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Linking Teacher Evaluation and Student Performance: What do New Yorkers Think?

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What is the Issue?

In February 2012, New York State (NYS) Governor Andrew Cuomo announced an agreement on a new teacher evaluation system based on multiple measures, including student achievement. The broad framework of the new system, negotiated between the NYS Department of Education (SED) and the NYS United Teachers Union (NYSUT), has been a source of tension since NYS first set its sights on securing \$700 million in Federal *Race to the Top* funds. The debate continues as the specific details of the program are still to be collectively bargained within each of NYS's nearly 700 school districts.

What is the new system?

The teacher Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) program formalizes and standardizes the evaluation of teachers and mandates the inclusion of student achievement measures as part of the evaluation. Each teacher evaluation conducted under the new system must include three components:

State Growth Measures (20%) – State-provided student scores comparing student growth to those with similar past test scores and may include consideration of poverty, English Language Learner, and Students with Disabilities status.¹

Locally-Selected Measures (20%) – Select from three testing options including NYS state tests, third party assessments/test approved by the SED and locally developed tests that will be subject to SED review and approval. Local school districts may choose to use additional state exams as these locally-selected measures that would result in 40% of the teacher ratings being based on state exams.²

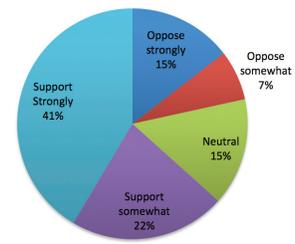
Other Measures (60%) – Including multiple measures of teacher performance obtained by at least two in-class observations. Details for this portion of the rating plan are locally negotiated.

What do Upstate New Yorkers think?

In February 2011, CaRDI conducted a survey of 600 Upstate New Yorkers on a range of public policy issues³, including public education. Respondents were asked the following question: “The federal government has awarded NYS \$700 million “Race to the Top” funding. To qualify for this money, the state will allow teachers’ evaluations to be linked to student performance. On a scale of 1-5, would you support your local school district’s interest in obtaining funding by using local student performance to partially evaluate local teachers’ performance?”

Sixty-three percent of Upstate New Yorkers support the idea of using student achievement as one measure to evaluate teachers’ performance at the local level (see Figure 1). In fact, 41 percent *strongly* support this idea. Slightly more than one in five (22%) are opposed, with fifteen percent strongly opposed.

Figure 1: Level of support for using student achievement to evaluate teacher performance



Source: 2011 SOUS Survey

Implications for NYS Schools

While the survey results indicate broad levels of support for the general idea of determining teacher effectiveness by the performance of their students, providing more detailed information about the new APPR system may have yielded different results. Among key issues of concern are fairness (to both students and teachers) and reliability of the measures. Students deserve effective and engaged teachers and would be well served by an evaluation system that improves teacher quality or removes poorly performing teachers from the classroom. Likewise, teachers deserve to be evaluated on rigorous, uniform and reliable metrics that aren't vulnerable to cheating, manipulation, bias, or arbitrary judgment. This places a tremendous burden on the reliability of the state and local student assessments, a concern found in the research literature. Indeed, while this new system may be appropriate for assessing *district-level* performance, when applied to individual teachers and individual classrooms the system may be less statistically reliable.

The APPR system requires significant effort for a relatively small financial gain. The \$700 million, spread over four years, translates to just 0.35% of the more than \$50 Billion spent annually for K-12 education in NYS. At just over \$60 per student per year, some see implementing this new system as a particularly onerous burden, as it will require significant effort on the part of individual school districts as they work to identify locally-selected measures of evaluation and train administrators and teachers to implement the new system. No longer is the pressure just on districts as a whole to demonstrate adequate student performance and improvement, but all teachers will now be individually evaluated on these measures. Many fear the increased emphasis on test results will result in the curriculum being narrowed even further, and result in less time for teaching subjects such as arts, science, civics, history, foreign languages, music, and physical education.

Will this lead to increased cases of “gaming the system” by teachers, administrators and even students? Will it lead to increased levels of teacher turnover because of firings and increased teacher stress? Or will NYS slowly evolve into a model K-12 system with stellar teachers producing high-performing students? Parents and school district officials have been searching for ways to better assess and evaluate teacher performance for a long time. This is a worthwhile effort since the goal is to improve teaching quality, efficacy, and student performance. It is too soon to tell if this is the system that will fix the problem.

¹ <http://engageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/State-Growth-Measures-Teachers-and-Principals.pdf>

² <http://www.governor.ny.gov/press/02162012teacherevaluations>

³ <http://devsoc.cals.cornell.edu/cals/devsoc/outreach/cardi/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=1000528>

