Shifting Practices in Teacher Performance Evaluation: A Qualitative Examination of Administrator Change Readiness

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.

Nancy Spina
Phillip Buckley
Laurel Puchner
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

This study examines the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of administrators and teachers in a Southwestern Illinois School District regarding the recent reforms in teacher performance evaluation. This study uses a qualitative approach and provides data from individual and focus group interviews to determine the extent to which the district is prepared to make the changes effectively. The findings show that while teachers and administrators perceive potential benefits to teacher evaluation reforms, they also recognize barriers to successful implementation. Implications provide strategies that would benefit the district in an effective transition to the new model of teacher performance evaluation.

Introduction

The Illinois State Board of Education is requiring nearly 11,500 building-level administrators across the State of Illinois to change the way in which they evaluate teacher performance. Necessitated by Senate Bill 315, Public Act 96-0861, or the Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 (PERA), performance evaluations across all districts in the state will soon include a four-category system of ratings, coupled with student growth indicators. These reforms amount to a mandated change in the evaluative practices and a shift in the primary role of the school principal from building manager to instructional leader (ISBE, 2012).

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This shift is happening at a time when many Illinois school districts are exploring every cost-cutting and revenue-generating option and facing late and/or prorated payments from the State. In this climate, when fiscal and personnel resources are shrinking, districts cannot afford to make the necessary investment to maintain fidelity with the new model of teacher evaluation without realizing returns in student achievement and improved teacher performance. This qualitative study examines the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of administrators and teachers in one school district located in Southwestern Illinois related to the recent reforms in teacher performance evaluation and the extent to which their district and schools are prepared for them. Specifically, we use the information gained in this study to identify potential barriers and develop strategies to help district-level administrators and teachers better understand and be better equipped to address the potential barriers to successful organizational change as it relates to the implementation of new teacher evaluation reforms. We sought to answer two research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the district's building-level administrators and teachers regarding shifting teacher performance evaluation practices?
2. What do these perceptions tell us about the administrators' and teachers' degree of change readiness related to teacher performance evaluation reform?

Theoretical Framework

In order for school leaders to transform their environment and lead their schools through this transition successfully, they must understand organizational change and the dynamics of the change process. Organizational change occurs because the leaders and change agents deem it necessary. Implicit to organizational change is the assumption that an environment can be altered and that employees are capable and willing to adapt to the change (Kezar, 2011). Leadership is described as the most critical component in the development of the change process. The leader or change agent is responsible for managing the transition.

For leaders to help employees get motivated and prepared for change, they must create readiness for change. Change readiness, according to Jones, Jimmieson, and Griffiths (2005), is the "extent to which employees hold positive views about the need for organizational change as well as the extent to which employees believe that such changes are likely to have positive implications for themselves and the wider organization" (p. 362). Central to the process of preparing for change are stakeholder attitudes toward change (Walinga, 2008). This attitude, according to Elias (2009), will be a determining factor as to whether the change will be a success. Change readiness, according to Rafferty, Jimmieson, and Armenakis (2013), is "influenced by the individual's beliefs that change is needed, that he or she has the capacity to successfully undertake change, and that change will have positive outcomes for his or her role and by the individual's current and future-oriented positive affective emotional responses to a specific change event" (Rafferty et al., 2013, p. 116).

Review of Literature

Research indicates that educational reform efforts are focused on teaching practice because it is considered to be "at the heart of education" (Larsen, 2005, p. 292). Increased pressure for improvement in teaching has led to closer supervision of teachers and more accountability

through the teacher evaluation process (Larsen, 2005). The current generation of teacher evaluation models (e.g., Danielson's framework, Marzano's causal model) strives to fulfill better the need for institutional accountability and professional growth in a manner that is fair, reliable, valid, research-based, and data-driven (Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012). In this literature review, we outline the historical roots and evolution of teacher evaluation and consider the context in which current evaluation reforms have unfolded.

The Evolution of Evaluation

Research on teacher effectiveness has demonstrated that there are specific teacher characteristics and practices that are related to student achievement (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Recent research has demonstrated the importance of instructional practice in teacher effectiveness. As indicated by Munoz and Chang (2007), instructional practices, such as engaging classroom discussions and high-level questioning, have been related to growth in student achievement.

