

**The Impact of IMPACT:**  
How the Current and Outdated Evaluation System Undermines  
School Climate, Teacher Efficacy and Staff Collaboration

**Rationale**

DCPS has experienced a high level of teacher attrition during the last decade. Concurrently, DCPS introduced IMPACT, a forced distribution ranking system. Research has shown evaluation instruments like IMPACT can negatively affect factors of the work climate. Negative work climate has been linked to teacher attrition. Teacher retention has been positively linked to school quality. Does IMPACT adversely affect work climate?

**Background**

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) introduced a new performance evaluation system in the 2009-2010 school year. The system called, IMPACT, is similar to the forced distribution ranking systems (FDRS) introduced by General Electric (GE) in the 1980's. The system ranks employees on a bell curve. From that curve, an employee's distance from the 50th percentile can guide decisions concerning the employee's future with the company. Originally, GE's idea was to terminate the bottom 10% on the curve. Thus the system got it's name rank and yank. Originally, organizations believed this method would eliminate the subjectivity of performance evaluation by applying metrics to actions in the workplace and create a stronger workforce.

During the first years of IMPACT, teacher terminations made up part of the attrition rate. In the first three years, the retention of Highly Effective and Effective teachers remained consistent between 84 and 89% Though the 80th percentile sounds manageable, the actual numbers are not. DCPS was losing 310 more Highly Effective and Effective teachers on average than the teachers it was trying to get rid of.

**Data/Tools/Process**

This research draws from an online survey of 70 PreK through 8th grade teachers, coaches and counselors at a DC public school. The school's union committee conducted the survey during the last week of April and the first week of May 2016. The survey has eight sections with prompts on a likert scale. The sections include:

- 1) how teachers get support for behavior and achievement,*
- 2) when teachers feel free to speak without repercussion,*
- 3) how teachers are treated professionally and with respect,*
- 4) what kinds of impact teachers have,*
- 5) what motivates teachers,*
- 6) which meetings make teachers more effective teachers,*
- 7) from where teachers gets support to develop professionally,*
- 8) how teachers feel about workplace policies and expectations.*

Questions were designed to evaluate the teachers' sense of work climate and their ability to affect it. Fifty one teachers responded to the survey and more than 30 of the respondents left written comments.

## **Data Analysis**

Data will be compared with work climate characteristics associated with the use of FDRS. Some of these characteristics include: competitiveness, limits on collaboration, limits on risk taking, favoritism, low morale and paranoia. Since the survey was made in collaboration with the local school union committee, questions are not tailored directly to the agenda of this action research. However, many of the questions do speak directly to the climate of a workplace using forced distribution ranking systems as well as provide inferences and connections to that type of workplace.

*“I can make a significant impact on what happens in my classroom from day to day ( with the burden of unannounced IMPACT observations holding you back)...Yet, your contributions stop at the door. Your input is not wanted or valued (in spite of weak attempts by our administrators to say otherwise). In a data driven environment, we are losing our ability to have a significant impact if it is not quantifiable. In the process, we are losing our humanity.”*

Though this research will not establish causation between the ranking system and work climate, a correlation is readily apparent. School climate, teacher efficacy and staff collaboration are missing in parts of the school.

*“A good leader builds motivation through trusting their employees, appreciating them and acknowledging them as people. I feel this is the only place I've ever worked where my skills were not valued. Rather than asking teachers what they know and how to share that knowledge teachers are treated as if they need to be retrained and discarded. We are losing many wonderful professional [sic] with years of service and talent due to this lack of motivation. “*

Urban public school systems are not known for hospitable work climates in general so results will be more of an observation of the correlation than an answer to a problem.

## **Future Directions for Study**

1. What can the education sector learn from lessons in the business sector?
2. How do DCPS reforms to IMPACT recognize flaws in forced distribution ranking systems?
3. If IMPACT affects school climates, does it affect attrition?

## **Recommendation**

DCPS should shape its performance evaluation system to foster collaboration and creativity. Corporate America has found that rank and yank performance evaluation does the opposite.

## **Bibliography**

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