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Top 10 teachers in Florida illustrate how messy and absurd the new teacher data is

This week of February 24, 2014 the State of Florida was forced to dump a boat load of data on its teachers into the public domain (It lost a law suit to Times Union newspaper in Florida, which requested the data). Nearly every public and charter school teacher in the state is named. And next to each named teacher is a “value added measure,” a figure that’s supposed to represent how effective he is based on how much his students’ reading and math test scores surpassed what you would expect them to be.

It starts with a complicated formula that predicts how much you expect each student to learn during the year. I’m not quite clear on how the formula factors in where a student started. It’s usually easier to show larger gains off of a low starting point. But much harder to show gains from a high starting bar. I’ve already seen at least one post from a teacher of “gifted” students, complaining that she now has a negative value added measure because her students started the year with very high test scores. Her students’ scores increased at the end of the year, but not by as much as the complicated formula predicted they should have. It’s possible that this teacher isn’t very good. But it’s also possible that she’s a great teacher. It would be fascinating to calculate how many of the teachers of advanced students received negative value added scores.

One illustration of how bad this data is is simply to look at the top 10 list of teachers in the State. (I sorted the entire database by value added measure and made this table).

	Teacher Name	School Name	District Name	Value Added Measure	Taught a course measured by the state tests
1	RHODEN, TARA ARLENE	BAKER COUNTY MIDDLE	BAKER	326.69%	Yes

		SCHOOL			
2	FISCHETTI,TRACY JANE	NAVARRE HIGH SCHOOL	SANTA ROSA	273.99%	Yes
3	MUNOZ,JULIA	LATIN BUILDERS ASSOCIATION CONSTRUCTION AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT ACADEMY	DADE	265.23%	No
4	HARRIS,SAMANTHA LEIGH	LATIN BUILDERS ASSOCIATION CONSTRUCTION AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT ACADEMY	DADE	265.23%	No
5	YORDAN,LINETTE MARIE	RONALD W. REAGAN/DORAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	DADE	259.38%	No
6	BURRIER,LYNNE M	FORT MYERS HIGH SCHOOL	LEE	251.89%	No
7	PHELAN,STACEY MARIE	CORAL REEF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	DADE	249.34%	No
8	FERNANDEZ,HILARIO LAZARO	BEN SHEPPARD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	DADE	243.21%	No
9	KEARNEY,KAREN E	F. W. BUCHHOLZ HIGH SCHOOL	ALACHUA	241.88%	No
10	BUTLER,LORINE GRIER	ENGLEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL	DUVAL	234.52%	No

It's not immediately apparent what subjects each of these teachers teach but 8 of the top 10 don't even teach the courses that are measured by the state's math and reading tests that were used to calculate the value added measures. They could have been art or physical education teachers. For the teachers that don't teach a subject measured on the test, the state still uses the students verbal and math test scores. It's just that other teachers taught those subjects to these students.

I happened to Google a few of the teachers on the list above. It turns out Lynne Burrier-McDill is a *math* teacher. But when you look up the details behind her stellar value added measure, only her students reading scores were used. Go figure.



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POSTED BY **Jill Barshay** ON **February 26, 2014**

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February 28, 2014
at 10:40 am

[...] Top 10 teachers in Florida illustrate how messy and absurd the new teacher data is Hechinger Report: 8 of the top 10 don't even teach the courses that are measured by the state's math and reading tests that were used to calculate the value added measures. They could have been art or physical education teachers. [...]

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[kafkateach](#)

February 28, 2014
at 4:51 pm

Thanks for digging into the real story behind the top 10 teachers according to the Florida VAM data. What concerns me more, however, are the bottom 10. These are people that are in danger of being unjustly fired and having their teaching licenses revoked. I looked up the very worst teacher in Florida, and she teaches 9th grade world history in a Pre-IB program. The worst teacher in Florida teaching in an IB program? I highly doubt it. I also teach gifted ninth graders Advanced Placement world history and I was ranked the worst teacher in my school, the 14th worst in Dade County, and 146th out of 120,000 teachers in Florida. Did I mention that I served as a mentor teacher for Dade County? The second worst teacher in Florida teaches at a magnet school where she surely is also teaching high level students. But let's not overlook the opposite end of the spectrum. There were many special education teachers at the bottom of the VAM rankings as well. Not surprisingly, in a growth model, teachers who teach the high end and the low end are going to end up looking bad.