The first burst of interest in teacher evaluation in the US coincided with the launch of the Russian Sputnik satellite during the Cold War, as fears arose that students from the Soviet Union were better educated than students from the United States (Markley, 2004; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995). Administrators at this time began identifying desirable teaching skills that could be used to evaluate teachers and provide a more useful method for evaluation. With significant advances in evaluation skills and classroom observation techniques, teacher evaluation research became an increasing part of the educational landscape during the 1970s and 1980s. Researchers developed the clinical evaluation processes to have a greater impact on the instructional performance of teachers and student achievement.

The landmark report *A Nation at Risk*, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, represented the most significant challenge to public education (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995) since the launch of Sputnik. The committee wrote, "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur - others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9). Much of this report focused on the need for substantial improvement in teacher training and effectiveness. Accountability in education began to be the focus of a nation, and the push for standards-based evaluation of teachers' skills followed.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was likely the most significant catalyst for educational reform since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Among the major components of this act were requirements that all students have an opportunity to attend quality schools and be taught by highly qualified teachers. This legislation also mandated stronger accountability for increasing all students' academic achievement (Simpson, Lacava, & Graner, 2004). At the same time, as we moved further into the 21st Century, another catalyst for reform emerged: globalization and global competitiveness. In his first State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama warned that "the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow" (Obama, 2009, p. 5). How well students from the United States perform compared to these peers is the crucial component that drives accountability (Duncan, 2009).

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed the Performance Evaluation Reform Act in 2010, changing how the performance of Illinois teachers would be measured. While evaluations will continue to be based upon standards of effective practice, student achievement will become a

significant factor in every evaluation. Measurement of student growth is now a key criterion of teacher evaluation, and district-level administration and teacher unions are charged with developing a system of evaluation with this new criterion. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2011), the shift in the expectations of the evaluation towards the inclusion of student achievement measures puts a new light on teacher quality. This shift is critically important because the assessment and achievement of students had not been a factor in the evaluation of teachers in the past.

The New Illinois Evaluation System

By 2016, all school districts in Illinois must have in place a valid and reliable teacher evaluation system (ISBE, 2012). The Illinois State Board of Education recommends using the state model, which is comprised of 50% practice, based upon the Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*, and 50% student growth (ISBE, 2012). According to Danielson (2013), the *Framework for Teaching* identifies "those aspects of a teacher's responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting improved student learning" (p. 3). This framework includes four domains (i.e., Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness, and Professional Responsibilities), which are further divided into twenty-two components. At a minimum, however, district models must be comprised of at least 30% student growth. The Illinois State Board of Education (2012) defines student growth as a "demonstrable change in a student's learning between two or more points in time" (p. 22). To determine growth, it will be required that data from at least two assessments be used. These assessments are characterized by type (i.e., Type I, Type II, and Type III). At a minimum, one Type III assessment must be used. This assessment type, according to the Illinois State Board of Education (2012) must be curriculum-aligned and rigorous (e.g., teacher-made assessments). Additionally, at least one Type I or Type II assessment should be used to indicate demonstrable change in a student's learning. A Type I assessment (e.g., NWEA MAP tests) is defined by the State as an assessment which measures student achievement similarly across students, is widely administered outside of Illinois, and is not scored by a school district. Type II assessments (e.g., curriculum tests) are defined as "an assessment developed or adopted and approved by the school district and used on a district-wide basis that is given by all teachers in a given grade or subject" (e.g., ISBE, 2012, p. 23).

Change Readiness and Change Management in Schools

Although there is a substantial base of literature on change management in educational reform, and to a lesser degree research related to change readiness in education, there is a lack of research focused on teacher performance evaluation. Spillane, Parise, and Sherer (2011) longitudinally examined planned continuous change in work practices of both administrators and teachers over a four-year period. They concluded that organizational routines are a valid venue of changing school norms and culture. These authors reinforce the notion of a role-change of building-based administrators from maintaining current practices (i.e., management) to transforming practices (i.e., leader). What these researchers tell us about readiness for change within the context of an educational organization is that an organizational routine for evaluating teachers helps to "frame and focus interactions among staff, helping to define work practice" (p. 3).

