Understanding the Instructional Culture Index
Spring 2013

What is the Instructional Culture Index?

The Index is an independently-validated predictor of student performance and effective teacher retention. The power of the Index is that it is universal: it is applicable across various learning models, subjects and grades, and state lines. The Index measures talent management practices by quantifying teacher experiences and attitudes.

The Index can be considered a summative measure of a school’s talent management practices. While domains and individual items within the Insight report provide feedback on specific systems that support and develop strong instruction, the Index score tells us about teachers’ experience as a whole. In other words, the Index can be thought of as a school’s score on an interim assessment, while individual domains show how we’re doing on an assessed standard. The individual items on the survey help pinpoint the actions leaders can take within each domain to improve performance. As in the case of any effective assessment, we use carefully designed items to make it clear to school leaders where their culture is strong and where they need work.

How is the Index calculated?

The Index is calculated from the % of teachers who “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with three items from the survey:

- Teachers at my school share a common vision of what effective teaching looks like.
- The expectations of effective teaching are clearly defined at my school.
- My school is committed to improving my instructional practice.

These three items are used for the Index because we have found they reliably summarize teachers’ experience of performance management practice in their schools. These questions come from distinct domains and represent essential elements for achieving exceptional instruction in every classroom; these ideas are instrumental in creating environments where good teachers become great, and where those great teachers want to work.

Index scores are reported on a scale from 1-10 based on the responses from all teachers. Index scores are also calculated based on the isolated responses from teachers with stronger and weaker performance ratings, if ratings for teachers have been provided and there are 5 or more teachers in each group.

How is the Index used in Insight reports?

Along with Index scores, we also provide each schools percentile ranking, indicating the % of schools with Index scores lower than the given school.

Insight reports include results in comparison to “top-quartile” schools – those schools with Index scores in the top-25% within their district or region. We provide these comparisons based on the Positive Deviance theory of social change, the belief that we can learn from the successes and practices of local exemplars who are facing similar challenges. Through the entire Insight report, “top-quartile” or “top-tier” always refers to these schools identified via their Index scores; top-quartile schools are consistent through each report, they do not vary by domain.

How is the Index validated?

After each annual cycle, the Insight research team reviews our national data set to analyze each survey item, domain score and Index calculation. During this cycle of deep analysis, we compare each survey item and all calculated scores to school performance outcomes and to teacher retention plans. For individual items, we strive to maintain a range of difficulty within each domain, eliminating redundant or unhelpful items and testing new items based on emerging research and work with our partner schools across the country.

For our domain and Index scores, we test alternate combinations and alternate formulas to verify there are no better alternatives. While we made slight adjustments to the formula of the Index in 2011, we have not changed the composition of the Index items in the last three cycles of analysis. TNTP will continue to analyze the item bank and formulas annually, assuring our partners we will continue to provide leaders with the best possible Insight about how to improve talent management and school culture.