



Can a Commercial Screening Tool Help Select Better Teachers?

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POLICY ISSUE

When looking to hire a new teacher, districts can receive anywhere from dozens to hundreds of applications per vacancy. This can require significant time and effort as school leaders wade through the resume stack in order to find a teacher who will be most effective in the classroom. So, when a popular software company offers a product that screens and prioritizes candidates for review, it’s an attractive option—particularly when a district already utilizes that company’s other software in its hiring process. This paper looks at whether the scores from one such product, Frontline Education’s TeacherFit Instrument, predict later teacher performance and student outcomes.

Several recent studies suggest that information gathered during the applicant-screening process could be compiled to make predictions about teacher effectiveness. However, Chi & Lenard show in this paper that district and school leaders should be cautious about investing too quickly in a commercial product purporting to save time and improve results.

STUDY DATA AND FINDINGS




The Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) in North Carolina began requiring teacher applicants to take the TeacherFit assessment in 2016. Frontline Education’s TeacherFit assessment, which claims to help “identify outstanding teachers,” takes approximately 20-30 minutes to complete and attempts to assess applicants’ attitudes, beliefs, habits, and personality traits. Candidates receive an overall score and scores in six dimensions: Fairness & Respect, Concern for Student Learning, Adaptability, Communication & Persuasion, Planning & Organizing, and Cultural Competence. These scores are made available to hiring officials.

During the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years, there were nearly 11,500 applicants with TeacherFit scores, of whom 2,104 were hired by WCPSS as

KEY FINDINGS

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Short answer: This one is a bit of a mixed bag, but other approaches may be better. This study finds that higher scores on Frontline’s TeacherFit assessment:

-  predict higher performance on teacher evaluations
-  predict lower likelihood of retention
-  are not associated with student outcomes in math or ELA

new teachers. Chi & Lenard study the outcomes associated with these individuals and find the following:

- **Scores positively predict teachers evaluation ratings.** A one standard deviation increase in the TeacherFit index of scores is associated with a 0.06 standard deviation increase in evaluation scores from principals. This is about 16% of the difference between the performance of a first- and second-year teacher.
- **Higher scores on the screening tool are associated with a greater chance that a teacher will leave the school and district the following year.** A one standard deviation increase in the TeacherFit index is associated with a 3.4 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of remaining in the same school and a 2.4 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of remaining in the district the following year.
- **There was no detectable relationship between scores on the TeacherFit instrument and student test score outcomes.**

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Districts should proceed with caution. Results suggest that the TeacherFit commercial screening tool is not necessarily a substitute for the promising, but labor intensive, screening processes that are conducted by human resources officials as detailed in other studies (see Additional Resources section below). The screening scores from these more elaborate approaches appear to be better at predicting desirable teacher outcomes than scores from TeacherFit, which is easier and likely cheaper to implement.

Additionally, more attention—both in the research and in implementation—should be given to the uptake of these various tools by the principals in their own hiring processes. In the case of WCPSS’ use of TeacherFit, scores were available on the platform, but hiring principals did not receive strict or explicit guidance about how to incorporate them into their decision-making process.

Future work should examine how *promising* screening systems can be best incorporated the hiring process, perhaps using experiments to understand whether and how new tools are used by school leaders.

For the complete working paper, visit wheelockpolicycenter.org.

ADDITIONAL STUDIES

Other recent studies examining teacher screening processes:

[Making the cut: The effectiveness of teacher screening and hiring in the Los Angeles Unified School District.](#) Bruno P., Strunk K. O. (2019)

[Screen twice, cut once: Assessing the predictive validity of applicant selection tools.](#) Goldhaber D., Grout C., Huntington-Klein N. (2017)

[Teacher applicant hiring and teacher performance: Evidence from DC public schools.](#) Jacob B. A., Rockoff J. E., Taylor E. S., Lindy B., Rosen R. (2018).

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