charter schools in State A that belonged to the same charter network, principals noted that they had received helpful professional development on their evaluation instrument. A few principals of conventional schools also spoke positively about the professional development they had received on evaluation. For example, the principal in an urban State A elementary school who previously had been an instructional coach cited the professional development she had received in that role as helping her considerably in her work as an evaluator.

In summary, principals noted a number of barriers to carrying out teacher evaluation in ways that improved instruction and allowed them to dismiss consistently underperforming teachers. As with hiring and assignment, obstacles were not only contractual and legal but also cultural, interpersonal, and organizational.

Induction and professional development

How did principals approach professional development and induction?

When asked how they attempted to raise teacher quality in their schools, almost all of the principals cited professional development as one of the most important mechanisms for doing so. Some mentioned induction as a critical piece of this professional development. They identified the following constraints on their ability to offer high-quality professional development and induction, the formal and informal processes that help new teachers begin teaching within a school:

• Financial support
• Time

The overwhelming majority of principals interviewed noted professional development as a leading strategy in their efforts to raise teacher quality. However, they defined professional development differently. The majority framed it as discrete workshops on specific topics. A sizeable minority described it as ongoing and job-embedded. A few extended this latter description to include all professional interactions among teachers.

The majority of principals noted the importance of professional development in terms of a series of workshops. For example, a principal of a suburban elementary school in State A said:

> We have… four full professional development days and three half-days during the school year. And then, whenever I can… I do try to send people out of the school for professional development. Last year we were trying to implement RTI [Response to Intervention] and I had a core group of people where we were going to be piloting it so I was sending them out for a lot of PD on RTI.

A sizeable minority of the sample, including many of the charter school principals, described professional development as ongoing, job-embedded support. One charter middle school principal in an urban-suburban area of State A described her plans for this year's professional development:

> So a lot of our PD will be based on assessment. So it'll be teacher directed and I'll have teachers come in and share best practices and then we often will do a combination of presentation and then discussion in small groups and coming back as a whole to discuss as a whole, the issue. So it's very, very rare that we will have a two-hour presentation on Friday. Teachers don't like that. Anyway, we pay way too much money for our guests to come in and [only] occasionally they are great.

A principal of a charter middle school in an urban district in State A described his school's approach to professional development:

> On Fridays as a staff, we have something called an inquiry group where it cycles week by week and one teacher brings a question to the group—"Here's something I'm struggling with in my classroom." It can be as broad as, "I'm struggling with participation"—getting more participation from students in discussions, let's say. Or it can be as narrow as, "I can't teach right—my students don't understand the difference between apostrophe 's'—and when the apostrophe comes after the 's'" … so they'll bring it to the group and we have kind of a protocol—we talk about the question, the teacher who brought the question with them then comes up with a lesson based on the input from the group and then we videotape it. And then the next week we debrief it and give the teacher feedback.

This principal further explained that these professional development sessions were linked to evaluation:

So a lot of times, the goals we'll identify in the evaluation as growth goals... I'll encourage the teacher to bring that to the inquiry group as a question—or as a challenge—"Here's something I want to get—something I want to do better in my lessons. Here's the problem I'm having now." And then have them—so actually bringing to our—using our professional development, or the vehicle we have, as a way for them to get more feedback and support from more people around their goal.

Although this school represented the most robust and ongoing professional development in our sample, other settings also embedded professional development in the day-to-day work of the school. A principal in a conventional elementary school in a State A city described her school's prioritization of professional development:

Here at our school we take great pride in job embedded professional development... we provide a lot of training—hands on—via modeling and coaching and it has truly increased our teacher quality. I have I would say 96 percent of my staff are first- to fourth-year teachers. So they're fresh out of college—not a lot of teaching experience under their belt. However they're masterful. I am proud to say that they've—they've got it [laughs]... We learn together—well we're always learning—staff meetings—grade-level meetings—leadership team meetings. We build a lot of capacity here...

Finally, a few individuals extended this definition of professional development. One principal of a suburban elementary school in State B stated, "I think professional development is the key. I think having a relationship where they [teachers] can again talk to one another is a huge piece of improving teaching and learning."

