

# Principals' Approaches to Cultivating Teacher Effectiveness: Constraints and Opportunities in Hiring, Assigning, Evaluating, and Developing Teachers

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## Abstract

*Purpose:* How principals hire, assign, evaluate, and provide growth opportunities to teachers likely have major ramifications for teacher effectiveness and student learning. This article reports on the barriers principals encountered when carrying out these functions and variations in the degree to which they identified obstacles and problem-solved to surmount them. *Research Methods:* I conducted semistructured interviews with 30 principals in charter or conventional schools in two adjacent northeastern states. State A has been at the national forefront of efforts to raise teacher effectiveness. State B is a particularly strong union setting. Charter school principals constituted 23.3% of the sample; 53% of principals worked in urban schools. After coding interview transcripts, I used thematic summaries, categorical matrices, and analytical memos to identify themes across participant experiences. *Findings:* Principals encountered barriers to cultivating teacher effectiveness that were economic, contractual, cultural, and interpersonal. Principals with more professional development regarding

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how to improve teachers' instruction and principals of schools that were elementary, smaller, and in State A reported fewer barriers and more opportunities to developing human capital. *Implications:* Implications for policymakers include creating incentives to draw teachers to urban and rural schools and curtailing teacher assignments that prioritize seniority. Implications for practitioners include efforts to shift the culture of schools to support principals in providing accurate and frank feedback on instruction. Further research should examine whether the patterns identified here hold for a larger, random sample of principals including those in large, urban districts and right-to-work states.

### **Keywords**

principals, teacher hiring, teacher assignment, teacher evaluation, teacher effectiveness, professional development

In recent years, an increasing number of educational leaders have identified human capital management as a key strategy for raising the quality of schools. In embracing human capital management, school districts focus on elevating the competencies of teachers and school leaders individually and overall. Describing human capital as “the ‘people side’ of education reform,” stakeholders have argued that leaders should prioritize “aligning school district academic goals with school district organization and practices, from curriculum and assessment to teacher and administrator recruitment, retention and compensation” (Strategic Management of Human Capital, 2009, p. 1). Many leaders, particularly those of large school districts such as Boston, have embraced this emphasis and sought to align teacher and school leader recruitment, hiring, professional development, and evaluation to a larger vision of teaching and leadership that supports student learning (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2010).

Leaders' emphasis on human capital management reflects recent research. It is now well known that, of all school resources, teachers have the largest impact on student achievement (see, e.g., McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003). But this impact is more positive in some schools than others, and human capital functions help to explain why. Recent research by Loeb and colleagues suggests that schools that produce greater gains in student achievement hire, assign, develop, and retain teachers differently than schools with lower student achievement gains (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Béteille, 2012). Although these researchers did not examine the inner-workings of the

schools in their sample, many of the key decisions related to these human capital functions are made by school principals. Principals' decisions regarding whom to hire, how to assign teachers to classes, how to structure professional development, and how to retain teachers long term may have implications for teacher effectiveness, defined as their success in improving student learning (Kennedy, 2010).

This article investigates this proposition, examining principals' experiences with various human capital functions as they seek to increase teacher effectiveness. In particular, this article examines the barriers that principals report encountering as they carry out four key personnel functions: teacher hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development. Using in-depth interviews, this study inquired into the experiences of a sample of 30 school leaders in charter and conventional schools at the elementary and secondary level in two adjacent northeastern states. One state is noted for its strong union presence (see, e.g., Hirsch & McPherson, 2011), while the other has been lauded as a forerunner in creating policies, such as boosting teacher salaries while substantially raising certification standards, aimed at increasing teaching quality.<sup>1</sup>

Although prior research has investigated individual vectors (e.g., hiring or professional development) through which principals might increase teacher effectiveness, few papers have examined a range of strategies together. There are at least three benefits to considering multiple human capital functions simultaneously. First, an individual-vector approach risks missing what principals identify as their most promising strategy or most vexing challenge related to increasing teacher effectiveness. A study might examine a principal's approach to teacher evaluation when her most promising strategies relate to teacher hiring and her most significant barriers arise regarding professional development. This study asked principals to nominate their preferred levers for increasing teacher effectiveness and subsequently probed these approaches and levers suggested by theory and research. Second, the multivector approach this study employed enabled principals to compare and contrast their own experiences across a range of personnel functions. For example, they were able to compare obstacles in the area of hiring to barriers in evaluation. This permitted me to get a better sense of the magnitude of obstacles principals identified and the extent to which they truly inhibited principals' efforts. Third, while a multivector approach by definition limited the depth to which this study could investigate any one personnel function, by collecting data across a number of functions, it more closely captures the actual range of areas in which principals work to attempt to increase teacher effectiveness. Few principals focus only on hiring, for example; most juggle efforts to hire strong teachers with efforts to evaluate and develop current

teachers. As such, in some ways this study presents a broader and perhaps more real-life perspective on principals' day-to-day efforts to increase teacher effectiveness than prior studies have done.

## Background

The concept of human capital is central to this study and larger efforts to increase teacher effectiveness. With its origin in economics (see, e.g., Becker, 1993), "human capital" refers to skills and competencies that individuals acquire and are valued in the marketplace. Economist Gary Becker (1993, p. 11) calls it "resources in people" and argues that investments in human capital take the form of education, training, and medical care, among other things.

Studies have tied human capital management, specified as the personnel functions outlined above, to organizational outcomes. Research on the private sector first established a connection between human capital management practices and organizational performance (see, e.g., Becker, Ulrich, & Huselid, 2001; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997). This research suggests that "strategic alignment" or coordination of various human capital functions is a strong predictor of a company's performance (Becker et al., 2001). More recent research indicates that the same general relationship holds within public education: schools' personnel practices are related to their aggregate student performance. In Miami-Dade, Loeb et al. (2012) found that schools led by more effective principals, as defined by value-added scores, were more likely to hire and retain more effective teachers and remove less effective ones. Bassi and McMurrer (2007) found that improvements to human capital functions were associated with test score gains in Beaufort County, South Carolina.

Although these aggregate relationships between human capital management and student performance are becoming established, we have not studied this topic in-depth. In particular, we have not yet explored in tandem the factors that affect human capital management practices at the school level. This study speaks to this gap by examining principals' experiences with teacher hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development.

### *Principals as Human Capital Developers*

Spurred by emerging research and private sector examples, districts have begun to emphasize human capital management. In choosing this focus, leaders assume that they can systematically increase the quality of instruction that teachers provide and, in turn, improve student performance. This argument further assumes that if they are provided information demonstrating the

importance of aligning human capital functions with district goals, school leaders will take steps to bring their human capital practices in line with those objectives. Better information, the argument posits, will lead to better decisions by leaders, which will in turn lead to better decisions by teachers, which will then result in higher student test scores.

Research and theory, however, suggest that schools and the people in them behave in ways that often thwart this tidy chain of logic. Decades of research and theory indicate that schools are loosely coupled organizations (Gamoran & Dreeben, 1986; Weick, 1976). Leaders' efforts to tightly control what happens in classrooms have been stymied by the complicated and imprecise nature of teaching and cellular structure and culture of schools (Lortie, 1975; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Although principals exercise tighter control over teacher hiring and assignment, their influence over instruction is limited and often indirect, relying more on persuasion than prescription (Gamoran & Dreeben, 1986).

While recent research suggests that schools are becoming more tightly coupled (see, e.g., Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010), principals' influence on instruction and, in turn, student learning is layered, complex, and, most importantly, bounded. Research nonetheless indicates that principals do have an effect on student learning (see, e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 2011; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson, 2010). While principals' efforts to improve teacher effectiveness may be dulled by the culture of schools and the nature of teaching, they influence teachers' instruction, thereby affecting student learning (Heck & Moriyama, 2010; Muijs, 2011). Within schools, principals' impact on student achievement is second only to that of teachers, and they arguably play the most important role in ensuring that excellent teaching occurs in their school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, principals are increasingly expected to raise student achievement (and, implicitly, increase teacher effectiveness) as a condition of their employment. As the stakes increase for principals, our understanding of the barriers they encounter as they work to increase teachers' effectiveness is underdeveloped. Research suggests that principals' success in raising teacher effectiveness via various human capital functions differs across settings.

### *Teacher Hiring and Assignment*

Principals may influence overall teacher effectiveness in their schools through hiring more skilled teachers and assigning them to classrooms that align with their preparation. Analyzing data from surveys distributed

nationwide, Ballou (1996) found that principals tended to hire teachers from less selective colleges. However, more recent research by Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, and Wyckoff (2010) found that principals in New York City schools hired teachers who were more effective, as defined by a number of measures, including their value-added contributions to student achievement. An increase of one standard deviation in value-added score was associated with a 20% increase in the likelihood of being hired. Rutledge, Harris, and Ingle (2010) found that principals responded to policy messages regarding the characteristics of effective teachers; they expressed a preference for candidates with subject knowledge, for example, when hiring teachers. However, these principals' personal opinions regarding the characteristics that made teachers successful at improving student learning heavily influenced their hiring decisions.

Additional research shows how hiring practices and outcomes can differ even within a single district. DeArmond, Gross, and Goldhaber's (2010) analysis of school-based hiring practices in one district led them to conclude that schools' hiring practices and outcomes differed based on the interplay among school-based knowledge, resource constraints, and individual schools' relative standing in the district's internal labor market. Schools that were situated in undesirable locations within the district suffered disproportionately from declining enrollments and charter school competition. This meant that they had even fewer resources with which to hire teachers than did their counterpart schools in more desirable locations within the same district. They conclude: "In the end, a school's location and relative attractiveness appear to have a central impact on its ability to cope with the task of staffing its classrooms" (p. 349).

