

PEDAGOGY

Teacher Perceptions of the Tennessee Student Growth Measures in Physical Education

Todd Estel Layne, Carol Irwin, Kelly Simonton

Abstract

Few states have implemented an evaluation system to measure teacher efficiency through the use of student growth measures within physical education. Evaluation procedures can be extensive and have the potential for reduced active student learning time in addition to reduced teacher discernment. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to analyze teacher perceptions of a current state evaluation system that measures teacher efficiency within physical education. The overarching goal of this research was to help improve overall physical education instruction through high-quality evaluation systems. This study employed a mixed-methods design due to the collection of survey data, which included quantitative results and responses to open-ended questions during the focus group (qualitative). Forty-five (26 male, 19 female) teacher participants completed the online survey questionnaire (Phase 1), and 17 (6 male, 11 female) teachers volunteered to participate in follow-up focus group interviews (Phase 2). An electronic survey designed to obtain feedback regarding the student growth measures system was sent to all participants. Once surveys were collected, two focus group sessions occurred during an in-service for all physical education teachers. Survey data and interviews were analyzed. Results show that teachers believe the intent of the Tennessee Student Growth Measures portfolio is good and can provide potential benefits to teachers. However, adjustments that better support teachers, students, and the physical education program should occur. It is the duty of state

Todd Estel Layne, College of Health Sciences, University of Memphis. Carol Irwin, College of Health Sciences, University of Memphis. Kelly Simonton, College of Health Sciences, University of Wyoming. Please send author correspondence to telayne@memphis.edu

leaders to improve the portfolio system to help maintain high-quality PE teachers.

Research suggests that there has been a focus in the last decade on the implementation of teacher evaluation assessment protocols including the use of student growth measures in physical education (PE; Mercier & Doolittle, 2013; Metzler, 2014; Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, & Amrein-Beardsley, 2017; Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, Amrein-Beardsley, Kwon, & Hodges, 2017; Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, Kwon, & Amrein-Beardsley, 2017; Phillips et al., 2017). One reason for this is the general uptick for improved accountability in teaching and learning in all school subjects (Rink, 2013). In addition, effort to raise the status of subjects like PE with increased accountability and evidence of student learning is being made because PE continues to be a marginalized subject area (Rink, 2013; Phillips et al., 2017). However, recent evidence suggests a great deal of pushback from PE teachers regarding evaluation systems. This is due to content-related differences that do not seem to be accounted for given the similarities and universal principles in evaluation tools and procedures used predominantly targeting regular classroom teachers (Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, Amrein-Beardsley, Kwon, & Hodges, 2017). Research also indicates that effective assessment procedures in PE that are needed to measure student growth can be problematic because of time demands (Phillips et al., 2017) and lack of content knowledge from the evaluator (Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, & Amrein-Beardsley, 2017). Several studies are combatting these issues by examining current teacher evaluation systems and assessment delivery efficiency within PE.

To better understand teacher perceptions of evaluation systems, Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, Amrein-Beardsley, Kwon, and Hodges (2017) surveyed and interviewed current PE teachers to better understand the issues they faced. Results indicated that teachers were confused by the evaluation system and were unsure of their expectations as a PE teacher. In addition, over half of the participants did not believe their administrator could effectively evaluate them due to their lack of content area knowledge. This led to a belief that a fair and valid assessment of their instructional delivery was not being implemented in the current system. Similarly, Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, and Amrein-Beardsley (2017) found that administrators

acknowledged that a lack of content knowledge made it difficult for them to provide proper assessment of the delivery of content unique to PE teachers. These administrators reported the value of PE and believed it provided benefits to all students, but believed they needed more training to evaluate PE teacher effectiveness accurately and fairly, overall. For administrators to provide effective evaluation of all teachers, there needs to be a system in place to assist with obtaining the proper knowledge of high-quality instruction with all content areas within the school (PE, music, art, etc.).

Another benefit of strengthening the evaluation system is the potential for enhancing the expectations of teacher content delivery and the significance PE teachers could have in their position in schools (Rink, 2013). As PE is a marginalized subject, the expectations for PE teachers are often diminished by peers, administration, and from students (Phillips et al., 2017). If a subject is not seen as important in the school system, students can inaccurately and inadvertently be provided feedback on the lower status of PE as compared with other subjects, which likely leads to lack of interest in the subject. Administrative support is critical to the success of any PE program. For change to occur and the subject to be given importance, PE stakeholders must find ways to help their administrators believe in, and understand, what they are doing and the difference they make with students. For example, student growth measures that align with state and/or national PE standards may provide evidence of objective and subjective student achievement and concrete areas of knowledge, ability, and experience tied specifically to PE content. The lack of administrative awareness to the PE standards and the complexities of measuring these student growth outcomes likely contribute to limited awareness and overall marginalization of PE in schools.

One hindrance to changing the viewpoint of administrators is the mandate of certain state evaluation systems that are less cohesive to subjects like PE (Metzler, 2014). If states require all teachers to be evaluated through the use of the same system, teachers will be forced to incorporate a “teach to the system” approach. In addition, several teaching strategies and approaches that are conducive to quality PE delivery may not align with regular classroom expectations (Metzler, 2014). This approach could limit teacher creativity and the various

pedagogical approaches that can be implemented in PE. There is fear that teacher effectiveness research will be found useless due to the evolution of state educational policy, which can hamper high-quality teacher instruction and focus more on what the evaluation system measures. This directly impacts areas such as PE due to the uniqueness in how it is taught.

Current Trends in Evaluation Systems: Teacher Portfolios

One method for enhancing teacher evaluations is the use of video portfolios (Admiraal et al., 2011). Instead of using written narratives to describe their teaching, teachers record actual teaching to provide an understanding of what is happening in the classroom and provide evidence of student growth. This tangible evidence provides immediate evidence of what is happening with students in the classroom. Teachers are expected to create teaching plans, record teaching performances and student learning, and then provide follow-up reflection and evidence of teaching quality, which is then reviewed by administrative evaluators. To complete the video portfolio components, teachers are expected to store everything in an online platform and to use the technology provided to understand the steps as well as collect and store the data and information. While the use of technology by teachers continues to evolve, it is not without issues. Regardless of experience, some teachers are not educated on current technology features or the expectations for portfolio artifacts they submit. This can limit their ability to display their teaching accurately. In addition, setting up a recording opportunity can take time away from other important duties of a teacher, such as teaching, assessing, and spending time with students.

The state of Tennessee implemented the use of student growth portfolios for the purpose of teacher evaluation in nontested grades and subject areas (Stone & Walker, 2017). Grades and subjects included fine arts, first grade, pre-K/kindergarten, world languages, and PE. PE teacher evaluations was first implemented by pilot schools the 2013–2014 school year. That year, 33 teachers participated. In following years, that number went up to 146 (2014–2015) and 193 (2015–2016). The intent of the student growth portfolios was to provide a way for PE teachers to be measured for their work and effectiveness in their subject, instead of through use of a school-wide growth measure. Stone and Walker (2017) found that when