The perspective of principals is particularly central to the process of change represented by these reforms because the principal is at the heart of these changes. Research shows that the principal's role is instrumental in the establishment of a successful school (Elmore, 1999). More specifically, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) conducted meta-analyses on leadership responsibilities (e. g., culture, monitors/evaluates) and found significant correlations between leadership and academic achievement. According to Elmore (1999), a role change from building manager to the instructional leader will result in higher accountability for improving the teaching and learning process and providing more guidance in developing teacher skills. O'Pry and Schumacher (2012) report that the support principals can provide teachers through the evaluation process is paramount. For all of these reasons, the support of principals may be the key to reforming the system of teacher evaluation successfully.

Methods

Research Design/Overall Approach

This study of the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding shifting teacher performance evaluation practices used qualitative approaches for gathering and analyzing data. The study followed Maxwell's (1996) interactive qualitative research design model, in which five components - purpose, conceptual context, research questions, methods, and validity - are interconnected and flexible in structure. The design "emphasizes the interactive nature of design decisions in qualitative research and the multiple connections among design components" (p. 4).

Community School District Overview

"Community School District" is located in Southwestern Illinois. Geographically, the boundaries encompass roughly 200 square miles. This particular district is comprised of several communities, from rural to small towns and villages to suburban communities. The student population (Pre-K through Grade 12) is approximately 8000 divided among over a dozen buildings. The school district has multiple primary elementary and intermediate elementary buildings, two middle schools, one high school and one alternative high school.

According to the Illinois District Report Card (iirc.niu.edu, 2014), this district is composed of approximately 84.2% White students, 7% African American, 2.3% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% Native American, and 4.3% multiracial and has a low-income rate of 16.2%. The school district has a high school dropout rate of 0.7%, truancy rate of 1.2%, and attendance rate of 95%. Student-to-Staff ratios are 19.5 at the elementary level and 19.1 at the secondary level. The Pupil-to-Administrator ratio is 249.3 (iirc.niu.edu, 2013). The Community School District is one of the largest employers in the area with over 1,000 employees, 600 of whom are "certified" staff members. The teaching staff is 94.6% White, 4.5% Black, 0.5% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, and 0.2% multiracial. The school district is comprised of 22.7% male teachers and 77.3% female teachers. The average teaching experience is 12.7 years. Forty-five percent of the teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, and 55% have a Master's Degree. All classes are taught by "Highly Qualified" teachers. The average teacher salary is $58,439 (iirc.niu.edu, 2013).

Sample/Participants

Teacher data from this study came from a sample of seven elementary school teachers and seven secondary school teachers employed by the Community School District. The number of years participants had taught in the Community School District ranged from two years to twenty-three years (M = 10.04, SD = 6.29). The sample was racially heterogeneous (78% Caucasian, 14% African-American, and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander) and the gender distribution (64% female) was fairly representative of the district (77% female). The student academic level taught by the participants was nearly equally represented across grade levels: 21% at the primary level (grades kindergarten through two), 29% at the intermediate level (grades three through five), 21% at the middle school level (grades six through eight), and 29% at the high school level (grades nine through twelve).

Administrator data from this study came from a sample of two elementary school administrators and four secondary school administrators employed by the Community School District. The number of years serving as an administrator ranged from four years to seventeen years (M = 10.83, SD = 6.08). The sample was racially heterogeneous (66.67% Caucasian, 16.67% African-American, and 16.67% Multiracial). Gender was equally represented in the sample (50% female, 50% male). The grade levels the participants serve were as follows: 33.33% of the participants in an administrative role at the intermediate level (grades three through five), 33.33% of the participants in an administrative role at the middle school level (grades six through eight), and 33.33% of the participants in an administrative role at the high school level (grades nine through twelve).

Data Sources/Instruments

Demographic Form

Two separate demographic forms were used to gather basic information about administrators selected for the interviews and the fourteen teachers selected to participate in the two focus groups. The form for administrators asked for participant gender, race/ethnicity, highest degree achieved, number of years in the role of building-based school administrator, and academic level of the students served (e.g., primary, high school). The form for teachers asked for participant gender, race/ethnicity, number of years of teaching experience in the Community School District, and academic level they teach.

