Developing a Definition of Teacher of Record

THE NEED TO DEFINE “TEACHER OF RECORD”

With states addressing teacher effectiveness through a range of development and measurement policies, it is crucial for policymakers to think critically about the data necessary to inform decisionmaking. A high-quality teacher-student data link (TSDL) is essential for producing actionable and reliable data for these efforts. However, to truly maximize the data states must develop a clear definition of “teacher of record” (TOR) and ensure its consistent use statewide.

Efforts to understand educators’ impact on student learning, a critical component of determining effectiveness and providing meaningful feedback to educators, must reflect the reality of today’s classroom assignments. Absent a definition that captures this, states and districts will be unable to accurately attribute student learning to the appropriate educators. This primer lays out:

- a framework to guide state discussions around defining “teacher of record”;
- sample definitions that demonstrate various strengths and weaknesses; and,
- the need to clearly communicate the policy and its implications to stakeholders.

THE TEACHER OF RECORD DEFINITION FRAMEWORK

The Teacher of Record Definition Framework is the starting point for states to begin a dialogue about the purposes, characteristics, and data elements required for an effective teacher-student data link. The five-step process below, drawn from the Framework, is intended to guide states through the critical discussions related to defining “teacher of record”. The first three steps are important discussions that should involve a variety of stakeholders and are necessary precursors to the fourth step which is the development of the actual definition.

Step 1: Discuss and establish the purpose(s) for which the TSDL and TOR definition will be used. The Framework offers a list of possible uses ranging from the ability to examine teacher preparation programs to identifying the effectiveness levels of instructional practices to supporting pay for performance policies.

Step 2: Consider the characteristics of the TOR definition (e.g. accounting for all professionals and all educational settings)

Step 3: Discuss and define the educator roles to include (e.g. lead teacher, co-teacher, mentor, lead administrator, etc.)

Step 4: The Framework offers a definition template and directs the state to specify the words in quotations; the resulting word choice should be specified to match the priorities and intended uses in each state. The Framework provides questions for each term in quotations to guide discussants in their thinking.

Step 5: Consider the data elements required to support the chosen TOR definition and whether these can be gathered in a cost-effective manner.

A Teacher of Record is an “educator” who is responsible for a “specified proportion” of a student’s “learning activities” that are within a “subject/course” and are aligned to “performance measures”.

1This framework was developed by CELT (Connecting Education, Leadership, and Technology) in collaboration with five states participating in the Teacher Student Data Link project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The project continues through 2011 and the framework will evolve throughout. For more information, see the complete Teacher of Record Definition Framework.
**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

At the end of this process, how a state chooses to define “teacher of record” will communicate a great deal about what the state values and what the state intends to report about its educator workforce. The following examples illustrate various interpretations and policy implications that highlight the importance of thorough and rigorous dialogue tied to larger teacher effectiveness goals. As this work is still in progress there is no best practice definition to suggest, but promising practices are emerging. The first example clearly allows for a richer, more comprehensive analysis of the data while the latter is somewhat limited in use.

**Example 1:**
Definition: A Teacher of Record is an individual (or individuals in co-teaching assignments) who has been assigned the lead responsibility for a student’s learning in a subject/course with aligned performance measures. A Contributing Professional is an individual who has been assigned the responsibility to provide additional services that support and increase a student’s learning.

**Implications:**
- Attribution of student learning is based on level of responsibility.
- Allows for more than one lead educator in co-teaching or team-teaching assignments.
- There will potentially be educators in the system who are not identified as contributing to any student learning.

**Example 2:**
Definition: A Teacher of Record is a certified teacher who is responsible for at least 25% of the scheduled time for a student in a course for which there is an annual state assessment.

**Implications:**
- Limiting the definition to courses where there is an annual state assessment ignores the majority of the educator workforce.
- There are many educators who impact student learning who are not certified teachers.
- While allowing for multiple educators to be linked to a single student, this definition reflects an emphasis on current compliance reporting on Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT).

**ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**Engaging Stakeholders**

Successful implementation of these policies requires use of data by stakeholders, particularly educators. Therefore, they need to trust the reliability of the data, understanding where it comes from and how decisions are being made regarding its use. Soliciting input from these stakeholders throughout the process can help to foster early buy-in as it communicates that their perspective is valued and they develop a connection to the efforts. Since stakeholder buy-in will dictate sustainability and effective utilization of the resulting data its importance cannot be minimized.

**Communicating About Data**

Communications plans should accompany this effort. States can begin by creating a clear vision for the work so that messages can be framed around the broader goals of teacher effectiveness and student achievement and how the definition of Teacher of Record impacts the ability to achieve these goals. Communications should emphasize and provide evidence of the value of a robust teacher of record definition and teacher student data link and how it will help stakeholders to do their jobs better. This “flashlight” focus will help to balance the current concerns that this data will solely be used for punitive purposes. While working with stakeholder groups, “champions” should be identified who can then lead the communications efforts among their peers by helping to further personalize the message.

With an urgent timeline, states may feel the urge to adopt a TOR definition from a state that has an established teacher student data link. However, successful implementation hinges on the involvement of critical stakeholders in the conversation around definitions and use. The Teacher of Record Definition Framework provides states with a key resource to begin that dialogue.

For more information and resources on effectively linking teacher and student data and defining “teacher of record”, visit the Data-Driven Educator Development page on the DQC web site.