



The Case for Student Achievement Data in Teacher Evaluation Programs

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Over the last several years No Child Left Behind's rigid 'Highly Qualified Teacher' provisions have befuddled states and school districts, giving rise to teacher evaluation policies that explore innovative ways to promote effectiveness. When considering the design of their respective teacher evaluation programs one issue school districts and states must contend with is the inclusion of student achievement/performance data. Supporters of linking achievement data to teacher performance maintain that this valuable information provides districts and state the metrics needed to ensure high quality teachers are in every classroom.

To be fair, however, there are some teachers and teachers unions across the country who are strongly opposed to using this data. [New York City's](#) teacher's union for example, feels that this is an unfair way to gauge their effectiveness as a teacher. Their biggest fear? That new evaluation programs will lead to termination if they score on the lower end of the teacher effectiveness spectrum.

Quasi-opponents tend to make more coherent arguments. According to Dr. [Steve Cantrell](#), Co-Director of the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project, research confirms teacher evaluation systems based on multiple measures are a superior way to gauge teacher quality. The [report](#) demonstrated that using different measures – student assessments, classroom observations, and student surveys – helped predict whether teachers would raise the performance of future groups of students. Furthermore, a combination of these measures does a far better job predicting which teachers will succeed in raising student performance than master's degrees and years of teaching experience. A similar policy recommendation was proposed by RAND Corporation. In their [education report](#), they came to a similar conclusion to the MET project, which is that states should create evaluation systems that incorporate multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. The reason is that it helps to create a complete and stable picture of teaching performance improves the accuracy of teacher evaluations.

All states do not seem convinced however of the unworthiness of student achievement data. Two years ago, the state of Tennessee implemented a new teacher evaluation system called, [Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model](#) (TEAM). Under TEAM, at least fifty percent of that evaluation must be based student growth (35%) and student achievement (15%). A student's educational growth is determined by the use of TVAAS (Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System); a statistical method that compares each student's actual growth to his/her projected growth. Also, the student achievement has to be determined by a matrix of options by teachers and principals for this 15% achievement measure component.

During the brief implementation of TEAM, students and teachers have enjoyed remarkable success. According to Dr. James McIntyre, superintendent of the Knox County schools the newfound success is a direct result of using student achievement data in their new TEAM system. Tennessee students increased overall in grades 3-8 in all four tested subject areas: English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Furthermore, Tennessee teachers scored in the highest category of teacher value-added performance, a category designated to those instructors making the greatest impact on student learning, increased from 27% to 36% from 2011 to 2012.

It would seem that once you rake through the mud and the muck of the opposition, one fact remains clear. The use of student achievement data in evaluation programs has shown to be the best indicator for grading overall teacher effectiveness. Proponents for using student achievement as a teacher evaluation measure contend that the new system will help districts better evaluate their teachers, locate areas where teachers are struggling, and immediately work with those teachers to improve. States are beginning to get the message. Two years ago only four states used student achievement as a predominant influence in how teacher performance is assessed. Currently, the number is 13 and rising according to the 2011 [report](#) from the National Council on Teacher Quality, illustrating a shift occurring at the state level, of demand for highly qualified teachers to a call for highly effective teachers. Congress will have the opportunity to capitalize on this growing state trend, when they eventually reauthorize a new Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Linking student achievement data to teacher evaluations gives teachers the opportunity to track the impact over time that they are making on their students. This information is also crucial for local districts that are looking for programs to increase the number of effective teachers in their schools. Using a combination of measures, including student achievement data and traditional observational techniques, will help give these districts more information with which to evaluate their teachers. Effective teachers have a positive impact on their students, and that is accomplished by using student achievement data in teacher evaluation programs.