Forum Brief

AYPF Using Student Surveys for Teacher Professional Development: Ongoing Discussion

April 2, 2015

Overview

AYPF hosted a forum to continue the discussion about the use of student surveys for teacher professional development. This forum focused on how schools and educators can best use the surveys to improve as well as using the surveys to prepare teachers for the classroom. Presentations centered on how surveys are implemented and how their data can be utilized to improve professional development and to track schools' progress over time.

Forum presenters for the April 2 event were:

* Penny Murray, HR Operations Hamilton County Department of Education;
* John Stewart Project Manager Project COACH, teacher and assistant principal;
* Michael Dunlea teacher Ocean Acres Elementary School New Jersey; and
* Jennifer Carinci, Director of Research, Innovation, and Data Strategy Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation

Presentation #1

Michael Dunlea was joined by Penny Murray and John Stewart on the phone for their presentation. Murray and Stewart began on the phone discussing their bottom up approach to implementing Project COACH in their school district in Tennessee and how this same approach can be used to implement student surveys.

Murray and Stewart wanted to involve teachers in the process of implementing Project COACH so they would feel more comfortable with it. A bottom up approach best does this. This approach is more organic and with volunteers they can try out the tool and talk about it with their colleagues and eventually role out the tool fully. Murray and Stewart used this model when first starting Project COACH in their schools. First they selected a few schools to pilot the program and made it completely voluntary and did not make it evaluative. The results were simply used to improve professional development. Project COACH is a “collaborative, coaching model based on brief, unannounced observations over the course of the school year.” Each teacher is observed by the administration a minimum of six times a year for a total of at least 60 minutes and following each observation there is a feedback conference that is focused on steps teachers can make to improve. This tool encourages more conversations about evaluations and fewer written evaluations. Stewart explained it well when he said, “We want to move administration out of the office and into the classroom.” Eventually, Murray and Stewart want the student survey data to be part of the conversation between administration and teachers.

Stewart and Murray went on to explain the district’s prior use of the Tripod survey. Originally the Tripod survey was piloted in nine schools but to continue using the Tripod survey the state required the survey results to be used as 5% of the teacher evaluation. Due to this, schools stopped using the Tripod survey and started focusing on Project COACH, which Murray and Stewart say teachers are comfortable with.

Following Murray and Stewart’s discussion about the bottom up approach, Michael Dunlea, a second grade teacher, presented about how he has used student surveys to improve his teaching and how he is trying to get student surveys in more classrooms. Dunlea was able to first implement the survey though his fellowship with America Achieves by asking to pilot the Tripod survey. Last year was the first year he implemented the survey in his classroom. Dunlea explained the driving force for him to start using the Tripod survey was that he recognized the importance of getting the student perspective because students spend the most time in the classroom and with the teacher. Dunlea said, “I realized students have a far greater viewpoint of what’s going on in the classroom than administrators.” He also explained that he was frustrated he had a lack of control about what happens in the classroom, but the survey allowed him to have some control to change things.

Dunlea acknowledged that that although teachers have a good sense of what is going on in the classroom there are always surprises. Although he thought he was doing well in control, the survey results proved otherwise. This was “a wakeup call” for him, as he said, that he had let go of classroom management over the years. The question Dunlea did the most research on after the first year of the survey was, “My classmates act the way my teacher wants them to.” This was Michael’s worst performing question. Following personal reflection, looking at what he was doing and how he could do it better he was able to improve his score in this category from a 2.0 to a 1.4; a 1 being the best score. His class this year was able to benefit from the survey because he was able to reflect and decide how to improve.

Dunlea went on to explain how to best use the survey results. He recommends teachers pinpoint one area and focus on that part of professional development. By improving one component a teacher can indirectly improve others as well. After receiving the survey results teachers should take time to reflect on how to improve classroom practice.

Currently the survey is being used in Michael’s classroom but he wants to bring in district wide, which he now has approval for. Dunlea is starting implementation from the ground up and is getting teachers familiar and interested in the survey before it gets thrown at them by the district. Currently New Jersey has student goal objectives all teachers need to prove students have reached by set times. Dunlea wants the state to create teacher goal objectives to help teachers become better teachers.

Question and Answer

Following the presentation, forum attendees had an opportunity to ask a few questions of the experts. The first member of the audience asked about how teachers might react to the district wide implementation of the student surveys.

Dunlea responded that teachers might be stressed and overwhelmed, but districts should at first make it optional and confidential. In addition to this, administration should allow teachers to receive the survey data prior to their observation so teachers can improve on what they scored low on. Dunlea also emphasized that teachers need to acknowledge that there will be outliers in the survey results and not to get stressed by those outliers. Murray and Stewart added that they have created an administrative evaluation model in addition to the teacher evaluation model which will help lower stress. Rob Ramsdell, CEO and co-founder of Tripod Education Partners, explained that is important to get teacher buy in order to successfully implement the survey while limiting stress.

