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## Our view on education: When every teacher is rated 'great,' students suffer

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Enlarge By Reed Saxon, AP

Students begin the new school year in Los Angeles.

As students return to school, the Los Angeles teachers' union is in an uproar, so incensed that leaders are calling for a boycott of the *Los Angeles Times*.

What did the paper do to anger the union?

It used district test data to rank 6,000 elementary school teachers based on how much their students improved from year to year on standardized reading and math tests. The data — which school districts across the nation possess on their own students — had never been analyzed. It suggested that the best teachers often taught just down the hall from the worst, and those highly effective teachers consistently raised test scores no matter who their students were.

### OPPOSING VIEW: 'It isn't that easy'

The teachers' union denounced the rankings as unfair, and the controversy highlighted one of the great ironies of the nation's public education system: Even though a teacher's job is to teach, student test scores are rarely used to evaluate teacher performance. Laws in several states — including California until recently — have actually prohibited using such scores to rate teachers. That's like barring the use of batting averages to help evaluate baseball players, for fear of embarrassing the .200 hitters.

Reformers agree that hiring good teachers and firing bad ones is the single best way to improve education. But powerful teachers' unions, abetted by weak-kneed lawmakers and school boards, have stood in the way of making evaluations meaningful.

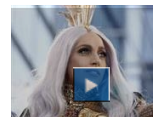
In too many districts, the system relies on harried administrators rating teachers based on pre-arranged observations in classes. In Los Angeles in 2008, 99.3% of teachers were rated "meets standards." Fewer than 1% were rated "below standard," according to a study by [The New Teacher Project](#), a non-profit group that advocates improved instruction. Even the teachers' union admits the system is broken.

Nor is Los Angeles an exception. After studying [teacher evaluations in 12 districts](#) in Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois and Ohio, the group concluded that "on paper, *almost every* teacher is a great teacher," even in districts replete with failing schools.

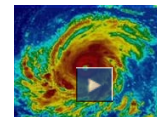
The upshot is that bad teachers don't get replaced, great teachers don't get rewarded and students' lives are blunted.

That's finally starting to change. The Obama administration, which is rewarding state reforms with federal funds in its "Race to the Top" competition, has made revamping teacher evaluations a priority. A dozen states — including Nevada, New York and Wisconsin — have rewritten laws to allow using test scores.

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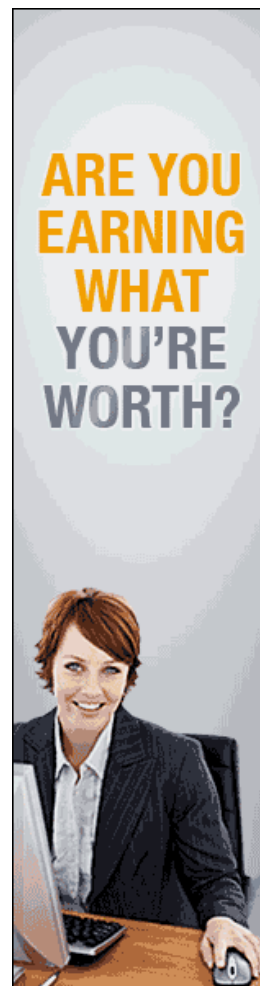
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More districts have begun using a "value added" evaluation, which provides one way to gauge teacher effectiveness because it measures a child's progress as he or she goes through a year of classes. To be sure, it isn't the full measure, and even its staunchest advocates suggest that it be used as half or less of a teacher's evaluation.

Even so, reform doesn't come easy. In Washington, D.C., school chancellor Michelle Rhee [combined value-added with sophisticated observations to evaluate teachers](#). Her firing this summer of 76 teachers has so angered the union that it is working to oust [Adrian Fenty](#), the mayor who hired Rhee, in next week's [Democratic](#) primary.

The raging debate over whether the *Times* should have published the test data misses the larger point. If school officials cared enough about students to [evaluate teachers properly](#), a newspaper wouldn't have to try to do it for them.

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Mickey Rat (1 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3d 16h ago

dspencer3 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 6h 46m ago  
I'm a teacher for 14 years, so obviously, I care. I have seen both good and bad teachers come and go. Bottom line, you don't last long without getting better. The problem is not the teachers, it's the kids. If you can demonstrate that students are learning, and there are a MILLION ways to do that, then you are an effective teacher.  
But when a kid says, "I don't feel like doing this" or "I don't care". NOBODY but God himself can

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Teachers are more than the sum of a single measure, which is why the value-added rating system is so unreliable.

OUR VIEW: [When every teacher is rated 'great,' students suffer](#)

When the *Los Angeles Times* recently published scores for 6,000 local teachers using the value-added system — a statistical measure of student improvement on standardized tests over a multiyear period — it investigated an issue that every parent of a public school child cares about, but it chose to focus on sensationalism over substance.

Although the *Times* acknowledged that this measure does "not capture everything that goes into making a good teacher," that's exactly how the paper used this data. In its race to create

dramatic headlines, the paper sacrificed both the tenets of responsible journalism and the reputations of thousands of teachers through this deceptive presentation of complex data. What parents aren't going to type in their child's teacher's name and make an instantaneous judgment?

