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Examining Teacher Perceptions and Student Performance of Teachers Mentored by Teacher Development Specialists

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In August of the 2011–2012 school year, teacher development specialists (TDSs) were hired to provide teachers in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) individualized, professional development opportunities to support the new Teacher Appraisal and Development System. This brief summarizes the perceptions of teachers regarding their experiences with their TDS and assesses student performance of a sample of TDS-mentored teachers on content area tests. The perceptions of the TDS mentors will also be discussed.

Background

To align with the district's strategic direction of having an effective teacher in every classroom, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) introduced the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (A & D System) at the beginning of the 2011–2012 school year. The A & D System was developed for two main reasons: (1) to accurately assess teachers' performance in the classroom and (2) to provide teachers with timely, accurate feedback that links them to individualized professional development opportunities (HISD 2011).

The teacher development specialist (TDS) position was created in an effort to support classroom teachers and provide personalized, job-embedded trainings. At the beginning of the 2011–2012 academic year, HISD administrators hired approximately 130 TDSs. Nearly every HISD teacher was assigned a TDS. Based on the TDS assignment rosters, TDS caseloads averaged 75 teachers. The roles of the TDS included providing teachers with professional development opportunities and trainings that align with the new A & D System. TDS responsibilities included classroom observations, identification of

development areas, and helping teachers with everything from planning lessons to asking questions that improve student performance (HISD, 2011).

Teacher development specialists started their training in the summer of 2011. The 5-day training included learning the A & D System, an instructional practice rubric, as well as learning new coaching techniques that best help teachers improve student outcomes.

Data and Methods

In order to explore the perceptions of HISD teachers about experiences with their TDS, four questions were included in a larger online survey administered to teachers about the A & D System. Approximately, 27 percent (n=3,017) of HISD teachers completed the survey items in February 2012 and 43 percent (n=4,714) responded in May 2012. The larger survey was conducted by The New Teacher Project (TNTP).

In addition, an online survey to assess the sentiments of the TDS about their job responsibilities and interactions with teachers was administered in May 2012. Sixty-seven percent

Table 1. Teacher Perceptions of their Experiences with Teacher Development Specialists, 2012

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n
		%	%	%	%	%	%	
I understand the role of the TDS at my school.	Mid-Year	7.2	7.5	8.2	25.0	38.3	13.9	3,017
	End of Year	8.4	7.5	8.8	24.3	37.3	13.7	4,646
I receive useful feedback aligned to the Instruction Practice rubric from my TDS.	Mid-Year	12.8	10.0	9.1	22.7	32.3	13.1	2,987
	End of Year	12.9	10.4	10.2	23.3	29.9	13.3	4,603
I have a positive professional relationship with my TDS.	Mid-Year	7.5	4.9	5.3	19.5	40.1	22.7	2,992
	End of Year	7.9	5.1	6.0	19.4	38.7	22.9	4,609
My TDS serves as a useful resource in my ability to grow as a teacher.	Mid-Year	13.8	10.1	10.5	22.5	28.4	14.7	2,988
	End of Year	15.2	11.9	11.5	24.4	25.6	11.3	4,714

Source: The New Teacher Project (TNTP), 2012.

(n=87) of the teacher development specialists completed the survey. Percentages reported in this brief were based on the total number of responses. Items marked “N/A” and missing data were not included in calculating the percentages.

To assess the impact of teachers on student performance, the 2012 Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) data in reading, language, math, science, and social studies were gathered for a sample of the 2011– 2012 teachers that were directly identified by teacher development specialists who received concentrated mentoring. Since the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) was a new testing program, no data were available for comparison. Value-added status was available for teachers instructing students in grades three through eight and indicated to what level the teachers’ students performed based on the average district performance.

How did teacher respondents rate their experiences with the teacher development specialist on their campus?

During the 2011–2012 school year, all HISD teachers were asked about their experiences with the TDS on their campus. Teachers were administered the survey twice; once in the winter of 2012 and in the spring of 2012. **Table 1**

displays the mid-year and end-of-year responses in percentages.