Conceptualization of teacher induction[12]

Principals expressed a range of beliefs about the appropriate approach to teacher induction, the formal and informal processes that help new teachers begin teaching within a school. Generally, principals at charter schools and conventional schools that they described as having a strong culture of learning tended to emphasize induction more than conventional schools led by principals who did not identify such a culture.

In one set of schools, induction was minimal and largely the purview of the district. One principal in an urban district in State A described induction in his elementary school to date: "They do a weeklong introduction to the district for all first-year

teachers prior to coming in. In terms of the school we haven't done anything in that past." Another urban principal, who worked in a State B middle school, said she "had nothing to do with it;" the entire induction program was coordinated and run through central office. What little induction that schools offered was restricted to procedural topics. For example, one middle school principal described induction as focused on "how things are done and where the bathrooms are."

Some charter school principals said they did not have strong induction programs. Asked to describe his school's induction supports, one charter elementary principal in State B responded, "We've started a mentoring program, but I don't think it's worthy of your time." Another charter school principal in State A stated her intention to shore up her school's induction program after a new teacher got into legal problems. She explained how the new teacher:

> … had a mentor but it was kind of loosey-goosey and she got into huge trouble. I am not saying because of our lack of oversight but I think that contributed to it. She was doing her own thing, people had concerns but we didn't address it the way we should have and so I really learned from that, that young beginning teachers need a lot of guidance and oversight. So that's my philosophy now after having learned the hard way, don't leave new teachers alone.

Another set of schools offered more formal induction programs at the school site. These tended to be conventional, suburban schools. A principal of a suburban middle school in State A described her school's approach to induction:

> You know they have an induction day, when they ride the bus and they see the library and the historical society and the other school buildings and they're taken out to lunch, it's a whole day thing. But as far as the workings of the school, they come in and on the very first day of school, I pull them together for about an hour and we talk about "In your classroom, this is what you need. You have your phone here, this is where you get your supplies, and this is where" you know all those little—they don't need to hear big things. They need to know where do I get pencils if I need them. And that's what we do. And then from there, we go on and I usually let them actually set the agenda for the rest of the meetings… we have four or six during the year. And usually what comes up is that communication piece and classroom management. So those are the big issues.

Principals in these schools thought of induction as mentoring plus a regular meeting of new teachers.

A third set of schools integrated induction into the daily life of teachers at the school. These tended to be schools—whether charter or conventional—with a strong identity and a relatively high concentration of newer teachers. A principal at an urban, charter middle school in State A described induction in the following way:

> [I]t's a two-week training that takes place in August, and then we have about a week and a half at our school site with new and returning staff, getting ready for the school year, kind of making sure that everybody is on the same page going into the school year… I would describe—week one is like, 'What is [our school] and why is it different?' you know, 'What's the prevailing culture of [our school] and the history of [our school]?' and all that. And then the second week starts getting more specific, like if you're a math teacher… here's the general approach to teaching math at [our school]—stuff like that.

He continued, describing induction at the school site:

> … the biggest thing is not just orienting people, but also integrating them. So I think that my vision of that working best is a real team approach, where the returning teachers take the lead on sort of integrating and orienting at the same time as the new people. So, you know, instead of me having the new teachers early for a day and talking them though our schedule, it's the whole grade-level team meeting and the veteran teachers walking the new teachers through the schedule.

Another urban elementary school principal in this same network explained how she provided induction through coaching. She explained that she "meet[s] with them once a week," either individually or in groups of two or three:

> [W]e have a set agenda that we go through which includes looking at data on their progress on some metrics, checking in with them to see how they are doing and talking about the aims that they want to teach in the upcoming week—do they have any questions on that, do they want to problem solve it at all—sharing some best practices and challenges… setting very specific goals for the coming week that we kind of craft together.

The principal of a conventional elementary school in an urban district in State A staffed mostly by teachers in their first five years of experience described induction in similar terms. For her, induction pervaded the daily life of the teachers. She said she prioritized induction and described herself as "grooming" new teachers. She also stressed the many supports her school provided for new teachers:

Here we have team leaders so once you're—if you're a new teacher on the block so to speak you always have a team leader that you can reference for any question that you could possibly ever have. I meet with my team leaders on a bi-weekly basis so messages are communicated and channeled to their team all the time. That team leader again shows them the ropes but they also have a mentor… And they hold monthly meetings in the building with the newbies.

