At-a-Glance

The Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET Project), sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, began in the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) in January 2010. The MET Project is a national research project that has been implemented in six school districts across the country, including Dallas ISD, over the last three academic years. Funding for Dallas ISD over the entire project period has totaled $1,301,251. A MET Project extension was awarded to Dallas ISD that extended the grant to June of 2013. This final phase of the project consisted of a smaller group of teachers and district staff personnel than in the first two years of the project.

Ultimately, the MET Project is aspiring to gather and share information that is taking a deeper look at the differences among individual teachers and what throughout their teaching is effective. Looking directly at classrooms and the work teachers are performing in them, MET Project researchers are trying to pinpoint practices that strengthen the teaching profession overall.

Budget

The MET Project received funding from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation totaling $954,607 over the course of the first two academic years: 2009-10 and 2010-11. It included personnel expenses, supplies, computers, consulting, travel, and research and evaluation service costs. Additionally, each individual teacher and school program coordinator that participated during the two year study received a stipend of $1,500 (total) and each campus also received $1,500 (total) as compensation for their time and effort. The grant extension added $346,644, dispersed over two payments during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years, and extending the district’s participation in the program through June of 2013.

Program Description

In 2009-10, Year 1 of the project focused on teacher recruitment and initial data collection. Year 2, 2010-11, focused on validating the measures of effective teaching from the data collections. Year 3, 2011-12, focused on solidifying the wealth of data collected, and performing final data analyses to inform the MET project’s final report, which was released in January of 2013.

Research Activities

The data collection and analysis were being led by key researchers from academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and several private firms with funding from the MET Project and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dallas ISD Evaluation staff provided demographic and student achievement data to the project as requested by program management.

Research Findings

The MET Project has not released any specific teacher or student surveys or assessment results pertaining to Dallas ISD at this time. The MET project released progress reports as its research and analysis progressed. Through these reports, practitioners and policy makers had quick access to the data developed through the project in order to begin thinking through the practical implications of the work prior to release of the final report.

In January 2012, the MET project released a set of preliminary findings, which focused on classroom observations and offered take-aways on creating high-quality observation systems:

1. All five observation instruments were positively associated with student achievement gains. The teachers who more effectively demonstrated the types of practices
emphasized in the instruments had greater student achievement gains than other teachers.

2. Reliably characterizing a teacher’s practice required averaging scores over multiple observations. In the study, the same teacher was often rated differently depending on who did the observation and which lesson was being observed. The influence of an atypical lesson and unusual observer judgment were reduced with multiple lessons and observers.

3. Combining observation scores with evidence of student achievement gains on state tests and student feedback improved predictive power and reliability. Observations alone, even when scores from multiple observations were averaged together, were not as reliable or predictive of a teacher’s student achievement gains as a measure that combined observations with student feedback and achievement gains on state tests.

4. Combining observation scores, student feedback, and student achievement gains was better than graduate degrees or years of teaching experience at predicting a teacher’s student achievement gains on the state tests. Whether or not teachers had a master’s degree or many years of experience was not nearly as powerful a predictor of a teacher’s student achievement gains on state tests as was a combination of multiple observations, student feedback, and evidence of prior student achievement gains.

5. Combining observation scores, student feedback, and student achievement gains on state tests also was better than graduate degrees or years of teaching experience in identifying teachers whose students performed well on other measures. Compared with master’s degrees and years of experience, the combined measure was better able to indicate which teachers had students with larger gains on a test of conceptual understanding in mathematics, and a literacy test requiring short written responses. In addition, the combined measure outperformed master’s degrees and years of teaching experience in indicating which teachers had students who reported higher levels of effort and greater enjoyment in class.

The MET Project’s final report was released in January of 2013. Key findings from the final report included that it is possible to develop reliable measures that identify great teaching. In the first year of the study, teaching practice was measured using a combination of student surveys, classroom observations, and student achievement gains. Then, in the second year, teachers were randomly assigned to different classrooms of students. The students’ outcomes were later measured using state tests and supplemental assessments designed to measure students’ conceptual understanding in math and ability to write short answer responses following reading passages. The teachers whose students did better during the first year of the project also had students who performed better following random assignment. Moreover, the magnitude of the achievement gains they generated aligned with the predictions. This is the first large-scale study to demonstrate, using random assignment, that it is possible to identify great teaching.

The report described the trade-offs involved when school systems combine different measures (student achievement gains, classroom observations, and student surveys). However, the report shows that a more balanced approach – which incorporates the student survey data and classroom observations – has two important advantages: ratings are less likely to fluctuate from year to year, and the combination is more likely to identify teachers with better outcomes on assessments other than the state tests.

Finally, the report provided guidance on the best ways to achieve reliable classroom observations. Many school districts currently require observations by a single school administrator. The report recommends averaging observations from more than one observer, such as another administrator in a school or a peer observer.

Recommendations

The MET project’s findings could prove valuable to inform future plans for training teachers and developing observation tools. Both the preliminary findings and the final report should be disseminated to district administrators for study.

For more information contact Program Evaluation at 972-925-6457 or http://metproject.org/welcome.