Interviews

We developed semi-structured interview protocols for the interviews and focus groups, which included 10 scripted questions and a number of suggested probes to assist the interviewees to further recall, reflect, and explore their experiences. We revised the protocol following a pilot interview with a Community School District administrator who was not familiar with the project. In the first section of the scheduled hour-long interview, participants were asked broadly about the new teacher evaluation model and the necessity of changes to the existing model and followed up with more specific questions targeting the perceived positive and negative impact of changes to the teacher evaluation model, perceived preparedness for the change, and utility of the new model.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the data drew on the recommendations of Hill, Thompson, Hess, Knox, Williams, and Ladany, (2005) and followed a three-stage format, which included segmenting the data into groups or clusters (i.e., domains), summarizing the data within the domains (i.e., core ideas), and formulating common themes across participants (i.e., cross-analysis). Consistent with Hill et al. (2005), we labeled categories as *general* results if they included all or all but one case, *typical* results if they include more than half of the cases and less than the demarcation for the "general" category, and *variant* results if applied to more than two cases (but less than half).

Findings

Three major domains surfaced from the interviews. First, participants, particularly administrators, perceived a need for a new teacher evaluation model. However, the need was felt to be less robust for the participants' own district than for other districts and for public education in general. Second, participants believed that there were advantages in making the shift to the new evaluation system. Third, participants perceived that there were significant barriers to changing to the new model successfully. Overall, the data suggest that the district is somewhat ready to implement the teacher evaluation reforms but the level of change readiness is limited given 1) the relatively low perceived need for the change and 2) the barriers to change identified by the participants.

Perceived Need for a New Teacher Evaluation Model

In a global sense, participants generally identified a need to shift toward a new model of teacher evaluation. They felt that a new, more rigorous, more demanding teacher evaluation model is needed to increase credibility and improve the perception of the public regarding education. At the district level, administrators typically identified a need to shift to a new model while teachers reported with variance their perception of the need for the changes to the new model of teacher evaluation.

Participants noted that the new model increases accountability for student achievement, including test scores, and allows for poor performing teachers to be released more easily. This was seen as helping to address the public perception that schools are complacent about improving student growth and tolerant of mediocre teaching. As one teacher explained, "Public education has really taken a beating. I think the new model is needed to help change public opinion of the education profession." Additionally, an administrator noted that "this model will reestablish credibility within the education profession."

Administrators and teachers reported differing views about the extent to which there was a need to change the teacher evaluation model in their own district. Administrators typically identified a need for changes to the evaluation model in order to make the evaluation process more meaningful in the Community School District and to continue to improve the instructional process of all teachers and the education of all students within the district. Administrators commented that the new model would provide more of a focus on evidence of teacher performance for all teachers and have measures in place to address those teachers who are not performing up to standards. For example, one administrator stated, "I think the new process is a reminder to all of us that we should strive to improve each and every day and not take our jobs

for granted. The new evaluation model will impact all teachers and provide an avenue that we have not had in the past to address poor teaching in a meaningful way." Administrators also believe the new teacher evaluation model provides more clarity for them as evaluators. Another administrator noted, "I think the changes are needed in that they enforce a more clear focus on the specific characteristics of an effective teacher, providing more consistency among evaluators."

Teachers, on the other hand, reported that while the Community School District could benefit from the new model, there wasn't a significant need to change from the traditional system. To the extent that they did see a need, teachers typically focused on the need for improved evaluation for the limited number of district teachers who are not performing up to standards. For example, one teacher reported, "I think these changes are needed for those teachers who have become too comfortable and aren't doing anything to improve."

Perceived Advantages in Making the Shift to the New Evaluation System

Although participants did not feel like a new system was especially needed, at least not in their district, both administrators and teachers perceived the new teacher evaluation model as having several advantages over previous approaches. Advantages included the decreased emphasis on teacher tenure, increased accountability for student growth for all teachers, greater focus on teacher professional growth and improved instruction through better identification of teaching strengths and weaknesses, more objectivity on the part of evaluators, and the emphasis on data-driven decisions.

Decreased emphasis on teacher tenure. Multiple teachers in this study expressed frustration and/or concern over a few of the veteran teachers within the district who have become complacent because they have tenure and are not concerned with being dismissed. Teacher participants shared their opinions that there are some teachers in the district who shouldn't be teaching because they do the minimum, are teaching in the same manner they have for years, and they don't want to change. The new model requires evidence of teacher performance and student growth and outlines dismissal procedures for any teacher, regardless of tenure, who is not performing up to standards. Several quotes illustrate teacher and administrator agreement with the de-emphasis on teacher tenure.

