

Council #10



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Why Student Test Scores Should Not Be Used to Evaluate Teachers

Popular belief that our public schools contain many bad teachers who do not deserve job security has been reinforced in recent months. As a result of the elections in Wisconsin this November, we are now likely to see public policy that links teacher performance with student scores on standardized tests as a solution to this alleged problem.

Professional educators should do all we can to improve our practice and the quality of instruction our students receive. But when it comes to efforts to link our pay and our job security to standardized test scores, we should not mince words. These efforts will not improve teaching and are based on wholesale ignorance of the research to date.

A recent review of the research by nine prominent education scholars, "Problems with the Use of Student Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers," found that even the most sophisticated testing, Value Added Modeling, is largely invalid for evaluating teacher effectiveness. One large-scale study over a period of years using such testing found that a vast majority of teachers who ranked in the top 20% in one year dropped to the middle or lowest 40% in the following year. The converse was also true, with the lowest scoring teachers in one year moving to the middle or highest scores the following year.

The instability of these measurements of teacher effectiveness is likely the result of differences in the characteristics of students assigned to teachers, the extremely small sample size of students tested (one class of students), other more prominent influences on student improvement outside the classroom and a mismatch of curriculum with the subject matters tested.

The report concludes that "Adopting an invalid teacher evaluation system and tying it to rewards and sanctions is likely to lead to inaccurate personnel decisions and to demoralize teachers." Legislatures should not mandate a test-based approach to teacher evaluation that is unproven and likely to harm not only teachers, but also the children they instruct.

To read the full report visit www.epi.org/publications/entry/bp278.

Dishonest Attack on WEA Trust

Recently the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) distributed a widely publicized report condemning WEA Trust to members of every school board in the state. This report was also discussed at length on the Charlie Sykes show.

The report was produced by an outfit out of Michigan called the Education Action Group (EAG). For example, in several places the report attributes large premium increases to WEA Trust in districts that do not even have WEA Trust insurance. It is so inaccurate and dishonest that **WEA Trust has sent a Cease and Desist demand to the group.**

Funding for the report and its publicity appears to come from groups with an obvious agenda ó to take away the right of school employees to bargain over health insurance.

For more information on the report visit www.weatrust.com.

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MAKE CONNECTIONS

Midwest Leadership
Conference, Kansas City,
January 14-15

Winter Conference South,
Madison, Feb 25-26



Election 2010: An Era of Consequences

It is popular these days to disdain politics as so much partisan grandstanding and bickering. But Scott Walker's victory in the race for Governor will bring very real consequences for all of us. His promises (from Walker's website) include:

- Make school employees pay up to 6.5% of our salary towards our pensions with no improvement in the benefit (effectively a 6.5% pay cut).
- Apply a new QEO (cap on our pay) to all school employees and link it to revenue caps that may now be frozen. Running the numbers for one of our districts we found that under this very possible scenario, teachers would take a 5% pay cut over a two-year contract period.
- Link teacher licensure to standardized student test scores as part of an evaluation formula. Teachers rated "ineffective" for two years would lose their licenses.
- Take away the right of school and other public employees to bargain over health insurance if the state employees' plan is cheaper.
- Uncap and further subsidize voucher schools, non-union charter schools and virtual charter schools.

Given the makeup of the new state legislature, it is reasonable to expect these promises to be fulfilled. "It's time for Republicans to put up or shut up," Governor-elect Scott Walker told reporters. "For Republicans, we have to step up and do exactly what we told voters we'd do" (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 11/4/10).

Here is what to watch for. Walker has said he would never raise state taxes, so he will have to find spending cuts to eliminate the \$3 billion state budget deficit. He has also promised to eliminate corporate income taxes and to lower tax rates for the wealthiest individuals and families.

What he does not talk about is the fact that school funding makes up the greatest portion of our state budget - meaning schools will certainly be the largest target of cuts. Who is going to stop him? Walker's allies in the new state legislature certainly will not. **According to Glen Grothman, a new Joint Finance Committee member, "school spending will be one of the first items in his crosshairs noting schools use 44 percent of all sales and income taxes" (Sheboygan Press, Nov 9, 2010).**

This approach is part of an altogether bogus economic program. Cutting employment and compensation for employees in schools and other public services will reduce demand for goods and services, driving our economy into a deeper morass than it is already in. Cutting taxes for big corporations and wealthy households will drain Wisconsin's economy, not stimulate it, because the vast majority of that money will not be spent or invested in Wisconsin but will be added to stock portfolios or shifted to other states or countries.

Absent any credible program to improve our economy and lower unemployment, Walker will make public employees (particularly school employees) the villains in this economy. Our collective economic problems will not be blamed on greedy Wall Street titans, the banks that improperly foreclose on homes, or on the companies that leave the United States for cheap labor. We did not cause this economic crisis, but cutting our wages and benefits will be sold as the solution.

The fact is this will negatively affect students, families and employees across the state. How is targeting tens of thousands of middle class jobs in public service for reductions going to help our economy? Do we want to end up with crumbling infrastructure and fewer quality schools? And if this happens, will businesses even want to move here? How does Wisconsin get out of a "rust belt" economy if school quality declines?

Simply put, we cannot walk away from these issues. We owe it to ourselves, our families, and to our students to fight back. During this past election season many dozens of members stepped up by volunteering their time to make a difference. Our profession and our students need us now more than ever and that means we must oppose the worst of Walker's program, provide a real and compelling alternative, and prepare to take back the state legislature in 2012.