

## Original Paper

# Student Performance on End of Year State Assessments and Correlation to Teacher's Worth

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Received: April 23, 2020

Accepted: May 2, 2020

Online Published: May 25, 2020

doi:10.22158/jecs.v4n2p139

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v4n2p139>

### **Abstract**

*This study explored how accountability over the years has shifted with attention mainly focusing how well students are performing on their end of the year assessments and how that determines a teacher's worth. Through these assessments, the teachers are being told of their worth if a student meets their goal or being told of their ineffectiveness when the teachers and students fail to measure up. Teachers were considered to have value-added as an educator when their students attained their goals. Other educators faced dismissal or reassignment when their students did not meet their goals. The focus is placed upon the educator and the educator's career is heavily impacted by low test scores and even the high test scores. With teacher value being associated with test scores, other problems came to the surface of the research. High teacher turnover rates, discourse amongst peers when scores were being compared or incentive pay being offered, and educators becoming teachers that teach to the test. The goal was determine how educators and those studying this new shift felt and reacted.*

### **Keywords**

*accountability, assessment, teacher, value, worth*

### **1. Introduction**

Teachers have always been expected to perform well in their classrooms and to make sure that students are achieving what has been set out for them to achieve. However, over the last few years the measure of the teacher's success has become different. The educational structure has changed and now schools across the nation are being graded based on the growth student populations are showing. This growth score is typically calculated, but not limited to, goals set by the state that are assigned to students based on the previous school year's performance. If students meet their goals the school receives points and if the student fails to meet the goals set for them, the school will not receive points for the student. The accountability for this growth has been placed in the hands of the student's teacher.

When schools receive their data at the beginning of the school year, teachers are called into meetings and told the percentage of growth their students attained. In some districts, the information is compared to the other teachers of that content area. I didn't realize just how impactful the growth of my students would be in regard to my confidence level until I was sitting across the table from administration waiting on my report. Having that personal experience with asking myself if I was good enough to be successful brought me to development of my research question. *How does student performance on EOY State Test correlate to a teacher's worth in the classroom?*

I had the opportunity to speak with a 20-year veteran within my district about her students and their growth. The educator told me that because her students didn't show the appropriate growth, that she was now questioning if she wanted to stay in education. She was no longer as confident in her abilities as she had been in previous years and felt that she may no longer be needed at the school. Whereas "my" connection to the growth of my students was the total opposite, because my students showed tremendous growth I now felt extremely confident in my ability to be effective in the classroom and that my worth to the district had increased.

## 2. Method

Worth is commonly known as the value associated with someone or something and at times used for ratings. One may think that a teacher should not be concerned with one test determining his or her ability or the level of his or her worth in a school, but even when a teacher's job placement could be at risk, why would he or she not be concerned.

Grissom, Kalogrides and Loeb (2017) first looked at the placement of teachers based on their student performance:

We first examine the relationship between the test performance of a teacher's students and whether he or she remains in a tested area in a subsequent year. Approximately 70% of "tested" teachers in our sample remain in a tested grade/subject in the same school in the following year. Thirteen percent move within the same school to an untested classroom, while 7% move to a different school (5% to a tested classroom, 2% to an untested one) (p. 13).

Through the presentation of my research, which is a correlational research between test scores and how they contribute to the value of a teacher within schools across the nations, I will address how a teacher truly can have increased or decreased value as an educator based on their student test scores and growth levels.

Teachers that don't show student growth are often considered "low-performing" teachers and that in itself can be detrimental to a teacher's confidence (Grissom et al., p. 27). Some would argue that it is not fair to hold teachers accountable for student performance given that the common core standards adopted are relatively new (Backes et al., 2018, p. 2). It does not change that fact that they have been and seemingly will continue to be held accountable at a higher level than other educational personnel.

Not only is the teacher held accountable for student performance, but his or her student scores also

contribute to the teacher's "value-added" worth and contribute to formal observation rankings or scores (Backes et al., p. 2). I ask myself, how could all of this focus on a teacher's success rate with his or her student's assessment scores not impact their accuracy inside the classroom? With terms such as low-performing, value-added, and teacher rankings being commonly linked with teacher-student performance relationships, it becomes to what extent is impacted (Backes et al., pp. 9-11).

One word that comes up often in educational literature research is the effectiveness of the teacher. Can we then start to replace effectiveness with worth? Harris, Ingle and Rutledge (2014) wrote that, "Of greatest interest here is that principals conceptualize teacher effectiveness as something other than simply raising student test scores, which may manifest itself through the characteristics of teachers whom they deem effective and ineffective" (p. 78). If I were to rewrite part of that sentence as, interest here is that principals conceptualize teacher worth as something other than simply raising student test scores, which may manifest itself through the characteristics of teachers whom they deem worthy and non-worthy (Harris et al., p. 78). According to previous researchers (Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2015), "The idea that teachers' beliefs about their capabilities as teachers are of interest, has been studied for several decades" (p. 46). Teachers are also aware of the scrutiny placed on their performance and their quality as educators after the implementation of *No Child Left Behind Act* (Strong, Gargangi, & Hacifazlioglu, 2011, p. 367).

