

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville)

February 25, 2014 Tuesday

**A TIMES-UNION SPECIAL REPORT: REVEALING THE DATA;
A look at Florida's Value-Added Model (VAM) system that the state says
measures teacher effectiveness;
Is this the formula for success?;
Teachers say it's flawed, parents want the results**

BYLINE: Topher Sanders, Steve Patterson, Khristopher J. Brooks, Denise Smith Amos & Christopher Hong

SECTION: Pg. A-1

LENGTH: 1707 words

Teacher groups are objecting, but some parents are cheering the release Monday of hundreds of thousands of scores that are part of a controversial system Florida's Department of Education says helps evaluate teachers' classroom effectiveness.

After a protracted legal battle, Florida's education department Monday released for the first time data showing how well most teachers scored on the value-added model, or VAM, which state officials say can quantify how teachers affect their students' academic growth.

VAM uses a complicated formula that measures students' year-to-year performance on state tests, calculating better-than-expected or worse-than-expected scores, and attributing that to the value teachers bring to students' education.

But teachers unions and some district officials say Florida's value-added scores and the formula for calculating them are flawed, useless and misleading. The state education department says the scores tell only part of the story of teacher quality. The scores amount to up to half of a teacher's annual evaluation, they said, and typically combine with principals' observations of teachers in classrooms, grades on classroom management, lesson planning and other functions, to make a more complete picture of teachers' skills.

The more subjective components already are public record, though state law keeps it closed for a year.

Now, the value-added part of the evaluation is available to the public as soon as it is filed.

Several states use value-added calculations, but only a few districts, in New York state and Los Angeles, have made teachers' names and scores public - and drawn criticism for it.

Diane Ravitch, a former assistant U.S. Secretary of Education and one of the nation's best-known education advocates, was outraged that Florida released value-added scores, calling the methodology "junk science."

"The information is meaningless," she said. "Most teachers do not teach the tested subjects [that make up Florida's VAM scores] so how can this be valid?"

Florida's value-added model seeks to predict how well students will score on state reading and math FCAT exams using prior years' scores and other factors. However, teachers unions point out that about two-thirds of teachers don't teach reading or math courses.

Florida released the scores to members of the news media and the public who requested it Monday, following a protracted court fight with The Florida Times-Union that ended with a 3-0 decision by the 1st District Court of Appeal that the scores were public records.

A TIMES-UNION SPECIAL REPORT: REVEALING THE DATA; A look at Florida's Value-Added Model (VAM) system that the state says measures teacher effectiveness; Is this the formula for success?; Teachers say it's flawed, parents want the results Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville) February 25, 2014 Tuesday

Terrie Brady, president of Duval Teachers United, said her organization received phone calls throughout the day Monday from teachers frustrated and angered about the data being released. She said she told them "that we value them and we think they're great teachers."

The numbers were released a day before Florida educators were to begin testing students on the writing portion of FCAT.

"This will hurt the morale of the teachers in the county," Brady said.

Several Northeast Florida parents said the records could give them a glimpse of how well their children's schools and classrooms are run and if teachers are meeting needs or are overwhelmed.

"We as parents would like to know what is going on in our kids' life and in their school, but we can't be with them 24-7," said Diamond Quiles, mother of a second-grade son at Justina Road Elementary, which earned an F grade on the state report card and averaged some of the lowest value-added teacher scores in the district.

She said the teacher scores would help her see which teachers may need help at the struggling school and which shouldn't be there.

"If you get the parents involved you can get the child involved," Quiles said. "There are a lot of kids with a lot of backgrounds here and some have their own issues. Teachers have got to understand them. If a child is acting out, there may be several reasons."

Several First Coast school districts said they plan to change their use of the measurements, especially for teachers whose students don't take reading or math FCATs, which feed the value-added scores.

"If you're a sixth-grade social studies teacher, you want to be held accountable for sixth-grade, social-studies content," said Duval Superintendent Nikolai Vitti.

Currently, teachers of subjects other than reading or math receive their VAM scores based on the reading and math scores of their students.

Andy Ford, president of the Florida Education Association, said the value-added system has major flaws, such as not accounting for student poverty and not having a reliable system for ensuring teachers' scores are based on the students they actually taught.

More than two-thirds of Florida's teachers have been evaluated, in part, on scores for students or classes they don't teach, according to union officials. That includes teachers in kindergarten through grade three, teachers in high school who don't teach reading or math, and teachers of art, music, physical education, certain sciences and social studies.

"To my mind, the data is not useful for anyone or anything," said Catherine Boehme, a Pensacola teacher who chairs the union's personnel problems committee.

Boehme, who teaches high school biology and advanced chemistry, said her VAM score was based on her students' ninth-grade algebra and 10th-grade reading scores, subjects she doesn't teach. She also said she didn't get her VAM scores until well into the following school year, making it hard to know what things she should do to improve.

Changes are in the works, state officials say.

Beginning with this school year, the state will give districts more flexibility to choose how they'll measure student growth for teachers of subjects that are not FCAT-tested or not Algebra I.