The next question concerned how teachers and schools can use the data from the surveys in a practical way. Dunlea emphasized that teachers should reflect on why they received the score they did. In addition to this teachers and schools should prioritize what they want to improve on and make goals for improvement small and simple. Reflecting on the previous question Dunlea encouraged the audience that once teachers start using the survey they will become interested in it and “once the value of the survey becomes known the conversation will shift and people will want to use it.”

The next question referenced the schools lowest performing teachers and what they should focus on after receiving their survey results. Dunlea explained that they should focus on challenge and nurturing because both of those cover multiple C’s of the Tripod survey. Have teachers ask themselves “are you nurturing and are you challenging?”

The final question addressed the opportunity and potential of the survey to be involved in the tenure process and development of teachers. Dunlea expressed that when the survey is used by new teacher most times veteran teachers are tied in with it as mentors and partners. As covered in the next presentation, he proposes that colleges should start using the surveys with student teachers, this will plant the seed and the co-teacher will see the value of the survey. To close Dunlea explained that teachers are currently able to make the survey their own and do what they want with it since there is no state plan yet so now would be the time to start using it.

Presentation #2

Jennifer Carinci, from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), discussed the role student surveys can play in preparing college students to become teachers. To begin, Carinci explained what CAEP does. CAEP is the sole accreditor for teacher preparation programs. CAEP wants their providers to use data to prove they have met a requirement rather than focus on the syllabus and what they are teaching. Carinci emphasized that evaluations of teacher preparation programs should put a focus on outcomes rather than solely on what the programs do to prepare teachers and student surveys are just one way to do this.

Carinci discussed five reasons CAEP is interested in implementing student surveys. The first is they measure what candidates should be able to do. Second, they help build strong clinical partnerships. Third, it allows programs to be selective and monitor candidates throughout the program. Fourth, surveys allow providers to look at the outcomes of their candidates and see what they are doing that can be improved. Finally, student surveys can be used for continuous improvement.

Currently CAEP is in the middle of a two year pilot in twelve states. The first year candidates use the survey in the classroom they are student teaching in. The second year, if the candidate receives a teaching job, they use the survey again. CAEP’s goal with this pilot is to connect the use of the survey in pre-service and in-service. The providers will receive aggregate domain scores and the raw data of the candidate’s survey results in order to improve their program and candidates. The survey results from spring and fall 2014 indicated that control is the lowest C of all seven C’s.

One of the concerns raised by a few audience members regarded bleed over results caused by the successes or failures of the roster teacher. Carinci explained that CAEP wants the survey to be taken about both the student and roster teacher in order for both to compare results. The student and roster teacher should also specify to the class that the survey is specifically about the student teacher.

Carinci realizes it would be complicated to implement student surveys in the pre-service arena. The hurdles discussed by Carinci are; permission with the provider, district, school, classroom and student, provider personal buy-in with the dean, clinical educators and candidates, placement duration, placement organization, semester timing, and cost.

Question and Answer

Following the presentation, forum attendees had an opportunity to ask a few questions of the experts. The first member of the audience asked about the willingness of states to work collaboratively since twelve states are running the pilot. Carinci explained that collaboration wasn’t the largest challenge. The largest challenge was recruiting people for the pilot. Providers were interested in the pilot but did not want to pay the price.

The final question referenced professional development and who, CAEP or someone else, provides the professional development. Carinci explained sometimes users need help to know how to use the data and CAEP has had discussions about how to do this. One audience member said, “We talk about common core at the student level but there is no common anything in schools of education, student survey’s help with providing this.”

Final Discussion and Questions

Dunlea raised a question about how much time is spent thinking about how student teachers are being surveyed on a classroom climate and environment that has already been set by the roster teacher for many years. Carinci replied emphasizing that this issue is something CAEP needs to look at moving forward and the need for both the student teacher and the roster teacher evaluated to where results align.

One audience members asked about how Tripod plans on scaling to increase capacity because currently Ramsdell does most of the work. Ramsdell replied that he only spent two days in Tulsa over a three year project and that there are people on the ground that know about the surveys and how to use them. He went on to reiterate that this is how he wants them to start, from the ground up.

Another question raised questioned the student’s opinions of the surveys. Dunlea explained that it is empowering to the students for them to have a voice in the classroom. Jana Burk, Executive Director of Leader Effectiveness at Tulsa Public Schools, told the group how her younger daughter feels bad answering some of the questions about their teacher. Another audience member suggested asking students if they saw improvements by their teacher from when they first took the survey. Ramsdell continued explaining that student’s opinions are shaped by how teachers implement, set up, and start the culture around the survey because it is a new tool.

To close the group had a discussion about whether or not student survey’s should be implemented top down or start from the ground up. One audience member discussed that a school doesn’t get the culture needed to successfully implement something like student surveys when it isn’t implemented top down. This person suggested that student surveys should be implemented top down and be at the national policy level. Ramsdell explained the caution that needs to be taken when trying to implement something top down that involved evaluation. He continued saying schools need good leadership that will be able to implement the survey. The forum ended with Ramsdell saying, “Nothing is debatable about what the survey measures, every parent wants the seven things that the Tripod survey measures.”