Approximately, 52 percent of teacher respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that they understood the role of the TDS at their school at the mid-year point while 51 percent of respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement at the end of the year.

Nearly 63 percent of teacher respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they had a positive relationship with their TDS at the mid-year administration. Forty-three percent of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that the TDS served as a useful resource in their ability to grow as a teacher. Although the level of agreement (strongly agreed and agreed responses combined) decreased for all survey items at the end-of-the year, the responses were very comparable to those expressed by teacher respondents at the mid-year point.

How did teacher development specialists feel about their job responsibilities and interactions with campus teachers?

Ninety-three teacher development specialists responded to the online survey accessing their experiences in their new role as a coach-mentor for campus teachers. Approximately 86 percent indicated that their teaching experience was greater than five years, with 54 percent with

Table 2. Response Rates of Teacher Development Specialists about their Experiences as a TDS, 2012

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n
	%	%	%	%	
I received adequate training to accomplish my job duties.	4.7	8.1	53.5	33.7	86
I felt supported by the campus principals.	1.1	12.6	57.5	28.7	87
I felt supported by the Professional Support and Development administrators.	3.4	9.2	49.4	37.9	87
I was satisfied with the number of teachers I was assigned.	17.2	39.1	39.1	4.6	87
The TDS meetings were helpful.	3.5	19.8	46.5	30.2	86

teaching experience ranging from 6 to 15 years. In addition, 89 percent of the TDSs noted that they had served as a mentor to fellow teachers in the past.

Table 2 presents the responses from teacher development specialists about their experiences. Over 87 percent felt they received adequate training for the position, while approximately, 86 percent felt supported by campus principals to complete their job responsibilities as the TDS. Fifty-six percent of the TDS respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I was satisfied with the number of teachers I was assigned”.

How did teacher development specialists divide their time among teachers assigned to them?

Figure 1 displays the results of how TDS respondents divided their time among the teachers

assigned to them.

The majority of TDS respondents (64 percent) reported that they spent their time mentoring with teachers who needed their assistance the most. Approximately 16 percent worked with the teachers who were the most receptive to their mentoring, while 10 percent of TDS respondents spent their time working with teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

What were the EVAAS results of teachers directly mentored by teacher development specialists during the 2011–2012 school year?

On the online survey, teacher development specialists identified teachers that they spent the most time coaching and providing professional development. **Figure 2** (page 4) presents the 2012 value-added results of those identified teachers who were directly mentored by a teacher

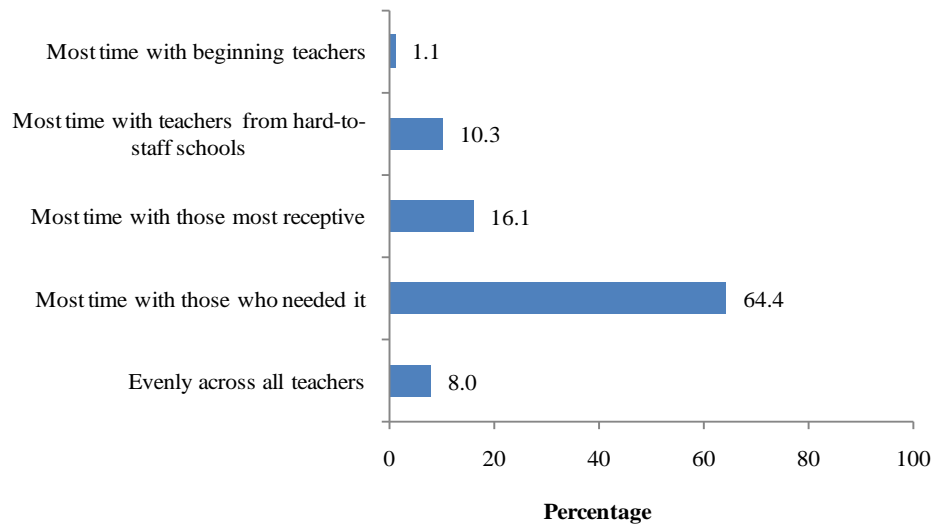


Figure 1. Percentage of Teacher Development Specialists to Survey Question “How did you divide your time among the teachers you were assigned?”, 2012

