

PICCS

Partnership for Innovation in Compensation for Charter Schools

A Project of the Center for Educational Innovation - Public Education Association



Volume 1, Issue 1

September 2010

PICCS Profiler

Key Findings from the Evaluation of the
*Partnership for Innovation in
Compensation for Charter Schools*



PICCS Implementation Taking Hold

Recent findings from the independent evaluation of the PICCS project suggest that participating charter schools are moving in the right direction toward embedding the core components of the PICCS school improvement model in their schools and classrooms. In doing so, positive change

is beginning to take place in teaching practices and school support for quality instruction. The progress of PICCS implementation is the topic of this first issue of the *PICCS Profiler*—a research brief focused on providing periodic updates about key findings from a multi-year evaluation conducted by **Measurement Incorporated (MI)**. We begin this issue with a description of the PICCS project and an overview of the evaluation.

About PICCS

The *Partnership for Innovation in Compensation for Charter Schools* (PICCS) is a *Teacher Incentive Fund* (TIF) program designed to recruit, retain, develop, and reward top-quality teachers and school leaders at 10 New York City charter schools. Led by the Center for Educational Innovation – Public Education Association (CEI-PEA), PICCS seeks fundamental reform in teaching and learning by combining performance-based incentives (PBIs) with a set of research-based tools to help teachers customize instruction and, ultimately, improve student outcomes. PICCS financial incentives are tied to a rigorous evaluation system for teachers and principals that uses multiple measures to determine educator effectiveness, including value-added assessments. PICCS PBIs fall into two categories:

- *Student Achievement PBIs*, where PICCS educators are rewarded for improving student performance at three levels: the individual student, the classroom, and the school;
- *Leadership PBIs*, where educators can earn incentives by assuming increased leadership responsibilities. The main way to earn a leadership PBI is to participate in a rigorous peer-review process, designed to encourage completion and presentation of effective, “suitable for replication” learning experiences.

The premise behind PICCS incentives is to reward *outcomes* as reflected in student performance and the development of replicable best practice.

About the Evaluation

Measurement Incorporated was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the PICCS project in the fall of 2007, and has completed three years of this five-year study. The evaluation serves three purposes: to provide the Project Advisory Team with information on (a) the implementation of PICCS core elements at the school and classroom levels, (b) the impact of the project on student achievement and other educational outcomes, and (c) the link between project implementation and outcomes.

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To address these goals, MI developed a conceptual model/theory of change to organize the study variables and guide all measurement work (**Exhibit 1**). In accordance with this model, our research efforts for the past two years have focused on gathering baseline and formative data on the design and initial stages of PICCS implementation. The third year evaluation builds upon this earlier work and extends it in two important ways. First, it incorporates more refined indicators of program implementation and instructional change. Second, it follows PICCS schools over a longer period of time to better gauge the extent of implementation and change.

Similar to our earlier research, information for the Year 3 evaluation was obtained from several sources including surveys of participating teachers and school leaders, focus group interviews with teachers, individual interviews with school administrators and charter school board members, and school/classroom observation.

The key findings from the Year 3 evaluation—presented below—address the following questions:

- What is the level of PICCS implementation?
- How is PICCS implementation supported?
- What professional learning takes place in PICCS schools?

- How do PICCS educators feel about performance-based incentive plans?
- What changes in instructional practice have taken place in PICCS schools?
- What factors influence the extent of PICCS implementation and instructional change?

The next issue of the **PICCS Profiler** explores the question of program impact on students.

PICCS Participating Charter Schools

- **Bronx Charter School for Children**
- **Family Life Academy**
- **Hebrew Language Academy***
- **Hellenic Classical Charter School**
- **Manhattan Charter School**
- **Merrick Academy**
- **Renaissance Charter School**
- **South Bronx Charter School for International Culture and the Arts**
- **John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School**
- **Williamsburg Charter High School**

*First Year of Program Participation

Exhibit 1. PICCS Evaluation Theory of Change

Design	Implementation	Short-Term Impact	Long-Term Impact
<p>PICCS Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitability - Practicality <p>School Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational Capacity - Professional Capacity - Instructional Capacity <p>Implementation Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PICCS Training/TA - Resources - Collaboration 	<p>Fidelity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adherence - Quality of Delivery - Valuing/Receptivity 	<p>Change in Schools/Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational Practice - Instructional Practice - Attitudes/Expectations 	<p>Change in Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achievement - Attendance - Attitudes - Graduation Rate

Key Finding 1



The level of PICCS implementation has expanded over time.

Studies of school improvement over many years suggest that schools know how to change. They are experts at adopting quick fixes to pressing educational problems in the hope of finding the magic bullet for reform. What schools do not know how to do as well is *improve* by sustaining change. Indeed, a decade of research on comprehensive school reform (CSR) reveals that sustaining school reform beyond the initial stages of enthusiasm is one of the biggest hurdles educators confront. A study by RAND, in fact, found that after two years, only 45% of the schools that had initially adopted a CSR model were still engaged in model implementation. Considering that major change takes time—typically three to five years—before the necessary structures and systems are in place to realize student achievement gains, it is no wonder that research to date has found only modest effects of schoolwide reform models on student achievement.