What constrained and supported these principals' approaches to professional development and induction?

All principals argued that professional development in particular was critical to their efforts to improve teacher quality in their schools. However, many principals cited barriers that decreased the impact of professional development and induction on teachers in their buildings. One barrier was financial. All of the principals in State B, which had recently cut its professional development funds to districts, and many of those in State A cited this challenge.

One principal in a suburban elementary school in State B explained:

The unfortunate thing is this year there was absolutely no money in the district… So any professional development that's done, we used to have the flexibility to do it, allocate a certain amount of money and we could base it on a strategic plan... This year, there is no money that we're given. So, any PD is district-based and it's revising curriculum.

Charter schools, in particular, noted that grants heavily influenced their professional development focus. A principal of an urban, elementary charter school in State A explained that professional development "is something that we have to work on, because in traditional systems, you have committees, and everything is kind of taken care of, and here we are doing it as we need to do it, depending on what needs to get done. A lot of our professional development was around early literacy, because we were [a] Reading First school, so everything was targeted at early literacy, and it was set, because we had the grant." Now that the grant expired, the principal said her school was looking for a new focus and source of funding for professional development.

Consistent with this view, most principals expressed gratitude for district guidance regarding professional development. One elementary principal in an urban-

suburban district in State A welcomed her superintendent's efforts to institute a district-wide focus for professional development. She said that in the past:

> …we never actually had to plan out our entire year in advance. So we knew we had a professional development day next week but nobody had actually planned anything for it… So it was always like, "Oh Jesus, what are we going to do?" "Okay, we'll do this." Now, we plan out the year in advance, we look at the overall picture of what we're trying to achieve in the district, what are the needs that the teachers will have based on what we're trying to achieve.

All principals cited time as limiting their involvement in induction. For example, the principal of a conventional middle school, explained why he could not be more involved in working with teachers:

> I think a big part of that is the—is just the other demands of my position or the structuring of my position, doing things like lunch duty two hours a day—you know, I mean—just things that nobody else can do, either by contract or, you know, whatever.

In summary, principals said they were relatively content with professional development and induction being managed at the district level. While they said they wished for more discretion over evaluation, dismissal, and, to a certain extent, hiring and assignment, most principals in this sample did not mind relinquishing authority for professional development and induction to their central office.

How did principals' approaches differ by context?

Principals' approaches to hiring, assignment, evaluation, dismissal, professional development, and induction differed in several ways. Some principals seemed less inclined than others to perceive obstacles or more inclined to problem solve in the face of barriers. Within the same district, some principals highlighted barriers that others did not mention. For example, a principal of an urban elementary school in State A noted few barriers to developing teacher quality through these human capital functions, while others from her district identified several obstacles. In another case, one principal of an urban middle school in State B thought her district's evaluation instrument was inadequate and responded by developing her own addendum. Similarly, a principal of a large, urban-suburban high school in State A confronted the oft-cited limitation of time by relieving assistant principals of lunch duty and

requiring that they spend all of their newfound time working on teacher evaluation. In sum, principals' own human capital—their leadership skills, ingenuity, and initiative—seemed to play a role in the extent to which they perceived and responded to obstacles in their efforts to improve teaching quality in their schools.

But there were also clear contextual patterns. Principals in certain schools reported fewer barriers to carrying out these human capital functions in their preferred manner; they also described strategies to reduce any obstacles that happened to arise. Principals of smaller, elementary schools that were in State A and had a more unified emphasis on learning or more support from their district reported fewer barriers to developing human capital as they saw fit. Principals of charter schools did not necessarily report more freedom in performing these functions than those of conventional schools. Instead, the particular characteristics of the school, whether charter or conventional, and district seemed to influence how much latitude the principal experienced. Sometimes unionization constrained principals' decision-making; more often, however, culture and tradition seemed to play a larger role in limiting principals' efforts to raise teacher quality in their buildings.

State context

Overall, principals in State B schools reported less freedom to hire, assign, evaluate, and dismiss teachers. In conventional schools this was largely due to restrictions enshrined in teachers' contracts. Although the suburban district in the sample gave more latitude to principals to evaluate how they wanted to take action than its urban counterpart, it required principals to interview all town residents who applied for an open position before hiring for it and permitted more senior teachers to displace the least senior teacher with the same certification in their school. Tenure laws restricted the dismissal procedures principals needed to abide by in charter schools in this state.

