

EDUCATION

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EFP Takeaways

Enacting the Rubric: Teacher Improvements in Windows of High-Stakes Observation

Background

Teacher evaluation programs are conceptualized as both accountability and information systems. As accountability systems, teacher evaluation programs are theorized to improve the teacher workforce through selective incentivization or dismissal. As information systems, evaluation programs are theorized to give feedback for teacher improvement through standards-based observation rubrics. However, no causal link has been empirically established between an evaluation program and daily teacher practices. Furthermore, in-class evaluations may be a confounding issue by serving as motivating events for teacher practice. In volume 16 Issue 2 of *EFP*, Aaron Phipps and Emily Wiseman examine how teacher improvements can be attributed to either accountability or informative components of a DCPS teacher evaluation program.

The Study

Using three years of administrative data from the DCPS teacher evaluation program IMPACT, the authors used the unpredictable timing of unannounced classroom observations to examine how evaluation scores changed as observation became more likely. By leveraging random variation in the timing of classroom observations within teacher observation windows, the authors estimated the daily probability of an evaluation and documented teacher responses to that probability as a causal relationship. They also considered if the order of an evaluation affected teacher performance.

Findings

Analyses revealed that teachers increased their classroom evaluation score as an observation became more likely, suggesting that teachers both know and understand how to apply the teaching standards delineated in observation rubrics. Importantly, teachers improved in small increments across multiple rubric standards, suggesting they prepare and attend to the rubric as a whole, rather than overemphasizing particular teaching domains. Findings also suggested that teachers make improvements in their teaching practice from one evaluation to the next. Based on these results, the authors emphasized a need to ensure rubric construct and language are specified to encourage desired teacher behavior. Furthermore, the findings caution against evaluation systems that do not use standards-based observation rubrics.

For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
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- Summary of:
Phipps, A. & Wiseman, E. (2021). Enacting the Rubric: Teacher Improvements in Windows of High-Stakes Observations. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16(2).