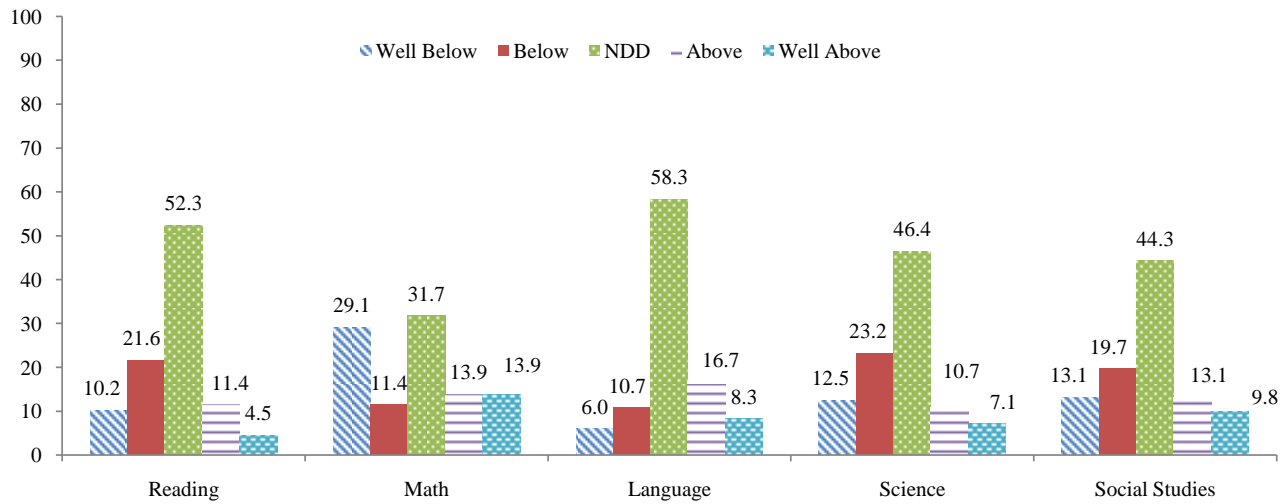


Figure 2. Value-Added Results by Content Area for Teachers Directly Mentored by a Teacher Development Specialist, 2012

development specialist during the 2011–2012 school year. Value-added data were available for teachers instructing students in grades three through eight.

For reading, the majority of teachers (52 percent) had no detectable difference (NDD) from the district average, while approximately 10 percent fell well below the district average. Twenty-nine percent of math teachers directly assisted by teacher development specialists fell well below the district average growth and 32 percent had NDD. For language, science, and social studies, the majority of teachers (58, 46, and 44 percent, respectively) were NDD from the district’s average growth.

Limitations

Given that the position of teacher development specialists was in its first year of existence, there were limited ways to measure the effectiveness of their work. Within this report, the value-added results were reported for teachers identified as receiving the most assistance from a teacher development specialist; however, no comparison data were available. Furthermore, the teachers with whom the TDS spent the most time were teachers identified as lower performing.

Conclusions

HISD is committed to providing its teachers with personalized, job-embedded professional development experiences. The role of the teacher

development specialist is to provide the needed mentoring and professional development to district teachers. During the first year of implementation (2011–2012), teacher development specialists worked with teachers to help them strengthen their instructional practices. Approximately, 37 percent of teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their TDS served as an useful resource in their growth as a teacher.

Future examination of the impact of teacher development specialists on district teachers is needed. Currently, teacher development specialists are providing teachers with welcomed classroom support, mentoring, and professional development experiences.

References

Houston Independent School District (2011). Teacher Development Specialists. Professional Development Services website.