By contrast, State A principals reported that seniority played a much smaller role in their hiring and assignment decisions. Principals of all conventional schools and some charter schools reported that dismissal procedures were cumbersome as a result of tenure law. In a small set of State A charters, teachers were at-will employees and principals reported fewer constraints on their ability to dismiss poor performers.

Beyond these broad state differences, principals' decision-making freedom varied at the school level. One conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that like schools are not necessarily alike. Within states, charter and conventional school

principals experienced similar constraints and comparable opportunities. Some principals of charter schools reported barriers of the same magnitude and complexity as those reported by some conventional schools. Likewise, some conventional school principals *and* charter schools identified few obstacles and many opportunities to raise teacher quality. Generally, principals of schools—whether charter or conventional—that were smaller, enrolled elementary students, exhibited a strong identity, and were supported in key ways by their districts reported fewer barriers to conducting these important human capital processes. Principals of schools that exhibited all of these characteristics reported the fewest barriers to making key decisions regarding teacher quality and leaders of schools featuring none of them reported substantial obstacles to this important work.

School size

Principals of smaller schools, whether charter or conventional, tended to report fewer obstacles to developing teacher quality within their schools. One alternative high school principal compared her experiences as principal of her current school with her experiences as principal of a traditional high school. She noted that with a much smaller staff she was able spend time with teachers on a scale that she "would never [have been] able to do at [her other school]." Because her school was smaller, with fewer students and staff, she said she had fewer demands on her time in terms of discipline, teacher needs, and parent problems.

A second principal who led a charter middle school discussed the ratio of administrators to teachers in his school: "We have 18 or 19 teachers, and there are, right now there are four administrators, but typically we have three." A principal with 17 teachers in her building was able to divide her schedule, allowing her to spend substantial time in classrooms. She said she tried to be in classrooms three days every week and visit every classroom of all 17 teachers in her building at least briefly once a day. She calls the three days her "coaching days" and the other two days a week "office days" and has her office manager plan her schedule accordingly.

By contrast, principals of larger schools struggled to find time to hire, assign, evaluate, and, potentially dismiss more teachers. One principal of an elementary school with 700 students discussed her evaluation load: "I have to do all evaluations myself. I have over 80 people on staff here. I have to do the classified [non-teaching staff], which I have about 20."

Principals at smaller schools had fewer individuals to hire, evaluate and, if necessary, dismiss than their counterparts, some of whom led schools with teacher popula-

tions that were triple or quadruple the size of the small schools. Even principals who worked with a team of administrators in a large school reported more barriers than did principals at small schools who were the lone administrator in their building.

School level

Generally, principals of elementary schools reported fewer barriers to attracting and developing high-quality teachers than did principals of secondary schools largely because of subject specialties. Principals of secondary schools were more likely to cite an inadequate supply of teachers to hire, especially in math and science. Similarly, they were more likely to identify barriers to evaluating rigorously and fairly when they lacked expertise in the subject taught by a teacher they evaluated. One middle school principal explained: "I was an English teacher so my English teachers tend to get a little nervous, but my science teachers not so much." She continued: "[G]oing to a Spanish class, well, I don't speak Spanish. So the content knowledge can be sometimes prohibitive and interfere. Math, how am I going to evaluate the content knowledge of the math teacher?... They could be making a major math error and I might not catch it."

In contrast, principals of elementary schools generally did not question their own ability to evaluate instruction across a variety of subject areas. One elementary principal put it succinctly: "[P]art of my job as an instructional leader is to go in the classrooms and give feedback. That's daily—that just happens." She continued, saying that teachers sought out her feedback on their instruction: "My opinion matters to them…they know that I know instruction."

School culture

Principals of schools they described as having a strong and unified culture of learning were less likely to report substantial barriers to performing these human capital functions than principals of schools that leaders did not describe in such terms. For example, the principal of one urban elementary school said that teachers expected and requested feedback on their instruction from her: "It's part of the culture." At the heart of this culture was an exchange between her and the teachers. She explained this as if talking with a teacher:

> I'll give you more than enough tools that you need to be successful. That's what you'll take away from me. You'll—you'll learn as much—lifelong learning [and receive] job embedded professional development. There will be no excuses for why you can't get the job done because I'll help you to get the job done. Now, are you willing to do the job?

