

Lead. Solve. Change.



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
University of Colorado Denver



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher Identifiers and Improving Education Practice:

Experiences in Colorado and the Nation

July 2009



Edited by Emmy J. Glancy and Robert Reichardt from the Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA) School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado Denver
www.cepa.ucdenver.edu

This report was made in partnership with the Colorado Children's Campaign with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.



Introduction

On Friday, February 27, 2009 the Colorado Children's Campaign and the Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA) at the University of Colorado, cosponsored an informative, interactive symposium on using data linked to unique teacher identifiers (teacher ID data) for improving research, programs and policies that make a difference in teacher development and student achievement. The panelists represented a wide range of perspectives, from researchers to practitioners, focusing on Colorado and examples from across country.

This report is a compilation of the papers the expert panelists have written. This issue is especially relevant as Colorado works to create an educator identifier pilot program. This information is also helpful as the state prepares applications for federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education or allocates existing federal formula funds that can be used to support the development and implementation of data systems that include teacher identifiers and use them to improve schools.

Executive Summary

This series of five white papers explains how the teacher identifier is being used in Colorado districts and nationwide to improve teaching and learning, and provides advice to Colorado policymakers in creating a statewide teacher identifier. The first article by Robert Reichardt explains what the teacher identifier is and provides an overview on how the identifier is being used across several Colorado school districts. The purpose of the teacher identifier is to reliably bring together multiple streams of data, including student assessment data. The identifier needs to be consistent and unique, and provide the lowest possible risk of problems associated with identity theft. It is being used by districts that have invested in the data infrastructure to inform educator reflection in the classroom, school and central office.

The second article by Jason Glass describes the history and uses of the teacher identifier in Eagle County Schools (ECS). The core reason for creating and using teacher identifiers in ECS was to improve student achievement through a more sophisticated use of assessment data. The process of creating unique teacher or student identifier numbers was not particularly complex or technical. The process of correctly aligning the teacher identifier number with the appropriate student identifier number is incredibly complex and technical. Further, the decision about what form of assessments and what kinds of analysis techniques are appropriate to determine teacher effectiveness is also very complex and technical. Despite the technical barriers, the teacher identifier provides district and school leadership with

quantitative information to inform professional development decisions and personnel assignments within schools. Finally, the identifier helps ECS evaluate the effectiveness of a number of different instructional approaches being implemented across the district.

In the third article, Elliott Asp describes Cherry Creek School District's (CCSD) use of a unique teacher identifier. CCSD created a teacher identifier to link student achievement data to specific teachers in 2002 as part of the process of developing a growth model. The growth model uses assessment data to describe student learning and targets for achievement. The teacher identifier is used to provide teachers and building administrators with information on student growth and targets for individuals and groups of students. The teacher identifier also enables teachers and building administrators to examine relative teacher effectiveness and set goals for improvement. The challenges to using this kind of data are both technical and cultural. In order for teachers to use this kind of information, they must have access to it and be trained to interpret it. Overcoming barriers to the use of the data requires training, sensitivity on the part of administrators, and most importantly, trust among teachers, and teachers and administrators. Without this cultural context, fear and resistance to change will derail efforts to create and use this very valuable data source.

The use of teacher identifiers in other states and in national research is the focus on Dan Goldhaber's writing in article four. When good information exists about the match of

teachers and students, educators and policymakers can learn how equitably students are distributed across teachers who hold different skills or qualifications and whether these credentials are related to student learning.

Perhaps more importantly, one can assess the relationship between teacher credentials and their effectiveness, as measured by their contribution toward student achievement growth. A striking finding from the relatively new studies of teacher effectiveness is that individual teachers can have profound impacts on student achievement. This body of work also shows that there are major differences among teachers in their effectiveness. Surprisingly, the differences in teacher effectiveness are only weakly related to most teacher credentials. Even where a credential matters in a statistical sense, as in the case of teacher experience or National Board Certification, there is a significant amount of overlap in effectiveness between teachers who appear to be alike in terms of their credentials. What this means, for instance, is that the average teacher with three years experience is more effective than the average first-year teacher, but there are many first-year teachers who are more effective than the average third-year teacher.

Dan Goldhaber's chapter goes on to make the case that having teacher identifiers that can be linked to students represents a tremendous opportunity to use the vast amounts of data that states already collect to learn a great deal about school policies and programs. This would in turn make K-12 schools more of a learning system. The up-front investments in data systems impose obvious short-run costs, but offer the longer-term opportunity to inform policy decisions leading to improved youth outcomes.

The final article contains the findings of Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (APA) on costs and implementation issues associated with developing a teacher identifier system in Colorado. The timeframe for and cost of implementing a teacher identifier system are affected by two critical elements: the purpose of the teacher identifier system and the sophistication of the computing platform on which the system was to be built. APA recommends a four-step process over a three-year timeline for implementing a teacher identifier system in Colorado: design, develop, rollout, maintain. The projected cost to develop a teacher identifier system in Colorado ranges from about \$686,000 to at least \$2.7 million, depending on which components are included.

With the passage of HB-09-1065 Colorado is poised to implement a teacher identifier. Seven key insights and recommendations for Colorado policymakers emerge from these white papers:

- 1. Teacher identifiers are unique numbers that allow linking of teacher and student data.**
- 2. Teacher identifiers are being used now by Colorado schools and districts to support improved instruction, staffing, and programs.**
- 3. Teacher identifiers are being used in other states and nationally to inform policymaking and practice.**
- 4. Effective use of the identifier requires technical capacity, training, sensitivity, and trust.**
- 5. Colorado should define a clear goal for the use of the teacher identifier.**
- 6. Accuracy is central to the value of the data created using the teacher identifier; systems for verifying and validating the data must be part of a teacher identifier data system.**
- 7. Implementation of the teacher identifier should be done in consultation with districts and be accompanied by modern database systems for all of the state's education data collection and management.**

Teacher identifiers and related data systems have been identified as part of systematic efforts to improve education quality and results, and are central to the federal "Race to the Top" grant competition. The implementation of the teacher identifier will help Colorado in that competition and in its efforts to close the achievement gap; it will ensure that all students have quality teachers; and it will increase post-secondary access and success.

Please visit www.cepa.ucdenver.edu to download a copy of this report and others. For more information please email Robert Reichardt at robert.reichardt@ucdenver.edu



This report was made in partnership with the Colorado Children's Campaign with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Colorado Children's Campaign

1580 Lincoln St. Suite 420

Denver, CO 80203

303-839-1580

www.colordokids.org

The Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA)

School of Public Affairs

University of Colorado Denver

1380 Lawrence Street

Denver, CO 80202

303-315-2228

www.cepa.ucdenver.edu