Districts can use their own tests or purchase assessments to measure student growth and achievement in non-FCAT courses if they get state approval. Officials in Nassau and Duval counties said they're developing new assessments or purchasing others to measure student growth in the untested courses.

That doesn't resolve every concern about VAM. The union says VAM should only amount to 25 to 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation while the state is in favor of 40 to 50 percent.

Vitti is calling for the state to provide money to the education department to create statewide assessments for all subjects, so science teachers, for instance, would get a VAM score based on science test results and not reading or math.

For now, the VAM scores reflect pockets of excellence and low performance in Florida school districts.

A TIMES-UNION SPECIAL REPORT: REVEALING THE DATA; A look at Florida's Value-Added Model (VAM) system that the state says measures teacher effectiveness; Is this the formula for success?; Teachers say it's flawed, parents want the results Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville) February 25, 2014 Tuesday

About 58 percent of school districts in the state last year saw a majority of teachers receive aggregated scores below statewide norms, according to a Times-Union analysis of the data.

The analysis of those teachers who received scores also showed:

- In most Northeast Florida school districts, the majority of teachers were scored above the average, according to aggregated numbers.
- In St. Johns County, 68 percent of the teachers received above-average evaluations, the highest rate in the state. Overall, St. Johns teachers were credited for helping students make about 15.6 percent more progress than a state model said would have been typically expected.
- Baker, Clay and Nassau counties also had a majority of teachers outperform the state average. Baker students' gains - about 9 percent more than typical - led to its teachers having the third-highest aggregate VAM ratings in the state. Clay had the state's seventh-highest teacher score, about 7.6 percent higher than would have been expected. Nassau County teachers were scored about 2.6 percent higher than the state overall.
- In Duval and Putnam counties, slightly more than half the teachers rated received below-average VAM scores. The state's modeling said Duval teachers contributed to about 1.5 percent less progress than would be typically expected, and Putnam teachers' impact was about 2 percent below normal.

Numerous redacted and duplicated names hampered precise analysis.

In addition to providing VAM scores for many teachers, the state also provided scores for schools. About 57 percent of Duval County schools scored below average, and 59 percent of schools in Putnam County were below average.

The scores might have helped Gabriella Torres choose whether to put her two sons in Justina Road Elementary, she said, where both have had substitute teachers and where her second-grader struggles with his new teacher.

"I want to be able to look and see how the teachers scored," she said. "I think I should have been able to see that; then I'd know if I want to keep them here."

Florida fought disclosure of the VAM scores to maintain the confidentiality of teachers' names, said Kathy Hebda, the education department's chief of staff.

"This was important to the commissioner [Pam Stewart] because she believes in the value of the teacher-principal relationship for professional development which is supported when evaluation information has a period of protection," Hebda said.

There's still a nagging question: What happens when Florida again changes its state exams to reflect changing academic standards?

The state has already begun incorporating the more rigorous Common Core set of state standards, with some statewide alterations, and it next expects to develop a new set of state tests for more grades and subjects.

Union officials are seeking a time out.

Using VAM, Ford said, "is just moving too fast to be valid..."

"We're in a state of flux right now."

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM READERS

The state provides Value Added Model, or VAM, scores to districts, which most districts use as part of teacher evaluations. In some school districts, those evaluations can help determine whether a teacher is promoted, where the teacher is placed, if the educator earns a raise or even losing loses a job. The Florida Education Association says the system is useless and flawed. The Times-Union wants to hear from you. Are you a teacher who agrees or disagrees with the VAM scores the state provides for you? Are you a parent who agrees or disagrees with the score your child's teacher received? We have published these scores so we can analyze if this is a fair system. We want to hear your opinion. Let us know at schools@jacksonville.com

GRAPHIC: Graphic

Graphic: ACTUAL VAM FORMULA Is this the formula for success? Steve.Nelson@jacksonville.com Graphic: WHERE TO FIND HIGH-SCORING TEACHERS At four Northeast Florida school districts, most teachers had

A TIMES-UNION SPECIAL REPORT: REVEALING THE DATA; A look at Florida's Value-Added Model (VAM) system that the state says measures teacher effectiveness; Is this the formula for success?; Teachers say it's flawed, parents want the results Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville) February 25, 2014 Tuesday

above-average scores on the Florida Department of Education's Value-Added Model (VAM) system. In Duval and Putnam counties, below-average scores were more common.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

SUBJECT: TEACHING & TEACHERS (92%); TEACHER EVALUATION (90%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (90%); EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION EMPLOYEES (90%); EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS (90%); TEACHER UNIONS (89%); LABOR UNIONS (88%); MATH & SCIENCE EDUCATION (79%); ACADEMIC TESTING (79%); SCIENTIFIC METHOD (76%); PUBLIC RECORDS (76%); MATHEMATICS (74%); SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (73%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (63%); APPELLATE DECISIONS (63%); APPEALS (63%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (60%); APPEALS COURTS (60%)

CITY: LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (79%); JACKSONVILLE, FL, USA (73%)

STATE: FLORIDA, USA (97%); NEW YORK, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%)

COUNTRY: UNITED STATES (97%)

LOAD-DATE: March 25, 2014