There is also evidence that the ways in which principals assign teachers vary, sometimes leading to systematic patterns that penalize low-income and low-performing students. Research from North Carolina suggests that principals tend to assign high-performing teachers, measured by student test scores, to classes containing greater percentages of students with higher prior test scores and girls and lower percentages of low-income students, Black students, and students with disabilities (Player, 2010). In a separate analysis of North Carolina data, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006) also found systematic patterns in teacher assignment: teachers with higher licensure test scores or National Board certification were assigned students with higher prior year test scores. Teachers with lower scores were assigned fewer White students.

Additionally, first-year teachers, who were lower performing, on average, than more experienced teachers, tended to be assigned to classes enrolling larger percentages of students with lower prior year test scores (Player, 2010). National evidence confirms this finding: Inexperienced teachers were more

likely to be assigned low-performing and low-income students (Feng, 2010). Thus, students who arguably most need strong teachers—students who are low performing, low income, and students of color—were systematically assigned weaker teachers.

Further research suggests that principals in low-income schools may employ assignment practices that further limit the effectiveness of teachers. In a multisite, national study, researchers found that principals in such schools tended to assign new teachers difficult assignments (multiple elementary grades or multiple secondary subjects), and these teachers were more likely to leave their school than those with less difficult assignments (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010).

Although there is growing evidence that intraschool teacher assignment patterns privilege higher performing and higher income students, there is debate about the cause of these patterns. Some studies argue that teachers' contracts limit principals' ability to hire the teachers they want and match them with appropriate class assignments (Levin, Mulhern, & Schunck, 2005; Levin & Quinn, 2003). Other research, however, finds that teachers' contracts are less restrictive than previous research suggests (Hess & Kelly, 2006; Koski & Horng, 2007; Nelson, 2006). These findings suggest that principals may not use their authority to assign teachers in ways that best support the growth of all students and specifically low-income, low-performing students of color.

### *Teacher Evaluation and Dismissal*

Another means by which principals may influence teacher effectiveness is teacher evaluation and dismissal. Teacher evaluation has come under increased scrutiny in recent years as a promising lever for increasing teacher effectiveness (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006). However, its track record is weak. A recent study in 12 districts in four states indicated that principals gave the vast majority of teachers they evaluated the highest rating possible and rarely dismissed teachers (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Only 26% of teachers in a recent national survey reported that teacher evaluation was "useful and effective" (Duffett, Farkas, Rotherham, & Silva, 2008). More generally, Louis, Leithwood et al. (2010) recently found that 83.3% of principals but just 37.7% of teachers reported that "monitoring teachers' work in the classroom was a helpful practice for improving their instruction" (p. 71). Several explanations for these results have been offered, including poor evaluation instruments, lack of district guidance on the substance of evaluations (Koppich & Showalter, 2008), and a lack of evaluator skill and will (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Studies have highlighted a number of

reasons for principals' poor execution of teacher evaluation, including lack of training and little oversight (Donaldson, 2009).

Additionally, some have argued that a "culture of nice" in schools limits evaluation's potency, discouraging evaluators from giving teachers critical feedback or rating poor performance accurately (Donaldson, 2009, 2010). Kimball and Milanowski (2009) found that evaluators framed evaluation as formative and allowed teachers substantial input in defining the evaluation focus and evidence. They further found that written evaluations "focus primarily on praise, with minimal description or decision rationale or feedback for teacher improvement" (pp. 60-61). Another study found that evaluators spent 48% of postobservation conference time "checking in on personal or school activities/ happenings" (Halverson & Clifford, 2006, p. 602).

Dismissals of teachers are relatively rare. In 2003-2004, districts dismissed/nonrenewed on average 3.1 teachers and approximately 209.7 teachers total (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006). More recently, although 81% of administrators in the 12-district study reported that there was a tenured teacher in their school who was performing poorly, only .01% to .03% of teachers were dismissed annually for performance reasons (Weisberg et al., 2009). In half the districts where data were collected, no teacher had been dismissed in the last 5 years.

### *Teacher Professional Development*

Principals may also influence teacher effectiveness through professional development. Principals play an important role in securing and supporting professional development for teachers that enriches their instructional skills (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008; Youngs & King, 2002). In a recent large-scale study, teachers and principals identified professional development as a key way in which principals facilitate enhanced teaching. "Keeping track of teachers' professional development needs" was one of the top three leadership practices identified as helping teachers improve their instruction (Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010).

Professional development that extends over a longer span of time and that is conducted for longer periods of time per installment has been shown to positively affect student achievement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Principals are well positioned to ensure that teachers' professional development is both intensive and sustained. Leithwood et al. (2010) argue that principals play a key role in creating the conditions so that teachers may engage more fully in professional development and, thus, benefit more from the experience. Summarizing findings on school leaders' effects

on student learning, Leithwood et al. (2008) state that successful leaders understand and develop people, among other things. Developing people involves providing “individualized support and consideration” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 30).

In this vein, Youngs and King’s (2002) study of principals’ support for professional development suggested that principals developed teachers’ instructional skills by building trust, creating structures to foster teacher collaboration, and bringing experts into their schools. This underlines the key role principals can play in implementing external professional development, following up on sessions with external providers so that lessons learned are more likely to affect teachers’ instruction. These findings also highlight principals’ role in organizing teachers’ work and setting a culture of trust that encourages informal learning opportunities among teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010).

While broad findings suggest school leaders can influence instructional quality through professional development, more detailed analyses complicate this picture. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) found that school leaders’ direct effects on teachers’ skills and knowledge were small. They summarize the education community’s typical response to these findings: “the position most often advocated is that leaders ought to make greater direct contributions to staff capacities” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008, p. 34). This response adds to the motivation for this article: What inhibits leaders’ influence on teachers’ knowledge and skills through professional development?

In investigating this question as it applies to teacher hiring, assignment, and evaluation, and professional development, this study is one of a handful to examine how individual principals approach all of these critical decisions. In fact, Kimball, Milanowski, and Heneman’s (2010) study of principals working in two large, urban districts and Loeb et al.’s examination of leaders in Miami schools are two of the only other studies to date to examine principals’ efforts to develop human capital on multiple fronts. The primary aim of this study was to investigate how a sample of principals made decisions regarding teacher workforce development, the challenges they reported encountering, and the extent to which their experiences differed by context. As such, this study posed the following questions:

1. What constraints do principals report affected the ways in which they carried out these tasks?
2. Do the ways in which principals carried out hiring, assignment, evaluation, and professional development differ by context (e.g., state policy context, district urbanicity, school size, charter status)?

## Methods

To examine principals' work in this area, qualitative interviews were conducted with 30 principals in two adjacent northeastern states. Both states have demonstrated a commitment to raising teacher effectiveness. State A has arguably been at the national forefront of this effort for 30 years. For instance, in the 1980s, it sought to raise teacher effectiveness by boosting teacher salaries while increasing the rigor of certification requirements and establishing mandatory induction for all new teachers. The states differ in the general strength of teachers' unions, with state B being a particularly strong union setting (Hirsch & McPherson, 2011). In this state, teachers in charter schools and conventional schools are eligible for tenure, while in state A teachers in some charter schools cannot receive this protection. The states also differ in terms of the presence of charter schools and other choice programs. State A has charter school networks that provide economies of scale and curricular and instructional support not usually observed at stand-alone charters. State B received a Race to the Top grant, while State A was unsuccessful in this competition. These variations in context make these states particularly suited to this study.

## Sample

I identified the largest public school districts in each state and several smaller districts within the same teacher labor market. I sought to recruit at least two principals per district with three to four principals in each of the three largest cities in the sample.<sup>3</sup> I attempted to recruit a balance of elementary and secondary principals and leaders of higher and lower performing schools. Additionally, I sought to recruit principals of charter schools located within or near the largest districts. I included charter schools in the sample because some suggest that fewer legal and bureaucratic barriers impede their ability to carry out personnel functions related to teachers (see, e.g., Moe, 2009; Toch & Rothman, 2008). However, few studies have explored whether these structural differences actually lead to different personnel practices.<sup>4</sup>

Principals were recruited by e-mail and telephone. Forty-one principals were contacted. Nine principals failed to respond to invitations despite repeated contacts. Two principals declined to participate. As shown in Table 1, charter school principals constitute 23.3% of the sample. Six principals work in suburban districts, 16 individuals work in urban settings, 6 principals work in urban-suburban settings, and 2 principals lead schools in rural areas. Eight principals work in State B, and 22 work in State A. Because it is a much smaller state, State B has approximately one third the number of principals that State A employs.

