



Year three findings on the implementation of the PICCS Human Capital Management System (HCMS) Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant in participating New Jersey charter schools are the focus of this research brief. Overall, the schools were in various stages of implementation of the HCMS components. For the most part, though, the focus of work in all schools was directed towards improving teaching and learning, as well as a strong focus on using data to inform and guide instruction. PICCS onsite resources were perceived as instrumental in moving the schools along their path towards improvement. Echoed throughout this report are high praises to the frequency, quality, and relevancy of support that was provided by grant resources such as Literacy and Math Coaches, Danielson/Marzano PD, and SAM, in particular. Other components, however, could benefit from more attention and amendment from both parties (i.e., schools and PICCS) in order to increase their utility and effectiveness.

The findings in this brief summarize survey and site visit data that were collected by Measurement Incorporated in four charter schools located in central and south New Jersey. The findings are organized by the main HCMS components of the grant, which are bulleted below.

HCMS Components¹

- Educator Evaluation
- Professional Development
- Performance Management and Career Lattices
- Induction and Mentoring

Educator Evaluation

The educator evaluation procedures and practices in NJ charter schools received improved marks from administrators and teachers this past year. As seen in **Table 1**, several areas in particular showed significant improvements. Most notable, 90% of teachers agreed that procedures were consistent and objective, which was up from only 69% last year. Similarly, 90% of teachers agreed that they received evidence-based, improvement focused feedback and guidance on their performance, which was up from 80% last year. Also increased, albeit not as high, was the percent of teachers who agreed that the evaluation activities and schedule were communicated to them (81% in 2015 and up from 77% in 2014).

¹ Recruitment and Hiring is another component of PICCS' HCMS that is not addressed in this report. Rather, information on schools' recruitment and hiring practices are reported in their HCMS Indicators Chart.

Table 1
Quality of Educator Evaluation Procedures and Use of Results
Percent of Teachers Reporting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

	2014	2015
The conference between my supervisor and me was a two-way conversation.	90%	90%
Procedures used were consistent and objective.	69%	90%
I received evidence-based, improvement focused feedback and guidance on my performance as a teacher.	80%	90%
The evaluation activities and schedule was communicated to me.	77%	81%
Teachers were provided with adequate training and resources to ensure their understanding of the evaluation process.	N/A	81%
Performance feedback was given to me in a timely manner (i.e., w/in a week of observation).	87%	75%

Constructive feedback was a common theme articulated in focus groups and interviews with teachers and administrators regarding the evaluation process. Teachers, many of whom were new to the profession, expressed appreciation for the specific feedback that they received from their administrator. One teacher had this to say, “[Our administrator] will tell you what you can do to improve...and she will actually give you examples. And that is very helpful. Then she will look for it at the next observation...It’s not just a score, she will tell you why and how to get to the next level.” Another said, “[Our administrator] will research things for you. She sent me some stuff and said, ‘Have you tried this?’”

Administrators agreed that constructive feedback and collective dialogue were benefits to the process. “It is more of a conversation, rather than me dictating what the feedback is. It is really a growth opportunity in which we talk about and break down the lesson from both points and not just me talking,” said one administrator. Another had this to say, “I try to push them to be more reflective and bring evidence of what they did to meet a specific element, especially when they are teetering between [two different levels].” A third added, “The teachers are saying this is such an improved way to talk about instruction. I really look forward to our conference at the end. I look forward to the discussions. And we have had some tough discussions.”

