

IMPACT IN WASHINGTON D.C. LESSONS FROM THE FIRST YEARS

October 17, 2011

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Summary

While many districts around the country are beginning to implement teacher evaluation systems that for the first time take student achievement into account, in Washington, D.C., the IMPACT teacher evaluation system is already entering its third year.

IMPACT is a teacher evaluation system that uses multiple measures of classroom performance to gauge effectiveness and provide feedback and incentives for improvement.

Early results suggest that IMPACT is doing what it was intended to do: recognizing and rewarding the most effective teachers, providing feedback and targeted professional development to help teachers improve and dismissing the relatively few that don't belong in classrooms.

To critics, IMPACT is simply the evaluation system that helps fire teachers. This misses a huge point. Perhaps the biggest benefit of IMPACT is for the teachers who stay, not those who go.

Many DC teachers report that they finally have the feedback and support they – and kids – deserve. The evidence is in the numbers: More than half of the teachers who were deemed to be “minimally effective” in IMPACT's first year and stayed in the district improved their performance enough to earn an “effective” score in the following year.

This element of the IMPACT system can't be emphasized enough. This is NOT a gotcha, anti-teacher program. It is quite the opposite: It's a fairer, more objective, and more supportive tool using multiple measures that honors teachers and the teaching profession and protects kids from the damage we know is caused by ineffective teaching year after year.

It's no wonder that elements of IMPACT are already spreading across the country. IMPACT, like any evaluation system of any profession, is not perfect. But in this model we have one of the nation's best examples that it is not only possible to measure a teacher's impact on student learning using multiple methods, but that it's possible to do so in a way that adds resources, is supportive and focuses on improving instruction.

What does IMPACT measure?

- Student achievement through test scores or other assessments
- Classroom practice through five annual observations
- Collaboration with other teachers and staff
- Professionalism, including attendance and punctuality
- Efforts to engage families in their child's education

The IMPACT system appears to have the resources to recognize strong teachers and to identify what areas teachers need improvement. I have benefited greatly from the system and appreciated the feedback and collaboration with my master educator, principal, and special education coordinator.

- Teacher, Barnard ES

Based on these multiple measures, teachers are then rated Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective or Ineffective.

Components of IMPACT Rating

*For Math and Reading Teachers in 4th Through 8th Grades
(15% of All Teachers)*

50%:
Individual Value-Added Student Achievement Data (IVA)

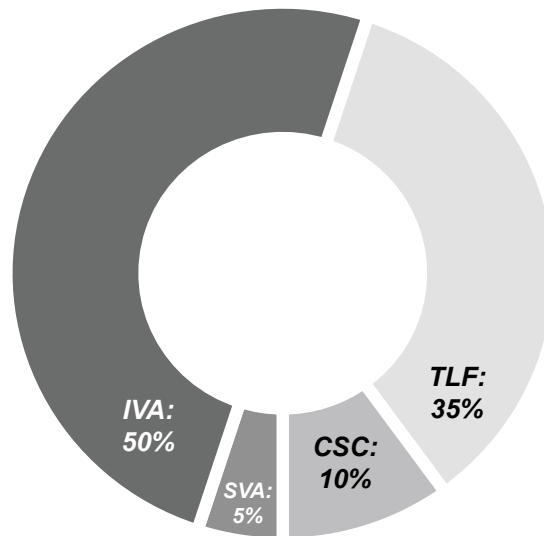
This is a measure of the impact you have on your students' learning over the course of the school year, as evidenced by the DC CAS [standardized assessment] ...

[IVA estimates] the teacher's impact on student learning as opposed to the impact of other factors.

5%:
School Value-Added Student Achievement Data (SVA)

This is a measure of the impact your school has on student learning over the course of the school year, as evidenced by the DC CAS [standardized assessment] ...

Because education is a team effort, almost all school-based staff — not just teachers — have SVA as a small portion of their annual IMPACT evaluation.



35%:
Teaching and Learning Framework (TLF)

This is a measure of your instructional expertise.

