EFP Takeaways

The Promise of Video Technology to Improve Teacher Evaluations

Background

Teacher evaluation has been a key focus of education reform efforts in recent years. Following the introduction of the Race to the Top program in 2009, many states redesigned their teacher evaluation systems. Although much of the public controversy has focused on the use of student test scores, classroom observation is the most costly component of teacher evaluations, with potential costs ranging from $1.4 to $4.2 billion per year (mostly consisting of educators' and administrator's time.) Video technology has the potential to improve this process in multiple ways—by giving teachers a greater role in evidence-gathering, reducing disputes due to differing recollections, allowing for input from content experts outside the school, providing more specific evidence on teaching practice, and allowing supervisors more flexibility in the timing of when they perform observations.   A new study by Thomas Kane and colleagues in *EFP* volume 15, issue 3 examines the effectiveness of substituting teacher-collected video for in-person observations.

The Study

The study utilized a randomized field trial format to evaluate whether allowing teachers to submit videos in lieu of in-person observations by their supervisors could improve the overall value of observations for teachers, administrators, or students. In total, the study included data from over 130 school administrators and 430 teachers from nearly 100 schools in California, Colorado, Delaware, and Georgia. Comparison schools continued with the traditional in-person observations. The logistics of the intervention are detailed in the *EFP* article.

Findings

Analyses revealed three key findings:

- In the schools using video, both teachers and administrators reported that post-observation meetings were less confrontational. Moreover, teachers in the video group rated their own instruction lower and were more able to identify specific practices to shift in their teaching.
- Principals who participated in the video observations found that they could perform their observation duties outside of instructional hours.
- Overall, teacher retention was higher in the schools using video.

While the overall effects of the program show promise for teachers and administrators, there were no observed effects on student achievement or on students' self-reported experiences in the classroom. In order to have larger effects on student outcomes, the authors hypothesize that video feedback will need to be coupled with stronger supports to shift desired classroom practices. The use of video technology should be further explored as a means to improve teacher evaluations for teachers, administrators, and students.