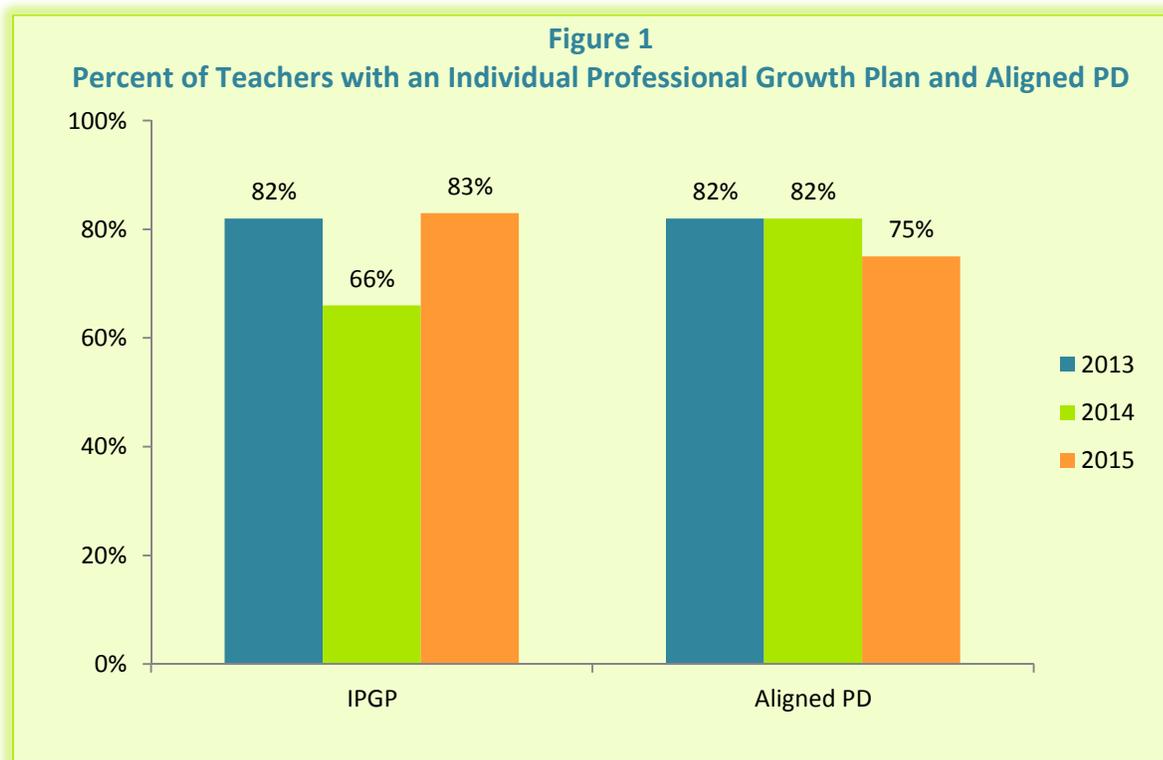
Moreover, several teachers who had worked in other schools offered comparisons, casting their current experiences in a much more positive light. In the words of a teacher, “I have to say that teacher evaluation in this school is fair and consistent...Our administrators give us time for remediation...it is done more constructively. It is not a ‘gotcha’ moment.”

Administrators gave various examples of the ways in which the evaluation data was used for improvement. The most cited was using the data to identify trends in teaching styles, which were shared and discussed with staff both individually and as a group. “Collectively, we use it reflectively to build and strengthen our practice,” said an administrator.

Professional Development

Teachers and administrators also gave high praise to the professional development opportunities that they had last year, many of which were provided through the grant. Once again, some teachers rated their opportunities as better than that of the public school system for which they were appreciative. Moreover, they were grateful for the frequency and availability of PD, which is exemplified in this comment, “A lot of districts couldn’t pay for the amount of PD we get. We certainly couldn’t without the help of PICCS. It is nice to have someone here on almost a weekly basis. There is constant follow up. It is not like you see them one month and not again for two months because then it isn’t really worth anything.”

Survey data supports these claims. Compared to last year, an increased percent of teachers (nearly 20%) reported that they had an individual professional growth plan (IPGP) that they developed with their administrator (see Figure 1). Slightly fewer reported that PD was aligned to their growth goals, nevertheless, the percentage remained high.



Moreover, 94% of teachers agreed that PD was appropriately timed and ongoing through the school year (Table 2). They reported that they had ample opportunities to directly incorporate new techniques into their instruction. The majority of teachers also agreed that PD helped them to improve their instructional strategies and their knowledge of content and pedagogy.