Our work with PICCS paints a different picture of program implementation. Year-to-year comparisons show that according to school leaders, and to a lesser extent teachers, participating charters not only were active implementers of the PICCS model, they had expanded the quality of model implementation with time (**Exhibit 2**). Specifically, in both 2009 and 2010, all leaders reported that the PICCS program was being used in their schools. What was different across years was the quality of use: From 2009 to 2010 more leaders observed *routine* implementation of the PICCS model rather than *uneven* implementation. Teachers, too, saw an improvement in PICCS implementation, with more reported users in 2010 than 2009—59% vs. 54%—and more reported

Key Components of the PICCS School Improvement Model

- Performance-Based Incentives
- Embedded Professional Development
- Peer Review & Professional Learning Communities
- Data Warehouse*
- Customized Curriculum and Assessments

*Still developing and expanding

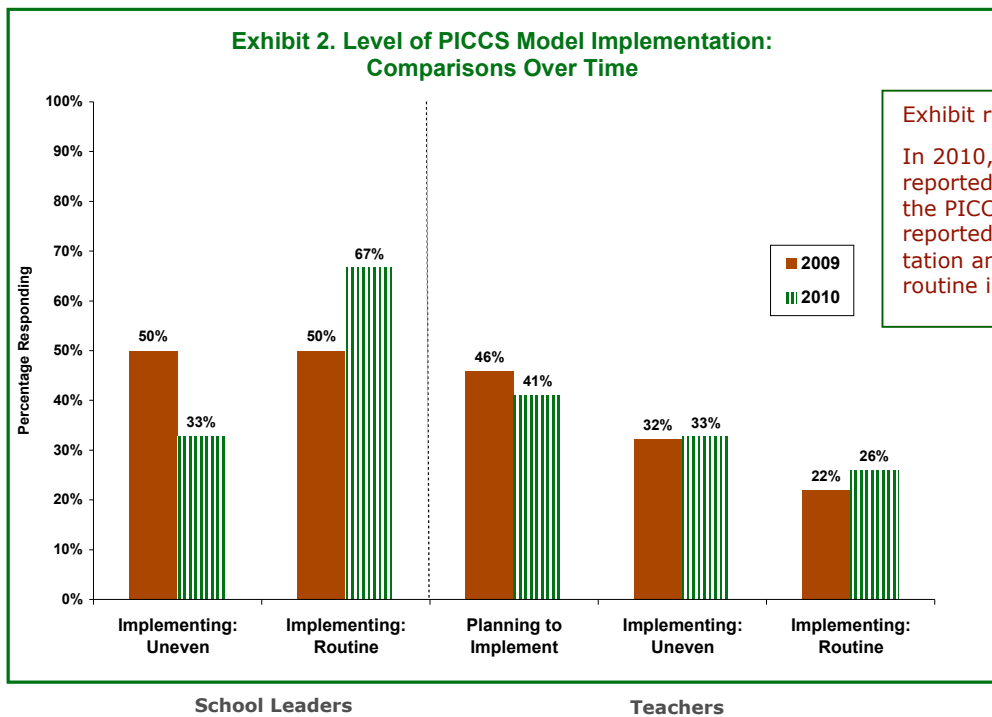


Exhibit reads:
In 2010, all **school leaders** reported implementation of the PICCS model: 33% reported uneven implementation and 67% reported routine implementation.

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“routine” users—26% vs. 22%. To be sure, teachers’ level of use in both years is best described as “uneven” or “in the planning phase,” but that can be expected to change in the future as teachers become more familiar with the PICCS model and as all model components reach scale.

Our research also showed that some components of PICCS were implemented more widely and with greater fidelity than others. According to leaders and teachers, the following components were used by nearly all PICCS educators:

- PICCS Peer Review Process
- PICCS Professional Learning Communities
- Job-Embedded Professional Development
- Performance Pathways Curricular Tools

Although some thoughtful and intentional adjustments were made in these components to better “fit” local situations, most leaders and teachers implemented them *pretty much as intended* by the PICCS developers.

In contrast, leaders/teachers experienced more difficulty following the Performance-Based Incentives plans and the Data Warehouse and Assessment practices/tools prescribed by PICCS. Many (40%) acknowledged making *major* changes to these components or not using them at all, particularly individualized achievement plans for students, classroom improvement plans, and Performance Pathways assessment tools. Open-ended comments spoke to lack of flexibility with the data warehouse format and to certain “glitches” with the Pathways technology as reasons for lower levels of use in some schools.

Facts and Figures about PICCS Peer Review

This past year

- 100 school level peer reviews were conducted,
- 25 network level peer reviews were conducted,
- 80% of all network level peer reviews were approved as “ready for replication”,
- 74% of PICCS teachers participated in the peer review process compared with 69% in 2009, and
- 52% of PICCS teachers produced a learning experience compared with 46% in 2009.

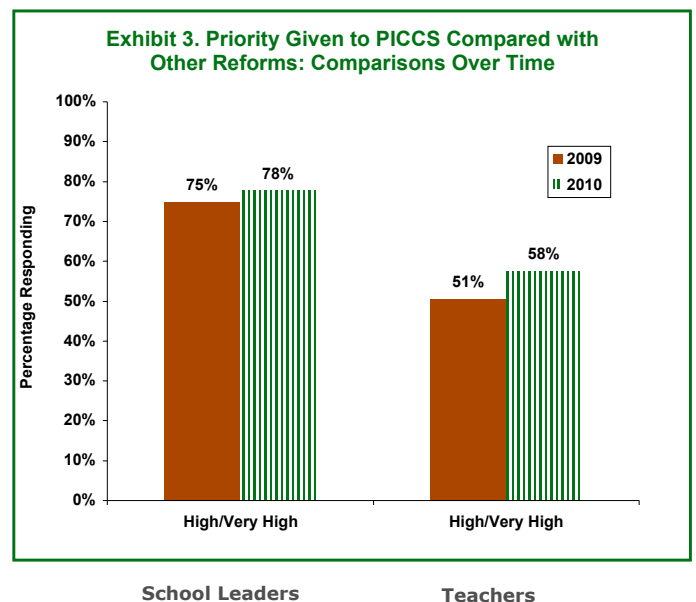
Key Finding 2



Support for PICCS continues to grow in classrooms and schools.