**Table 1.** Key Features of the Sample.

	District	Level	Charter	District enrollment, 2009-2010	School enrollment, 2009-2010	Percentage free and reduced lunch, 2009-2010	Did school meet AYP? 2009-2010	Years as principal at school/total	Race	Gender
State A										
Urban	Essex	K-2		19,000	400	44.8	Yes	3/5	Latino	Female
Urban	Essex	3-8		19,000	400	44.8	Yes	1/23	White	Male
Urban	Essex	Middle	X	500	500	69.1	Yes	4/4	White	Male
Urban	Essex	K-8		19,000	500	79	No	2/2 (+AP)	White	Male
Urban	Essex	K-8		19,000	600	89.3	No	3/10+	African American	Female
Urban-suburban	Heightstown	HS		6,000	2,000	21.7	No	2/5+	African American	Male
Urban-suburban	Heightstown	K-5		6,000	500	14.2	Yes	4/4+	White	Female
Suburban	Nemeth	K-5		3,700	400	14.7	Yes	6/8	White	Female
Suburban	Nemeth	HS		3,700	1,200	6.5	Yes	2/2(+AP7)	White	Male
Suburban	Canterbury	Middle		4,700	800	5.0	No (subgp)	2/2 (+AP)	White	Male
Urban	Hillvale	Middle	X	400	400	68.2	No	1/3	White	Male
Urban	Hillvale	K-5		21,000	300	95	No	5/5	African American	Female
Urban	Hillvale	HS		21,000	400	95	No	1/2.5	White	Male
Urban	Hillvale	HS		21,000	400	95	No	1/1	White	Female
Urban	Hillvale	K-5	X	400	440	68.2	No	2/2	Asian	Female
Urban-suburban	Bowersett	HS	X	2,300	90	40	No	5/14	White	Female

(continued)

**Table 1. (continued)**

	District	Level	Charter	District enrollment, 2009-2010	School enrollment, 2009-2010	Percentage free and reduced lunch, 2009-2010	Did school meet AYP? 2009-2010	Years as principal at school/total	Race	Gender
Urban-suburban	Westview	K-5		3,500	300	27.0	No	5/5	African American	Female
Urban-suburban	Westview	K-5		3,500	400	33.7	No	4/6	White	Female
Urban-suburban	Oakton	HS	X	200	200	40	Yes	2/2 (+AP 3 years)	White	Female
Urban-suburban	Norwood	K-8	X	300	300	20	No	2/5	Latina	Female
Suburban	Gloucester	Middle		6,800	1,100	7.5	No (subgp)	4/4 (+AP 3 years)	White	Female
Rural	Causeway	K-8		300	300	16.5	Yes	5/7	White	Male
State B										
Urban	Preston	7-8		9,000	500	56	Yes	4/9	White	Female
Urban	Preston	7-8		9,000	400	87	Yes	3/3 (+AP)	White	Female
Urban	Preston	HS		9,000	1,000	76	No	8/12	White	Male
Suburban	Clearview	K-8		5,400	400	19	Yes	9/9	White	Female
Suburban	Clearview	K-8		5,400	700	13	Yes	1 <sup>3</sup> /10	White	Female
Urban	Guilford	K-8	X	300	300	56	Yes	4/4	White	Female
Urban	Guilford	K-8	X	500	500	75	Yes	9/30+	White	Male
Rural	Perryville	HS		1,400	800	14	Yes	1/1 (+AP)	White	Female

Note. For charters, "district" designates the city in which the charter school is located. All proper names are pseudonyms and all numbers are estimates to maintain confidentiality.

a. This principal's school merged with another to form her current school. Thus, she has worked with a sizeable portion of the staff previously.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Semistructured interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes, were audiotaped, and were transcribed verbatim. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted in person at principals' schools; two were conducted by telephone due to scheduling constraints. Interviews were conducted between summer 2009 and fall 2010. The interviews followed a semistructured protocol (see appendix). Additional data sources include collective bargaining agreements and field notes.

To analyze the data, I first created thematic summaries soon after completing each interview (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).<sup>5</sup> These summaries included categories for each human capital function and a miscellaneous section to include other information that appeared salient. After having the interviews transcribed verbatim, I coded the transcripts, documents, and field notes using open, closed, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Closed codes were selected based on the literature. Open codes were created through a process of reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify salient concepts within and across the interviews.<sup>6,7</sup> Once codes were established, I identified themes. The first step in this process was to read and reread across the transcripts to identify potential themes. Looking across the dataset, I then examined all segments of text with particular codes that might suggest an emerging theme. I then constructed categorical matrices capturing what individual participants had said or done related to that theme. I subsequently wrote analytical memos to test the robustness of themes within the dataset. All these measures facilitated my use of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emerging themes across participant experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### *Validity*

I used several procedures to increase the validity of this study. My first procedure was to employ peer review and debriefing throughout the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Two research assistants helped me in designing the interview protocol, constructing the sample, and collecting and conducting initial analysis of the data. With different experiences, perspectives, and training in qualitative research, these individuals challenged me during these phases of the study. This was particularly important during sample selection, when I debated potential participants with them, and data analysis, when they questioned my interpretations of the data. I applied this same concept of peer review/peer debrief (Creswell & Miller, 2000) in inviting external reviewers to analyze and assess earlier drafts of this article. Drafts

were reviewed by a colleague within my department with expertise in district-level policy and practice and a faculty member from a different university with expertise in the role of the principal and public policy. Both individuals raised important questions to which I responded by returning to the data and addressing the questions as I revised the article.

I used two additional validity procedures focused on data analysis specifically. To attempt to draw valid conclusions from the data, I spent considerable time reading and rereading all interview transcripts. This repeated review of transcripts increases validity, according to Patton (1980), who asserts that returning to the data repeatedly to test whether “the constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations, make sense” is essential (p. 339). I also explicitly searched for disconfirming evidence that would suggest that my interpretations or conclusions were not valid (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The last validity procedure involved exploring my own reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I am a former secondary-school teacher in conventional public schools. I hold a commitment to developing teachers’ skills and knowledge so that they may deepen and enhance student learning. As a graduate and past employee of public schools, I firmly support such schools, whether charter or conventional, and believe they are vital to American democracy.

Given my commitments and experiences, I felt it important to build a sample of leaders of a range of schools, some of which enroll high proportions of students of color and low-income students. As a result, the sample includes rural, suburban, and urban schools and charter and conventional schools. My identity shaped data collection in that I have a deep interest in and experience with qualitative research methodologies. It shaped data analysis in that I viewed the data through the lens of a researcher and former teacher in different types of secondary schools. By cross-checking decisions with my research assistants, a former principal, and former teacher, I worked to ensure that my conclusions accurately reflected the data.

## Findings

Principals described distinct approaches to hiring and assignment, evaluation and dismissal, and professional development. Overall, principals said that a limited supply of qualified candidates, excessive centralization of hiring procedures, and the dominance of seniority, either as a result of contractual obligations or long-standing cultural norms, limited their opportunity to hire and assign teachers. Principals further reported that a lack of time, a limited opportunity to observe representative teaching, inadequate evaluation instruments, and a school culture that discouraged honest, critical feedback and

making the decision to fire a member of the school community impeded their ability to evaluate and dismiss as they saw fit. Principals identified a lack of funding, time, and decision-making authority as obstacles to providing high-quality professional development. Principals tended to nominate hiring and professional development as the primary ways they sought to influence teacher effectiveness. In general, principals with more extensive professional development regarding how to improve teachers' instruction—in other words, more human capital themselves—and principals of schools that were in State A, elementary, and smaller reported fewer barriers to developing human capital as they saw fit.

### *Hiring and Assignment*

When I asked one principal how she bolstered teacher effectiveness within her elementary school, she said, “making sure you have the right people through the hiring process—that’s where it all starts” (Heightstown, 2).<sup>8</sup> In fact, about half of the principals in the sample cited hiring as a primary mechanism to achieve this outcome. This made hiring the second most often cited lever to increase teacher effectiveness.

### *What Constrained These Principals’ Approaches to Teacher Hiring and Assignment?*

Principals reported four major constraints to their ability to hire high-quality teachers and assign them to appropriate classes. One constraint, noted by eight principals, was a limited supply of skilled candidates. A second constraint, identified by seven principals, was what they perceived to be excessive centralization of hiring. A third constraint to both hiring and assignment that 12 principals reported was seniority, either enshrined in teachers' contracts or established through long-standing custom. A fourth constraint to assignment, noted by eight principals, six of whom were charter school leaders, was certification.

Almost one third of principals interviewed identified a limited supply of qualified candidates as a key constraint to hiring. This was particularly problematic for principals of schools in more sparsely populated regions and for all schools regarding shortage areas. The principal of the rural high school in State B noted that few candidates applied to positions at her school because “some people don’t want to drive this far into the country” (Perryville). Her school’s remoteness was compounded by its relative poverty, as she explained: “I know there are two history teachers who have 10 years of experience and would love to come here, [but] I don’t think we are going to be able to afford them.”

A principal of a large, urban middle school in the same state also cited supply as a barrier to hiring strong candidates. She said, “Urban [schools], they’re tough to work with” (Preston, 1). She elaborated, “You’ll get this candidate pool and you’re thinking, ‘This is not good. We cannot go with any of these—we’ll have to start again.’ And that’s how we ended up with a teacher being emergency certified for math because none of the candidates were appropriate.”

A second constraint on principals’ opportunity to hire, noted by seven principals and State B administrators in particular, was a centralized approach to this human capital function. A principal in a large, urban high school in State B said that his district oversaw hiring, leaving him “little or no control” over this important process. He elaborated: “I am told when the interviews will take place ... I am invited to be part of the [hiring] team, if I can make it, and I’m asked to get some parent input. There’s usually six-eight people on a team including two or three of my people and the rest of the people are central office people” (Preston, 3).