Teacher ability is constantly being observed and researched to contribute to their worth or lack thereof, as researched by Strong et al.:

Using student achievement data from a school district's database, we calculated value-added scores for teachers. We then identified teachers whose scores indicated that their effectiveness was consistently higher or lower than average over the prior three years. This resulted in two groups with a difference in mean value-added scores of roughly a 0.50 standard deviation (p. 370).

The language being used to assess teachers and their academic ability is clearly changed over time. Teachers aren't being ranked, tenured, or promoted based on their individual characteristics and performance throughout the year. They are being scored using value based assessments on their student test scores (Strong et al., p. 371). I don't see the issue in using student scores to assess the progress of schools as a whole given that researchers Buzik and Jones (2018) wrote that, "In the past decade, there has been increasing interest in using student academic growth to gauge the success of and improve U.S. K-12 public schools" (p. 28). The interest is there as it should be to show justification that student needs are being met within the confines of school buildings.

Student test scores should factor into teacher evaluations but it should not be the main component. In this instance Ballou and Springer argued that, "There is information in student test scores about teacher performance; the challenge is to extract it and combine it with the information gleaned from other instruments" (2015, p. 77). There is not a lot of evidence found to show that it has not become the main focus. Imagine a new teacher not attaining adequate growth in regard to test scores and being told her

pay would now be based on her students' performance. A decade ago that may have been slightly talked about but Woessmann (2011) has provided research that proves the practice has increased (p. 404). With this research it actually attaches monetary value or "worth" to educators using pay based on performance (Woessmann, p. 405). Add that to job placement being attached to scores, teachers are being impacted in ways some may deem justified or unjustified. Taylor and Tyler (2012) write about the impact of teachers being evaluated based on performance (pp. 3628-3651). The authors argue that their research shows, "The only way to adjust the teacher distribution for the better is to gather information on individual productivity through evaluation and then dismiss low performers" (p. 3628). Throughout this study, the main focus was not just upon their scores, but they still played a large part in the teacher evaluations and subsequent assessments.

With all the focus being on a teacher's worth through value added assessment, performance pay incentives, and other issues associated with focusing on student-teacher growth scores leads to the buildup of other problems within education. One main concern that a lot of schools across the nation are experiencing is the high teacher turnover rates. Now other research may contribute that to working conditions or student behaviors but, Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff did confirm that, Most existing research on the relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement is correlational, revealing negative correlations (2013, p. 5). While they did discover teachers that had achievement success wanted to stay in schools they were in, some that did well wanted to move on to better schools in different areas (Ronfeldt et al., pp. 6-8).

Teachers that were not successful also were likely to be transferred, dismissed, or asked to leave the school (Ronfeldt et al., p. 8). The teacher that had good scores was had more "worth" than the teacher that didn't have good scores. Even from both standpoints, there still arises an issue of turnover and that's only one of many issues with worth being placed upon a teachers' students score. Regarding worth, we have to factor in teacher incentives and we essentially have teachers being rewarded for how their students performed on their test. Programs such as Race to the Top, a grant created as incentives for states to fix their lower performing schools, were created (Ballou & Springer, 2015, p. 77). Teachers are also offered performance pay based on how well their students performed, according to Balch and Springer (2015, p. 116).

When the stakes are being raised then teachers might be prone to cheat as Ballou and Springer discovered in their research:

Some highly publicized incidents have shown that the use of value-added assessments in high-stakes decisions may lead teachers to cheat. The most egregious forms of cheating involve changing student answer sheets and revealing answers to students. Less attention has been paid to what we suspect is a far more widespread abuse: coaching students during testing. Coaching can take such subtle forms that students, and perhaps even teachers, are not aware that they have overstepped a line (p. 81).

Educators are also becoming teachers that "teach to the test" (Jennings & Bearak, 2014, p. 381).

Teachers are feeling the pressures of preparing students for test to succeed or they stand the chance of lessened value to the schools they are in. Jennings and Bearak found that there are two types of consequences to be of importance when teaching to the test, validity based on test scores and experiential based on the quality of the students' education (p. 382).

### 3. Result

Moving forward, research answers questions posed but also creates more questions to be answered. The literature has shown that are multiple differentiating circumstances that teachers are facing aside from their worth being determined by EOY test. They deal with being grief counselors for students that have lost parents, students that only eat when at school, students that are homeless and countless other problems faced by students that are not taken into consideration. Teachers are more committed than anyone when it comes to their EOY student performance on exams. Current literature has not explored the main sources that are actually the contributors to the worthiness of educators.

### 4. Discussion

What remains to be determined if they are willing to invest in a fair and unbiased method that actually takes into consideration all of the components of an educator and not just a test score. If I leave my readers with something to think about, it would be the following questions. Are doctors deemed unworthy for one failed surgery? Does the NFL or NBA fire their entire staff after failing to win the ultimate championship? Are any other professionals held accountable for so many people, students in an educator's case, as our teachers are with such high risk? Worth should not equate to test scores.

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