



MCALLEN AFT NEWS



McAllen AFT, 1500 Dove, McAllen, TX

June 2014

Volume 21 Issue 11

EVALUATIONS

Linda Bridges, President of the Texas branch of the American Federation of Teachers (Texas AFT), commented in early May on the Texas Education Agency’s guidelines for teacher evaluations submitted to the U.S. Department of Education:

“The commissioner is relying on a defective value-added model to measure teacher performance based on standardized test scores, and the state will face the same problems that we’ve seen in Houston ISD, which now is the target of a lawsuit against its faulty evaluation system.

It is very troubling that the commissioner is depending on SAS Institute—the same company that developed the dubious evaluation system targeted by the lawsuit in Houston—to develop the state's value-added formulas.”

Parents, teachers and students across Texas are rebelling against overtesting and the damage it has done to our schoolchildren, yet the state’s top education official is pushing to increase the emphasis on standardized tests even further.

Many teachers already are fed up with the standardized-testing obsession that hinders real teaching and learning, and now this model proposes to tell them that their professional abilities can be judged by vague statistical formulas based on their students’ test scores.

The commissioner’s game plan to increase the misuse of test scores and rely on black-box formulas for evaluations should add fuel to the revolt among parents, students and teachers against this destructive course for Texas education.

The key Education Code provisions on teacher evaluation do not authorize the commissioner to dictate to school districts that scores of an individual teacher’s students on state assessments will be a significant factor in the evaluation of that teacher. Yet the commissioner apparently aims to circumvent state law, demand that school districts show "fidelity" to his appraisal scheme and forge ahead with this flawed model under the guise of compliance with bureaucratic edicts from his counterparts in the federal government.

Texas AFT takes a back seat to nobody in supporting proven models of evaluation that gauge a teacher’s performance with multiple measures that more accurately reflect the teacher’s ability to inspire learning in students and ensure they are both learning the curriculum and learning how to think critically and creatively. As professionals, we understand the importance of fair and supportive evaluations, and we’ll continue to fight for a system that achieves that goal.



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- See more at: <http://tx.aft.org/press/statement-commissioner-education%E2%80%99s-guidelines-teacher-evaluation#sthash.TilZm8OU.dpuf>

HOUSTON FEDERATION OF TEACHERS LAWSUIT

Challenging Constitutionality of Value-Added Measure for Evaluations

Highly recognized, good teachers are receiving poor evaluations because of a grossly flawed value-added algorithm that should be changed, seven Houston teachers and the Houston Federation of Teachers said today in an unprecedented lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

The lawsuit details numerous problems with the Houston Independent School District's Education Value-Added Assessment System, or EVAAS. Its statistical methodology uses a student's performance on prior standardized tests to predict academic growth in the current year, though what is considered a sufficient level of growth is not defined. A teacher's EVAAS score is supposed to measure the effect, or added value, of a teacher on a student's academic growth over the school year. The school district uses this deeply flawed methodology for decisions about teacher evaluation, bonuses and termination, yet it is a "black box" system in which the methodology is considered proprietary and confidential.

"Due to a faulty, incomprehensible and secret formula, good teachers like the ones filing this suit are being labeled failures and our entire education system is being reduced to a numbers game," said American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten. "Testing isn't aligned with the purposes of public education. It doesn't measure big-picture learning, critical thinking, resilience, creativity or curiosity, yet those are the qualities that great teaching brings out in a student. The fixation on testing has literally drained the joy out of learning. We've always been leery of value-added models, and we have enough evidence to make clear that not only has VAM not worked, it's been really destructive and it

in no way helps improve teaching and learning."

Daniel Santos, an award-winning sixth grade social studies teacher at Jackson Middle School, said the evaluation system is failing him, his students and his profession.

"It's dispiriting and insulting to be told I'm ineffective, a judgment that doesn't mesh with my classroom performance or the time and effort I devote to my students. Texas is using a broken evaluation system that isn't properly identifying who really needs help to improve," Santos said, adding, "My students are being tested on material that is not aligned with our curriculum."

While there have been other suits challenging VAM, the Houston suit is unique because it was brought by highly recognized teachers who contend their poor EVAAS ratings do not correlate with their actual performance nor take into account socioeconomic or demographic variables in predicting student performance. The complaint also charges that the district directed and/or pressured school administrators to "manufacture deficiencies or otherwise find fault with the instructional practices" by teachers who received low EVAAS ratings. Those teachers would be placed on a growth plan to correct the supposed faulty instructional practice.

Myla Van Duyn, who teaches ninth grade biology at Davis High School, received an unwarranted low EVAAS score and contends her classroom observation scores were artificially lowered to be aligned with the EVAAS scores. "This is demoralizing," said Van Duyn, who is leaving the school district at the end of the school year, a decision motivated in part by the flawed evaluation system.

"EVAAS is driving out great Houston teachers because they'd rather work in a place that respects teachers. Everybody can do better, but the EVASS method does not accurately account for all of the variables that go into a child's ability to answer questions on a multiple choice test," Van Duyn said.