- One teacher stated, "I believe the current reforms will even the playing field between novice and veteran educational professionals."
- Another teacher claimed, "Once some teachers obtain tenure, they feel that they no longer have to perform to high standards. Evaluating teachers with the same components will help level the playing field."
- An administrator expressed, "Education is one of the few professions where your length of employment outweighs the quality of your performance. This, in my opinion, has led to a high number of staff members who have grown complacent and no longer work diligently each day to ensure student success, and this notion needs to change."

Increased accountability for student growth. Both teachers and administrators generally expressed that the new model of teacher evaluation will lead to increased accountability for student growth for all teachers. They believe that not every teacher in the Community School

District is performing up to standards. The new model includes clear descriptions of professional excellence and accountability in the area of student achievement. One teacher specified a belief that the new teacher evaluation model "needed to be addressed in order to keep employees accountable for their productivity and contributions to the educational field. The new model appears to hold everyone more accountable." Both teacher focus groups expressed concern that a few veteran teachers in the Community School District have lost sight of their responsibility for student growth and do not value student achievement with the current evaluation system. One teacher pointed to the impact of the student growth portion of the new model for teacher evaluation, stating, "Student growth can hold teachers responsible for a set of standards that each student should know and understand."

Focus on professional growth and improved instruction. Participants indicated that the new model of teacher evaluation will have a positive impact on teacher professional growth and improved instruction in the Community School District. They felt that the new model would require more discussion between administrator and teacher to identify and enhance individual strengths and pinpoint areas for improvement. A middle school teacher stated that the new model "is the first real tool that seems to address teachers and help teachers be better and assist administrators fulfilling the role of master teacher."

Administrators shared similar perceptions of the impact on professional growth and improved instruction. They indicated that the new model focuses on measuring teacher presentation of content rather than on the teacher. One administrator shared, "I think the criteria levels are very well thought out and most particularly in the areas of the development of the training and the education of the teachers to help them become better educators"

Participants felt that the new model would demand more specific feedback focused on various teaching practices as well as student achievement results. One teacher indicated that "lessons will be more effective because it will force us to look more at the dynamics of the class and I will be able to plan to more modalities and reach more students. I feel the new model will guarantee that this happens in all classrooms." Several administrators felt that the addition of the student growth component in the new model would help teachers improve instruction. They felt that student data would help administrators and teachers identify areas of weakness, and they could focus their efforts to improve upon those weaknesses. One administrator said, "The new teacher evaluation model will lead to improved teacher practice due to teachers being held accountable for their performance as well as student growth."

While both teachers and administrators acknowledged the dual focus of the new model of teacher evaluation on both accountability and improvement, the transcript analysis reveals a noticeable difference between administrators and teachers, with teachers citing the potential for a positive impact on teacher professional growth more frequently than administrators.

More objectivity on the part of evaluators. Administrators and teacher focus groups perceived objectivity in the new teacher evaluation model to be an advantage. Several administrators spoke to the new model's clear descriptions of what excellent/distinguished instruction looks like, enabling administrators to conduct observations in a more standardized manner. Comments made by many of the teachers in the focus groups indicate a hope that evaluations will be less subjective and more objective on the part of the evaluator. One teacher felt that "a uniform model takes away the subjectivity that can occur across the district." Another teacher related the importance of objectivity to decisions about a person keeping his/her job or not and stated, "I go back to the subjectivity of it all. I think that any time a person's job or

livelihood is at stake and it is based on judgment on an evaluation, I think it needs to be as objective as possible. This model will provide more objectivity."

Emphasis on Data-driven Decisions. Administrators and teachers reported with variance that there is an advantage in the emphasis of the new model on data-driven decision-making. A teacher noted, "I do like how the new model is evidence-based and research-based. We are a very data–driven school district and this will help us to use the data when making decisions." Both teacher focus groups expressed the Community School District's growth in the area of using data to make decisions over the past few years; however, not all administrators and teachers are on board with using multiple data sources to make decisions on a regular basis throughout the year.

