

Survey: Teachers Place Little Value on Standardized Tests

By **Anthony Rebor**

Most teachers do not believe standardized tests have significant value as measures of student performance, according to **a new report** published jointly by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The report, based on a survey of more than 10,000 public school teachers, finds that only 28 percent of educators see state-required standardized tests as an essential or very important gauge of student achievement. In addition, only 26 percent of teachers say standardized tests are an accurate reflection of what students know.

One potential explanation for those low marks lies in another of the survey's findings—that is, only 45 percent of teachers think their students take standardized tests seriously or perform to the best of their ability on them.

Overall, according to the report, teachers see ongoing formative assessments, class participation, and performance on class assignments as much more important measures of student learning. At the same time, most teachers (85 percent) agree that their students' growth over the course of the year should contribute significantly to evaluations of their own performance.

The report, titled "Primary Sources: 2012: America's Teachers on the Teaching Profession," was released March 16 at WNET's Celebration of Teaching and Learning in New York, where a frequent focus of discussion—and attendees' ire—was New York State's recent decision to release value-added ratings of teachers based on standardized test scores.

At a conference panel discussion on the Scholastic-Gates report, Margery Mayer, president of Scholastic Education, said the findings speak to the need to use multiple measures to evaluate teachers' impact on student learning. On questioning from session moderator Chelsea Clinton, in addition, Gates Foundation president Allan Golston reiterated his organization's **opposition** to the public release of the value-added ratings, saying it was "counterproductive" in terms of conducting meaningful evaluations of teachers.

The Gates Foundation's position, especially in connection with the findings in the new report, is significant because the organization has widely been perceived as being an influential proponent of increasing the use of standardized test scores in teacher evaluations. (*Note: The Gates Foundation underwrites coverage of industry and innovation in Education Week.*)

Educators included on the panel emphasized what they said were the limits of standardized tests in their current configuration, saying such assessments are not well-matched to contemporary teaching and learning goals. "How can you get critical thinking into a bubble?," asked Cate Dossetti, a teacher at Fresno High School in Fresno, Calif.

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Naima Lilly, a 5th grade teacher in Queens Village, N. Y., said that standardized tests are also at cross-purposes with the principles of differentiated instruction.

Teacher-effectiveness authority Charlotte Danielson added that "not a single one of the 21st-century skills can be assessed on a multiple-choice test." She said that the appeal of standardized test scores is that they "give you a number" but that teaching is too complex to be captured in that way.

Danielson and other panelists suggested, however, that the Common Core State Standards Initiative, adopted by all but four states, may present an opportunity to develop more nuanced types of assessment.

Other Findings

Beyond the findings on standardized testing, the Scholastic-Gates report, designed to delve into the "everyday experience of teaching in today's schools," compiles a wide range of data on teachers' views on pressing issues in education. Among some of the other notable findings:

- Teachers rank family involvement, high expectations for students, and effective school leadership as having the highest potential impact on improving student achievement.
- Most teachers in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards Initiative have heard of the common standards, but less than a quarter of affected teachers feel they are "very prepared" to teach the them.
- Teachers generally believe that they should be evaluated and observed, through a variety of methods, more frequently than they are now.
- Large majorities of teachers also favor tying tenure decisions to evaluations of teachers' effectiveness and having tenure status reassessed at regular intervals.
- Only 63 percent of teachers believe their students will leave school prepared for college, while many veteran teachers say more students are struggling in reading and math.
- Veteran teachers also say they are seeing growing numbers of students struggling with poverty, hunger, and behavioral issues.

The report also says that, despite the challenges they face, teachers tend to be content in their jobs, with 42 percent saying they are "very satisfied" and another 47 percent saying they are "satisfied." The recent **MetLife Survey of the American Teacher** found that 44 percent of teachers were very satisfied with their jobs, but noted that that was a 15 percent decline from two years ago.

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