Bringing about change in schools is not simply a matter of inspiration and determination. Support structures must be in place for new practices and behaviors to take root and last. Vital to the successful implementation and sustainability of comprehensive reforms, such as PICCS, is strong leadership support and commitment/buy-in from teachers.

On the leadership front, PICCS schools can be commended. **School leaders purposely created structures and opportunities to promote the PICCS model** and effectively manage the school improvement effort; they did so through two important strategies. First, they clearly communicated the importance of PICCS by treating it as a top priority compared with other reforms in their schools. This emphasis did not go unnoticed by teachers, as there was a convincing increase in the percentage that considered PICCS to be the main agenda in their schools relative to other educational initiatives (**Exhibit 3**).



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Second, school leaders shifted resources in a very intentional fashion to support PICCS improvement. For example,

- 100% realigned professional development time and resources to accommodate PICCS,
- 88% redistributed personnel to accommodate program implementation,
- 75% realigned time for teachers to receive ongoing technical assistance, and
- 75% restructured teacher planning time to encourage greater project collaboration.

Leaders also worked at promoting program coherence by providing teachers with the necessary *time* for expanding their professional capacities, exchanging information, and collaborating around the PICCS model. Of note, “lack of time,” which invariably is one of the chief obstacles to program implementation, was far less of a concern for teachers this year. Moreover, other barriers typically cited as interfering with project implementation saw a decline in 2010 including work overload and confusion about the PICCS model. The latter finding is important as

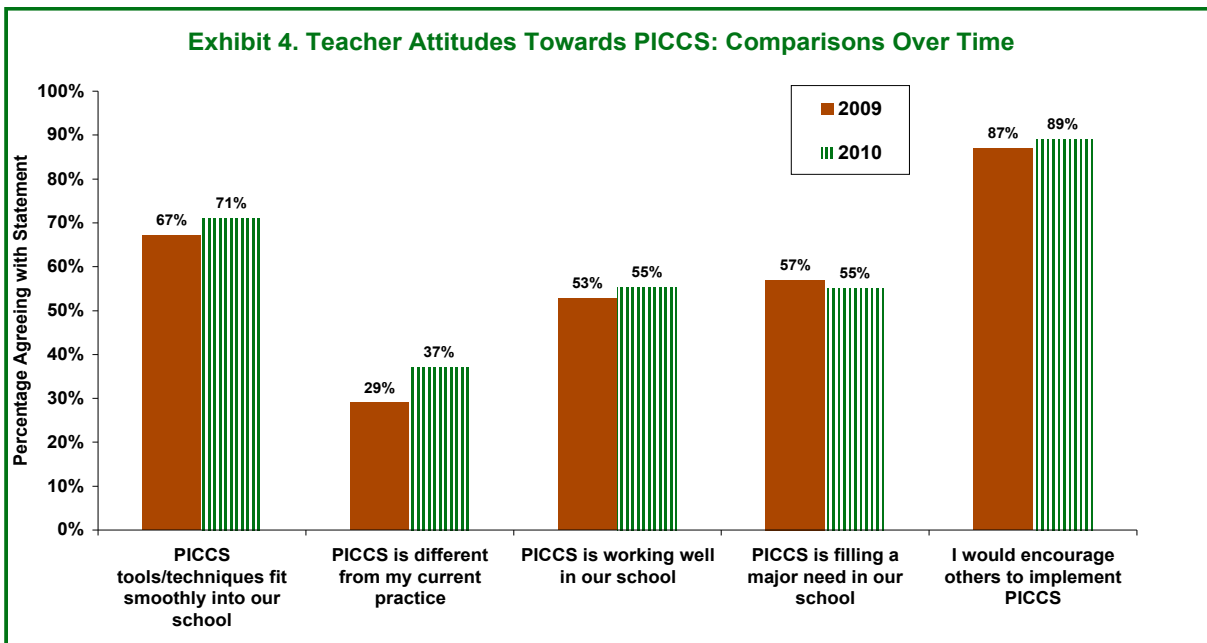
more than 40% of last year’s teachers identified “confusion about the purposes of PICCS” and “insufficient knowledge of PICCS components” as obstacles to program implementation. Less than 30% felt the same way this year, which suggests that PICCS developers are doing a far better job of getting their message out and explaining what practices and activities must be in place to achieve full-scale program implementation.

On the question of buy-in and support, PICCS continues to enjoy moderate to high backing from teachers. As revealed in **Exhibit 4**, a majority of 2009 and 2010 teachers agreed that PICCS tools and techniques fit smoothly with on-

going instruction, was working well in their schools, and was filling a major need. Yet, many also believed that PICCS activities were sufficiently

“...PICCS developers are doing a far better job of getting their message out...”

different from current practice to stimulate their interest and inquiry. This is a significant finding in that all developers of new programs need to find the “right mix”, between practices that “fit” with ongoing work, but are different enough to move change forward. Lastly teacher commitment to



Note: The percentage of teachers who would “encourage others to implement PICCS” (last set of bars), is based on those who felt that they had sufficient knowledge about the program to make a recommendation.

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PICCS can be seen in the high percentage of those who would encourage their colleagues to implement the program. As one teacher wrote, *"All schools should definitely use PICCS!!"*

Key Finding 3



The amount and quality of professional learning has changed dramatically in PICCS schools.

