



The Misuse of Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is prepared to release 12,000 internal teacher data reports (TDRs), with individual teachers identified, rated and ranked from high to low, in response to a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request. These data reports use a “value-added” approach – that is, how much “value” does a teacher add to a child’s test scores – to rate teachers based on their classes’ state test score changes in English Language Arts (ELA) and math from one year to the next. The DOE calculates this added value by comparing the actual test score changes with a “prediction” of how much these scores should have changed for this particular class and teacher.

There are many problems with both the TDRs and their public release. Here’s what you need to know:

- The DOE's “value-added” model to calculate teacher ratings is unreliable. Though it does account for students’ poverty levels and class size, it does not take into account a host of other variables that affect test scores, including the deliberate decision of principals to place struggling students with particular teachers, the differences in students’ home and extra-curricular experiences, and the influence of tutors and teachers in other subject areas (e.g., science and social studies) on math and ELA achievement. In fact, a recent study by Sean Corcoran of NYU demonstrates that the New York City TDRs have an average margin of error of 34-61 percentage points out of 100.
- Principals across the city report that many of their best teachers have received poor ratings on their TDRs due to flaws in the model. For example, a minute .05 change in math test scores, from 3.97 to 3.92, landed one teacher in the bottom 6% of the rating scale.
- The DOE has used unverified and erroneous raw data to calculate TDRs. For example, one teacher was given a math rating when she didn’t even teach math. Another received a 4-year rating when she had been on child care leave for the past 7 years. In one school, the principal discovered that there were data errors for 3 of the 13 teachers (23%) who received a rating.

- The DOE has used invalid test data to calculate TDRs. Specifically, the New York State Education Department declared this summer that the state tests have become easier to pass over the past several years and the test scores have therefore inaccurately represented children’s achievement. Yet these inaccurate test scores are the basis of the TDRs.
- The DOE’s technical advisers for the TDRs warned they should not be used to judge teacher performance. Not only did these advisers refuse to endorse “any particular use [of the model] for accountability, promotion or tenure” of teachers, they warned that “Test scores capture only one dimension of teacher effectiveness, and ... are not intended as a summary measure of teacher performance.”
- Our children will lose excellent teachers if the TDRs are publicly released. Principals report that some of their best teachers have declared their intent to leave the profession rather than face the public humiliation of a bad rating. (Ask yourself - would you want an incomplete and flawed rating of your job performance to be printed in the local newspapers?) Instead of improving our schools, the release of the TDRs will severely harm our children’s education.
- The public release of the TDRs will promote even more teaching to the state tests. Our children will receive a substandard education as teachers will be compelled to drive up test scores by narrowing the curriculum to test content and drilling our kids with test prep.
- The DOE originally promised the teacher’s union that the TDRs “will not and should not be [publicly] disclosed” as they were intended to be used by teachers and principals to help improve teaching, not as an accountability tool. Yet, Chancellor Klein has reneged on this agreement and declared that the TDRs should be released. These actions are an open invitation to scapegoat individual teachers and deflect attention from the deep-seated problems facing our schools, e.g., lack of appropriate funding and support structures, over-crowding, and high-stakes testing policies.

We believe that there must be accountability and transparency in our children’s schools. However, the public release of the TDRs, which provide unreliable and flawed information, will thwart these goals and harm our children’s education. Therefore, we oppose the public release of the Teacher Data Reports.

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<http://timeoutfromtesting.org>
 Email us at info@timeoutfromtesting.org