



Member alert: *L.A. Times* to run article on “teacher effectiveness”

*Newspaper is planning to post database linking
teacher names with student test scores.*

This Sunday, the *L.A. Times* is expected to run an article on teacher effectiveness and how test scores can be used to measure it. It is written by the same reporters who wrote the series that sensationalized the issue of teacher job protections by focusing on a few egregious cases. **We expect this new article will once again dramatically oversimplify complex education issues and create a skewed and unfair picture of hardworking, dedicated teachers.**

The article will most likely involve so-called Value-Added Models (VAM). VAM is the latest fad among policymakers who want to distill the complicated, creative process of teaching into an overly simplistic evaluation model that relies heavily on standardized test scores.

By most definitions, VAMs use test scores to track the growth of individual students as they progress through the grades and see how much “value” a teacher has added. As part of the *Times* analysis, the reporters submitted a California Public Records Act request to LAUSD and received CST scores from 2003 to 2008. **We have heard that the *Times* did an analysis of the test scores using its own criteria to create a database with teachers’ names linked to student test scores.** We do not know the details of the database, but it is an irresponsible, offensive intrusion into our members’ professional life that will do nothing to improve student learning.

We urge all members to contact the *Times* and write letters to the editor. This is part of the continuing attack on our profession, and we must continue to fight back on all fronts.

See page 2 of this fax for talking points on what’s wrong with Value-Added Models and using standardized test scores to assess teacher effectiveness.



What's wrong with Value-Added Models and using standardized test scores to assess teacher effectiveness

- Value-Added Models exacerbate the overreliance on standardized test scores. We are heading down a road of no return that will lead to the further narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test, and the exclusion of critical thinking skills, the arts, and any other area that is not measured by the standardized tests.
- Value-Added Models rest on a faulty premise—that high-stakes standardized student test scores can measure a teacher's effectiveness. Standardized tests are imperfect measures already. They often do not test what students really know and, worse, they often test low-level skills.
- As stated in a July 2010 report by the U.S. Department of Education, more than 90 percent of the variation in student test scores is due to student-level factors that are not under the control of the teacher.
- Standardized test scores do not come close to measuring everything that teachers do. They are just a snapshot of a single point in time and should not be substituted for evaluating all the work the teacher has done the other 170-plus days of school.
- UTLA does not support keeping a teacher in the classroom who clearly isn't making the grade, but standardized test scores should never be the basis for determining that.
- VAM is another example of a "quick fix" that some policymakers embrace instead of doing the harder work of pursuing long-term solutions for public education. We already know what works to improve student learning: smaller classes, more resources for schools, relevant professional development for teachers, and time for teachers to work collaboratively on lesson plans and curriculum.
- The research base on VAMs is currently insufficient to support the use of VAM for high-stakes decisions about individual teachers or schools. Even supporters of VAM admit that it is a flawed, inconsistent system.
- Standardized tests were not designed to evaluate teachers and they are not valid instruments for doing so. Using standardized test scores to evaluate teachers will do nothing to tell teachers how to improve their practice.
- UTLA agrees that the evaluation system for both teachers and administrators needs to be overhauled, but using standardized test scores isn't the way. The evaluation system should be designed to support teachers and help them grow in their profession.
- Policymakers who are pushing programs like VAM need to listen to parents. Parents want teachers to teach the whole child, and that includes the arts and high-level thinking skills. They do not want us to create a "culture of bubblers."