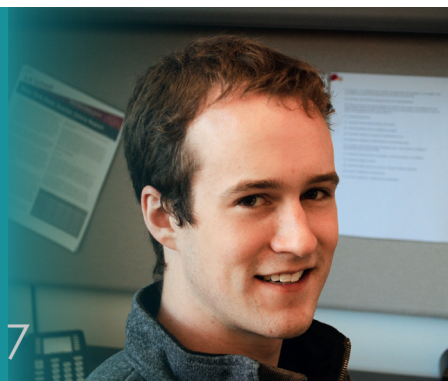


Evaluations for a Better Education

By Nivedita Vatsa '17



School of Industrial and Labor Relations
Simon Boehme '14



19

The Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) is a newly announced teacher evaluation system that is making waves in the state of New York. In order to receive the funding from the national competition, Race to the Top, New York made the commitment to implement these new systems. As a result, the school districts and teachers negotiated the provisions for these systems. Since its announcement in 2012, the APPR has drawn criticism from school districts and teachers unions for its complexity and thus, has become a key topic of discussion in the sphere of public education. In light of these developments, Simon Boehme, a senior in the ILR School is conducting pioneering research to

“‘[It] gave me great hope that the research we put out will truly have an impact”

unravel and interpret the new evaluation process.

Since April 2013, Boehme, under the guidance of Professor Alex Colvin and Sally Klingel at the Scheinman Institute of Conflict Resolution, has been studying the contracts negotiated with every school district in New York State. “One thing we want to shed light on is the conflict resolution aspect of it”, says Boehme. His research focuses on the new system of appeals delineated in these contracts. Although all contracts are available to the public, this is the first study that holistically analyzes the implications of the appeals process. It examines what teachers can appeal for and how verdicts are determined. In doing so, Boehme hopes to provide a better understanding of the new due process system.

Boehme, with his team of researchers at the Scheinman Institute, analyzed over 700 contracts agreed upon by school districts in New York. Information from these contracts was organized or “coded” into 180 separate variables for statistical analysis. His principal responsibilities include creating the system of coding, reviewing literature, training researchers on the team and completing statistical analysis of the data.

“A lot of the results have been surprising”, says Boehme. One area of interest is the possibility of differences between the rights of teachers depending on their tenure or non-tenure status. Data seems to indicate that the due process system for non-tenured teachers preserves their rights more securely than would have normally been expected. Furthermore, in the resolution of disputes in public education, it has been noted that

This research is conducted at **Scheinman Institute of Conflict Resolution** under the supervision of **Professors Alex Colvin and Sally Klingel**. To contact the researcher e-mail sjb334@cornell.edu.

superintendents now command a stronger and more final say. “I think this [research] will turn a lot of people’s heads and recognize that maybe the dynamics of the power struggle between management and labor. There are interesting shifts towards management in some areas and shifts towards teachers in other areas. We’re trying to present a fair observation of where we see this power shift going— and most importantly, see where collaboration can take place to improve student outcomes”, he explains.

Since many of these contracts are recent and have an annual tenure, there is a strong opportunity for Boehme’s research to be referenced when they are renegotiated. By presenting new information about successful collaborative methods and deficiencies in the appeals system, this research can potentially impact future changes to APPR. Boehme hopes that his work will ultimately contribute to rewriting the law. Recalling a particularly memorable experience at a mediation between a teachers union and a school district, he says, “[It] gave me great hope that the research we put out will truly have an impact because I was just sitting there thinking to myself if they only knew what I knew, they could get past these impasses.”

Boehme has previously worked with Professor Alex Colvin and Sally Klingel, studying collective bargaining agreements between teachers’ unions and school districts. He says that this experience helped him discover an interest in conflict resolution in the workplace. Over the past summer, Boehme visited seven countries as part of his commitment to understand international education systems. He is also the founder of Red Ideas and Cornell Global Law Brigades. He was recently named a 2013 Truman Scholar from the Harry S. Truman Foundation and upon graduation will continue studying the intersection of conflict resolution and education policy. Boehme hopes to bring a change in the future by applying what he knows through the political system or the non-profit sector.

Nivedita Vatsa '17 is in the College of Arts and Sciences. She can be reached at nkv4@cornell.edu