

Random Notes

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GROUP MULLS ASSESSMENTS, PROGRESS MONITORING

“When are we supposed to teach?” Walk through the halls of any elementary school in Akron, and odds are high that you won’t get too far without hearing that question from one or more teachers. The question is no longer a rhetorical one. Testing and the progress monitoring that goes along with much of it is taking big chunks of instructional time away from teachers and kids, particularly at the elementary level.

Just prior to the winter recess, an “Assessment Action Team” was convened to review every assessment at every grade level in elementary schools. For each assessment, the Team identified its content area, why and when it is given, what it is supposed to measure and who is responsible for administering it. Not surprisingly, most testing is mandated by state and federal requirements. A far lesser amount is district-sponsored. The overall goal of the Action Team is to determine whether or not certain testing can be eliminated. Since there is no choice involved in state and federal requirements, the group will look primarily to locally controlled testing. Beyond that, there are several secondary issues related to assessments that the group will scrutinize:

- What are the goals of the various assessments; what are we hoping to accomplish through their use?
- Is the necessity for and purpose of all testing communicated effectively to teachers; do teachers find relevancy and value in all assessments?
- Is there any duplication of effort that can be eliminated by using a single assessment instead of several for similar purposes?
- Are assessments beyond district level assessments being required in some schools but not others?
- Is there consistency across the district regarding progress monitoring, particularly with respect to who is progress monitored and how frequently?
- Is there consistency among buildings with respect to what is being done with assessment results?

In order to get a clear, district-wide picture of assessment practices, AEA is in the process of asking teachers in every building and at every grade level to complete an “assessment inventory.” Teacher feedback will play a significant role in further deliberations of the Action Team.

Members of the Team are: **Toan Dang-Nguyen, Ranay Hatherill, Aimee Kirsch, Julie Mann, Ellen McWilliams, Steve Miller, Jeff Moats, Mary Outley-Kelly, Bill Siegfert, Pat Shipe** and **Angela Vassalotti**. Teachers interested in sharing their thoughts on assessments and/or progress monitoring can write to Ranay Hatherill (rhather2@akron.k12.oh.us) or Pat Shipe (pshipe@akron.k12.oh.us).

Ohio Legislature Gets an “F”

If the Ohio legislature was to be evaluated using the new school effectiveness rating scale it recently enacted, lawmakers would earn a solid “F.” That’s because within just six months of the effective date of a new statewide teacher evaluation system, they approved legislation (HB 555) creating rules significantly different from the State Department of Education guidance districts have been scrambling to meet for the last 18-24 months. The changes, signed by Kasich on December 20, are sure to have teachers and administrators across the state who have spent countless hours preparing to implement the new evaluation system breathing fire.

The 11th hour change is certain to generate controversy centering on the use of student growth measures. As every teacher in Ohio should know by now, one-half of his or her evaluation will be based on student growth. HB 153 was enacted in the fall of 2011 and required that **multiple measures**, not just one “all or nothing” measure, be used to determine student growth. As **one** of the **multiple measures**, 153 mandated the use of value added data in grade levels and subject areas for which such data is available. Districts and ESC’s across the state have been working furiously to come up with other tools (**multiple measures**) for measuring student growth to supplement value added data, and for use in subjects and grade levels for which there is no value added data or any other means to measure student growth. Enter SLO’s (Student Learning Objectives). SLO’s have become the favorite alternative to meet the **multiple measures** requirement of HB 153. Trouble is, there is no SLO “bank” in Columbus from which districts

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Fact-Finding Moving Forward Feb. 12

Contract negotiations which ended at impasse last summer will be settled by a fact-finder. The initial hearing date is set for February 12th. Each side will have an opportunity to present their respective proposals to the fact-finder and to argue against the other side’s unresolved issues. The fact-finder is charged with making a recommendation for settlement which either side may accept or reject. Failure by either or both sides to ratify the recommendations will force mediation of the disputed issues.

AEA members are working under the terms of the Agreement that expired last June 30 as mandated by Ohio law. The contract states that the fact-finder must submit her recommendations to the parties within ten days of the final hearing date. It is not unusual for a third party to request additional time to publish recommendations. When recommendations are made, AEA will schedule a membership meeting to consider ratification or rejection.

can draw; the SLO's have to be written locally. Writing SLO's for such high stakes purposes requires a lot of smart people (who already have their own job to do) doing a lot of hard work. The urgency to get SLO's written by July, 2013, is evidenced by the collaboration around the state among districts to get the job done, and the flood of organizations (including ESC's) offering their expertise and training to help get it done.