Another teacher commented on the positive aspect of looking at data over a longer period of time and stated, "This will force us to look at data over time. Looking at five years of student data will help gauge where I need to go. The data will help us look at kids' progress over time and make instructional decisions based on that data and not on our gut feelings."

Perceived Barriers to Changing to the New Model Successfully

In spite of the advantages of a new teacher performance evaluation, participants felt that there are several barriers to the implementation of the new model. Administrators and teachers expressed concern over trust issues, the teacher union, lack of teacher training, apprehension about the student achievement component, and the amount of time for administrators to be potential barriers in the successful implementation of the new evaluation.

Trust. Participants reported with variance that they perceived the issue of trust to be a barrier in shifting to the new teacher evaluation model. When asked about barriers, one teacher noted, "I think there will still be a lot of trust issues between teachers and administrators." Administrators supported the notion that the trust of all teachers was essential in making the shift to the new model. One administrator spoke to the notion of trust being a potential barrier, stating "If teachers feel threatened by the new evaluation process and the possibility of losing their job or position to a fellow colleague, it could foster a climate of mistrust and restrict the collaborative efforts among them due to a perceived threat of competition to be the "better" teacher."

Unions. Participants in the teacher focus groups and administrators perceived teacher unions to be a barrier in implementing the new teacher evaluation model effectively. Two teachers spoke of situations which they were familiar with where the union supported teachers who were not performing. It was their opinion that the union sees it as its obligation to support all teachers, regardless of right or wrong, because all teachers pay union dues. A teacher expressed concern that unions would support teachers who received low ratings and indicated there would "likely be pushbacks from the educational union when/if veteran teachers are evaluated in a manner they do not believe to be accurate." Similarly, an administrator reported that unions will attempt to use "loopholes to railroad poor evaluations based on technicalities." The overall perceptions expressed by administrators and teachers suggest that they feel there will be resistance from unions when teachers are evaluated in a negative manner.

Lack of teacher training. Participants generally reported their perception that administrators were well-prepared for the changes to the new teacher evaluation model. In contrast, participants perceived that teachers were not as familiar with the changes and did not

have any formal training on the new model, which creates another barrier in the implementation of the new model.

Teachers felt they needed more training to understand the new model fully and to be ready to make the changes. Teachers reported that they didn't have a clear understanding of the new process and how it would impact them. One teacher stated, "I think we were made aware of changes, but I don't know specifically how the changes will impact my teaching or my evaluations." Two teachers at the secondary level expressed that they felt prepared for the changes to the teacher evaluation model. However, both of these teachers are taking classes at the university level and said that they have discussed teacher evaluation reforms extensively in class.

A few teachers anticipate that the district will at some point provide teachers the information they needed in order to prepare for the changes. One teacher expressed confidence in the district's ability to help prepare teachers for the changes stating, "Our district has always moved forward with things like PolyVision and Common Core so we are used to those kinds of changes. The district really sets us up for success in everything we take on."

Administrators felt that the teachers would benefit from participating in the same type of formal training that was provided them. Administrators participated in state required training sessions regarding the new teacher evaluation model. The State did not require teachers to participate in any training. Administrators took part in over 40 hours of training to enhance their knowledge in the new framework for teaching, getting familiar with the domains and the components of each domain in order to observe and evaluate teachers better. In addition, the district provided opportunities for administrators to have meaningful conversations about the evidence they collected in the observation videos they viewed. An administrator stated, "The discussion that took place amongst a large number of administrators about the teachers they saw in the practice sessions was extremely valuable. We were able to hear and understand the process others go through when observing teaching behaviors, and that was helpful. It gave me a better perspective and more of an open mind when viewing teachers in the classroom." Administrators believe this same type of formal training for teachers would be beneficial in helping teachers become more familiar with the new model and helping them understand the various components of the evaluation instrument.

Apprehension about the student achievement component. Typically, the participants expressed concern with the student achievement component of the new system. Teachers and administrators do not know how the district will define "student growth," and they have questions in particular about how the district will determine growth for students with special needs. One teacher shared, "I think a barrier may come into play for special education teachers. Some of the special students have so many other things going on in their lives, and with a disability on top of that, they could go in so many different directions. I don't think it would be fair to evaluate the special education teacher in the same manner as the regular education teacher." Participants were also concerned about how the student achievement component would impact teachers in special areas, such as speech pathologists, music teachers, art teachers, and other teachers outside of the regular classroom.