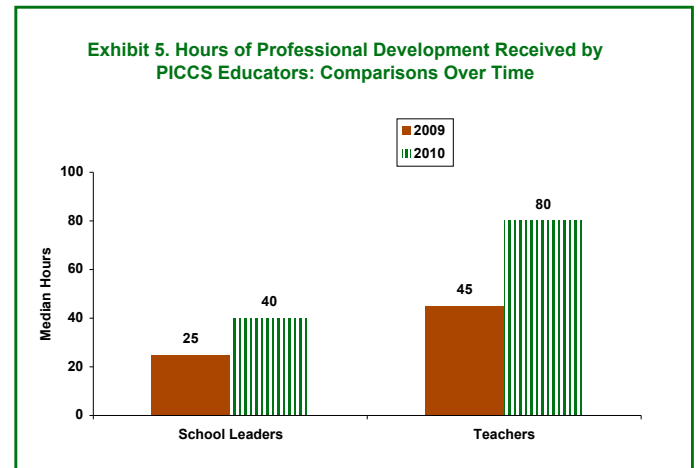
While principal leadership and staff buy-in are certainly critical implementation supports, the long-term survival of large-scale reform is rooted in the professional capacity of staff to implement and sustain the reform effort and create a knowledge base that will assure student learning now and in the future. Key to doing so is effective initial and ongoing professional development.

Indeed, in effective schools, leaders make a long-term investment in professional learning, devoting substantial funds to creating a culture that supports continued growth and inquiry. In these schools, professional development...

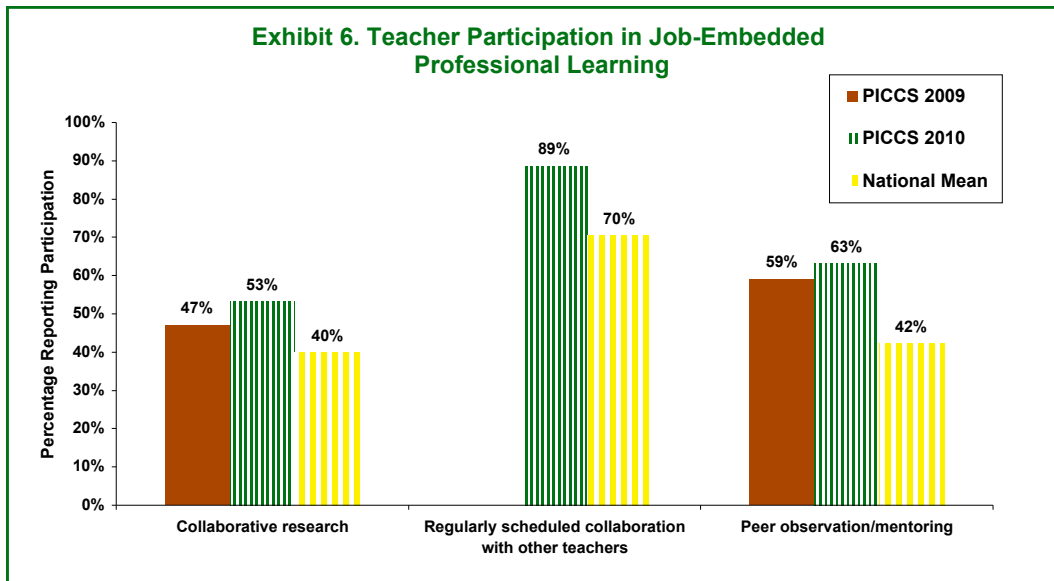
- is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice,
- is based on needs, addressing the everyday issues involved in teaching and learning,
- is explicitly aligned with the school's vision and improvement goals,
- provides collective supports to help teachers improve instruction such as school-based coaching and mentoring, and
- provides multiple opportunities for collaboration, sharing, and reflection among staff.

Our findings revealed that in PICCS schools, teachers and leaders increasingly have been exposed to high-quality professional learning. We found, for example, that PICCS teachers received an average of **80 hours of professional development**—or 10 days—during the year. This is nearly three times the national average, which many estimates place around 25-35 hours per

year. Moreover, it exceeds the estimated number of professional development hours (i.e., 50 hours) that, according to research, teachers typically need to improve their skills and their students' learning. School leaders, too, received substantial professional development in 2010—an average of 40 hours. For both leaders and teachers, professional learning was more sustained this year than in 2009 (**Exhibit 5**).



The bulk of this professional development was directly associated with the implementation of PICCS key elements. To this point, leaders and teachers received sustained training around the PICCS software platforms (TetraData and Performance Pathways), the Danielson Group Framework for Teaching, the Peer Review process, and the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process and protocols. At the same time, significant learning opportunities were provided on other school improvement topics central to the pedagogical reforms endorsed by PICCS: using best practice instructional strategies, differentiating instruction, motivating and engaging students in learning, mapping the curriculum across grades and subjects, and using data to inform instruction. Although many of these learning opportunities consisted of short-term workshops, **PICCS schools have paid growing attention to more effective, job-embedded professional development** strategies to impart information including collaborative research/teacher study groups, regularly scheduled teacher collaboration, and peer observation and coaching. As shown in **Exhibit 6** (next page), the percentage of PICCS teachers participating in these learning activities compares very favorably with national averages.



Source of National Data: *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*. National Staff Development Council, 2009.

Note: The 2009 Teacher Survey did not ask about participation in “regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers.”