This principal explained how district-based hiring weakened the hiring process:

It’s not just about the credential; the credential is a great starting point. But there’s a whole personality component, there’s a whole element of socio-emotional connection that you feel with the people during interview processes that you can’t get if you’re not part of the culture, and usually most of the people that are making decisions about who comes into my building are not a part of my culture everyday. ...

In the same state, a principal of a large, suburban middle school also cited bureaucratic constraints on hiring. She recounted, “I had over 300 applications for this one position. You have to interview every resident of this town [who applied for the position],” which could be a tremendous undertaking, before offering the position to an applicant (Clearview, 1).

A third constraint on principals’ ability to hire and assign strong candidates was seniority. Twelve of 30 principals identified this as a restriction. State B principals were again more likely to note this constraint. Principals wanted to hire the best person for the open position. They reported that sometimes seniority rules, either formally enshrined in the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement or informally integrated into district norms, allowed veteran teachers within the district the first claim on open positions and, in some cases, the right to claim the position of any more junior teacher with the same certification in their school.

On this point, the principal of a large high school in an urban district in State B recounted, “The union and the system that they have in this district about how teachers bid on jobs. ... It really takes the power away from me,

the administrator, to have any say in who comes into the building” (Preston, 3). He elaborated: “The hiring and assignment process is largely based on seniority. People bid into and out of my building without my control. The positions that are left over after the teacher pool are filled by central office, so I have no control. ...” He further described the process by which teachers selected course assignments:

AP English 12—that’s the most academic group, very successful. This is a small class of 10-15 students. The most senior person would take that regardless of whether or not they had AP training, or if they were a good educator ... but just because they were older and they had been in the school longer.

As a result, the last classes chosen, “the [low-level], ninth grade classes” according to the principal, were assigned to teachers who were new to the building and had very low seniority.

Another principal in the same state but in a large elementary school in a suburban district also described having little control over the assignment process. In her district, newer teachers could be displaced by more senior teachers with the same certification who lost their positions due to program cuts or enrollment declines. She further explained, “You have no control”:

[T]hose [new] teachers are laid off and they are not called back until the 11th hour after the job fair. So say I have a stellar teacher in fourth grade, she is laid off, and I have worked with her now ... she has done all my professional development, sunk my heart and soul into this particular teacher. Now I have had her for four years, she is laid off, what happens, her job goes up [is posted] ... and you pray. (Clearview, 2)

She further explained that relatively new teachers who were laid off and then hired back had very low seniority “so they are still going to be bumped around” for “seven, eight years.”

Additionally, one of the charter schools in State A had been founded by a teachers union. This principal’s ability to assign teachers was restricted by the teachers’ contract in this school. The principal stated:

There is actually a spot in the contract that says you can’t assign somebody in a grade level that’s too distinct from [their] existing grade level. And that came about because a prior director had done that, had taken somebody that was in ... maybe first [grade] and put them in fourth [grade].

She further compared working as an administrator in her current charter school to her prior position: “I think I had more freedoms in [her prior, conventional school in an urban district] as far as personnel and staffing.”

The principals located the source of seniority's power not only in teachers' contracts but also in district norms. A principal of a charter school in State B that was not unionized said that seniority could still play a role in assignment decisions, saying, "Seniority might be a factor. All things being equal, a more senior teacher who has been here longer would have the first shot at an opening if I thought that teacher was just as good as anybody else" (Guilford, 2).

Another principal of an urban-suburban high school in State A said that the assistant superintendent in his district had recently clarified that while seniority had been playing the decisive role in hiring, this was not contractually required:

[A] year or two ago, I had a discussion with the assistant superintendent and she said ... seniority doesn't give you the right to get a transfer. So if somebody wanted to transfer to here ... it doesn't matter if you have more seniority. It's the best person for the job. So, for a long time. ... There was no question about it if they [more senior teachers] wanted to transfer in. Now it doesn't work that way. Now you can say, "I don't want that teacher—I want this one. And this one is a better fit for these reasons"—and I've been pretty successful about that. I think there was a misinterpretation of the language for a long time. (Heightstown, 1)

In this case and others, seniority's influence had exceeded its contractual basis.

Eight principals, including most of the charter school leaders, mentioned a fourth constraint on principals' ability to assign teachers to appropriate courses: certification. One principal in State B explained:

You are always struggling with that, because in this charter school, which is a smaller school ... you have needs that the larger districts don't have to address—a half-time Spanish position, a 60% PE position. So the certification can be a pain because you can often find people who are better at those jobs than the applicants [with certification] but you can't hire them because they don't have the certification. (Guilford, 1)

Another charter middle school principal contrasted the barrier of certification to hiring and assignment in State A with a neighboring state where he used to work:

I'll see really strong teachers but say they're certified out-of-state and there might be some concern ... will their certification transfer to State A quickly enough? That's unfortunate. Even in [other state], in the charter schools there—there's more leeway and I was able to hire really strong college grads ... and if they can pass the equivalent of the Praxis tests, then they can teach in the classroom in the charter school. And that just really opened up the pool. (Hillvale, 1)

In summary, principals reported using hiring as one of their preferred levers to increase teacher effectiveness in their buildings. Most principals further reported that they had some degree of authority over teacher hiring in their buildings. Principals were less apt to discuss assignment as a lever they frequently employed to increase teacher effectiveness. Although in some cases principals said that teachers' contracts or certification constrained their decisions, norms that dictated that more senior teachers be assigned the less challenging classes seemed to be a considerable impediment to making more deliberate course assignments for teachers.

### *Evaluation and Dismissal*

Although principals could theoretically influence teacher effectiveness through evaluation and dismissal, those in the sample were much less likely to identify these functions, compared to hiring, as primary ways they sought to improve teacher effectiveness in their schools. Principals in the sample conceived of evaluation as serving two main purposes: first, to improve instruction, and second, to identify poorly performing teachers for intervention and, potentially, dismissal. Over two thirds of the principals felt that evaluation did not regularly achieve either of these purposes, however. In the starkest example of this, the principal in the rural, State B district observed: "[O]ur tenured teachers here have not been evaluated in about 10 years." Only five principals in the sample had dismissed a tenured teacher in their career.

### *What Constrained These Principals' Approaches to Teacher Evaluation and Dismissal?*

Participants identified many factors that they felt limited their opportunity to carry out rigorous and meaningful teacher evaluations. These included time, a limited chance to observe and document representative teaching, inadequate observation instruments, and school culture.

*Time.* All 30 individuals in the sample noted that they lacked sufficient time to complete high-quality evaluations. One high school principal in an urban-suburban State A district described the volume of demands on his time:

Time is a constraint—and time is a constraint only because ... I put the clipboard in my hand, I head up to B210 and between here and B210, something happens, whether it's "Can I talk to you for a minute?" whether it's, "You've got a phone call from the central office," whether it's a parent downstairs who is pretty irate and doesn't want to see the assistant principal, only wants to talk to you—or at central office, "The superintendent needs you to call right away."—Anything

could happen. You've got a bomb scare, you've got a fire alarm that's been pulled—so any of these things can happen. (Heightstown, 1)

For some participants, the sheer number of teachers who needed to be observed limited their ability to provide in-depth feedback or observe classrooms for more than the minimum amount of time required. Several principals reported that they were expected to evaluate well over 20 teachers each year as well as other staff such as guidance counselors and custodians.

In other cases, competing priorities limited principals' opportunity to observe and provide feedback to teachers. In one case, a principal and assistant spent eight school days at professional development, limiting their ability to be in classrooms. Some principals who worked in schools serving low-performing students spoke about regular interruptions that could not be ignored:

[At] high-performing schools [in our district]... principals will say, "I just shut my door and I just tell my secretary that I'm going to be in classrooms and I'm going to be in there for an hour and a half and don't bother me." That can happen at specific schools. Then there are other schools where if Grandma comes in with her pj's on and is raising holy hell in the office you have to stop what you're doing and talk with her or else you're risking the entire day being horrible. So those types of things ... happen here. (Essex, 3)

Even in a charter school in State B where the principal identified few obstacles to robust evaluation, he noted: "I think it is a weak part of the process. As hard as I work on it, I do think that teacher evaluation is not generally well done. And, I think the problem is that it is so labor intensive. If you really want to help someone you have to be in there a lot" (Guilford, 2).

*Limited opportunity to observe and evaluate representative teaching.* Another limitation, cited by about one third of principals, was their lack of opportunity to observe what they considered to be representative teaching. Principals said that the scheduled nature of formal observations led teachers to teach in atypical ways. For principals in the urban State B district, only formal observations could factor into the evaluation report. One middle school principal described how this limited the information she included in these reports:

I think sometimes a happen-by is far more telling than the "Now I'm coming in. You pick the period" ... and then they put on this big dog and pony show and that's what you can comment on when the rest of the time they are sitting at their desk. ... I want to be able to say any time I walk in it can be part of the evaluation. (Preston, 2)

Notably, leaders of some other schools, both unionized and nonunionized, did not report being constrained in when they observed or what they could include in summative evaluation reports. They could observe any time and include any information they gathered about a teacher's instruction in her evaluation; unlike principals in the settings described above, their comments were not constrained to a discrete formal evaluation session. These principals talked about incorporating information from walk-throughs and brief drop-ins that their counterparts in other settings struggled to include in summative evaluations.