[TLF] is the school system's definition of effective instruction ... You will normally have five formal observations: three by an administrator (principal or assistant principal) and two by an impartial, third-party observer called a master educator.

10%:
Commitment to the School Community (CSC)

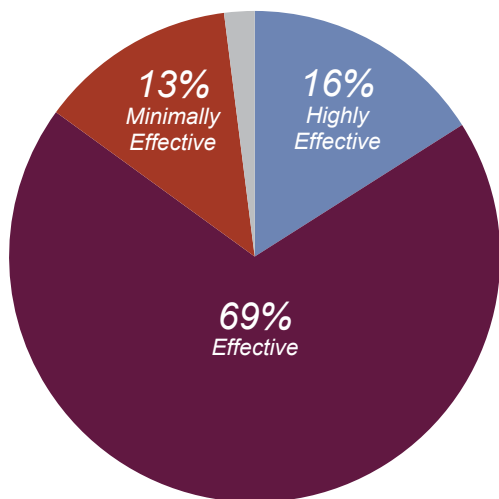
This is a measure of the extent to which you support and collaborate with your school community.

This component measures several aspects of your work as a member of a school community ... Your administrator will assess you according to the rubric.

How It Works

- All teachers' classroom practice is assessed in five formal 30-minute observations each year. By contrast, according to a national study by The New Teacher Project, only about 10% of teachers get five observations a year.
- Three observations are by a principal or assistant principal. Two are by a master educator, who is an expert in the same field as the teacher being observed. The district invested heavily in the training of these evaluators.
- All evaluators—principals and master educators alike—follow one rubric to assess teachers. This means that expectations are clear and that all teachers and evaluators share a common language when it comes to effective instruction.
- A teacher's evaluation includes his or her students' standardized test scores where they are available. In DC, this is the case for about 15% of teachers: all 4th through 8th grade reading and/or math teachers. The remaining 85% of teachers are evaluated based on student achievement goals and assessments that they select in collaboration with their principals.
- All teachers are also assessed by their principals on the other factors listed above: professionalism, collaboration, and family engagement.

IMPACT Rating Distribution
% of Teachers in Each Category (2010-2011)



How It Affects Teachers

Teachers are assigned points for each of the multiple areas on which they are evaluated and the points translate into the four rating categories: Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective and Ineffective.

- Teachers who earn Highly Effective ratings are eligible for performance bonuses and increases to their base salary.
- Those who are Minimally Effective for two consecu-

Highly Effective (16%)



“This rating signifies outstanding performance. Members of the Washington Teachers’ Union (WTU) who earn this rating will be eligible for additional compensation under the WTU contract.”

Effective (69%)



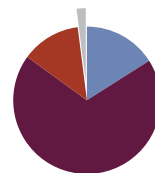
“This rating signifies solid performance. Individuals who earn this rating will progress normally on their pay scales.”

Minimally Effective (13%)



“This rating signifies performance that is below expectations. Individuals who receive this rating have another year to take advantage of the professional development opportunities provided by DCPS ...”

Ineffective (2%)



“This rating signifies unacceptable performance. Individuals who receive this rating will be subject to separation from the school system.”

tive years are subject to termination.

- Those who are Ineffective can be terminated after one year.
- Teachers rated Ineffective or Minimally Effective can file an appeal to the Chancellor. They may also file a grievance through their union and may file an appeal with the D.C. Office of Employee Appeals.

How It Played Out

- Last year, over 660 (out of a total of just over 4,000) Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) members were eligible for bonuses ranging from \$3,000 to \$25,000.
- 290 WTU members (7%) were eligible to have a base salary increase of up to \$27,000 for being rated Highly Effective two years in a row.
- The maximum teacher salary under IMPACT is \$131,540, compared with \$87,584 under the previous contract.
- 65 WTU members (2%) were rated Ineffective and were terminated.
- 141 WTU members (4%) were rated Minimally Effective for two years in a row, and were terminated.
- In 2009-10, the chancellor's office received 92 appeals; 10 were granted
- In 2010-11, the chancellor's office received 260 appeals; all are pending as of September 2011