PICCS schools also have recognized the importance of building strong working relationships among teachers by carving out blocks of time for teacher sharing and collaboration. In this regard, we have seen an increase in the frequency of teacher meetings to plan and learn together, and to develop a sense of collective responsibility for student learning. The PICCS Peer Review process and the PLC have been major contributors to the increase in professional collaboration. Both components encourage teachers to engage in authentic work with their colleagues, helping to break down the privacy and isolation that typifies teaching in most U.S. schools. We were struck by the enthusiasm for these PICCS elements in our site visit interviews with school leaders and teachers. The comments in the shaded box are reflective of educator’s satisfaction with the peer review and PLC processes.

Perhaps because of the increased sharing and job-embedded nature of training in PICCS schools, the majority of **teachers gave high marks to the quality of the professional development they received**. For example, most teachers—80 to 90%—reported that professional development...

- gave them opportunities to work on aspects of their teaching that they wanted to change,

“The Peer Review/PLC is one of the best contributions [of PICCS]. To me it is an unexpected hit. Our teachers have really embraced it...and used it as a way to work together as a community and organize work around the needs of everyone in the school.”
School Leader

“I’m very pleased with the Peer Review piece. I want to make a “leaderful” building. And I can’t do it myself. PICCS provides opportunities for teachers to take a leadership role. We’re trying to send more and more teachers to the Peer Review trainings.”
School Leader

“When teachers have a chance to share struggles in a structured meaningful way, that produces a wave of professionalism.... We want to try harder; we want to try different suggestions. PICCS [Peer Review and PLC] has given us the time to do it.”
Teacher

“I don’t get to see what’s going on in [other grades] but sitting in on the PLC meetings I can get a feel for what other teachers do. It helps me better my practice. It helps open up a dialogue across grades—it helps us all.”
Teacher

“From January on, we have been working in collaboration to develop units. This has been a great experience not to have to prepare in isolation.”
Teacher

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- provided them with new techniques for teaching their students,
- shifted their emphasis on how to teach,
- helped them to pay closer attention to their classroom practice, and
- led them to try new things in the classroom.

Satisfaction ratings were consistently favorable for both general and PICCS-specific training. Furthermore, the ratings surpassed nationwide statistics, which show that fewer than half of U.S. teachers are satisfied with the professional development they receive in areas other than content, including areas where they would like more opportunities to learn.

PICCS leaders were similarly positive about professional development in their schools. All or nearly all, characterized it as...

- ongoing and job-embedded,
- aligned with the goals of their instructional program,
- planned and designed by teachers,
- based on staff needs,
- supported by an adequate budget and adequate time, and
- evaluated on a regular basis.

These characteristics match research-identified best practice in professional development, and provide further testimony to the quality of professional learning in PICCS schools. But quality, aside, leaders spoke to the need for additional training for themselves and for their staff. Several commented that professional development focused on principal leadership would be welcomed. According to one leader, *"It's lonely at the top. I appreciate having PICCS staff as resources, but sometimes we need more help leading [the change effort]. We've had success, but it's only good until it ain't."*

A final observation about professional learning deserves mention. At the beginning of this section, we discussed the importance of ongoing

support to assuring the sustainability of large scale change. In PICCS schools, ongoing/follow-up support for project implementation is provided through several strategies including in-classroom assistance and onsite visits by PICCS consultants and staff; the MyPICCS portal, which serves as an intranet for schools; email and telephone contact; webinars; PICCS print/media resources; and continuing training sessions.

In evaluating these strategies last year, we observed the following:

- Teachers and school leaders were provided with a fair amount of follow-up technical assistance to support the successful implementation of PICCS.
- Reactions to technical assistance (TA) varied according to the respondent—teacher or school leader—and the delivery strategy used. Without question, school leaders were far more satisfied with TA than teachers.

"PICCS schools received more follow-up assistance this year than last, and [educators] expressed greater satisfaction with the assistance received."

The headline this year is similar, but with a more favorable slant: PICCS schools received more follow-up assistance this year than last, and school leaders and teachers expressed

greater satisfaction with the assistance received. But like last year, a higher percentage of school leaders than teachers were exposed to some form of TA (84% versus 40%), and far more of them rated the TA as *moderately* or *very* helpful (65% versus 33%). That said, many leaders felt that "insufficient follow-up assistance" was an obstacle to their PICCS implementation efforts and would have benefited from further guidance from PICCS staff/consultants. The majority of teachers also noted that additional support from PICCS staff would have improved the implementation of PICCS in their schools. Given these findings along with what research tells us about the importance of ongoing support to reform sustainability, some attention to the structure and frequency of PICCS follow-up assistance is warranted to bring this comprehensive reform to scale and effect deep and lasting changes in practice.

Key Finding 4



PICCS educators demonstrate strong support for performance-based incentives plans.

Compensating teachers based on performance is not a new idea. In fact, the concept has been debated for over 40 years. Proponents say that performance pay will help attract and retain talented professionals in the classroom and motivate teachers to teach better. Critics argue that incentive pay can be counterproductive to the educational process, fostering competition among staff and leading to lower morale. Traditionally, teachers have not given high grades to incentive plans although in recent years, attitudes have begun to change. Given the differing sentiments, we wondered what PICCS teachers felt about performance-based compensation. To explore this issue, we asked several questions about the design of incentive plans, in general, and about the perceived impact of PICCS incentives on teacher interactions and morale.