This principal reported that she had generally been able to hire whom she wanted, assign teachers based on student needs, evaluate teachers as she saw fit, and offer ongoing professional development that she thought made a real difference in teachers' practice. Although her school was unionized, she reported that she knew and adhered to the teachers' contract and the union generally worked with her rather than against her.

By contrast, principals of schools with a more diffuse culture reported more obstacles to raising teacher quality. One principal of a high school cited many barriers to hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development. She explained that her school did not have a uniform culture of learning and experienced high turnover at the administrator and teacher level. Some departments had strong leadership and were relatively focused on learning, but others were like, in her words, "a ship with no rudder." She continued: "So that's what we're really trying to change this year…what we tried to do last year was just improve the culture, improve the morale" of teachers. She further explained "The goal this year now is to make it more educational."

District role

Lastly, principals of schools in districts (or charter management organizations) that centralized noninstructional tasks but decentralized instructional responsibilities tended to report fewer constraints and more opportunities to engage in raising teacher quality. For example, principals at three charter schools in State A reported that their CMO had taken steps to assist with hiring and relieve them of many noninstructional responsibilities at the building level. This CMO had developed a process to screen applicants, winnowing down a large number of interested people to send on a select few candidates for principals and teachers to interview and assess at the school level. It had also removed some noninstructional duties from principals' purview. For example, each of their schools had a director of operations to handle facilities and budgeting, a dean of students to handle student discipline, and a director of assessment to handle testing. One principal in this network explained:

> For me, personally, I hired an executive assistant this year, which we haven't had across the network. And so it's been—trying to be really creative in how can she make me as effective as possible—how can I take away all this stuff that my brain doesn't necessarily need to do and have her do it, or have other people do it and then for me, the number one thing that's left is developing teachers.

The result of actions like this was that these principals were able to visit classrooms and meet teachers weekly or bi-weekly to discuss instructional improvement.

At the other end of the spectrum were principals of schools where districts had assumed many of the central decisions related to teacher quality, leaving principals little control over hiring and assignment, in particular. As described above, principals felt that people with little understanding of their building culture were making decisions that would have a substantial impact on teacher quality at the individual and group level.

Conclusion

Within this sample, principals felt more constrained in some areas than others. Specifically, principals reported feeling most constrained in conducting evaluation and dismissal and least constrained in their approaches to professional development and induction. Key obstacles principals noted to practicing evaluation and pursuing dismissals included a lack of time, a limited opportunity to observe representative teaching, inadequate evaluation instruments, and a school culture that discouraged honest, critical feedback and making the decision to fire a member of the school community. Principals identified the following key obstacles to hiring and assignment: a limited supply of qualified candidates, excessive centralization of hiring procedures, and the dominance of seniority, either as a result of contractual obligations or long-standing cultural norms, or both. Finally, principals identified only a lack of funding and time as obstacles to providing high-quality professional development and induction, and most voiced appreciation for district oversight of these matters. Interestingly, principals in unionized and non-unionized settings and in both charter and conventional schools reported similar barriers to raising teacher quality in their schools. On some topics, there were more similarities *across* sector than *within* them regarding the extent to which principals felt constrained in their efforts.

Within these broad findings, some principals reported having less latitude to hire and assign, evaluate and dismiss, and develop teachers as they saw fit. Specifically, principals of secondary schools, larger schools, schools described as having a less unified culture of learning, schools with a less supportive district, and schools in State B reported more constraints and fewer opportunities to raise teaching quality within their building. Often these factors exerted a multiplicative effect such that principals of schools that exhibited all of these characteristics reported the most barriers to making key decisions regarding teacher quality and leaders of schools featuring none of them reported substantially fewer and less intractable obstacles to this important work.

Some of this is certainly in the proverbial eye of the beholder; this report is based on principals' perceptions. These perceptions were checked against teachers' contracts and, in most cases, against the word of other principals in the district but ultimately these findings are based largely on principal self-report. It is possible that some barriers identified by the principals were more perceived than real. As discussed above, principals' efficacy, locus of control, or leadership skills likely influenced the extent to which they perceived obstacles and the degree to which they tried to surmount them. Additionally, their level of confidence and candor could have affected their willingness to discuss these obstacles with researchers. We did not gather detailed data on these internal factors, but, as noted earlier, they likely played a role.