In effect, the legislature sabotaged much of the work that has been done to supplement value-added data with SLO's by enacting HB 555. The law reverses the multiple measures requirement of HB 153 with respect to teachers in subjects and grade levels for which value added data is available: ***"On or after July 1, 2014, the entire student academic growth factor of the evaluation shall be based on the value-added progress dimension."***

Sure to be of great concern among teachers is the change from using multiple growth measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness to using a single measure. Research on the reliability of value added data for high stakes teacher evaluation is both supportive and critical. As several states around the country move toward evaluating teachers through the use of value-added data, more and more research is raising questions about the wisdom of the practice. Perhaps a study by Stanford University more closely than any other reflects the concerns expressed by teachers. Stanford's findings are summarized below:

- (1) Value-added models of teacher effectiveness are highly unstable. Teachers' ratings differ substantially from class to class and from year to year, as well as from one test to the next.***
- (2) Teachers' value-added ratings are significantly affected by differences in the students who are assigned to them. Even when statistical models try to control for student-demographic variables, teachers are advantaged or disadvantaged based on the students they teach. Contrary to proponents' claims, these models reward or penalize teachers according to where they teach and what students they teach, not just how well they teach.***
- (3) Value-added ratings cannot disentangle the many home, school and student factors that influence learning gains. These matter more than the individual teacher in explaining changes in scores.***

The Stanford research group concluded that its findings "have been duplicated in many studies." They added, "Most researchers have concluded that value-added scores should not be used in high-stakes evaluations of individual teachers". The National Research Council, one of the country's leading research organizations, agrees: "VAM estimates of teacher effectiveness ... should not be used to make operational decisions because such estimates are far too unstable to be considered fair or reliable."

By eliminating consideration of other measures of student growth, HB 555 no doubt raises the already high stakes for those teaching subjects for which value-added data is gathered.

Thinking About Retirement? Read This!

Members who are seriously considering retirement at the end of May or at the end of the school year are reminded that the Early Retirement Announcement incentive and guidelines changed last school year as part of one of the district's Race to the Top strategies. Members wishing to qualify for the \$1,000 incentive must notify Human Resources by **February 28th** of their intent to retire between the last work day in May and June 30th, and then actually retire within that time frame. The incentive is not available to members who retire before the last work day in May, regardless of when they notify the Board that they are leaving. February 28th falls on a Thursday this year.

Secondary Trustee Elections to be Held in May

Secondary school AEA members who wish to run for a secondary district representative position on the AEA Board of Trustees for the term August 1, 2013 through July 31, 2015 must fill out a petition and return it to AEA by Thursday, January 31, 2013. The election will be held on May 7 and 8, 2013. Board of Trustees meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month after school. Petitions are available from your building representative or the AEA office.

Many are aware of the recent passing of Ernie Calhoun, Jr., teacher and AEA Board of Trustees member. Mr. Calhoun served the organization as an at-large member. The AEA Election Committee will present eligible nominee(s) to the Board of Trustees in order for the Board to select and appoint a minority Representative to fill Mr. Calhoun's seat on the Board. Minority members wishing to be considered for the position, the term of which expires June 30, 2014, should contact AEA.

Ohio Moving to Common Core

The Common Core State Standards Initiative began in 2009. The movement toward a national set of standards in Mathematics and English/Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects was begun by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. To date, all states have adopted the Common Core with the exception of Texas, Alaska, Virginia and Nebraska. Minnesota has adopted the ELA standards only.

Essentially, the Standards are written in two parts. The first part includes the college and career readiness standards, which address subject matter students are expected to learn when they have graduated from high school. The second addresses K-12 learning expectations for elementary through high school. The purpose of having a set of common standards nationwide is to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.

In Ohio, districts across the state are transitioning to the Common Core. The target date for full implementation in grades K-12 is the 2013-2014 school year. Work has not yet begun on the development of common standards in science and social studies.

**Mark your calendar and save the date: Friday, May 31. 32nd Annual AEA Night at the Stadium
Tribe vs. Tampa Bay Rays**