

Transforming High Schools: Performance Systems for Powerful Teaching

Teaching quality is recognized as the most powerful school-based factor in student learning. This does not mean, however, that all teachers have powerful effects on student learning. Considerable evidence points to the enormous variation in teaching practice as a fundamental problem in improving high schools.¹ The national policy community recognizes that in order for the United States to compete in a global knowledge economy, the concentration and distribution of effective teachers in secondary schools must be dramatically improved. Fundamental policy questions remain unanswered, however, about what approaches are best to ensure teaching quality.

This policy brief examines standards-based approaches that hold promise for shaping a common vision of skilled teaching commensurate with the national goal of preparing all students for college and careers. Numerous studies confirm that teachers are the most significant school-based factor in improving student achievement, particularly for the most challenging students. Yet, while the current mantra is that *teachers make the difference*, John Hattie, professor of education and director of the Visible Learning Labs at the University of Auckland, contends that this notion is not quite right.

Enough is known about effective teaching to act on a broad scale. Highlighted in this brief are successful prototypes for assessing teaching performance that have been shown to be effective in improving teacher performance, student learning, and teacher education. The pending reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as NCLB, offers an opportunity to improve high schools by ensuring that systems are in place to build the teaching profession based on validated performance measures. The brief concludes with a set of policy recommendations to improve the consistency and quality of teaching in high schools. It calls for legislation, regulations, and incentives to help states and districts attend to the central role of human capital and the priority of fostering the expert performance of teachers in order to create high-quality learning environments for high school students.

To achieve these national educational goals, policy leaders must ensure that the roles and responsibilities of actors at the federal, state, and district levels actively contribute to building the expert performance of teachers. They must align systems for assessing teaching practice and providing feedback essential to ensure that the education high school students receive over time will be consistent, coherent, and successful.

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2011, February). *Transforming high schools: Performance systems for powerful teaching* (Policy Brief). Washington, D.C.: Mariana Haynes.