Administrators and teachers of both focus groups perceived the student growth component to be a challenge, and they expressed the need for the new model to be "fair and equitable." The concern regarding student growth was expressed more often by teachers than administrators. Surprisingly, both teachers and administrators spoke about the student growth

portion of the new model of teacher evaluation as if it were separate from the model itself and not a significant component of a unified model.

Time-Intensive for administrators. Administrators and teachers typically perceived an additional barrier to the new teacher evaluation model to be the amount of time it requires of administrators. One teacher stated, "I believe it will be a large undertaking for administration to keep up with the demands of the evaluation tool through observations, conferences, and evaluations. It will consume much of their time, and they have other things to do." An administrator also commented about the time it would consume outside of the school day and stated, "The new model is very labor intensive and will require an administrator to spend more time outside the work day to organize and author a document that will be used to facilitate communication about improving instruction."

Discussion and Implications

With new mandated changes in teacher evaluation on the horizon for all school districts across the State of Illinois, district-level administrators have an opportunity to transform this essential aspect of educational leadership. This study suggests that in Community School District, teachers and administrators see both the potential for and barriers to this transformation.

One of the study's major findings is that administrators and teachers believed there is a need to shift towards a new model of teacher evaluation because they felt the new system would help to improve the public's perception of public education. It is difficult to predict whether or not the new model of teacher evaluation will lead to a change in public perceptions of public education, even if the new model results in improved instructional practices and increases in student achievement. Teacher evaluation practices are one of many indicators that have the potential to shape the public's perception of public education. And while it is a valuable objective of evaluation reform, it should not be its primary goal.

Teachers spoke to how a need exists mainly for district teachers who are underperforming and/or complacent but did not express a strong need for a new teacher evaluation model in the Community School District. This finding represents a significant challenge for district and building-level administrators, as there is a positive relationship between perceived need for change and change readiness.

Elias (2009) indicates that a positive or negative evaluative judgment of a change initiative will be a determining factor as to whether the change will be a success. This study found that teachers and administrators alike perceived the change initiative to have several advantages, including increased accountability and improved instruction for all teachers, regardless of tenure.

Administrators and teachers felt that the new model would be more objective and force data-driven decision-making to improve teaching practices and student achievement. The new model would better identify strengths and weaknesses in order to address professional development in a more meaningful way. It is clear that the teachers and administrators believe that the new model will require more reliable evidence of teacher performance. The message from teachers and administrators in this study is that all teachers, including complacent, sub-standard teachers, should be held accountable in the summative evaluation.

Another finding in this study was that both teachers and administrators identified potential barriers to a successful change process with the new model of teacher evaluation. Kezar (2011) emphasizes that obstacles may slow the change process, and they must be analyzed so

that leaders can move the process along and overcome the resistance to change. Mistrust, union involvement, lack of teacher training, apprehension regarding the student growth indicators, and time were all noted as potential barriers to change readiness and acceptance. With so much at stake, potential barriers need to be aggressively and proactively addressed in order to make an effective transition to the new model.

Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) discuss the importance of helping relationships in the process of change. In order to build trust, the District must cultivate buy-in and understanding of the new model. Rafferty et al. (2013) concluded from a review of the empirical literature that "high-quality change communication increases acceptance, openness, and commitment to change" (p. 122). As such, the administration should begin discussions with teachers regarding the new model to communicate the need for change. Administrators as evaluators must build this alliance by conducting more frequent observations and spending a greater amount of time in classrooms. Administrators must also offer productive feedback and professional development that is more closely linked to the evaluation system. While these types of activities will not eliminate all of the mistrust issues, they will assist in building teachers' confidence and trust in administrators' abilities to evaluate teachers accurately and effectively.

The district must include union leaders at the ground level to provide support in this process. Union leaders are influential and teachers may respond to other teachers more favorably than to administrators. Union leaders should be included in the training process and the administration should view union leadership as collaborators in identifying employee issues and in helping to devise solutions to rectify those issues. As Rafferty et al. (2013) concluded from the empirical literature, "when employees participate in decisions related to the change, feelings of empowerment are created, providing them with a sense of agency and control" (p. 122).