Transparency in our educational system is necessary. The United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) strongly believes that information such as these scores can be used as one piece to guide instruction in the classroom.

However, when it comes to value-added, many experts — including former assistant secretary of Education [Diane Ravitch](#) and noted educational researcher [Linda Darling-Hammond](#)— agree that student test scores are not reliable indicators of teacher effectiveness.

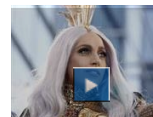
A recent report done for the Education Department concluded that there is a significant likelihood that a teacher's rating under value-added systems will radically shift from year to year, which means that even excellent, experienced teachers could shift from a good rating to a bad rating.

We all want assurance that our kids are receiving the best that we can offer. Having a simple number that confirms we are on track is a seductive assurance that we are doing our jobs as parents and educators. But unfortunately, it isn't that easy.

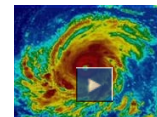
UTLA agrees the evaluation system is broken. Multiple ways of evaluating teachers is not only necessary, but crucial to our children's future. That is why UTLA teachers will continue to work toward creating an evaluation process that works for students, is a fair and accurate measure of teacher effectiveness, and supports the teaching process.

*A.J. Duffy is president of United Teachers Los Angeles, which represents about 45,000 teachers.*

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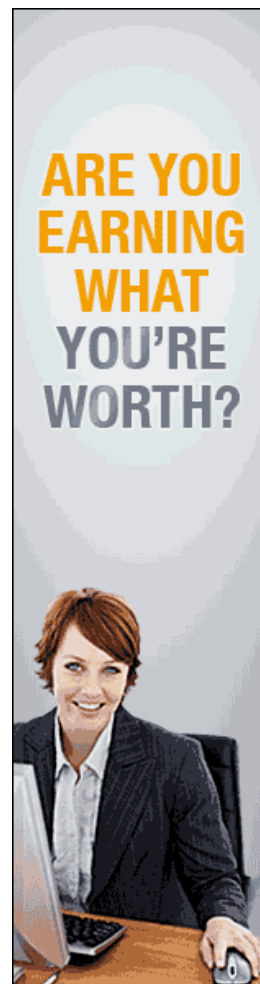


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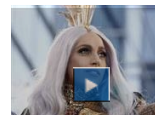
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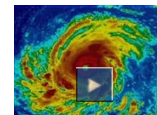
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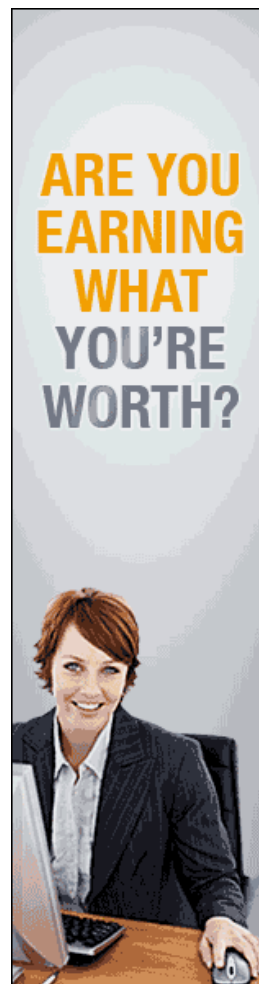


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**Founders1791** (7 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3d 19h ago

Teacher Unions and their MEMBERS have become lemmings of Marxist Ideologies that are more concerned with THEIR CONTINUED EMPLOYMENT than anything else.

Demand accountability and you get whining, blame, and "don't blame me".

America, this is not what happens in the "real world". In business you either earn your keep or you are gone! Teachers MUST be held to a standard based on something and that something is pretty simple:

- (1) What percent of students graduate
- (2) What percent of students graduate above a 1.0, 2.0, or 3.0 grade level.
- (3) Can the Teacher actually pass a qualifications test "every year they are employed" just like Doctors.

If a Teacher cannot pass the qualifications test...FIRE THEM  
If the percentage of students graduating falls below 75%....FIRE THEM  
If the percentage of students who fail to achieve a GPA of 2.0 is greater that 25%....FIRE THEM

Then next best thing Parents can demand to ensure their kids learn is to END TENURE.

Unions are based in Marxist ideology and have no place in a Free Market Enterprise System.

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Dennis C (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3d 23h ago

Koenigsberg (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1h 7m ago

very fair, informative, and positive analysis; thanks

~~~~~

Nothing offered as an alternative. It does sound like the Presidents speech writer put out this statement that is essesece says It's complicated, I'll think about it.... for as long as it takes....

"That is why UTLA teachers will continue to work toward creating an evaluation process that works for students, is a fair and accurate measure of teacher effectiveness, and supports the teaching process."

There are people who have solved this complicated question and their schools are doing a better job at a lower cost. They are almost all non union. Look at the charter school program in New York City

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Bid59 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 4d 1h ago

Acknowledgement of the problem with no suggestion of a solution for 40 years at least? That rates a "F" in my book!

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Koenigsberg (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 4d 1h ago

very fair, informative, and positive analysis; thanks

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