At the same time, perception is reality. If principals report feeling constrained in their efforts to raise teacher quality it is likely that there is a gap between actual and potential teacher quality in their schools, and this gap means students are not being served as well as they should be.

How can policymakers help principals narrow this gap between actual and potential teacher quality in their schools? The answer, according to these findings, does not lie in simply mandating the creation of more charter schools. Instead, it resides in addressing the four primary barriers that emerged in this study: economic influences, contractual limitations, interpersonal challenges, and cultural impediments. Policymakers can take steps to address each one, thereby improving principals' opportunity to enhance teaching quality in both charter and conventional settings:

- **Rethinking resources for professional development and teacher compensation.** This study finds that economic realities limited principals' ability to hire the candidates they wanted and offer the professional development they felt necessary. Principals viewed hiring and professional development as the top two ways in which they worked to raise teacher quality. From their vantage point, therefore, investments in hiring and professional development would make it easier for them to increase the quality of instruction in their buildings.

  Efforts to attract more teachers to remote regions, hard-to-staff schools, and shortage assignments are critical. Offering bonuses and salary increments to attract strong candidates and retain them in less desirable locales and positions is important. This points to a role for the state or district in helping hard-to-staff districts offer adequate salaries over the course of the teaching career. Although money alone may not retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools, insufficient salaries will most certainly hasten their exit.

Regarding professional development, schools' and districts' failure to provide robust learning opportunities to people who guide student learning is not only ironic, it is detrimental to the quality of instruction our children receive. Efforts to improve professional development and reduce its dependence on unreliable funding sources are critical. This may involve rethinking the way districts and schools currently use professional development dollars.

- **Decreasing contractual limitations to raising teacher quality.** This study finds that some principals perceived teachers' contracts to be an obstacle to teacher assignment and evaluation. To be sure, teachers' contracts that mandate what is known as "strict seniority" privilege seniority over effectiveness and place real constraints on administrators. To address this, policymakers, including union leaders at the district and state level, should work to make sure that seniority does not govern important personnel decisions at the expense of other important considerations such as the quality of a teacher's instruction.

At the same time, however, policymakers must realize and respect why seniority is so treasured not only by teachers' unions but by teachers themselves.[13] Seniority is one of the only rewards teachers can expect as they progress through a teaching career. In reducing the role of seniority, policymakers must institute new rewards for experienced teachers as well as more robust opportunities for growth throughout the career.

Similarly, contracts that severely limit the information that administrators can include in a teacher's summative evaluation write-up drastically curtail the value of this process, reducing evaluation to, as many remarked, a "dog and pony show." Policymakers, both union and management, should also work together to ensure that evaluators may report on teachers' typical instruction. This suggests that evaluations should be based on multiple observations. These observations should include both announced and unannounced formats, as is done in places like Cincinnati. At the same time, all efforts should be made to make observation protocols and practices systematic and fair.

- **Reducing cultural and interpersonal impediments to efforts to raise teaching quality.** Principals also felt constrained by the culture of schools and the interpersonal dynamics of day-to-day school life. It is here that policymakers and practitioners must focus their most concerted efforts, since these challenges are in some ways the most obdurate. They are also the most complex, because principals play an active role in setting or changing school culture and in determin-

ing the interpersonal dynamics of their building. Thus, when principals indicted school culture, they also implicated themselves for not working to change that culture into one that supported their actions in these areas. Efforts to reduce these barriers must focus not only on eroding undeniable, objective obstacles to principals' work to raise teacher quality, but also principals' perception of certain conditions as barriers.

This finding has implications for principal preparation, certification, hiring, professional development, and evaluation. Policymakers can require that principal pre-service programs instruct candidates in vital interpersonal skills, including how to communicate, negotiate, provide critical feedback to teachers, and make difficult and unpopular decisions. They can also require that principal candidates demonstrate a knowledge of instruction across content areas in applying for certification and a position, and maintain and extend that expertise over time. This is particularly critical for secondary school principals who reported feeling less justified and confident in passing judgment on instruction that was outside their subject area expertise.