Many principals also noted that, after tenure, teachers were required to be observed rarely or not at all. In State A, most principals said they rarely observed tenured teachers; such observations were optional. Instead, they reviewed portfolios that these teachers prepared. For example, one suburban middle school principal said:

In a more perfect world, there would be more opportunity for more classroom observation and feedback ... the system that our district has for teacher evaluation is limited with respect to classroom observation. As a matter of fact, a tenured teacher does not have to be observed—it's strictly two conferences, one for goal-setting, a mid-year check in and an end of the year evaluation without a formal observation. (Canterbury)

Many principals said that they would have preferred to observe tenured teachers more often but that there were reasons not to do so. Speaking of observing tenured teachers, the same principal stated, "I'll be honest—logistically, it's easier for me not to do it because of the amount of paperwork that is generated."

*Inadequate instruments.* A third limiting factor was the evaluation instruments. Few principals felt their district's instrument was excellent. Eleven principals reported serious limitations in their district's instrument. One middle school principal in State A, for example, said her suburban district's instrument was "too bulky, too cumbersome, too much paperwork." She wanted something that was "simple and user friendly" instead (Gloucester). Another principal of an urban middle school in State B emphasized the limited quality of her district's tool for evaluation. The principal said, "I think it is awful [laughs] I don't think that it taps into the heart of [teaching] ... this needs some significant work" (Preston, 1).

Another type of complaint voiced by the principals concerned the binary nature of many evaluation tools. Discussing the fact that his urban-suburban district's tool offered only two ratings—"meets standard" and "does not meet standard"—one high school principal in State A noted:

The document doesn't give me a latitude to rate somebody unsatisfactory because the standards are so low in the document. So unless a teacher has done something pretty egregious, they are satisfactory. ... A better document is going to get you a greater number of unsatisfactories—a better document will give you a true reflection of what's going on. But you are restrained by the document itself. (Heightstown, 1)

He added:

So you are stuck with—there are ten things—well, they met them on six. Does he now meet standard or not meet standard because it's most of them—but it's more than half, it's not less than half—so what do I do? So it's written in such a way, that you go—you throw your hands up, you kind of—you grit your teeth and you turn your head and you hold your nose and you go...“Meets standard”—you have no other choice. Because then, it's a grievable situation—now I've got to prove to you, point by point, why you're not [meeting standard].

The result, according to this principal, is “you have to be awful ... not to meet standard.”

Another limitation of the evaluation instruments cited by principals concerned how the results were used. One principal of an urban middle school in State B noted how the form forced her to “play a game” with her evaluations (Preston, 2): “As a new teacher you may not be meeting the standard, but that may be o.k. But if the superintendent sees too many x's in that column, he may not renew.”

*School culture.* According to about one third of the principals, school culture seemed to limit the robustness of evaluations. It is important to note that principals play a key role in shaping school culture (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Thus, in citing it as a barrier to high-quality evaluation, they implicated themselves. As discussed above, several principals noted, for example, that nothing prohibited them from observing tenured teachers, but standard practice discouraged it. For example, one principal in State B discussed evaluating tenured teachers, which happened every 3 years in her urban district. She reported, “You can do essentially as many formative [evaluations] as you need to get to a summative ... but the general rule is you don't do more than two” (Preston, 1). In adhering to this “general rule” and conducting no more than two formative evaluations, this principal reinforced the strength of this norm while also limiting the robustness of her own evaluations.

Similarly, some principals commented that cultural expectations discouraged them from critiquing teachers through the evaluation process. One principal in a State B middle school stressed that teachers “have to respect your

position, but kind of like you as a person at the same time ... I don't know that I got to that, but I think that's huge" (Preston, 1).

School and broader professional culture was also a barrier to dismissing or declining to grant tenure to a teacher. One State A charter school principal said that denying a teacher tenure could be interpersonally challenging: "[I]n education, being kind of a humanistic field, I think it's very hard to make those kinds of decisions of not granting tenure, there's all these emotions and feelings and relationships that make it very difficult" (Norwood).

Another charter principal (in State B) addressed a similar sentiment, noting the potential political ramifications of dismissing a popular teacher:

[G]enerally speaking, if someone isn't impressing us by the end of the first year, it's better to let them go. And the problem is that they may be okay ... and you say, "well, you know, after another year, they are probably going to be fine." But another year goes by and they are the same and then they've been with you two years and they've made all kinds of friends and you like them and someone babysits their kids and then it becomes very difficult. (Guilford, 1)

Interestingly—and importantly—this charter school principal emphasized both the cultural constraints on how evaluation played out in his school and his role in creating this culture. After noting that his school did not have union barriers or district mandates, he spoke about evaluation: "I think we need to be reminded that there are no constraints and if we fail to do a good job, then it's our own fault" (Guilford, 1).

In sum, principals noted a number of barriers. As with hiring and assignment, obstacles were not only contractual and legal but also cultural, interpersonal, and organizational.

### *Professional Development*

When asked how they attempted to raise teacher effectiveness in their schools, over two thirds of principals interviewed explicitly mentioned professional development. Professional development was the most popular human capital lever cited by principals.

### *What Affected These Principals' Approaches to Professional Development?*

Although many principals argued that professional development was critical to their efforts to improve teacher effectiveness, they also cited key barriers—a lack of adequate funding, a lack of principal voice in determining the

content of professional development, and a lack of time—that decreased its impact in their buildings.

*Lack of funding.* One barrier to high-quality professional development cited by about one half of participants was a lack of funding. All principals in State B, which had recently cut all of its professional development funding, and many of those in State A cited this challenge.

One principal in a suburban elementary school in State B explained:

The unfortunate thing is this year there was absolutely no money in the district. ... So any professional development that's done, we used to have the flexibility to do it ... we could base it on a strategic plan. ... This year, there is no money that I've been given. So, any PD is district-based and it's revising curriculum. (Clearview, 2)

Similarly, a State A principal in a suburban district stated: “Unfortunately, in recent years with terrible budget cuts our PD has been on the of the first things to go” (Nemeth, 2). As a result, he said, “My focus has been, ‘Alright, given what we have, how can we do this basically for free and do what’s most meaningful?’”

Charter schools, in particular, noted that grants heavily influenced their professional development focus. A principal of an urban, elementary charter school in State A explained that:

[Professional development] is something that we have to work on, because in traditional systems, you have committees and everything is kind of taken care of and here we are doing it as we need to do it. ... A lot of our professional development was around early literacy, because we were Reading First school, so everything was targeted at early literacy and it was set because we had the grant.

With the grant expired, the principal said her school was looking for a new focus and funding source for professional development (Norwood).

*District control.* A second related constraint noted by principals was their lack of input or authority in decisions regarding professional development. One principal in a State A suburban district noted, “I’m a little bit frustrated because the superintendent moved forward with her plans for professional development without consulting with the elementary principals or at least having a conversation about what we need” (Nemeth, 1).

Most principals who reported reduced funding for professional development said that school-based professional development had been reduced, leaving only district-based professional development in its place. This was

particularly the case in the urban district in State B, where professional development money from the state had been cut and the district had been flagged for persistently low scores. One principal recounted, “[T]he professional development money that we were supposed to get for the [school-based Professional Development] Plan was cut, so that’s out the window. There’s no professional development right now that I have under my control” (Preston, 2). Her counterpart at a high school in the district concurred, “The central office decides it all and my teachers get pulled out of school on central office schedule” (Preston, 3). A third principal in this district voiced a similar sentiment: “I have very little control to none at all ... over professional development” (Preston, 1). District control over professional development was problematic for principals for two reasons. First, schools had developed plans for professional development that were sometimes more closely aligned with school needs than professional development provided by the district. Second, districts scheduled professional development in ways that sometimes interfered with instruction. This problem is discussed below.

*Time.* One obstacle to increasing teacher effectiveness through professional development cited by more than 50% of the principals was time. Principals were constrained by contractual limitations on professional development hours and the absence of funds to pay teachers to attend professional development beyond their contractual workday.

The principal of the rural State B high school described the limitations on her ability to offer high-quality professional development of her own choosing:

[W]e have no professional development days built in the year. ... They [the district] had to constantly take teachers from the classroom and pay them ... some of the teachers had to be out of their classroom so much; it’s been terrible but you also have to get the curriculum written. It would be a half day all the English teachers or full day or whatever. It was a necessary evil, you have to do it to get it written but it wasn’t the way that you would want to do it. I mean we’re not like [a nearby wealthy suburban district] that has seven professional days. We don’t have any, and we badly, badly need them. (Perryville)

A principal in an urban elementary school described how district leaders would often appropriate time set aside for school-based professional development:

[T]hat fourth Monday of the month could be where we offer [professional development]. ... But a lot of times the district comes in and says, “You’ve got to make sure that this is in place. You need to do this or you need to do that.” (Essex, 2)

Another principal encountered a related challenge created by the district's removal of teachers from the classroom to complete professional development: "I wish they [district officials] did not pull teachers out of the classroom so much. But then after school they can't mandate after school professional development so it's a catch-22" (Preston, 1)

A principal of a suburban middle school in State A described her struggle to secure time in which to offer professional development to teachers:

It's just very hard to find time. ... Most of our after school or 1 o'clock [early-release] days ... are taken by department directors. So, the administrators in the building have no time and that has been an issue that I begged for every year. I need time with my staff to do some PD. I'd love a whole day. (Gloucester)

In sum, principals said that lack of funding, time, and control over offerings hindered their ability to use professional development as a lever to increase their teachers' effectiveness.

