

Young Enough to Run America, Too Old for IMPACT

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Introduction

Trump, Reagan and Harrison were 70, 69 and 68 years of age the time of their inaugurations. America did not sequester them due to age; they were elected to an enormous job - Commander in Chief of the Free World. So, if older men can run America why does DCPS IMPACT out veteran teachers? In 2009, former D.C. Chancellor Michele Rhee led the design for a performance evaluation system for teachers. IMPACT includes various rubrics to measure pedagogical ability, student achievement, core professionalism, valued added and commitment to schools. Teachers must achieve a baseline score to pass and maintain employment. This score also rates instructors as ineffective, minimally effective, developing, effective, or highly effective. Just as teachers can be terminated for their performance, those who achieve higher scores receive bonuses. IMPACT illustrates one of the most streamlined teacher evaluation, promotion and dismissal systems in the United States (Shober, 2017). With all its rubrics, categories and percentages to help promote best practices and student achievement, there may be another purpose for IMPACT. After all, the evaluations are conducted by school administrators mostly principals and assistant principals. Yet, if humans are conducting the evaluations, could hidden agendas be involved with the outcome of the process?

Rationale

Two years after the implementation of IMPACT, 206 District of Columbia Public School teachers were fired for poor performance under the assessment, amounting to 5 percent of the 4,100 teachers in the city school system (Strauss,2011). Although the tool was created to measure teacher performance, it appeared to be also under the guise to eliminate the instructors that administrators no longer wanted? Realistically, there is enough subjectivity in the interpretation of a teacher's observation that the observer could lower the score. After enough questionable observations when the teacher and the administrator don't see eye to eye the teacher may be sent packing and walking out the school house door. If a school system is changing its culture and decides to eliminate higher paid/veteran teachers, IMPACT is an excellent vehicle to assist in that effort. This would allow newer teachers to be hired at lower salaries and consequently help maintain a school system's budget. Union leaders and many teachers have assailed the system as arbitrary and punitive. They call it a vehicle for Rhee and her successor Henderson to push older veterans out of the system (Turque, 2011). My research study will examine which teachers' ratings have decreased and hypothesize that age has affected the outcome of the evaluation process.

Literature Review/Interview

The literature and interview support the reality of age biasness against older and veteran teachers. Rosales, reports, "Across the United States, veteran educators are facing a growing problem of age discrimination." Even though, the Age Discrimination Act of 1967 guards individuals 40 and over against ageism, it still occurs. Rosales points out, "In many cases, school officials use the guise of improvement plans to harass veteran educators without considering the countless contributions they have made to public education." Hammond emphasizes, "...that we not adopt an individualistic, competitive approach to ranking and sorting teachers that undermines the growth of learning communities; research shows

that student's gains are most pronounced where teachers have longevity and work as a team." Yet in 2015, The Network for Public Education conducted a study in 48 states with 2,964 teachers and principals. The respondents reported 52.08% witnessed evidence of bias against veterans.

Research suggests a connection between the dismissal of older teacher and salaries. Age Discrimination Info, stresses "a key contributory factor to the crisis is the competitiveness of teachers' pay and rewards compared with pay of graduates in other occupations." Teacher pay needed to increase to entice graduates into the profession. However, to maintain the budget data infers veteran teachers are let go.

On January 27, 2018, former DC Public Schools Chancellor Antwan Wilson was a guest speaker for the WTU Teacher Leaders and agreed to take interview questions. I asked him if he was aware of older teachers losing their jobs, and how does he plan to safeguard this from happening? Chancellor Wilson responded he was aware, and that if people are still teaching at that age he's not surprised they would be let go. He said, "Decisions are made based on money." He went on to discuss teacher salaries and school budgets. Wilson also said, "A career trajectory should be created to develop teachers." A career trajectory if created effectively (and made privy to all teachers and not select ones) could assist teachers to know of other opportunities and provide next steps in their career.

Research Design and Process

I created a survey of 18 items. The first four items included a demographic profile which naturally consisted of age, gender, ethnicity and length of service. Nine items required teachers to respond to their experience with IMPACT and administration. Three of the items asked respondents about their age with relationship to the tool. The last question was a written response which allowed respondents to be more detailed about their experience. The Likert Scale was used for five of the items. Initially, I emailed the survey to twenty teachers, and I received only one back. I decided to put Plan B into effect. I went to schools during lunch. Sometimes, I sat in various teachers' classrooms and conducted the survey; other times, I walked around the building during lunchtime. I even conducted telephone interviews, and went to classes teachers attended after hours. I assured teachers' anonymity. The total number of teachers canvassed was 32. However, only 9 out of 32 teachers provided their IMPACT scores. It's for this reason, I used the Overall IMPACT Ratings Scale to determine a decrease in scores.

Data Analysis

Twenty two out of thirty-two (**68.7%**) teacher's ratings decreased. Twenty of that thirty-two are over the age of forty.

One out of thirty-two (**0.3%**) remained Developing. The respondent was in the age range of 20-39 and had been teaching less than ten years.

Seven out of 32 (**21.8%**) teachers remained Effective. One respondent was 40-44, two were 45-50, and four were 20-39.

Only two out of 32 (**0.6.2%**) teachers remained Highly Effective. One respondent was in the age range 20-29 and the other respondent was 40-44.

Most teachers over age 40 (**63%**) experienced a decrease in IMPACT scores. In my study, only three teachers over 40 remained effective, and only one maintained a highly effective rating.

Recommendations:

Allow a qualified outsider with a demonstrated and clear comprehension of IMPACT to conduct half the teacher evaluations to provide a less biased outcome. This would be an advantage since some principals are not yet proficient at evaluating instructors (Hammond, 2016).

Create a career trajectory where all teachers regardless of age, gender or race are exposed to and trained in other areas (of their interest) that facilitate the field of education. Allow these teachers to demonstrate newly learned skills within the system, during summer, one day a week, during professional development, after the school day or one day during the weekend. Include this as a mandatory part of the evaluation to be discussed and monitored with administration, qualified evaluators and others. This will allow opportunities to be inclusive to all and help to eliminate ageism.

Create a task force to regularly monitor school administrators' actions regarding IMPACT evaluations to prevent biasness. This task force will communicate with DC Council members, local politicians and activists to mandate ethical treatment for teachers over 40 years of age. Pair or group teachers to collaborate or provide events that foster diversity in age, gender and race. Remove the value-added measure from IMPACT; that number is contingent on diverse variables such as class size, student attendance, student health, student home life and school materials.

References

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