

Issue BRIEF

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The Importance of a Teacher of Record Definition and Roster Verification for High-Stakes Decision Making

ESTABLISHING A STATEWIDE TEACHER OF RECORD DEFINITION

ToR definitions help ensure data accuracy by establishing a common understanding among districts of the purposes, characteristics, and data elements required for teacher-student data-linking activities.

CREATING A STATEWIDE ROSTER VERIFICATION SYSTEM

RV is the process of reviewing the list of an individual teacher's students for accuracy to ensure that the data correctly link teachers and students.

When states and districts make high stakes decisions based on teacher evaluation results that include student achievement growth, the data must be correct. To ensure that teacher-student data are accurately linked, states can use a statewide teacher of record (ToR) definition and a roster verification (RV) system. This is particularly important if states generate teacher evaluation results and then share those results with districts. This brief highlights strategies for implementing statewide ToR definitions and RV systems and identifies potential pitfalls states should consider when implementing these elements to ensure that teacher-student data links are valid.



STRATEGY 1

Develop a definition that reflects all professionals and educational settings (for example, co-teaching). States should develop ToR definitions that reflect their states' educational priorities. Most states that have policies to use teacher evaluation results to inform high-stakes personnel decisions also have statewide ToR definitions that enable teachers who are responsible for the same student's performance in the same grade and/or subject to be linked to that student. In fact, states that plan to use student achievement growth for a large portion of a teacher's evaluation should be particularly inclined to develop a statewide ToR that accounts for multiple educators so they can produce reliable teacher-student data links.



Potential Pitfall 1

States that do not have ToR definitions may delegate the responsibility for defining the teacher of record to districts. This approach is acceptable as long as districts are also responsible for developing teacher evaluation results and implementing high-stakes personnel decisions. When districts use their own definitions, however, states cannot develop teacher evaluation results and use those results to inform high-stakes personnel decisions, because the attribution of instructional time to classroom teachers will vary. Such variation also hinders the state's ability to conduct legitimate comparisons of state policy implementation at the district level.

Not having a statewide ToR runs the risk of having inconsistent ToRs across the state, thereby developing teacher evaluation results that are unreliable for cross-state comparisons.



STRATEGY 2

Provide guidance to districts on how to implement the statewide ToR definition.

States should provide guidance on how to interpret the ToR definition to ensure that districts apply the definition consistently across the state. Linking multiple educators to a student could be done in a number of ways. Some states attribute a percentage of responsibility for students to a teacher, often using an RV system for the claiming process, whereas other states weight all educators' students equally. Statewide guidance in the form of descriptive memos, system documentation, or webinars can help clarify any questions educators and administrators have about applying the definition to their specific teaching situations.



STRATEGY 3

Allow district autonomy, as long as it aligns with the state's educational priorities and use of the data for high-stakes decision making.

Some states emphasize the importance of district autonomy in making policy and personnel decisions. Approaches that encourage district autonomy could threaten the accuracy of teacher evaluation results that include student achievement growth at the state level (see potential pitfall for details). However, if the decisions are made at the district level, using a consistent approach within the district can help ensure that policies are not problematic.



Potential Pitfall 2

States should use caution when allowing districts to develop their own ToR definitions. States that calculate teacher evaluation results at the state level and require the use of those evaluation results to inform high-stakes personnel decisions should develop a statewide ToR.



STRATEGY 4

Pilot statewide roster verification systems before full implementation.

Piloting RV systems provides an opportunity for states to identify pitfalls and adjust policies or procedures accordingly. Changes that could result from piloting the system include improving communication to teachers, adjusting the timing of RV, and modifying technical details of the system to improve the accuracy of the data.¹



STRATEGY 5

Ensure that staff familiar with the students and their classroom experiences approve the rosters.

Any combination of staff—teachers, principals, and district-level data managers—can review rosters before they are submitted to the state. However, some experts suggest that both teacher and principal reviews are essential for an accurate RV process.² Teachers are apt to be the most knowledgeable about students they teach and may want to be involved in the process; this could help gain their buy-in for the teacher evaluation results.

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¹ For example, the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology defines roster verification as “the process by which a teacher and supervisor confirm that the class roster is correct and/or report discrepancies for correction.” (Soule, H., & Wilson, N. (2013, April). Roster verification white paper. Teacher Student Data Link Project. Retrieved June 2015 from http://www.tsdl.org/resources/site1/general/White%20Papers/TSDL_RosterVerificationWhitePaper.pdf.)

² See, for example, Battelle for Kids. (2009). “The Importance of Accurately Linking Instruction to Students to Determine Teacher Effectiveness.” White paper series. Columbus, OH: Battelle for Kids; Battelle for Kids. (2015, October). The importance of accurately linking instruction to students to determine teacher effectiveness. [White paper series]. Columbus, OH: Battelle for Kids; Data Quality Campaign. (2010, July). Effectively linking teacher and student data: The key to improving teacher quality. Retrieved June 2015 from http://dataqualitycampaign.org/files/993_DQC_TSDL_7-27.pdf; and Soule & Wilson (2013).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

States' policies surrounding the use of student achievement growth in teachers' evaluations to inform high-stakes personnel decisions likely reflect their educational priorities. As states continue to develop teacher evaluation policies, they should think critically about the connection between the data used to make the high-stakes decisions and the need to guarantee that the data are of high quality.

Support for producing this brief came from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which expressed interest in learning more about state perspectives about high-stakes decisions that were based in part on teacher-student linked data. The foundation contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct this work. Information for this brief came from telephone interviews conducted in winter 2014 to 2015 with officials who oversee educator effectiveness or teacher-student data link policies in 21 states. One state declined to participate.