### *How Did Principals' Approaches Differ by Context?*

Principals' approaches to hiring, assignment, evaluation, dismissal, and professional development differed in several ways. Some principals seemed less inclined than others to perceive obstacles or more inclined to problem solve in the face of barriers. Within the same district or state, some principals highlighted barriers that others did not mention. Several factors seemed to influence the degree to which principals perceived barriers. They appeared interrelated, working in tandem to amplify or reduce the extent to which principals identified constraints. For the sake of explication, I present the factors as isolated and independent here.

*Principal human capital.* Principals varied in the extent to which they identified barriers to increasing teacher effectiveness. In some cases, principals within the same district or type of school reported very different levels of constraint. For example, a principal of an urban elementary school in State A (Hillvale, 3) noted only time and seniority as constraints to her efforts to developing teacher effectiveness, while others from her district identified several obstacles. One colleague, for example, cited a poor evaluation instrument, cultural barriers, seniority, time, and excessive district oversight as challenging his work to enhance teacher effectiveness. In another case, all principals in the urban State B district cited problems with their district's evaluation instrument. Yet only one principal took the extra step to develop an addendum to the instrument that addressed its deficiencies (Preston, 2).

Similarly, a principal of a large, urban-suburban high school in State A cited time as a constraint on his ability to evaluate teachers. However, unlike other principals who voiced this barrier, this principal took steps to reduce this obstacle by relieving assistant principals of lunch duty and requiring that they spend all of their newfound time working on teacher evaluation (Heightstown, 1). His counterpart within the district, by contrast, identified time as a large obstacle and did not report any strategies to reduce this barrier. Lastly, one principal in an urban-suburban district in State A responded to a query about whether she encountered constraints to evaluating teachers:

I don't think so. I have plenty of time to do my evaluations. I'm pretty conscientious about it so I do get them done ... with a teacher, a marginal teacher, if you don't have your evaluations done you might as well forget about it because you don't have a leg to stand on. (Westview, 2)

In asserting she had “plenty of time” in which to complete evaluations, this principal was a clear outlier not only within her district but also in the sample as a whole.

As suggested by these examples, principals' own human capital—their leadership skills, ingenuity, initiative, and in some cases, sheer determination—seemed to play a role in the extent to which they perceived and responded to obstacles in their efforts to improve teaching quality in their schools. Closer analysis revealed that the principals least likely to report encountering obstacles to raising teacher effectiveness and most likely to problem solve in the face of constraints tended to have had substantial professional development on how to identify and cultivate high-quality teaching. For example, the principal of the urban elementary school (Hillvale, 3) cited above had received several years of professional development on instructional improvement in her prior role as one of three instructional coaches in her district. She had also received training through the state on how to mentor new teachers. The high school principal cited above (Heightstown, 1) had received extensive training on teacher evaluation when working for a different district. Personally interested in evaluation, he sought even more training on his own. Similarly, the principal of the urban-suburban elementary school (Westview, 2) worked in a district that provided professional development to school leaders on identifying and cultivating effective instruction. In one way or another, all the principals reporting minimal barriers to these human capital functions had considerable training and experience in improving teachers' instructional skills.

But there were also clear contextual patterns. Principals of schools that were in State A, elementary, and smaller reported fewer barriers to

developing human capital as they saw fit and described strategies to reduce any obstacles that arose. Overall, principals of charter schools did not necessarily report more freedom in performing these functions than their counterparts in conventional schools. Instead, the particular characteristics of the school and district seemed to influence how much latitude the principal experienced. As discussed below, sometimes unionization constrained principals' decision-making; more often, however, culture and tradition seemed to play a larger role in limiting principals' efforts to raise teacher effectiveness in their buildings.

*State context.* Overall, principals in State B schools reported less freedom to hire, assign, evaluate, dismiss, or professionally develop teachers than did their State A counterparts. Although they comprised just under 27% of the sample, State B principals made up 40% to 75% of the principals who cited each barrier, with the exception of one (poor evaluation instrument). Except in the case of professional development, where state budget cuts had severely restricted offerings, principals in conventional schools in State B often connected constraints to restrictions enshrined in teachers' contracts. About half of State B principals reported that contracts limited their opportunity to comment on a teacher's typical instruction in evaluations, compared to about 23% of State A principals. Although the suburban district in State B gave more latitude to principals to evaluate than its urban or suburban counterpart, it required principals to interview all town residents who had applied before hiring for an open position and permitted more senior teachers to displace the least senior teacher with the same certification in their school. In fact, many State B principals further said that contractual limitations on hiring and assignment curtailed their ability to hire and place teachers. By contrast, State A principals reported that seniority played a much smaller role in their hiring and assignment decisions; while 75% of State B principals cited seniority rules as a barrier, only 27% of State A principals noted it. In charter schools in State B, tenure laws restricted the dismissal procedures principals needed to abide by. In most State A charters, teachers worked at-will and principals reported very few constraints on their ability to dismiss poor performers. Beyond these broad state differences, principals' decision-making freedom varied at the school level.

As discussed above in the context of barriers encountered by principals in the suburban district in State B, district differences were also apparent. However, they were less prominent than the other contextual factors detailed here.<sup>9</sup> The relative strength of state patterns compared to district patterns in the data may reflect the fact that these states and the districts within them are small in geography and population. Districts may more readily borrow

policies and practices from each other in these states as opposed to larger states in the South or West. "Spillover effects" may have resulted in similar contractual language and board policies in districts within each state, thereby reducing variation in principals' constraints at the district level and making variations between the two states more apparent.

*Charter status.* On balance, charter and conventional school principals reported comparable barriers to developing teacher effectiveness in their schools. However, principals of charter schools were more likely to identify certain obstacles and less likely to identify others than their conventional school counterparts. While they constituted 23% of the sample, charter school principals made up 75% of respondents noting certification as a constraint to hiring and 50% of those citing lack of sufficient supply of teachers. However, as could be predicted given their relative autonomy and the absence of teachers' contracts in most charter schools, no charter school principals identified centralization as a barrier to hiring or professional development and charter principals comprised only 8% of those noting seniority as a barrier to assignment. Interestingly, charter school principals cited time and culture as barriers to evaluation and dismissal at roughly the same proportions as principals in noncharter schools.

Beyond charter status, principals of smaller schools and elementary schools reported fewer barriers to conducting these important human capital processes. Often these factors were intertwined such that principals of schools that exhibited both these characteristics reported the fewest barriers to making key decisions regarding teacher effectiveness and leaders of schools featuring neither of them reported substantial obstacles to this important work.

*School size.* Leaders of schools that were substantially larger (i.e., at least 15%) than the state average for their grade level were more likely than leaders of smaller schools to identify barriers to the human capital functions discussed above.<sup>10</sup> Although they constituted approximately 17% of the sample, leaders of larger than average schools comprised 30% of principals citing limited teacher supply as a barrier to hiring and an inability to comment on representative teaching as an obstacle to evaluation. In fact, compared to principals of smaller schools, they were more likely to identify all barriers except time related to evaluation and district control of professional development, which they were equally likely to identify, and certification as a barrier to hiring, which they were less likely to identify.

Why were principals of larger schools more likely to report obstacles? One alternative high school principal who had previously led a traditional

high school noted that a smaller staff enabled her to spend time with teachers on a scale that she “would never [have been] able to do at [her other school]” (Bowersett). Because her school had fewer students and staff, she said she had fewer demands on her time in terms of discipline, teacher needs, and parent issues. A principal with 17 teachers in her school was able to divide her schedule, allowing her to spend substantial time in classrooms. She tried to be in classrooms 3 days every week and visit every classroom of all 17 teachers in her building at least briefly once a day. She called the 3 days her “coaching days” and had her assistant plan her schedule accordingly (Hillvale, 3). By contrast, principals of larger schools struggled to find time to hire, assign, evaluate, and potentially dismiss more teachers. One principal of an elementary school with 700 students discussed her evaluation load and time as a barrier to her efforts to evaluate teachers: “I have to do all evaluations myself. I have over 80 people on staff here” (Clearview, 1).

*School level.* While they constituted 47% of the sample, principals of high schools or middle schools comprised 58% to 80% of all participants reporting all but two specific barriers to hiring, assigning, evaluating, or developing teachers. With the exception of time as a barrier to teacher evaluation and professional development, which they cited in similar proportions to elementary principals, secondary principals were more likely to report all obstacles. For example, secondary school principals made up 80% of participants reporting that a limited supply of teacher candidates was a barrier to hiring and 75% of those indicating that certification requirements were a barrier.

Why were principals of secondary schools more likely to report barriers? Principals of secondary schools must staff their buildings with subject specialists. The departmentalized structure of secondary schools and subject-specific certification reinforces a culture of subject primacy in these settings. Accordingly, these principals were more likely than elementary leaders to cite an inadequate supply of teachers, largely in the areas of math and science. Similarly, secondary school principals were much more likely to identify barriers to evaluating rigorously and fairly when they lacked expertise in the subject taught by a teacher they evaluated. One middle school principal explained, “I was an English teacher so my English teachers get a little nervous, but my science teachers not so much.” She continued, “[G]oing to a Spanish class, well, I don’t speak Spanish. So the content knowledge can be sometimes prohibitive and interfere. Math, how am I going to evaluate the content knowledge of the math teacher? ... They could be making a major math error and I might not catch it” (Preston, 1)

In contrast, none of the principals of elementary schools questioned their own ability to evaluate instruction across a variety of subject areas.

