

Although I think linking teachers' evaluations to standardized test scores is problematic for many reasons, such as the difficulty in assigning scores to teachers who have transient populations, my fears that the pressures will create an environment where teachers are teaching to the test at the expense of other subjects, etc. I feel like there are other issues to address. One of the things that I would want to let people know is that even when we don't use standardized tests to gather data, we struggle in seemingly unnatural ways to create numbers to prove that we are doing our jobs. The insistence on SMART Goals does not have any place in the evaluation form. A SMART Goal is a prediction of what percentage of students will master a certain skill or comprehend a certain amount of information. In our district teachers are required to write SMART Goals as part of their evaluation. Although it is appropriate to analyze how many students within a class are demonstrating certain skills or comprehending the instruction, any percentages should be used to inform instruction. Instead of periodically checking to see how many students are succeeding, teachers are being asked, at the beginning of the year, to predict how many students will achieve a certain goal, demonstrate a certain skill, or achieve one year's growth in reading comprehension. Rather than trying to predict how many students will be successful, we should be demanding that all students be successful. The push to predict numbers does not instill reflective practice, but forces teachers to manipulate data and goals so that they have decent evaluations and keep their jobs. If we truly want to ask hard questions about our teaching, then we should be encouraged to look honestly at what is happening in the classroom and question whether it is allowing students to grow, learn, and flourish as they should. Placing a percentage on success minimalizes a discipline that takes into account more factors than predicting how much knowledge is required to fill an empty vessel. At the beginning of the year I was discouraged from writing that 100% of my students would achieve success because my administration thought that I was being unrealistic. I felt it would be as realistic to say 100% as it would to say 5% because I don't really know. I don't have the statistical background to accurately predict the percentages of successful students, nor did I know my students' abilities at that time. Instead of wasting my energy making a prediction, I'd rather analyze what my students don't know or what skill they are missing so that I can better teach them. I also know that if I start the year with the assumption that a percentage of my students will fail, I start with a negative mindset that is always on the lookout for who those failures will be. Although after twenty years of teaching, my experience has added to my abilities as a teacher, I am confident enough to know that there are a lot of things I don't know. In an urban district with a transient population, I cannot rest on what I know, but must constantly challenge myself to learn more about the various groups that immigrate to our country, how to challenge students with inconsistent schooling, how to encourage students whose families are suffering economically or even emotionally. Knowing that my administration wants to evaluate me based on my ability to predict student performance and that these predictions somehow take precedence over true reflection is very frustrating to me personally. Perhaps I began teaching at a time when people used reflection as a way to improve teaching, but that time has passed because no one can quantify reflection. It's as if I sat down, over twenty years ago, with people who wanted to think and talk about how students learn best, but ended up at the table with gamblers.

Jennifer Shaff