

**Testimony of Thomas Scarice  
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I recently had the chance to see the latest installment of The Peanuts movie with my three young children, Ella, Owen and Gavin. I kind of got lost in a sea of their giggles throughout the movie, but one line just kind of stopped me in my tracks. The line was from my beloved Linus, a philosopher for all times. Miss Othmar, the warped trombone sounding teacher announced it was time for the yearly standardized test, at which time Linus, stood on his desk to address his teacher and the class. Schroeder gently accompanied him on the piano as Linus began his sermon. “Ma’am, will this test accurately reflect the knowledge we have gained here?” He carried on...”is it fair that at this young age...” To which Miss Othmar angrily interrupted, “Waa waa waa”, and Linus sheepishly took his seat. At that moment I realized that clearly the standardized testing movement has hit a new low... satirized by The Peanuts. This was the animated equivalent of jumping the shark.

But, in all seriousness, the discussion here today, which I believe is more about the misuse of standardized tests, in this case in the individual evaluations of teachers and administrators, is a discussion that is long overdue. We have experienced an era for nearly 15 years that has conflated measures with goals. In most instances, we have made our measures our goals.

It is noteworthy that there is not a single credible research study stipulating that a fixed percentage (22.5%) of a teacher’s competence is a function of how students perform on state and local assessments. Nonetheless, this 22.5% attempts to give the veneer of precision and objectivity. Research clearly fails to support this approach. And it’s not for a lack of research. With one in-depth look at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) website you will not find one citation of research that supports the practice of using standardized tests scores to evaluate the performance of individual teachers or administrators. Additionally, the American Statistical Association (ASA) is highly critical of the Value-Added Modeling (VAM) approach, which is a model that attempts to control for extraneous variables much more than the current Student Learning Objectives (SLO) model used in Connecticut.

This approach is opposed by every reputable professional educational organization across the country. Additionally research shows it is more than likely that it will result in false conclusions about teachers and the districts in which they work. But I understand that perhaps that is a discussion more appropriate for the PEAC Committee.

Also noteworthy is that pilot implementations of this approach across the country have been fraught with statistical and procedural errors, inaccurate ratings of teachers, and serious misrepresentations of their effectiveness.

This is not to say that there is not a place for standardized testing in public education. Standardized tests can provide a great deal of useful information when used as the tests are designed to be used. All tests are designed with a purpose. State and local tests are designed to produce information about students, namely, what students know and are able to do. These tests, including the SBAC, are not designed to be measures of teacher efficacy or school quality, and

are misused when employed as such measures, effectively perverting the teacher evaluation process. **The makers of the tests acknowledge that they are not designed to assess school quality or teacher competence.** Once again, perhaps this fact is best served to be discussed at PEAC. Whether the venue is PEAC or the legislature, this approach deserves a critical analysis, not yet done since adopted by our state

An analysis cannot be conducted without full consideration for the unintended consequences of attaching such high stakes to standardized tests, namely outright corruption, and the more common practice of a distortion of teaching, all intended to game the system. This is evident in professional fields beyond education, e.g. the scandal at Enron, and similar distortions of practice at Heinz, Sears, and Dun and Bradstreet.

It is indisputable that student academic performance must be a factor in determining teacher effectiveness, and that the most common method of gauging student academic performance is through the administration of tests - national, state and locally-developed. However, such scores are dynamic, continually changing indicators of student learning. Students have highly idiosyncratic rates of cognitive development which affect test scores, and that most tests themselves are neither fully valid nor reliable, thus rendering test scores imperfect proxies for student learning.