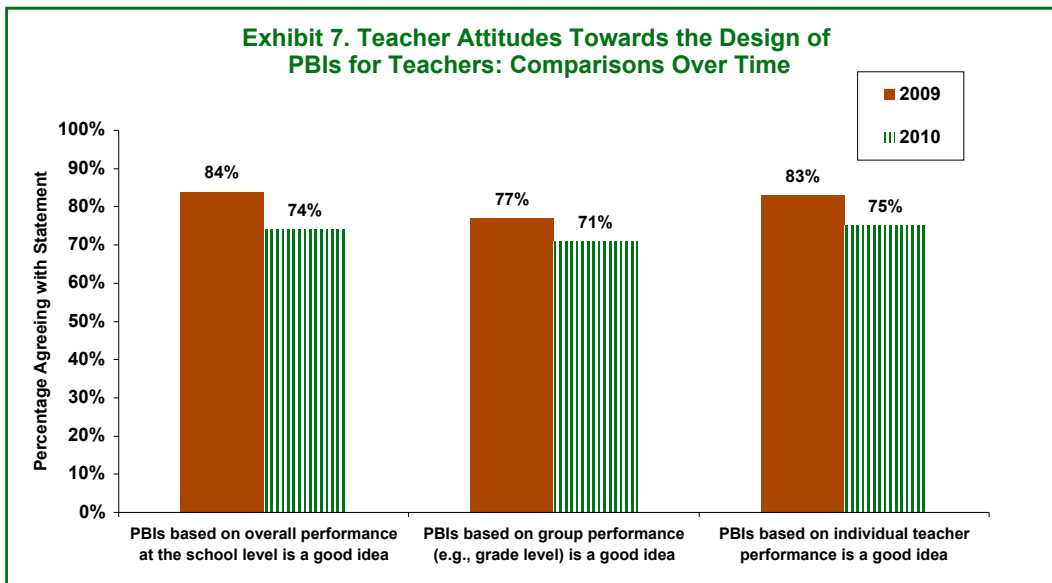
As illustrated in **Exhibit 7**, PICCS teachers exhibited strong support for performance pay, whether performance was measured at the school, group, or individual level. What’s more

teachers did not believe that PBIs or PICCS incentives compromised teacher cooperation or morale. Easily, the large majority (between 69% and 77%) **disagreed** with the following statements:

- Rewarding teachers based on pay will destroy the collaborative culture of teaching.
- PICCS has caused major resentment among teachers in our school.
- PICCS is not fair to most teachers in our school.

These feelings were upheld by responses to several other items addressing teacher-to-teacher interactions, morale, and collaboration. Here, nearly all PICCS teachers (90%+) believed that their colleagues were *more cooperative than competitive*, and *felt responsible to help each other do their best*. Teachers also observed that their morale was not adversely affected by the introduction of PICCS in their schools; morale even improved for some teachers. Together, these findings imply that—contrary to what detractors say about performance pay—PBIs did not create ill-will among PICCS teachers.

By the same token, there was lukewarm support for a rallying theme of PBI champions: that PBIs *will cause teachers to work harder*. On this score, just over half of the teachers were in agreement, as the following comments attest:



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"I don't think we're working harder. We work really hard in this school anyway; we did before (PICCS), and still do. I think what we are doing is working smarter. And we are working smarter because there are a lot of measurements that we didn't have before this program."

"I can say with complete confidence that I have never, nor will ever, work harder as a result of any incentive program....Effective teachers are not driven by money, but by a love for what they do."

We also asked school leaders about PBIs. Three themes emerged in survey and interview findings: First,

"...we are not working harder; we are working smarter because of PICCS."

leaders also were supportive of PBIs, despite some of the difficulties initially encountered in getting the PBIs in place. Start-up was varyingly described as "an uphill battle," a "nightmare," an "incredible amount of work", and a "very hard road to travel." Still, there was uniform satisfaction with the final PBI design. The following comment nicely summarizes this point:

"[The PBI] was hard, very hard to come up with. But we got through it and I think right now it's great. It's where we need to be. Our plan is very robust and very rigorous. It's a great success."

Second, similar to teachers, school leaders did not believe that PBIs had caused (or would cause) teachers to work harder:

"My staff works extremely hard anyway. They do their best regardless of the bonus structure. I don't think they would try less hard if those targets weren't in place. But, the PICCS structure does reinforce the idea that everything is about student achievement, including what you take home—your bonus."

Third, like teachers, there was a slight decline in PBI support levels from 2009 to 2010, even though a substantial majority of leaders (and teachers) agreed that performance pay was a positive change to practice. The decline was more

apparent among teachers, although none of the downturns was statistically significant.

We examined one final aspect of PBIs: teacher evaluations. Central to the effectiveness of a well conceived compensation system is a rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation system—one that differentiates effectiveness using many factors. On this front, PICCS teachers gave high marks to the systems in place in their schools. As can be seen in **Exhibit 8**, nearly all concurred with value statements having to do with the relevance, objectivity, appropriateness, and importance of their teacher evaluation systems. Fewer, however, agreed that teachers had significant input into the evaluation criteria or that teacher evaluation was linked to professional development. On balance, ratings showed a modest uptick over time, which some PICCS teachers (and leaders) attributed to the use of the Danielson model.

We also asked teachers to assess the fairness of their teacher evaluation systems. Here, 86% rated the systems as *moderately* or *very* fair, comparable to the 84% who did so last year.

Exhibit 8. Teacher Attitudes Towards Teacher Evaluation: Comparisons Over Time

(Percentage agreeing with statement)	2009	2010
Teacher evaluation is related to important instructional skills.	92%	94%
Teacher evaluation is based on clearly communicated standards.	89%	92%
Teacher evaluation is handled in a reasonable and appropriate manner.	90%	91%
Procedures used for teacher evaluation are consistent and objective.	87%	90%
Teachers have a lot of input into the evaluation criteria.	59%	51%
Teacher evaluation is linked to professional development opportunities.	67%	73%
Those conducting the evaluations have been trained appropriately.	85%	85%
Results of the evaluation are used to further develop teachers' skills.	83%	85%
Most teachers believe in the importance of evaluating teacher practice.	93%	95%

Key Finding 5



The core processes of teaching and learning are changing in PICCS schools.