How IMPACT Is Fair to Teachers

- IMPACT is a system using not one, but multiple measures of teacher effectiveness.
- IMPACT uses a student achievement measure that is based on student growth, not proficiency. It does this through a value-added model that measures a teacher's impact on student learning by taking into account things like students' free or reduced price meal status, special education status, or English proficiency status. This means that teachers are not penalized if they have students who started the year behind their peers.
- Where standardized test scores are not available –for instance, a science teacher –the teachers and administrators identify ambitious student achievement goals, select appropriate assessments, and track progress over the course of the year.
- As part of each observation, administrators and master educators write an extensive report to justify their ratings for each of nine teaching standards and offer suggestions.
- Evaluators and teachers then meet to discuss the ratings, areas of strength, and areas for improvement — a level of individualized support that very

...Surprisingly, it was the IMPACT system that made me more interested in being a part of educational policy. Initially, I was frustrated at how the system was rolled out and implemented. It just seemed as if the system was intended to see failure in teachers, not their successes. As I went through the process with my master educators and administrators, my perspective slowly began to change. For the first time in a very long time, I finally felt like I was being respected as a professional, and that a process was put in place to hold me accountable for my performance. As a result, I began to become more interested in further developing my leadership skills as an educator.

- Teacher, School Without Walls SHS

few districts provide.

- School-based instructional coaches provide ongoing, targeted professional development throughout the year to help teachers improve.

After teaching for 15 years, I finally received quality feedback from a formal observation. Let me tell you about the Master Educator. She is awesome! She is professional! She knows IMPACT and can give you accurate feedback!

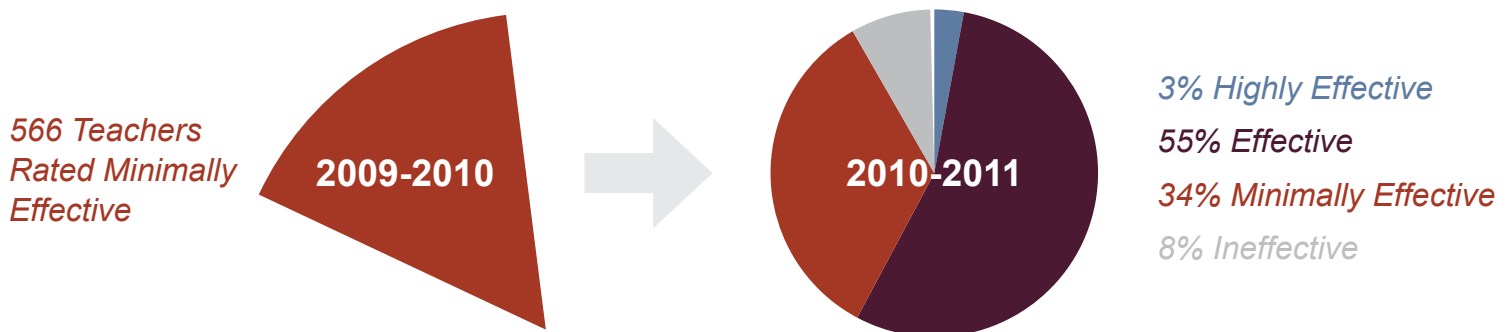
- Teacher, Seaton ES

Some Signs That It Works

- In IMPACT, there is a moderately strong correlation between a teacher's score for student achievement and the score she receives for her classroom observations. In other words, teachers who have high student test score growth also tend to perform well in observations by principals and master educators.
- The converse is also true. The IMPACT data show that teachers who have low student test score growth also tend to perform poorly in observations by both principals and master educators.
- There's a high correlation between principals' scores and master educators' scores, even though the master educators do not see the principals' scores. This means that, in most cases, external experts who do not have any personal relationship with the teacher reach the same conclusion as the teacher's day-to-day supervisor.
- Illustrating the contribution of individualized coaching after a robust evaluation, in DC nearly 60% of teachers scoring Minimally Effective in the first year of IMPACT and who stayed in the district improved to Effective in the second year.