Table 2
Teacher Perceptions of Professional Development
Percent Reporting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

	Percent of Teachers
PD was appropriated timed and ongoing throughout the school year.	94%
PD included ample opportunities to directly incorporate new techniques into instruction.	77%
PD helped to improve instructional strategies.	85%
PD increased knowledge of content and pedagogy.	81%

The PD supports and resources provided through the grant to both teachers and administrators are further described in this section.

Coaching

One of the most highly regarded and valued professional development resources from PICCS was the Literacy and Math Coaches. According to survey data, 58% of teachers participated in literacy or math coaching in year three of the grant, which was up from 43% last year. On average, teachers met with the Coaches 11 times.

The Coaches were commended by administrators and teachers for coming to their schools well prepared and willing to work side-by-side with teachers. They offered specific guidance, as indicated by this administrator’s comments: “[They are] really there for teachers and not talking about theory stuff or workshop stuff, but stuff that they can use right then and there, practical things. The teachers are seeing them utilize the same strategies with their students right then and there. That is key.” Teachers especially appreciated the wealth of resources offered by the Coaches, which they felt were aligned to their needs.

To the point of working directly with teachers, another administrator had this to say, “[Our Coach] came in and met with [teachers] individually. She camped out in a room and it was round robin. Everyone just went in on their prep time...To me, that was more valuable than the 3 or 4 days that we had before school because those days are so long and it is hard for people to absorb that much information.” Another added, “A lot of times when you do personal development you have to go on your own time or be out of the classroom. [Coaching occurs] during the teaching time in the classroom and it benefits the teacher immediately. Every single one of my staff has taken advantage of that—the music, the art, it hasn’t just been for one content area, we have really tried to spread it out, so everybody had the opportunity to have this coaching.”

One of the strengths of the Coaches was their ability to establish trusting and supportive relationships with teachers. “A coaching relationship has to be built on trust and the teachers trust them to come in and help them. It is not evaluative. They don’t tell [the teachers] what they did was right or wrong. They are purely there to help them grow and they do that in a wonderful way that is really helpful.” Similarly, the support was felt by administrators, who appreciated the Coaches’ willingness to understand their schools and staff needs. “[Both Coaches] always check in

with me and the staff as to what our needs are...They came in initially and they met with me and then the Math Department. They work with teachers individually and then collectively with the Math Department.”

Without exception, the intensity, the face-to-face interactions, and the format of the coach support is making a difference. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of teachers reported that their teaching benefitted from their work with the Coaches. Teachers noted changes in their ability to differentiate instruction, to develop centers, to use assessments to inform instruction, and most importantly, prepare for PARCC assessments.

Marzano/Danielson PD

Training in Marzano or Danielson, another resource offered through the grant, enabled teachers and administrators to increase their understanding of the rubric and how to apply it to their practice. Similar to coaching, what were noteworthy about the PD were the frequency of onsite visits as well as the depth of support that was provided by the consultants. Below are comments made by school staff that signifies the quality of support and the benefits to them.

I just think the amount of PD we have gotten is a huge help. [I know] teachers in the public schools....who say, “You know so much more about it [Marzano]. You are so much more well-versed in it...And we do and know a lot more. I have only been here two years...We just get so much more information and get to learn from so many more people. The PD is very beneficial. (Teacher)

Marzano training is a great asset but all of the other PDs are supportive and build you up so you are not left standing there not knowing how to implement things correctly. For ELA and Math it helps guide us in the right direction with rigor. (Teacher)

We have had Paula Bevans come in and really do the workshops...To go through the workshops, it was very helpful to see how to align everything and to have Paula come in and reinforce what I was doing. We then went into the classroom and had mini-workshops with the staff. There are multiple options for PD, it wasn't just one-stop all. PICCS really came to assess what we wanted or the teachers needed. (Administrator)

When Paula Bevans came she worked with us. She worked on getting some alignment with us and we are moving forward with that. Then she also met with teachers and gave them lesson plan feedback so they were hearing it from someone other than us. And the teachers have been great; they were receptive to all of that. (Administrator)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

PLCs provided a regular forum for collaborative discussions around data. According to survey reports, 83% of teachers participated in PLCs on a monthly or weekly basis. Looking at **Table 3**, most teachers reported that time in PLCs was spent having discussions about data use, whether it be importing data into PICCS warehouse/SunGard or using data to improve instruction.