“This overall program has been beneficial—not just the PBIs. My first year, when they were trying to implement PICCS, I was overwhelmed. There was so much work. But eventually as the program went on, we started learning more and I began to see the benefit: how PICCS is supposed to make us more reflective of our teaching, encourage deeper content, help us to be more focused and intentional, and help our students achieve even higher standards.”

Effecting changes in student achievement, ultimately, is about *instruction*. While there are important drivers of quality instruction and student learning—and we have touched upon them here: principal leadership, professional community, time and other resources, teacher knowledge and skills, and program coherence—in the end, it is good, solid teaching that matters most.

We have made the case throughout this report that PICCS seeks fundamental change in teaching practice through performance-based incentives and a set of instructional tools for customizing and enhancing the learning process. Given this ambitious goal, our research focused on the extent to which the intended change was taking place. We asked two questions, in this regard: (1) Did a change occur? (2) If so, was the change due to PICCS?

The simple answer to the first question is, “Yes”: **Instructional change did occur in PICCS schools over the course of project implementation.** The change was evident at a gross level, where 76% of the teachers agreed that overall instruction to students was different than in past years. And it was evident when looking at specific instructional strategies, where on average two thirds of the teachers reported greater use of *effective practice*, exceeding the 56% who did so last year (**Exhibit 9**).

Exhibit 9. Teacher Implementation of Effective Instructional Strategies: Comparisons Over Time

(Percentage reporting a change in practice compared with previous school year)	2009	2010
Using strategies that encourage higher levels of thinking	58%	68%
Using facilitation and coaching as instructional methods	52%	60%
Involving students in experiential, hands-on learning	55%	62%
Providing opportunities for cooperative and/or peer group learning	57%	67%
Using strategies for motivating and engaging students in learning	55%	68%
Making learning student centered	55%	66%
Integrating technologies into classroom activities	47%	61%
Providing opportunities for students to reflect on their learning	59%	67%
Using multiple assessment methods to inform instruction	65%	73%
Providing students with systematic feedback on their learning	59%	72%
Average	56%	66%

A majority of 2010 teachers also described year-to-year changes in the following strategies:

- selecting instructional goals and objectives for diverse learners (69%),
- planning instruction that builds on student interests and experiences (66%),
- differentiating instruction in response to differences in student needs (71%),
- tracking student progress using multiple assessment methods (74%),
- administering benchmark assessments or quizzes (69%), and
- improving practice through self-reflection (68%).

To be sure, the bulk of the changes identified had to do with *more frequent* implementation of methods teachers were already using, rather

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than the adoption of new teaching techniques. Nonetheless, with the increased frequency came a more focused, in-depth, and deliberate use of best practice:

"PICCS has helped elevate us to another level. Teachers are looking at data more intensely and through different lenses."

"PICCS has encouraged more innovative thinking. Teachers are more intentional in terms of how they are looking at their students, especially the ELLs and special needs."

On the second question, *Was the change due to PICCS*, we can confidently answer, "Yes, **some** of the reported changes were due to PICCS." As illustrated in **Exhibit 10** (next page), two thirds of the teachers gave PICCS credit for a portion of the instructional practices they had altered from 2009 to 2010, with a handful giving PICCS a great deal of credit for their accomplishments. Comments such as those highlighted in the shaded box infer that much of the perceived impact was associated with better lesson planning and use of data.

So, on the basis of these findings, we can safely say that PICCS is making a difference. Perhaps, the fairest statement about the project is that it is accelerating and sharpening many of the classroom practices already in place in the participating charter schools:

"PICCS has accelerated our processes. We had certain things in place, but because of PICCS and the kind of professional development we have gotten, it has accelerated what we've wanted to do. PICCS has been really great for us."

"We are very high performing. We are always looking at the quality of our teaching and the kind of work we are assigning to teachers. PICCS has helped us get there faster. It could have taken 3 more years."

Indeed, a ratcheting up of research-based techniques for organizing, delivering, and assessing instruction was evident in all schools visited. And while we did not see radical shifts in practice, we did find PICCS to be taking more of a center stage in helping schools with

their main event: the daily task of getting students to learn.

"Nearly all my teachers are focused more on achievement as the ultimate goal. PICCS has changed our whole learning environment."

School Leader

"There has been a big impact on lesson planning, specifically using the backward design model, looking at essential questions, looking at the assessments, content skills, etc. PICCS has definitely had that impact because data impacts instruction."

Director, Curriculum and Instruction

"PICCS reviews have helped our teachers to develop more innovative units that reach students who were not as involved before and allow them to show their strengths."

ESL Coordinator

"PICCS has helped sharpen our skills in different areas. For me, working on curriculum mapping, working on peer review, and being able to develop a unit of instruction backwards: planning first what the objectives are and the different skills have definitely helped me to become a better teacher."

Teacher/Peer Group Coordinator

"My teaching has improved. I am now stressing higher order thinking skills, I value the ideas I get from other teachers and feel more confident in my classroom."