Of Returning Teachers Rated Minimally Effective in 2009-2010, 58% Improved in 2010-2011

63% of Minimally Effective Teachers Returned



What Any School District Would Need to Implement a Similar System

- A state law that doesn't force districts to bargain teacher evaluations systems (or a district and union that are willing to implement a system like IMPACT through bargaining)
- A state law that allows for a significant part of a teacher's evaluation to be tied to student achievement
- A state law that doesn't ban differential pay for teachers for performance

- Some money, but not much of it. The per-pupil cost for IMPACT is \$150.
- A commitment to provide support to teachers to improve their practice. (DC did that through school-based instructional coaches, district-wide professional development, feedback from administrators and master educators and a video library of outstanding teachers in action.)

Where We Need More Information

One curious result of the first years of IMPACT is that teachers in parts of the city with higher poverty rates are less likely to receive high ratings. Some would say that means IMPACT is biased against teachers who teach in high-poverty neighborhoods.

While the DC school district is actively working on improving IMPACT in many ways, this is an area they are looking hard at. But the district doesn't believe there is bias, for several reasons. Across the country, we know that some of our most challenging schools have the least effective teachers—so the results so far in DC shouldn't be hugely surprising.

But what DC officials note is that IMPACT takes certain student characteristics (such as the students' test scores from the previous year and whether students receive free or reduced price lunches) into account when assessing a teacher's impact on student achievement. That is to say, teachers are not penalized when their students have more challenges.

In addition, all of the master educators, who conduct two of the five observations that teachers receive, have backgrounds in urban settings similar to DC – ensuring that teachers are evaluated by experts who understand the challenges of teaching in high-poverty urban schools.

What's more, to encourage the best teachers to take on the most challenging work, DC officials designed an annual bonus system for teachers in high poverty schools that are twice the size of those for teachers in low poverty schools. These teachers are eligible for larger increases in their base salaries as well. This means that a Highly Effective teacher in a high-poverty school can earn an annual bonus of up to \$25,000 – as compared to a teacher in a more affluent school, who is eligible for an annual bonus of up to \$12,500.

A Word on “Value-Added”

Perhaps the biggest hesitancy people have with an evaluation system that takes student achievement into

As a teacher who has received a highly effective rating, I feel that a big change this past year was the appreciation and excitement for good teachers. The IMPACT bonuses played a huge part in this excitement and giving raises for teachers who are not only doing their job – but doing a great job – has been a good incentive to retain strong teachers. I also feel that the “Standing Ovation” was a special night to recognize strong teachers and make them feel really appreciated. I was able to take this enthusiasm and excitement back into my classroom which motivated me to keep working hard and doing a good job for my students.

- Teacher, Hyde-Addison ES

account is the relative “newness” of the value-added system. It is understandable to worry about something that is so new. But the value-added system that IMPACT uses is gaining traction across the country because of strong evidence of reliability.

Many researchers and districts across the country argue that value-added is the fairest and most accurate method available for objectively measuring how successful a teacher is in helping students learn because it accounts for many factors that affect student achievement.

While it isn't perfect, research has shown that value-added is at least as reliable and predictive of future performance as are measures used to make high-stakes decisions in other fields – such as patient mortality rates for doctors, SAT scores for college applicants, and batting averages for baseball players. Research also tells us that value-added is a better predictor of future success than alternatives, such as principal evaluations.

In DC, the fact that there is a correlation between teachers' value-added scores and their observation scores suggests that the value-added scores only confirm what administrators and master educators are already finding in classrooms.

The IMPACT value-added model was developed in partnership with Mathematica Policy Research, a highly-respected organization often contracted by the U.S. Congress, U.S. Department of Education, and the National Academy of Sciences, among others.

Most importantly, though, student achievement is only one of multiple measures that are used to evaluate teachers in the IMPACT system.

About the Author

Barbara Martinez is a former reporter and editor at The Wall Street Journal, where over a 20-year career she won numerous awards and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Her last beat at the paper was covering public schools. She is now a consultant to various education reform organizations, including Democrats for Education Reform.