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EFP Takeaways

The Compositional Effect of Rigorous Teacher Evaluation on Workforce Quality

Background

Policies designed to improve personnel decisions have the potential to improve the quality of the teaching workforce and thus, student outcomes. One such policy is the Effective Teachers Initiative (ETI), which was implemented in 2011 in the Houston Independent School District (HISD). The cornerstone of the ETI is a comprehensive teacher evaluation system in which teachers are assessed in three domains: instructional practice, professional expectations, and student performance. Teachers' ratings are used to inform personnel decisions and skill development efforts, with the goal of improving teacher quality districtwide. A new study in volume 16, issue 1 of *EFP* by Julie Berry Cullen, Cory Koedel, and Eric Parsons examines the impacts of the ETI policy's targeted retention on the distribution of teacher quality.

The Study

The study covered the school years 2007-08 to 2015-16, spanning the period before and after the ETI was implemented in 2011. The authors used administrative data on students and teachers to assess the impacts of the policy on teacher attrition patterns. To facilitate their analysis, they constructed and validated their own measures of teacher effectiveness based on teachers' contributions to student achievement in grades 3-8. The authors used a difference-in-differences research design to identify shifts in the relationship between teacher effectiveness and exit that could be attributed to the policy.

Findings

The authors found that ETI led to a clear shift in teacher exits. Compared to teachers in the middle of the effectiveness distribution, teachers who were in the bottom quintile in terms of raising student achievement became more likely to exit the district. Additionally, teachers in the top quintile became less likely to exit. These patterns of differential exit were most pronounced at low-achieving schools within the district.

Despite improving the alignment between teacher effectiveness and exit, supplementary analysis revealed that these shifts in exits were not targeted enough to meaningfully improve student achievement. The authors conclude that the scope for workforce improvement via selective attrition policies appears limited. The authors discuss a caveat to the study, namely, that ETI was designed to improve student outcomes in other ways which were not examined in the analysis.

For more details:

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- Summary of:
Cullen, J. B., Koedel, C., & Parsons, E. (2020). The Compositional Effect of Rigorous Teacher Evaluation on Workforce Quality. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16(1).