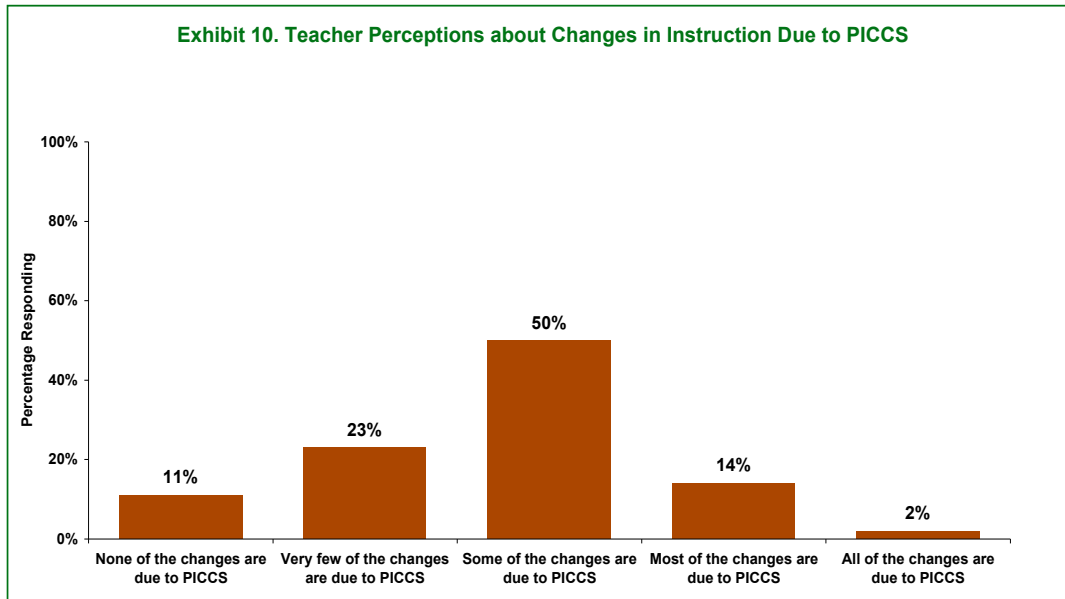
Teacher

"PICCS has driven conversations about student performance. Teachers can sit down and say, 'this is where my students are, this is where they need to be, and this is how I am going to get there.' They're also having that conversation with leadership to help support them. So I think this seriousness of purpose, and being able to make things quantifiable has had a big impact on our school."

School Leader

"We now have performance targets for every child, based on test results from the previous year. That's a change. I am able to look at certain children and certain classes. Whoa, this is powerful. I can't wait for TetraData to be fully functioning."

Teacher



Note: Teachers were asked to reflect on a series of changes they had made in instructional planning, classroom environment, instructional delivery, assessment, and professional responsibilities this school year compared with last, and to indicate the extent to which the changes were due to PICCS.

Key Finding 6



Certain school reform components are more effective than others in promoting instructional change.

The findings above tell us that PICCS implementation is expanding in schools and classrooms and that important instructional changes are taking place. But what factors contribute to successful project implementation and impact? We approached this question by performing a series of regression and correlational analyses in accordance with our theory of change framework (shown in **Exhibit 1**).

What we found squares with previous research on school improvement and the main ingredients of standards-based reform. Namely, PICCS model implementation was more successful when...

- there were **strong school leaders**, in particular, leaders who were visible and accessi-

ble to their staff, championed the PICCS reform effort by clearly communicating its importance, and worked hard at providing the necessary resources to support and manage the PICCS school improvement effort;

- **teachers collaborated** more regularly with other teachers, were empowered to exercise influence in program and instructional decision making, and were provided with the necessary **time to plan** and learn together;
- **follow-up structures/strategies** were in place to support program implementation, particularly technical assistance from PICCS staff and consultants;
- school leaders and teachers **believed that PICCS “fit in” with their ongoing instructional** program, yet was different enough to stimulate their interest.

We also found, as our theory of change posits, that schools with better levels of PICCS implementation experienced a greater degree of instructional change. The level of change also was influenced by (a) strong principal leadership, (b) the *effectiveness* of professional development (i.e., how well professional development prepared teachers for teaching their students), (c)

PICCS Profiler

the frequency of teacher collaboration and teacher involvement in instructional decision-making, and (d) the frequency and helpfulness of follow-up technical assistance from PICCS staff and consultants.

Having a weaker connection to program implementation and instructional change were...

- teachers' beliefs about **constructivist** pedagogy: the extent to which they agreed with practices that, according to research, help students become more engaged in the learning process,
- teacher **observation and feedback**: the frequency with which teachers were observed in their class—by principals, coaches, or mentors—or given feedback on their teaching as part of a formal evaluation or informally, and
- teacher participation **non-traditional professional development**: whether or not teachers received professional development through strategies such as teacher study groups, extended learning, self-directed learning, and long-distance learning.

On these weaker linkages, apparently, beliefs about good teaching do not guarantee good teaching. In the same way, frequent feedback, observations, and exposure to more effective forms of professional development do not

assure skillful instruction *unless* teachers perceive that these strategies have in fact, helped them to become better teachers.

Taken as a whole, the regression and correlational analyses signal a clear message to bolster effectiveness of PICCS in participating schools: **Leadership, teacher collaboration, time, and relevant technical assistance are the prerequisites for successful implementation and change.**

In summary, evidence from the Year 3 evaluation, suggests that PICCS is making steady progress toward realizing its ambitious change strategy. We have seen an expansion and deepening of the program's core components at school sites:

- Performance-based Incentive Plans
- Peer Review Process
- Professional Learning Communities
- Job-Embedded Professional Development
- Customized Curriculum and Assessments

And we have seen corresponding changes in instructional practice. Although PICCS, ultimately, must be judged by its impact on students, a solid foundation for achieving success is in place.

For further information about this research brief or about the PICCS evaluation, please contact Thomas Kelsh at (800) 330-1420