Table 3
Focus of PLC Discussions
Percent of Teachers

	Percent of Teachers
Importing data into PICCS warehouse/SunGard	82%
Using student data to continuously improve instruction	77%
Developing and understanding the SLO process	37%
Using data to identify a problem of practice	32%
Using data to analyze instruction to address a problem of practice	32%
Sharing best practices around data use	20%

The survey data also showed marked improvement in teachers' perceptions of the benefits of PLCs. Specifically, 72% reported that participation in PLCs was beneficial to their teaching compared to only 48% last year. Teachers highlighted the opportunities to work with others across grades and content areas as a particular benefit, as well as the opportunities to share ideas and collaborate. Comments bulleted below demonstrate these benefits.

I think it is nice to have that opportunity to work with teachers and articulate with different grade levels as well. Often you don't get that opportunity to work with different grades. Or take that data that you do collect throughout the year and analyze it to see what is working and what is not working and what can you do to differentiate instruction and go from that point. (Teacher)

It is a good level of support between the teachers at the grade level. Are we all having trouble with the same thing or is it something different? We talk about how we can teach things differently or those areas that we are all struggling with. (Teacher)

The beauty of the PLC is that it is not always 30 teachers in a room. We are doing a lot of small groups. The inputs are gathered, collected, summarized across the groups...We have done some creative things too. Recently we have had some students in the PLC participating in the training in technology with the teachers. Their role was to work with a teacher and mentor them. (Teacher)

School Administrators' Management (SAM) System

SAM was utilized by all but one administrator in New Jersey. All who used it found it to be helpful and something that they had grown to rely on to help keep track of their time, and prioritize their day. Below are statements from the administrators that highlight the value of SAM.

It really helped me gain a grasp on time management last year. It helped me figure out how to balance and delegate...so that I could be in the classroom...This year has been much smoother, much easier. (Administrator)

It really works out wonderfully and we go to the SAM conferences and get really good material from that too. I can definitely see the impact in the organization. I was at 32% instructional time when we started the project and now I am over 50%. I didn't think it would go up that much. (Administrator)

SAM coaching was a completely new process to me. Now I am really starting to depend upon it. It has become a priority to meet once a day [with the person in charge of her schedule]. We plug in two time slots just in case...We know these are the priorities, this is what we have to focus on the next day and we update the calendar. Every day before I leave I look at the calendar for the next day. It really is helpful. I really do like the concept...And little tips here and there and they come in frequently to meet with me. (Administrator)

Performance Management and Career Lattices

All schools had a performance-based salary schedule with differentiated teaching positions in effect this past school year. While most teachers were aware of the performance management system, fewer understood it (see [Table 4](#)). The latter finding might be more related to teachers' concerns about how the scores will fare this year with PARCC testing.

Table 4
Teachers' Awareness and Understanding of the Performance Management System
Percent Responding "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"

	Percent of Teachers
Our school has a performance-based pay plan.	87%
Our school has differentiated teaching positions.	87%
I understand the differentiated teaching positions.	70%
I understand the annual performance-based increases.	68%

Nevertheless, administrators are hopeful that teachers will buy into the system and be more willing to stay. Put by an administrator, "It is a great way to make our salaries more competitive with the public schools. One of the biggest problems that we face as a charter school is turnover of staff because of money. Our day is longer and they make less money. That is kind of the bottom line and that is a hard sell. And the same districts that we are housed in start their teachers \$6 or \$7.00 higher than we do. It is hard to hold on to them."

Induction/Mentoring

New from PICCS this past year was a formalized induction/mentoring program. According to the survey data, 25% of NJ teachers participated in induction, which is more than double from 12% last year.

Table 5 compares the median frequency of teacher participation in various induction experiences in 2014 and 2015. In 2015, inductees spent most of their time working with a mentor teacher, which occurred weekly. They received slightly more frequent support and guidance on instructional strategies compared to last year; otherwise, all other activities occurred with the same frequency as last year.

