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Using Student Performance To Measure Teacher Effectiveness: PDAS, T-TESS and Beyond

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Texas is poised to adopt a new state-recommended teacher evaluation system, called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), to replace the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS). T-TESS is in the second year of being piloted and is scheduled to become the new state-recommended system in 2016-17, with all components fully operational in 2017-18. With scheduled statewide implementation about six months away, there are many unknowns about the new system, one of which is the inclusion of student performance at the individual teacher level as a component of the teacher appraisal process. Of particular concern to stakeholders is the role that value-added measurements (VAM) of student performance will play in determining individual teacher effectiveness.

What is VAM?

Value-added models of teacher assessment use complex statistical techniques to try to estimate teachers' effects on student achievement. Proponents view them as a primary tool for differentiating teachers based on performance/effectiveness. TEA asserts that a VAM measures how much progress a group of students makes relative to the expectation of progress.[1] However, researchers have found that VAM results are unstable over time, subject to bias and imprecision, and rely solely on results from standardized tests that were not designed for that purpose. For these reasons, researchers say they are an invalid and unfair means of teacher assessment.

The Role of Student Performance in PDAS

[1] Texas Education Agency, "Common Questions About Value-Added Modeling" (May 2014)

Historically, Texas school districts have evaluated teacher performance by observing the interaction between a teacher and student that take place in the classroom, primarily under the auspices of the PDAS. PDAS was adopted in 1997 in response to legislation that required the commissioner to adopt a state-recommended system for the teacher appraisal process with criteria based on "observable, job-related behavior, including: (1) teachers' implementation of discipline management procedures; and (2) the performance of teachers' students." According to Tex. Ed. Code § 21.352, a school district may choose to use the appraisal system developed by the commissioner or may choose to develop an alternative appraisal system by taking certain steps outlined in the statute. Regardless of the appraisal method utilized, Tex. Ed. Code § 21.351(a) requires that appraisal scores be based on "observable, job-related behavior." Although state law also allows local school districts to use teacher appraisal systems developed by district and campus site-based decision-making committees that include the same two criteria as the state system, it is estimated about 86 percent of Texas school districts use PDAS.[2]

The PDAS was designed in such a way that it directs the appraiser's focus on the interactions between teacher and students, rather than student test scores. For example, PDAS Domain I addresses student learning in class. Although the criterion asks an appraiser to evaluate whether a teacher's students are "successful in learning," that phrase does not rely on test scores. The Commissioner's Appraisal Framework identifies the dimensions of the evaluative process that an appraiser must follow in scoring Domain I as follows:

Evaluation Dimensions:

[2] Texas Education Agency, Teacher Evaluation Systems 2010-2011

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