



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, August 30, 2012

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CFT Statement on AB 5:

Opponents of teacher evaluation bill want invalid tests to be measure of teacher effectiveness

Showing their hand, opponents of the much-debated AB 5, A Best Practices Teacher Evaluation System (Fuentes), stated in testimony to a State Senate hearing yesterday that they are opposed to a provision that the tests used to measure academic growth be “valid and reliable” for the curriculum, the pupil being taught, and for the purpose of teacher evaluation.

Why would anyone support the use of non-valid and non-reliable test results in teacher evaluation? Because their opposition is not about ensuring quality teaching and learning: it is about destroying collective bargaining in public schools between education unions and school district administrations, weakening in particular teacher unions, and rolling back the clock on teacher rights to the early twentieth century.

AB 5 does include language on using student test data. However, it does not mandate specific methods for including that data, nor how the data should be weighted, and it requires local collective bargaining to address evaluation details.

Who else, beside the teachers' unions, would ever be against using student standardized test scores in evaluations? Just about every expert that has examined the practice, including the highest scientific body in the nation, the National Research Council (NRC) of the Academy of Sciences. The most common of the various ways student test scores are used in teacher evaluations is Value Added Methodologies (VAM). VAM purports to directly associate a given student's academic progress over time to a teacher's effectiveness by comparing the student's test scores from year to year.

About VAM, the NRC says, "Too little research has been done on these methods' validity to base high-stakes decisions about teachers on them."

Then there is the Educational Testing Service (ETS)—California's state testing vendor—which says that VAM cannot sort out students' backgrounds and prior learning well enough to accurately attribute individual student learning gains to the teacher.

And then we have the nonpartisan RAND Corporation, which echoes the view of the NRC and ETS that VAM and other methods of using student test data in teachers' evaluations are not ready for prime time.

In short, there is no research base whatsoever that indicates student test scores can be used in a fair and valid manner to evaluate teachers, or that such use would result in better teaching. If you are looking for why the teachers' unions are against the practice that is it. And the unions have the support of the nation's leading experts in that opinion.

Those who oppose AB 5 because it doesn't specifically include student test data have the facts and the science to contend with. The opponents support test score-driven education that the NRC concludes will never bring US student achievement into line with the world's highest performing nations. Not one cutting edge education system—for instance, Singapore or Finland—uses student test data in teacher evaluations. (It should be mentioned that both Singapore and Finland have highly unionized schools.)

Opponents charged that AB 5 was not aligned with No Child Left Behind Act waiver requirements. A waiver would free up some federal dollars for other educational needs. Assemblyman Fuentes amended the bill to bring it into alignment with the waiver.

AB 5 would put in place for the first time a true "best practices" evaluation system, based on the rigorous California Standards for the Teaching Profession, providing a uniform base statewide for evaluations. It would require frequent evaluations as well as extensive training in how to validly, fairly, and constructively conduct evaluations. And with "multiple measures," evaluations would look at real student work done over a year, rather than in one week of testing.

AB 5 would require school boards to hold public hearings and seek input on implementation of the new evaluation systems. The boards are required to increase transparency of the details in newly negotiated evaluation systems.

And, yes, there is a requirement that the details of evaluation be collectively bargained. This is in recognition that one size does not fit all. Every district has specific needs related to its specific student populations. The teachers, management, school boards, and local parent communities will most intimately know those needs, and collective bargaining is the most appropriate setting to discuss and put in place the ways to address those needs.

It is clear from the comments of the opposition that they are not interested in a teacher evaluation system that will support improved teaching practice or improved student learning. Their stated goal is to create a system to identify "bad teachers." But plainly their unstated goal is to install a system to identify teachers as "bad."

For reasons based on the best research, what's best for individual school districts, and just plain common sense, AB 5 should be supported without any more amendments. And the Legislature should stop listening to people who think tests administered to students shouldn't be valid and reliable.

Gary Ravani, CFT EC/K-12 Council President will be available for comment.

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