

Case in Point: The Tulsa Model

An Observation Engine-supported rollout of a new teacher evaluation program in Tulsa public schools

"This is an example of very brave teaching." Jana Burk is looking at a video of a middle school teacher in an English class. Ms. Burk comments, "The teacher just asked a question and it's a complex, high-quality question. She doesn't know what the students will say. But the subsequent discussion it prompts is terrific!" Jana Burk, Executive Director of Tulsa Public Schools' Office of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness, is in the middle of working with school administrators on observing classroom instruction and using a protocol to rate how effective the teacher is in creating a quality learning experience.

In preparation for the 2012-2013 school year, Tulsa Public Schools implemented a new teacher evaluation model as a part of their Teacher/Leader Effectiveness (TLE) initiative. The Tulsa Model for Observation and Evaluation is a research-based and externally validated evaluation program that has been adopted by the entire district as well as many districts across the state of Oklahoma. In August 2012, the TLE team provided an initial training on the model for all 148 teacher evaluators in the district and then assessed the group's proficiency.

Key Challenges

Tulsa required a user-friendly, accessible system that could be incorporated into their training. The system needed to provide:

- An opportunity for teacher evaluators to practice using the evaluation protocol
- A testing environment to check for observer proficiency
- Individualized feedback to each teacher evaluator using the system
- Group-level performance results to TLE trainers to aid them in planning of subsequent training events

As Tulsa trained their administrators in primary grades separately from those focused on secondary grades, they also needed testing events and reporting of results to mirror this structure. The Observation Engine provided an online solution that met these needs and was successfully incorporated into Tulsa's August training.

Implementation

Tulsa's principals and assistant principals (78 primary and 70 secondary evaluators) took part in the two-day training on the Tulsa Model. At the end of the first day, trainers assigned a one-video practice assessment in the Observation Engine to each evaluator. This allowed evaluators to familiarize themselves with video observation, practice using the evaluation protocol by assigning scores for each indicator on the rubric, and become comfortable using the Observation Engine tool. At the end of the second day, each evaluator was administered a three-video calibration test to assess their proficiency using the Tulsa Model. TLE staff were able to download results of that test to determine levels of performance and detect rating patterns.

"We're not finished yet. Through the Tulsa Model framework, Principals know what to look for in a classroom. But ongoing calibration training and certification of our observers is critical. With Observation Engine, we have the means to collect and analyze calibration data to enhance the training Principals receive."

— Jana Burk, Tulsa Public Schools

Results & Lessons Learned

The results of the assessment gave TLE trainers important information that helped them refine their trainings and plans moving forward.

- In general, the group gave higher scores to the teachers in the videos than the expert raters.
- The reports also helped trainers pinpoint indicators that were particularly difficult to rate.

Ultimately, the system allowed the TLE team to gauge the appropriateness of pass/fail cut points which will inform future certification policies.