There is some indication, as well, that principals with a solid instructional foundation across various subject areas felt more able to influence teaching quality in smaller schools. Policymakers might consider requiring that all school-based administrators (assistant principals, department heads, deans, instructional coaches, e.g.) receive the same pre-service and in-service training as principals in the areas noted above.

Practitioners also have a role to play in eroding the barriers that inhibit principals' attempts to improve the quality of teaching in their schools. The findings of this study suggest that districts are central in this effort. They can play an important role in designing and carrying out professional development and induction, and in supporting school-based hiring by committee. In places where seniority holds sway according to custom as opposed to contractual dictate, central office leaders can clarify the rules and encourage and reinforce assignment based on qualifications and quality.

Finally and fundamentally, conversations in districts and schools must focus on instruction and must be frank, open, and specific. Superintendents must offer principals support and hold them accountable for performing human capital functions as they relate to teacher quality. In parallel fashion, principals must offer

teachers support, and in return, hold teachers accountable. Schools must change so that before every decision, principals ask "Will the outcome of this decision increase instructional quality in this building?" A district or school culture that discourages openness, that fails to foster authentic collaboration, that permits (or encourages) teachers, principals, and district leaders to retreat behind closed doors and toil alone will not result in increased teacher quality or better conditions for adults or for children.

Appendix

Data sources and analysis

Semistructured interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, were audiotaped, and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews followed a semistructured protocol. Data sources include interview transcripts; documents pertaining to evaluation policy and practice including collective bargaining agreements, district policy regarding teacher evaluation, and state laws pertaining to teacher evaluation, tenure, and dismissal; and field notes.

To analyze the data, investigators coded the transcripts, documents, and field notes using open, axial, and selective coding.[14] Thematic summaries, categorical matrices, and analytical memos facilitated the researchers' use of the constant comparative method to identify emerging themes across participant experiences.[15]

Endnotes

1 See, e.g., Daniel Aaronson, Lisa Barrow, and William Sander, "Teachers and student achievement in the Chicago public high schools," *Journal of Labor Economics,* 25 (1) (2007): 95–135; Barbara Nye, Spyros Konstantopoulos, and Larry V. Hedges, "How large are teacher effects?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 26 (3) (2004): 237–257.

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3 Kenneth Leithwood and others, "Successful School Leadership: What It is and How It Influences Pupil Learning" (Nottingham: National College For School Leadership, 2008), p. 15.

4 Dale Ballou, "Do Public Schools Hire the Best Applicants?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 111 (1) (1996): 97-133. For the latter, see Donald Boyd and others, "The Role of Teacher Quality in Retention and Hiring: Using Applications-to-Transfer to Uncover Preferences of Teachers and Schools." Working Paper 15966, (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010).

5 Morgaen Donaldson and Susan Moore Johnson, "The Price of Misassignment: The Role of Teaching Assignments in Teach for America Teachers' Exit from Low-Income Schools and the Teaching Profession," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 32 (2) (2010): 299-323.

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7 Kwang Suk Yoon and others, "Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement" (Washington: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance and REL Southwest, 2007).

8 See Jessica Levin, Jennifer Mulhern, and Joan Schunck, "Unintended consequences: The case for reforming the staffing rules in urban teachers union contracts" (New York: New Teacher Project, 2005); Jessica Levin and Meredith Quinn, "Missed opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms" (New York: New Teacher Project, 2003).

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10 Morgaen L. Donaldson, "So long, Lake Wobegon?: Using Teacher Evaluation to Raise Teacher Quality" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009).

11 Steven Kimball, Anthony Milanowski, and Herbert Heneman, "Principal As Human Capital Manager: Evidence From Two Large Districts< (Madison, WI: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Strategic Management of Human Capital Project, 2010).

12 Many thanks to Chad Ellis for initially conceptualizing the distinctions pertaining to induction.

13 Teaching is a flat profession, and for many teachers, their last day on the job differs little from their first. In a career with few opportunities for advancement and an earnings trajectory that peaks early, seniority is one of the few privileges teachers can expect to earn over time. Susan Moore Johnson, *Teachers at Work* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

14 Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

15 Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.) (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

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