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Reevaluating the Evaluations

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Reevaluating the Evaluations

🕒 OCTOBER 25, 2012 BY [ANDY BRUNNER-BROWN](#) 💬 0 COMMENTS

Educators are great assets. Among the wide variety of assignments teachers face, they teach, nurture, discipline, and lead children. This costs tax dollars. Teachers must be held accountable for this funding—just like Big Bird. Quantifying teacher performance is relatively easy with modern standardized tests, student evaluations, and the opportunity for professionals to observe courses. By placing performance accountability on individual teachers through measured data, this education policy seems to provide incentives for teacher performance and reasons for schools to fire underperforming teachers.

But these data ineffectively measure the **nuances** in teacher performance and they fail to understand the fluctuations in student performance, which can be caused by number of external factors. Instead, education policy should promote teacher and district success by providing training resources that build upon our existing assets and to enhance outcomes.

Teacher performance evaluations are the new thing. In the last three years, 36 states and the District of Columbia have adopted **new teacher evaluations**. Once argued to be an immeasurable “art,” teaching can now be easily measured to identify good and bad teachers. Simultaneously, this will help school districts keep great teachers and fire bad teachers; both great and bad teachers are often **unnoticed for years**, until they switch schools or a problem finally arises.

But maybe these systems miss the point of teaching and do not adequately address teachers’ needs—or even students’ needs. When asked after his keynote address at a **Save Our Schools** march whether teacher job insecurity would increase performance, Matt Damon described **why teachers even teach**:

So you think job insecurity is what makes me work hard? I want to be an actor. That’s not an incentive. That’s the thing. See, you take this MBA-style thinking, right? It’s the problem with ed policy right now, this intrinsically paternalistic view of problems that are much more complex than that. It’s like saying a teacher is going to get lazy when they have tenure. A teacher wants to teach. I mean, why else would you take a shitty salary and really long hours and do that job unless you really love to do it?

Instead of using “MBA-style thinking” of teacher performance, legislatures should implement Ph.D.-style thinking and utilize data on what creates great classrooms. Instead of just asking which teachers are underperforming, more questions should be asked to determine why the teachers are underperforming and how to make all teachers perform better.

If teachers want to teach, then policy should **stop micromanaging teachers** and start to fully support teachers. And if the goal is to create a good education system, then policy should focus on positive support for teachers (and students), not negative support.

Positive support programs might still evaluate teachers, but more importantly, they can determine what teachers need in order to better perform in the classroom. Certain teachers might need more supplies, others might need more training; certain districts might need more teachers to reduce class sizes, others might need more after school programs. Negative support programs, however, stigmatize and punish certain behaviors with punishment (loss of a job for a teacher or loss of class time for a student) without providing the retooling necessary. Simply put, the problem is not solved but just pushed under the rug.

Altogether, teachers and school districts need more support, first in high standards to meet the future demands of the nation and then in infrastructure and funding. No matter what, harshly punishing the teacher on account of poor performance for year or two is the opposite of what education policy needs. Such tactics dump valuable but under performing assets when cheaper

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