



**Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students**

Teachers at the Table: Teach Plus Amplifies Educator Voice in the Creation of Memphis' New Teacher Effectiveness Measurement

"Teach Plus has been quite instrumental in helping the district in terms of evaluation. The facilitation of sessions with teacher participants, rubric observers, and the Teacher Evaluation Working Group offered solutions-oriented conversation and real-time data. Teachers, observers, and the MEA [Memphis Education Association] really liked the real-time feedback because no one could say the information was biased or tainted in any way. Teach Plus has proven to be an asset to this work."

– Tequilla Banks, Executive Director, Teacher Effectiveness Initiative, Memphis City Schools

Summary

Memphis City Schools is rolling out a new Teacher Effectiveness Measurement (TEM) designed to help transform teaching and promote student success. According to MCS's Deputy Superintendent Dr. Irving Hamer, "With innovations such as TEM, the basis for individualized professional development, reformed career and compensation paths, and teacher recognition and support is set. The opportunity for transformation in education is at hand." Teach Plus helped to put teachers at the center of the design process.

"Memphis City Schools is in the vanguard of the national push to increase effective teaching. Our work is focused on providing effective teachers in every classroom, every day. The approval of the TEM is a major endorsement of our efforts."

– Superintendent Kriner Cash

Background

Two years ago, Memphis City Schools (MCS) embarked on an initiative to ensure students across the city are being taught by terrific teachers. MCS established the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative (TEI) to design policies to support a strong teaching force, on such topics as evaluation, promotion, tenure, compensation, and professional development. One goal of the TEI was to create a broad measure of teacher performance that could be used as a factor in employment decisions. The Teacher Effectiveness Measurement (TEM) would include several components, including measures of student growth in the classroom, classroom observations, stakeholder feedback, and assessments of teacher knowledge¹.

In preparation for its successful Race to the Top application in 2010, Tennessee passed the First to The Top Act, which mandates that annual evaluations include classroom observations, and that student achievement data will comprise 50% of the evaluation, including student growth measures based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) where available. The state gave districts the charge of developing measures of teachers' classroom practice.

MCS designed a process to solicit teacher and other stakeholder feedback. During the 2010-2011 school year, MCS tested three observation tools (or “rubrics”) that evaluators could use to objectively evaluate teachers in their classrooms. They tested the rubrics in 500 classrooms. The rubrics that were tested were: DC IMPACT, based on Washington, DC’s teacher evaluation system and observation rubric; the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), based on the rubric used in the Teacher Advancement Program by the National Institute for Effective Teaching; and the MCS Revised, a revised version of Charlotte Danielson’s “Framework for Teaching” most recently used in MCSⁱⁱ.

In addition, MCS conducted two district-wide surveys to solicit teacher feedback on evaluations.

Teach Plus’ Role

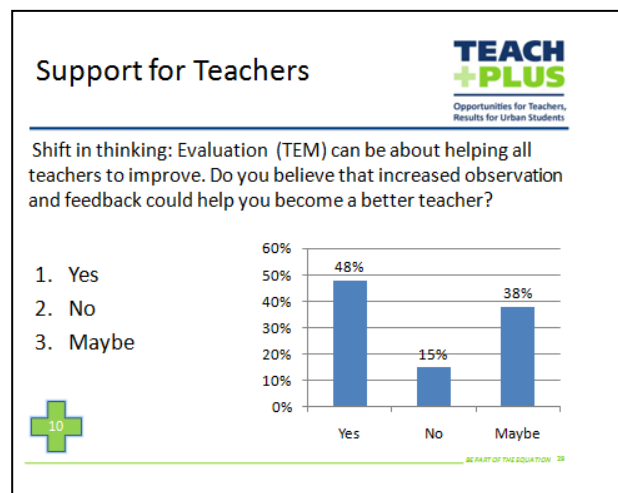
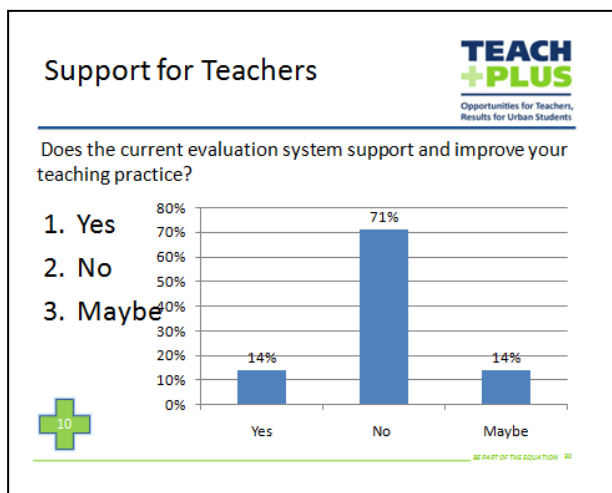
Teach Plus’ mission is to ensure that results-oriented teachers have a voice in the policies that affect their classrooms. MCS collaborated with Teach Plus to elicit feedback to use in the design of the Teacher Effectiveness Measurement.

“I thought the process was amazing. It gave a large group the mechanism to consider data from several sources, respond quickly, and see results instantly.”