Table 5
Teacher Participation in Induction Activities
Median Frequency

	2014	2015
Work with a mentor teacher (in school or online)	N/A	Weekly
Receive support and guidance on instructional strategies	Monthly	Monthly or more
Receive support and guidance on curriculum content	Monthly	Monthly
Meet with the school principal to discuss teaching	Monthly	Monthly
Engage in a Learning Path on EduPlanet	N/A	Monthly
Meet with curricular specialists to discuss teaching	Monthly	Monthly
Participate in a PLC	Monthly	Monthly or less
Receive support and guidance on classroom management	Monthly or more	Monthly or less
Attend professional development workshops	Monthly or less	Monthly or less
Observe classrooms with experienced teachers	Monthly or less	Monthly or less

On the survey, 67% of teachers reported that their induction experience was tailored to their needs. Unfortunately, only 41% reported satisfaction with induction. A deeper dive into comments made by teachers and administrators revealed some areas in need of improvement.

- Teachers and administrators expressed concerns over the amount of work that was required of the PICCS program and how it compared to other new teacher requirements in NJ. In the words of an administrator, “Some of the requirements of the teacher induction program were asking a lot. In the State of NJ, teachers have to go through a full year mentoring program with a state-sponsored mentor through the school itself. And then there are requirements through the state that they have to meet to put the induction program on top of that on top of (being a) first year teacher, on top of everything else they are learning. It was a lot.”
- There were also concerns that the requirements took precedence over the learning. “It is not a bad program, but it is just expecting a lot. I think it put things in place that people were doing for compliance, rather than for learning...and actually not getting any stronger feedback and gaining knowledge.”
- Teachers and administrators felt that the program could be better organized. One teacher had this to say, “The online portion of the mentoring program was very disjointed. It was hard to follow and would have benefitted from offering some sort of document providing

due dates and a detailed overview of expectations.” This sentiment was echoed by another teacher, “I liked it, but I feel like it was very disjointed. To keep up with everything that was going on with it. I felt like one thing was on Eduplanet, other stuff on EMMS and other stuff was on another site. It was hard to keep track of where I had to do things at what time. I thought it would have benefitted from a list that would break it down.”

All in all, some offered suggestions for how to improve the program, knowing that the principles and goals were sound. They suggest greater efforts be made to build relationships with the schools and gain a better understanding of NJ guidelines. This would allow for better alignment between their program and what currently exists, much in the same way that the Coaches worked with the schools.

Summary

The PICCS HCMS grant is undoubtedly challenging participating NJ charter schools to create and implement new ways to evaluate, compensate and support educators. These schools are rising to the challenge and credit PICCS for providing them with the right tools and resources to increase the instructional capacity within their schools.

As highlighted in the report, the professional development resources were all viewed as high quality and effective. School staff also appreciated that PICCS consultants listened to them and were responsive to their needs, even replacing people who were not a good match to their school.

Universally, though, the schools expressed concerns over what they perceived as too many initiatives and requirements of the grant. While understanding and agreeing that these things were worthwhile and important to the improvement process, they would also like PICCS to understand that they are a living and breathing institution of people that needs to absorb change. As stated by one of the administrators, “This is why we try to protect [the school], so that it can sync together and work well. Our fear is that if there is too much laid on the teachers, it becomes this traditional educational thing where you are just jumping from potential solution to potential solution and nothing gets done right. So we would like to create a bubble around the core and really let the pieces meld.”

To end on a positive note, the following quote made by a teacher captures the general sentiment about the value of being a PICCS participant:

I would like to say that PICCS is a filtering process because PICCS talks about data and they give us clear measures for doing it...We actually look at data and have discussions about what is fair and consistent in what we are doing with students. [In fact,] when we had to look at those bucket lists for PARCC, we realized that they were already part of our constant conversations. We felt like we were on the right path and didn't know it...I have worked consistently with PICCS for the past 2 or 3 years and I believe that PICCS has brought to this school a way of removing the noise and focusing on concrete things, so to speak. Whether it comes to data...teacher evaluation...or teacher career ladders, they bring rigor and how it should look in a classroom.