PRINCIPAL SUPPORT, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY, AND TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

Research highlights the importance of teachers’ expectations for the academic success of students, especially disadvantaged ones. Therefore, it is important to understand how to increase teachers’ expectations for their students at various levels. However, most prior research focused on teachers’ expectations of a specific student (hereafter individual-level teacher expectations). Relatively less attention is given to expectations that teachers have on for many students in their class or school (hereafter group-level teacher expectations). Studying group-level teacher expectations has important policy implications because group-level teacher expectations may have a greater impact on improving overall learning outcomes than individual-level teacher expectations by creating an effective school (or class) environment that benefits all students. Specifically, group-level teacher expectations can set the norm for “how much is taught by teachers and how much active student participation is permitted” (Copper, 1985, p.153). This norm can then shape the climate and processes in the classroom or school, which in turn affects not only a few students, but also the entire class or school population. The result would be improved student achievement for all students, but not just for a few students. Yet, little is known about conditions under which group-level teacher expectations are high or low. In this study, we address this lack of research by examining school contexts associated with group-level teacher expectations. Specifically, using contextual data provided by mathematics and science teachers from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 in the United States, we examine school-level factors associated with group-level teacher expectations beyond individual teacher-level factors. Among others, we are particularly interested in the role of principals in shaping group-level teacher expectations. In addition, we are interested in the role of professional learning communities as an important school process by which principals can affect group-level teacher expectations. This is because literature suggests that while principals play a key role in creating positive school climate by promoting professional learning communities, professional learning communities can play an important role in shaping teachers’ instructional behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, studying the relationships among principal support, professional learning communities, and group-level expectations offers important insights into the process by which principals matter to group-level teacher expectations. Our analyses of High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 showed that greater principal support and professional learning communities were significantly associated with higher teacher expectations, even after controlling for other variables. We also found that much of the relationship between principal support and teacher expectations was mediated by professional learning communities. Policy implications for school effectiveness and school improvement are discussed.

Keywords: Principal support, professional learning community, teacher expectations, High School Longitudinal Study.