– Margaret S. Box, MCS teacher

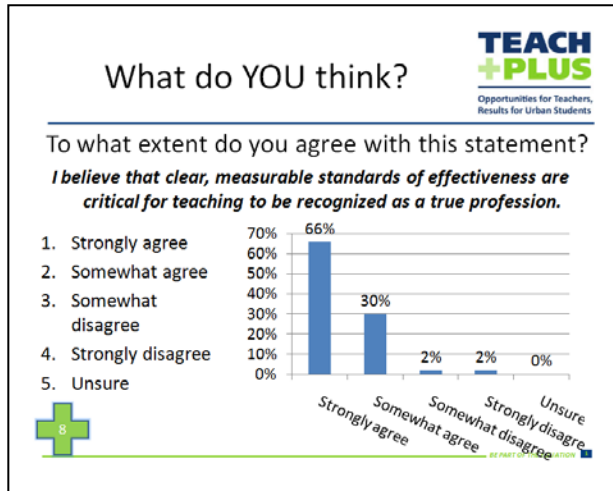
Teach Plus sponsored an event on evaluation and invited all MCS teachers to attend. At this event, using Teach Plus’ live polling technology, teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the old system, and openness to a new one. Specifically, 71 percent of teachers at the event said the current evaluation system does not support and improve their teaching practice. Teachers were optimistic that a new system could be useful to improvement. See Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figures 1 and 2.



Source: Memphis T+ Network Event: Teacher Evaluations: Supporting Improvement, Achieving Results October 28, 2010. (n=115)

Figure 3.

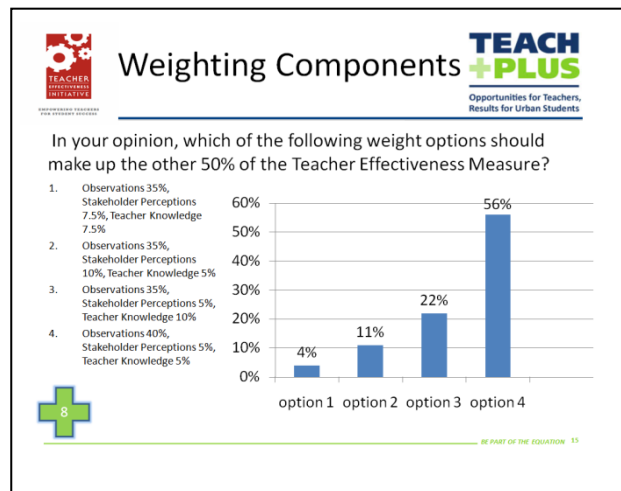
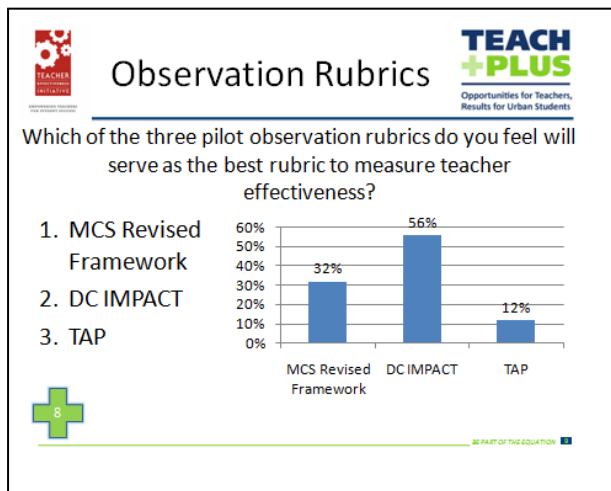


Teachers also indicated that an improved evaluation system could elevate their profession, and that using data as a part of that system could be beneficial. 96 percent of the teachers agreed that clear, measurable standards of effectiveness are critical for teaching to be recognized as a true profession.

Source: T+ Network Event – Impact the Initiative: Teachers Weigh in on TEI, January 31, 2011. (n=74)

Following the pilot of the three teacher observation rubrics, Teach Plus conducted three focus groups to gather feedback from teachers and evaluators about the value of the rubrics and to make decisions about which observation tool to use. By a clear majority, teachers identified DC IMPACT as the best observation rubric, and overwhelmingly preferred to make classroom observations as consequential as possible (40% of the evaluation rather than 35%), with stakeholder perceptions and teacher knowledge comprising 10%. As mandated by the First to the Top legislation, student value-added data will comprise the other 50% of the evaluation.

Figures 4 and 5.



Source: MCS Department of Teacher Talent & Effectiveness Teacher Evaluation Working Group Session, April 8, 2011. (n=65)

Results

The District adopted the Teacher Evaluation Working Group recommendations as centerpieces of the final Teacher Effectiveness Measurement: it selected DC IMPACT as a classroom observation rubric (and will make some modifications for the local context) and heavily weighted classroom observations. In addition, the Tennessee Board of Education unanimously approved the Measurement – and said that it could be used by districts across the state. Thanks to this work, MCS will now move from a teacher evaluation system that only offers up-or-down ratings of “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” to a multi-dimensional teacher evaluation system with five ratings that range from “significantly above expectations” to “significantly below expectations.” And any district in Tennessee – from the Mississippi River to the Appalachian Mountains – could follow suit.

With the Teacher Effectiveness Measurement, MCS and any other Tennessee district that chooses to adopt it will be better able to discover and share best practices and identify teachers who are most in need of increased support. The measure will also indicate which teachers would make the best mentors or be eligible for other leadership roles.

The fact that MCS included teachers throughout the design process ensures it will be more impactful than if they were excluded. Says high school AP teacher and Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellow Aimee Cothran, “We have been working on a tool that will allow teachers to understand where they need to improve their craft. This process always had teachers involved. Therefore, it will be teacher friendly while also improving the teaching profession.”

In addition, teacher involvement has also helped to encourage essential teacher buy-in as the system is implemented. According to 7th grade Language Arts teacher Everlina Hull, “The opportunity for input from those who serve on the frontline of student growth and achievement suggests that the district appreciates and respects the positive contributions teachers can make in education reform. I am sure this evidence of trust will result in teachers being more open to accept and embrace this document that addresses teacher performance, evaluation, and tenure.”

ⁱ To read more about the TEI, please visit: <http://www.mcsk12.net/tei/>

ⁱⁱ Each of these rubrics can be found by visiting <http://www.mcsk12.net/tem/>