One elementary principal put it succinctly: “[P]art of my job as an instructional leader is to go in the classrooms and give feedback. That’s daily—that just happens.” She continued, saying that teachers sought out her feedback: “my opinion matters to them ... they know that I know instruction” (Hillvale, 3).

Interestingly, several variables that might logically affect barriers to principals’ approaches to increasing teacher effectiveness did not surface in this study. Although I anticipated differences by principals’ years of experience, such patterns were not evident. Perhaps this was due to the lack of variation on this variable in the sample; the great majority of principals had worked in their current school for 5 or fewer years. Resources at the district or school level might affect the degree to which principals encounter barriers in this work. My protocol did not include explicit questions about financial resources. However, it is notable that the two rural principals were the only participants to note that their districts lacked funds to offer competitive teachers’ salaries and particular professional development. I also anticipated that differences might arise according to schools’ demographic profiles. Such differences were apparent, with principals of schools with higher concentrations of students in poverty encountering more obstacles, but these patterns were less prominent than those highlighted above.

## **Discussion**

This study explored the barriers a sample of principals encountered in their efforts to increase teacher effectiveness within their schools. Taking a broad approach, I sought to understand how principals preferred to act to enhance teacher effectiveness and how they used the specific levers of hiring, assignment, evaluation, dismissal, and professional development to affect this outcome. In nominating preferred methods for raising teacher effectiveness, principals tended to identify hiring and professional development and cited assignment, evaluation, and dismissal much less frequently. Principals’ fondness for hiring as a mechanism to build teacher effectiveness may speak to the premium they place on teacher attitudes and dispositions as components of teacher effectiveness (Rutledge et al., 2010). Principals may believe that their best chance to increase teacher effectiveness in their schools is through hiring people with the “right” mindset and then shaping their skills through professional development. Principals’ lack of attention to assignment is unsurprising. It is only recently that teacher assignments have been linked to teacher outcomes (see, e.g., Ingersoll, 2003). Moreover, attention to hiring over assignment also reinforces long-standing conceptions of teachers as interchangeable, possessing generalist knowledge that permits them to be

assigned to different grades or subsubjects within a discipline at little cost (Lortie, 1975).

Similarly, principals' emphasis on professional development, rather than evaluation, aligns with educators' beliefs about both human capital functions. Professional development is seen as essential to improving instruction (Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010), while evaluation has been viewed as less critical to this effort (Duffett et al., 2008). Again, this supports long-held norms of the teaching profession, which suggest that teachers are more receptive to uniformly distributed professional development than evaluation of and targeted feedback on their individual strengths and weakness as an instructor. Three norms govern teaching as a profession in the United States: egalitarianism, that no teacher should be identified as better than others; autonomy, that a teacher should have discretion over her classroom; and seniority, that rewards may be distributed to teachers only on the basis of longevity (Donaldson, Johnson, Kirkpatrick, Marinell, Steele, & Szczesiul, 2008; Lortie, 1975). Offered to all teachers, professional development reinforces teaching's egalitarianism, while observation infringes on teacher's autonomy and more generally threatens to differentiate among teachers (Lortie, 1975).

Principals' preferences for some human capital levers over others also reflect the extent to which they felt constrained in each area. Specifically, principals reported feeling most constrained in conducting evaluation and dismissal and least constrained in their approaches to professional development. In line with prior research, key obstacles to practicing evaluation and pursuing dismissals noted by the principals included a lack of time (Halverson & Clifford, 2006), a limited opportunity to observe representative teaching (Toch & Rothman, 2008), inadequate evaluation instruments (Donaldson, 2009), and a school culture that discouraged honest, critical feedback and making the decision to fire a member of the school community (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Principals identified the following key obstacles to hiring and assignment: a limited supply of qualified candidates (DeArmond et al., 2010), excessive centralization of hiring procedures (Levin et al., 2005), and the dominance of seniority (Levin et al., 2005), either as a result of contractual obligations or long-standing cultural norms, or both. Finally, principals identified a lack of funding, control, and time as obstacles to providing high-quality professional development, echoing the results of Drago-Severson and Pinto's (2009) study.

Within these broad findings, some principals reported having less latitude than others to hire and assign, evaluate and dismiss, and develop teachers as they saw fit. Specifically, principals with less professional development on instructional improvement and principals of secondary schools, larger

schools, and schools in State B reported more constraints and fewer opportunities to raise teacher effectiveness within their building. Often these factors exerted a multiplicative effect such that principals that exhibited all of these characteristics reported the most barriers to making key decisions regarding teacher effectiveness and leaders with none of them reported substantially fewer and less intractable obstacles to this important work.

Of these factors, there were particularly dramatic contrasts in principals' reported obstacles by state context. Why did principals in State B report more constraints on their human capital development efforts? It may be that greater centralization of districts in this state has led to district policies and contractual provisions that have restricted principals' efforts to hire, assign, and evaluate teachers. Moreover, State B was hit particularly hard by the economic recession starting in 2008; in recent years, it has consistently registered one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation (Davidson, 2013). This led the state to slash professional development funds. Thus, policy and economic factors may have aligned to constrain principals' efforts in cultivating teacher effectiveness in State B more than State A.

Beyond state differences, findings about contextual differences align with earlier research. Across various studies, Louis and her colleagues have consistently found that leadership's effects are stronger at the elementary level. In their 2010 study, for example, the relationship between school leadership and achievement was stronger in elementary than in secondary schools and secondary school teachers were less likely to report that their principal took actions to support their instruction than were elementary teachers (Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010). Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that the relationship between school leader efficacy and key outcomes (i.e., school conditions and student achievement) was weaker in secondary schools than at elementary schools. School size and principal opportunity to shape instruction are also established in prior research. In smaller schools, the principal and teachers are more likely to see the principal as an instructional leader and "trusted colleague" (Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010). The researchers conclude "principal leadership diminishes as we move from smaller to larger buildings" (Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 100).

While these findings generally echo previous research, one finding stands out. Teachers' contracts and teachers' unions more broadly do not appear to be as restrictive across the sample as some prior research suggests (i.e., Levin & Quinn, 2003; Levin et al., 2005). Principals in stronger and weaker union settings and in both charter and conventional schools reported similar barriers to raising teacher effectiveness in their schools. The cultural barriers that

constrained principals' efforts to assign, evaluate, and potentially dismiss teachers in some nonunionized charter schools, for example, suggest that teachers' contracts, in and of themselves, may be less of a hindrance than some argue.

This points to perhaps the most important finding of this study. Across varied settings, expectations heavily influenced how principals worked to increase teacher effectiveness. Teachers' expectations for principals shaped how they carried out these personnel practices. In many schools, principals said they scaled back their efforts to increase teacher effectiveness in order to preserve their relationships with teachers. Principals responded to what they thought teachers expected of them regarding teacher assignment, evaluation, and dismissal in particular. They cited cultural norms as barriers to observing teachers, providing negative feedback, dismissing teachers, or assigning them to courses based on their skills rather than seniority. As discussed above, unlike hiring, which tends not to affect teachers' positions, or professional development, which tends to be distributed evenly to all teachers, teacher assignment, evaluation, and dismissal all threaten one or more of teaching's sacrosanct norms of autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority. Principals' reports of cultural barriers underscore the norms' persistence and highlight the difficult balance a principal must walk between building teachers' trust and attempting to increase teacher effectiveness in ways that may breach teachers' cherished norms.

Principals' own expectations for themselves also affected their work to develop teacher effectiveness through these mechanisms. In citing time as an obstacle to carrying out these personnel functions, principals implicitly suggested that other uses of their time were more important than the lever in question. Sometimes this was because their district signaled that these other activities were more important than the personnel function. For example, districts that scheduled nonurgent meetings within school hours sent a message that attending those meetings was more important than observing classroom instruction. Sometimes, however, principals' citation of time as a barrier seemed to reflect their priorities more than external limitations. This underscores the challenge of shifting principals' practice. If we want principals to spend more time conducting evaluation or professional development, this will mean shifting principals' expectations for themselves so that they prioritize these activities.

### *Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research*

Although limited in scope, this study points to several implications. If the findings of this study are verified through subsequent investigations,

policymakers could begin by addressing two of the four primary barriers: economic influences and contractual limitations.

Efforts to attract more teachers to remote regions, hard-to-staff schools, and shortage assignments could play an important role. Offering bonuses and salary increments to attract strong candidates and retain them in less desirable locales and positions is important. This points to a role for the state in helping hard-to-staff districts offer adequate salaries over the course of the teaching career. Although money alone may not retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools, insufficient salaries will most certainly hasten their exit. Similarly, efforts to improve professional development and reduce its dependence on unreliable funding sources could prove critical. This may involve rethinking the way professional development dollars are used.

This study also finds that some principals perceived teachers' contracts to be an obstacle to teacher assignment and evaluation. To be sure, teachers' contracts that mandate what is known as "strict seniority" privilege seniority over effectiveness and place real constraints on administrators. To address this, policymakers, including union leaders, could work to make sure that seniority does not govern personnel decisions at the expense of other important considerations such as the quality of a teacher's instruction.

