

Dear Legislator:

My name is Chris Sutton and I am a Physics teacher at Danbury High School, a 17 year veteran of teaching.

I would like to comment on just one aspect of the new Teacher Evaluation system, as I am sure you will be inundated by thousands of e-mails. The area I would like to comment on is statistical significance and scientific validity.

Part of the new teacher evaluation has teachers writing benchmark exams to be administered in the Fall and Winter. The Fall exam is a measuring stick to see what the students know and the Winter one is to see how far they have progressed. In theory it all sounds great, but let's look at the details.

- 1) The teachers are writing the exams.
- 2) The teachers are administering the exams.
- 3) The teachers are grading the exams.
- 4) The teachers are reporting the results.
- 5) The tests are graded on a scale of 1 - 4.

Even the person most unfamiliar with statistical methods can see this is fraught with potential for bias, and worse yet, cheating! How can the results of such biased testing be used for something as important as Teacher Evaluation???

In order to produce real data indicating student learning, the following changes would have to be made:

- 1) The tests would have to be produced by someone other than the teachers themselves, probably some sort of independent testing company.
- 2) The tests would have to be administered under controlled conditions, and all students taking the same class in the school (i.e. all Honors Physics students) would have to take the test at the same time.
- 3) The tests would have to be graded by the outside independent testing company.
- 4) Students would need some sort of incentive to do their best on both the Fall and Winter benchmark. (Teachers could influence their students to do poorly in the Fall so the teachers look better come Winter, or students who have a vendetta against a teacher could deliberately do poorly on the Winter exam).
- 5) The tests would have to be graded on a finer scale than 1 - 4, for example 1 - 100. Lots of statistical irregularities occur when there are just four divisions measuring success.

Based on the recent backlash against excessive testing and the incredible amount of money being spent on it, I don't foresee that it is actually possible to administer such exams.

So in the end, we have to trust the teachers to do what they do best: teach. This is the system that is best for everybody. Let's not punish 100% of the teachers (and 100% of students) because maybe 1-2% of teachers aren't dedicated to their students' learning. Surely there are simpler ways of finding and assisting those teachers who need a little extra help, or a career change.

Thanks

Chris Sutton

Danbury High School.