Training sessions for teachers will be critical at the beginning of the year. In addition, the district needs to provide time for teachers to discuss the new process with administrators and other teachers. Ongoing communication regarding teacher evaluation updates will also be important in this process.

Wallinga (2008) states in the theoretical framework of change readiness that change can cause anxiety and anxiety can be the greatest impediment to performance. Teachers discussed their apprehension over how the district would determine student growth, especially for students with special needs. They were particularly concerned about the "one size fits all" approach Marzano (2007) cautions against in the literature. Munoz and Chang (2007) referred to the unique experiences students bring with them to the classroom as factors that greatly influence the success of strategies used by teachers. Participants in this study also expressed concern with these factors. Additionally, some teachers were concerned with the assurance of fair evaluations for teachers across all subjects. The district must begin to develop the student growth component and include all stakeholders in the decision-making process of establishing criteria for student growth. The district must also include multiple measures to evaluate student growth and help teachers understand how to use multiple data sources to improve instruction and set appropriate goals for student growth.

In addition, the Community School District should research technology and other possible solutions that could ease the burden of the new teacher evaluation requirements on evaluators and help provide immediate feedback to teachers. The amount of time required of evaluators was found to be a concern in this study. The district should research ways to streamline the system by researching online tools and other devices and forms that could possibly ease the burden of collecting data, utilizing data, and scripting observations. In addition,

the potential cost, which could be a limiting factor associated with the purchase of technology and other resources, must be carefully examined.

The findings that surfaced through this study give a qualitatively rich answer to our first research question: *What are the perceptions of the district's building-level administrators and teachers regarding shifting teacher performance evaluation practices?*

We now have a greater understanding regarding teachers' and administrators' perceived need for change, perceived advantages in making the shift to the new evaluation system, and perceived barriers to changing to the new model successfully. In summary, both administrators and teachers report that a new teacher evaluation model will help to improve public perception of public education; however, teachers perceived the new model in the Community School District was needed for underperforming teachers. Participants liked that the new teacher evaluation model has a perceived decreased emphasis on teacher tenure, increased accountability for student growth for all teachers, and a more objective, data-driven process that focuses on professional growth and improved instructional practices. Moreover, they identified five perceived barriers to changing to the new model successfully, including mistrust among administrators and teachers, union resistance to the new model and support of underperforming teachers, teacher training needs, fears about how the student achievement component of the new model will be determined, and the amount of time administrators will spend conducting the various evaluation components (e.g., observations, conferences).

The findings that surfaced through this study also give a qualitatively rich answer to our second research question, which asked *"What do these perceptions tell us about the administrators' and teachers' degree of change readiness related to teacher performance evaluation reform?"*

As indicated in the review of the literature, central to the cognitive components of change readiness are the beliefs, intentions, and attitudes regarding the "extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully make those changes" (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 681). This study yielded a better understanding of the degree of administrators' and teachers' readiness for change within the Community School District. While participants typically perceived that the new model of teacher evaluation will result in increased accountability and have positive implications for the wider community, the Community School District is only somewhat ready to implement the teacher evaluation reforms. Administrators must promote and communicate the need for the change for all teachers and address the perceived potential barriers in order to successfully make the changes.

Conclusion

While it is certain that teacher evaluation will change in Illinois in the coming year, what is not clear is the extent to which these changes will be meaningful and lead to improved teaching. In part, the quality of the change will depend on the beliefs and actions of district and building level administrators and teachers. This study supports the claim that those most familiar with the traditional system of teacher evaluation see the flaws in that system and the potential benefits of changing it. While this suggests that teacher evaluation reforms will be successful in the district studied, this study also highlights the barriers that might undermine those reforms. District-level leaders should anticipate that, in similar districts, teachers and administrators may not see teacher evaluation reform as an urgent matter. If their concerns bear fruit—if, for example, administrators find the process highly time-consuming—or other problems emerge that make the

changes overly burdensome or ineffective, change readiness theory would suggest that the likelihood of successful change will diminish. This calls for effective district-level leadership focused on promoting the benefits of evaluation reform and working to head off and minimize administrative problems as these reforms roll out. With effective leadership in these areas, district-level leaders may build sufficient momentum to overcome the potential resistance to change that emerges down the road.

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