Similarly, contracts that severely limit the information that administrators can include in a teacher's summative evaluation write-up can curtail the value of this process, reducing evaluation to, as many remarked, a "dog and pony show." Policymakers, both union and management, could also work together to ensure that evaluators may report on teachers' typical instruction. This suggests that evaluations should be based on multiple observations, including both announced and unannounced formats, as is done in places like Cincinnati.

While policymakers may be best positioned to address economic and contractual barriers to increasing teacher effectiveness, practitioners have the most leverage to create the conditions for cultural change. Principals felt constrained by the culture of schools and the interpersonal dynamics of day-to-day school life. It is here that practitioners could focus their most concerted efforts, since these challenges are in some ways the most obdurate and most complex because principals shape the culture and interpersonal dynamics of their school. Efforts to reduce these barriers should focus not only on eroding undeniable, objective obstacles to principals' work to raise teacher effectiveness but also principals' *perception* of certain conditions as barriers.

District leaders have an important role to play in eroding the barriers that inhibit principals' attempts to improve the quality of teaching in their schools. They design professional development for principals that can help

them develop the skills necessary to deliver constructive and sometimes critical feedback and plan professional development to help teachers improve their instruction. In places where seniority holds sway according to custom as opposed to contractual dictate, central office leaders can clarify the rules and encourage and reinforce assignment based on qualifications and quality.

Lastly, this study suggests several fruitful areas for further research. This study highlights several interrelated factors that seemed to affect the extent to which principals encountered obstacles as they sought to increase teacher effectiveness. Does school level affect principals' efforts in human capital development more than school size and, if so, why? Why was state policy context more salient than district context for these principals? Additional studies with larger samples of principals could probe these complicated relationships. This study was based on a modestly sized, purposive sample in two small states with school districts that are small geographically and in enrollment. Do the constraints described here represent the experiences of principals in other types of schools and regions such as the South or West? Qualitative studies involving principals with a broader range in years of experience in their schools, in larger, urban districts and other regions of the country would suggest whether other barriers such as district or school resources or principal preparation are important to consider. Moreover, this study is based on principals' perceptions. Qualitative studies that investigate in-depth the presence and influence of barriers on principals' work would thus be instructive. By observing principals at work, researchers could get a better sense of the extent to which perceived barriers are real constraints on how principals function. Such studies could also map how principals adapt to challenges and suggest whether particular adaptations are more successful than others.

With this knowledge in hand, researchers could develop quantitative studies that test the generalizability of key findings. Are the barriers identified here experienced by a larger, random sample of principals? Do principals in larger urban centers and other regions of the country, including right-to-work states and states that have much larger school districts, encounter such obstacles? What factors are most strongly associated with particular constraints?

Longitudinal designs would enable scholars to study changes over time in principals' perceptions and experiences of barriers and also facilitate the estimation of the causal impact of these barriers on key outcomes. Given the major changes underway in teacher evaluation, are principals encountering fewer barriers in this realm today than in the past? Do objective barriers affect instruction or student performance? Which barriers are most detrimental?

### *Limitations*

As with all research, there are clear limitations to this study. These findings are based on principals' perceptions. Perceptions were checked against teachers' contracts and, in most cases, against the word of other principals in the district, but ultimately these findings rely heavily on principal self-report. It is possible that some barriers identified by the principals were more perceived than real. As discussed above, principals' efficacy, locus of control, or leadership skills likely influenced the extent to which they perceived obstacles and the degree to which they tried to surmount them. Additionally, their level of confidence and candor could have affected their willingness to discuss these obstacles with researchers. I did not gather detailed data on these internal factors, but as noted earlier, they likely played a role. At the same time, perception is reality. If principals report feeling constrained in their efforts to raise teacher effectiveness, there may be a gap between actual and potential teacher effectiveness in their schools, and this gap means students are not being served as well as they should be.

Another key limitation is this study's inability to prove a causal relationship between individual and school characteristics and the extent to which principals encountered barriers related to hiring, assignment, evaluation, or professional development. As qualitative research, this study does not support causal inferences, but highlights potential relationships that could be probed at greater depth and breadth through subsequent qualitative studies and ultimately tested through subsequent, large-scale quantitative research. On a related note, it is important to remember that the findings of this study are based on a small, purposively selected sample. This study does not seek to generalize to all principals in the country, the states or even the districts in which these principals work. Instead, the purpose of this study is to begin to identify various factors and conditions that could constrain principals' efforts to improve teacher effectiveness in their schools. Thus, I caution readers against drawing broad inferences based on these findings.

This study highlights key ways in which a sample of principals' efforts to increase teacher effectiveness was impeded, in their view. Given the important role that teachers play in student learning, these barriers are worth interrogating further. If our goal is for every child to receive the most robust learning opportunities, we must create the conditions so that principals do not encounter substantial obstacles in their efforts to increase teacher effectiveness and highly effective teaching becomes the norm in U.S. schools.

## Appendix

### Interview Protocol

1. Teacher quality is an important issue in educational circles today.
  - How do you think about improving teachers and teaching at your school?
  - What steps do you take to make sure that excellent teaching occurs in your school?
2. How do you decide what courses to assign a teacher? *For example, how do you decide who teaches AP chemistry vs. earth science? Third grade vs. first grade? (If n/a, what guidance do you give?)*
  - How do you make decisions about which track to assign to a teacher? Which specific students to assign to a teacher?
  - What limits your freedom in making assignments?

*Can teachers retain assignments over time? Can they request/demand assignments?*
  - What opportunities do you have in assigning teachers?
  - What has influenced the way you approach assignment?

*(e.g., professional development, a veteran principal's approach, lessons from the private sector)*
  - Has your approach to assignment changed over your career?

*If so, in response to what?*
  - How do you wish you could assign teachers?
3. Tell me about your approach to teacher evaluation. (If n/a, what guidance do you give?)
  - What does the process look like?

*How many observations for probationary teachers? Tenured teachers? How many evaluations do you do a year? What percentage of your time is this?*
  - What purpose does evaluation serve here?
  - What training have you had?

*Does your school/district discuss what is effective teaching?*

- What instrument do you use?

*What do you think of it? What is it based on?*

*Does student achievement (i.e. state test scores) play a role in evaluation?*

- What constraints do you experience? (e.g., collective bargaining agreement stipulations or time)
- What opportunities do you have in teacher evaluation?
- What is the incidence of unsatisfactory ratings? Dismissals or nonrenewals? What explains these rates?
- What has influenced the way you approach evaluation?

*(e.g., professional development, a veteran principal's approach, lessons from the private sector)*

- Has your approach to evaluation changed over your career?

*If so, in response to what?*

- How do you wish you could evaluate teachers?
- For charters, what legal framework surrounds evaluation here? (e.g., due process, employment, or antidiscrimination law)

#### 4. Induction

- What programs do your district and school have for teacher induction?
- How involved are you in induction?

*Is this the right level of involvement for you? Would you like to be more involved?*

- What inhibits your involvement? What promotes it?
- What do you think affects the quality of induction supports?
- What has influenced the way you approach induction?

*(eg., professional development, a veteran principal's approach, lessons from the private sector)*

- Has your approach to induction changed over your career?

*If so, in response to what?*

- How do you wish you could induct teachers?

#### 5. Tell me about your approach to teacher professional development.

- How do you decide what sort of professional development to offer?
- What has been the focus of PD in your school since you became principal?

- What constraints do you experience in choosing and offering PD?
  - What opportunities do you have?
6. How, if at all, are the tasks of assignment, evaluation, induction, and professional development related to each other, in your view?
- In other words, does the way you conduct hiring affect how you approach assignment or evaluation or professional development?
7. I'm interested in learning about how you go about hiring teachers. Take me through the process of hiring a teacher for a position at your school.
- What do you look for in a candidate?
  - What is the timeline?
  - What constraints do you experience?
  - What helps you hire good people?
8. Is there anything I didn't ask you about developing good teachers at your school that you think is important for me to know?

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### **Notes**

1. Several leading scholars who study policies related to teachers and teaching have praised this state's approach to developing teacher quality. To maintain confidentiality, relevant citations of these scholars' work are not provided here.
2. School leadership explains about 5% to 7% of variation in student learning across schools, which is about 25% of the total variation across schools ascribed to school-level variables; classroom-level variables, by contrast, explain about

- one third of the variation in achievement (Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis, Dretzke et al., 2010; Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010).
3. I did not recruit assistant principals.
  4. Gross (2011) and Lubienski (2004) are notable exceptions.
  5. Two research assistants provided valuable help in this portion of the study.
  6. Examples of closed codes include "time influence" and "collective bargaining agreement influence." Open codes include "cultural change" and "leader professional development."
  7. I did not double-code transcripts to promote interrater coding reliability. Instead, I chose to allot my scarce resources to reviewing and confirming/disconfirming analyses starting when I identified potential themes. I continued to test analyses with my research assistants from this point on in the data analysis and writing process.
  8. All proper names in this article are pseudonyms.
  9. For example, urbanicity is one variable associated with districts in this sample. In most cases, leaders of schools in urban districts, comprising 53% of the sample, were not more likely than leaders of schools in nonurban settings to report barriers to developing teacher effectiveness, with two exceptions. Urban school principals were more likely to identify cultural barriers to executing teacher evaluation (66% of identifications were by urban principals) and barriers to certification (63% of identifications were by these leaders).
  10. School size estimates were compared to state mean school sizes as reported by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2009-10 ([http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_104.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_104.asp) and [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_105.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_105.asp)).

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