

A Comprehensive Human Capital Management Strategy for Teacher Effectiveness

Jane Hannaway

A full human capital management strategy is needed to select, train, retain, and reward teachers.

There is no doubt that teachers and teaching are the most important school-level influences on students' learning. However, to date, school reform measures aimed at improving teaching quality have done no more to consistently improve student performance levels than other reforms. *VUE* executive editor Phil Gloudemans asked organizational sociologist and education researcher Jane Hannaway, director of the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research and a noted expert on educator effectiveness, accountability, and federal and state reforms, about her ideas on teacher effectiveness.

What is the best way to achieve equitable access to high-quality instruction?

JANE HANNAWAY: We need to think about a full human capital management strategy. This would begin with selection. The entry bar into teaching is currently low, considerably lower than that of many other countries where it often occurs at the point of highly selective entry into a teacher training program. The next step is the training itself. Teacher training is highly decentralized in the United States with different teacher training institutions doing very different things. Some programs may do a much better job than others, and we have very little understanding of the training dimensions that make a difference. Even with the same training, evidence shows that there is still considerable variation in the effectiveness of teachers. This calls for a second point of selection – tenure. Here evidence on actual effectiveness can be

taken into account to determine who is retained. Rewards for the high performers can be used to ensure good rates of retention of strong teachers. Using the full set of human capital management instruments would greatly help ensure that all students have access to high-quality instruction.

Value-added models have become increasingly popular as a way to evaluate, reward, and dismiss teachers. Some researchers argue that these models are not precise enough for high-stakes decisions. What are your views?

JANE HANNAWAY: Every researcher I know who has conducted research using value-added understands its limitations and its virtues. The fact is that it is the best measure we currently have to predict future teacher performance. It does not make sense not to include

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this information when making personnel decisions about needed training and retention. At the same time, there is common agreement that it should not be used alone to make high-stakes decisions. Value-added should be used in conjunction with other information – for example, principal ratings or expert classroom observations – to help ensure that good teachers are not penalized by the limitations of value-added measures.

What features of the present labor regulations governing the teaching profession would you modify?

JANE HANNAWAY: Teacher pay is currently heavily based on experience and degrees. The evidence is clear that experience affects teacher performance, but only for the first few years. The evidence is also clear that degrees do not affect teacher performance, with some exceptions, such as the amount of math training by math teachers.

Some districts reward teachers with tenure after just two years of service, which you've characterized as premature. What would be a better approach to teacher tenure?

JANE HANNAWAY: After only two years, we do not have sufficient information to make reliable value-added estimates of teacher effectiveness. In addition, teachers are still moving up their learning curve in terms of how to teach. In short, we have exceedingly little information with which to make a lifetime commitment to a teaching job. I would like to see decisions about tenure made after, say, five years. With regard to the value of tenure, I think it is still something we need to investigate. It could be a very important job consideration for teachers. If it affects retention rates for good teachers, we should keep it.

What supports do teachers and students in high-minority, high-poverty schools need in order to improve the working and learning environments there?

JANE HANNAWAY: This is an area where we need further research. For example, an argument could be made that school districts (or states) should pro-

vide incentives for strong teachers to move to schools where they are most needed. Incentives could be in different forms – for example, pay-based, smaller classes, more instructional support, etc. But this assumes that teachers effective in one setting (say, a school serving advantaged students) are similarly effective in another setting (say, a school serving disadvantaged students). We have preliminary evidence that a teacher's value-added is portable – it goes with the teacher even in different settings – but more work is needed to confirm these findings. We also have preliminary evidence that it is the most experienced teachers in high-poverty schools who are the least effective. It is unclear whether this is due to the way teachers are sorted into and sort themselves into schools or whether it is due to burnout. If the latter, high-poverty schools may need to have established mechanisms that transfer teachers after some period of time to settings that are less demanding.

Are the performance management and instructional capacity-building perspectives mutually exclusive in their implications for policy and practice?

JANE HANNAWAY: They should go hand-in-hand. But we need to recognize that teaching is highly complex and demanding work. It calls on high levels of both cognitive and interpersonal skills, often in unpredictable ways. With good pre-service experience and focused support on the job, not all teachers may be able to perform at high levels, despite their best efforts. And it is often only clear who can do it after they have actually taught for some

period of time. We should celebrate and reward those who are successful. The bottom line is the students. We need a fully developed and fair strategy to select, train, retain, and reward teachers. No one element of the strategy is sufficient.

Note:

The National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) has a number of working papers on these topics at <www.caldercenter.org/publications.cfm>.