

My name is Gary Lotreck. I am a parent of 3 school-aged children who attend public school, and I am 25-year veteran educator who has taught high school, middle school, worked as an Assistant Principal, and currently work as a Teacher-in-Residence creating and presenting professional development and do one-to-one teacher coaching in classrooms. I have also been involved in the state and national level in training regarding the CCSS and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

I am writing to express my concerns about the trends in education in Connecticut. The Reform Movement is taking a very business-minded approach to a very human ‘industry.’ My major concerns are the massive over-testing of our children, thus decreasing instructional time and the use of student test scores in teacher evaluation.

Regarding teacher evaluation being based upon student test scores, the first rule of assessment is that you cannot use an assessment to measure or evaluate something for which it was not designed. For example, what does a 4th reading CMT test? It tests how well a 4th grader reads. It does not measure how well a teacher teaches, or how well the school is run, or how well the parent parents. It measures how well a 4th grade reads. The Value-Added Method (an 85 character formula used by economists) used in some states – supposedly – to ‘disaggregate’ the information to evaluate teachers based upon test scores was designed for evaluation of programs, not of individual teachers. The states that did this, including Florida, have found that a teacher can go from Superior to Needs Improvement and back again over the span of one or two years. There have also been lawsuits won by teachers who have been dismissed using V.A.M. An Article in the Stamford Advocate highlights the shortcomings of using test scores in teacher evaluation:

Research has demonstrated conclusively that using standardized test to rate teachers is invalid because scores vary widely based on the test, year, class and statistical model used. This overwhelming evidence prompted Tennessee’s State Board of Education, one of the first adopters of the so-called Value Added Model (“VAM”), to now abandon the use of VAM in any decisions to license or fire teachers. A bill is pending in Tennessee to prohibit the use of student standardized test scores in teacher evaluations.

Connecticut uses an even more inaccurate method called Student Growth Percentiles (“SGP”). While VAM tries but fails to isolate a teacher’s small effect on student test scores, SGP does not even attempt to measure a teacher’s effect.

SGP tells us nothing about a teacher. Yet that is what Connecticut uses for 22.5 percent of a teacher’s evaluation. Though SGP is a portion of a teacher’s evaluation, it will likely be the determining factor because its volatility will make it the tipping point in a rating.” (Wendy Lecker, stamfordadvocate.com, Friday, February 7, 2014)

Daniel Long, a sociology education professor from Western University has studied the causes of the achievement gap and value-added growth models for the last 15 years and testified at a Senate hearing about Senate Bill 24 on March 21, 2012. He stated, “Using standardized tests to evaluate teachers is ineffective, unfair and counterproductive. First, the use of tests is inaccurate and ineffective. I’ve studied the performance of more than 200,000 students in school systems in 64 countries. I found that using test scores to evaluate teachers tends to lower overall student learning outcomes.” (Transcript of legislative testimony, March 21, 2012, p. 138.) Using standardized test scores in evaluation of teachers is inappropriate and ineffective.

The over-testing of our children is counterproductive to the education of our children. The multitude of standardized tests given to children throughout the school year interferes – nay, replaces needed instruction. The CMT, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (M.A.P.) test, the Smarter Balanced Assessment take hours, days, and weeks to administer. The actual testing times do not sound too excessive to the general public, but the preparation, set-up, and adjusted school schedules interrupt learning for the entire school community during these tests. For example, in one school with one testing grade with only 60 children for the Smarter Balanced Field Test, the suggested testing times (the test is untimed) expressed are: 4 hours of English Language Arts and 4 hours of Math SBAC; however this translates into 7 days of testing over the span of 3 weeks (!), during which the school’s computer lab cannot be used and the school’s schedule must be adapted. This does not include the practice test or the time getting the students acclimated to using the computers for the test. In my last school, they also give the NWEA M.A.P. test as a formative assessment 3 times a year. Each time they administered the test, they had to close the library and all the computer labs in the

school for 15 days each time. This school had no library or computer labs for students for 45 days(!) of a 184-day school year just to assess – NOT TO TEACH – students. And this is only one set of tests...they still will take the CMT Science test this year and the Smarter Balanced test. This is a travesty. We test for accountability, yet the measures are not meant for all types of accountability, but are used this way anyway. We need to teach our children, not assess them so much.

In closing, I strongly urge you to not use standardized test scores in teacher evaluation and to find a way to assess students in a more efficient way so teachers can teach and students can learn without the myriad of disruptions by the plethora of tests.