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[Gosh Damn! That's a Bad VAM! | kafkateach](#)

February 28, 2014
at 8:19 pm

[...] leave). One journalist bothered to dig up the true story behind the top ten teachers in Florida, <http://educationbythenumbers.org/content/top-10-teachers-florida-illustrate-messy-absurd-new-teacher-#8230>;. But no one has bothered telling the stories of the bottom ten. Those are the teachers who are

most [...]

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March 2, 2014

at 12:05 pm

[...] [Ward Map Lawsuit Headed Back to Court](#) [Labor Notes: Book Excerpt: Campaigning for Union Office](#) [Hechinger Report: Top 10 teachers in Florida illustrate how messy and absurd the new teacher data is](#) [Send to Kindle](#) ← [Opt-Out ISAT Test Parent Public](#) [...]

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Jill Barshay

March 4, 2014

at 11:52 am

@Kafkateach Thank you for your post. It does seem that the value added formula in Florida isn't able to calculate growth properly for students at the top and the bottom. Perhaps that's because the tests themselves are aimed at middle students? Do the Florida tests have enough questions that are below and above grade level so that growth can be measured for students at the far ends of the spectrum?

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- Education By The Numbers is aimed at journalists and researchers. We seek to answer the question of when (and whether) data can improve education.

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[New York teacher speaks out: “A moratorium on the Common Core Standards frightens me”](#)

When it comes to the debates around the Common Core State Standards and how best to educate our children, I have a unique perspective: I am a parent of school-aged children, a high school English teacher, and an adjunct college instructor. Every day, through these lenses, I am reminded of how important the Common Core [...]

The post [New York teacher speaks out: “A moratorium on the Common Core Standards frightens me”](#) appeared first on [Hechinger Report](#).

[New York’s ‘shoddy’ Common Core rollout puts special-needs students at risk; a veteran teacher demands a moratorium](#)

My mother died suddenly last month and my father is in prison. There are five of us now from 8 to 17 years old who are essentially orphaned. We were just evicted and now I’m sleeping on my grandmother’s floor along with my mother, her boyfriend, my four brothers and our two dogs. It is [...]

The post [New York's 'shoddy' Common Core rollout puts special-needs students at risk: a veteran teacher demands a moratorium](#) appeared first on [Hechinger Report](#).

[Louisiana Jump Starts career tech ed](#)

Louisiana's Jump Start plan will revamp career technical education, reports the Baton Rouge Advocate. High schools, community colleges and employers will form regional teams to create courses and workplace training for 11th and 12th graders. Jump Start students will split their day between traditional courses and vocational training. They will have a chance to earn a "career diploma" [...]

The post [Louisiana Jump Starts career tech ed](#) appeared first on [Community College Spotlight](#).

[Universities with 10 largest endowments raise tuition for low income students more than for high income students](#)

This week of March 10, 2014, I was playing around with a new data tool, Tuition Tracker, produced by Holly Hacker of the Dallas Morning News and my Hechinger Report colleague Jon Marcus. The tool allows anyone to see the actual tuition charged to students of different income groups at every college and university in [...]

The post [Universities with 10 largest endowments raise tuition for low income students more than for high income students](#) appeared first on [Hechinger Report](#).

[Not ready for college: Will Common Core help?](#)

Washington state hopes the switch to Common Core standards will cut the college remediation rate, reports the Seattle Times. A majority of community college students fail college placement tests, especially in math. The new standards claim to prepare students for college and careers. The Washington Student Achievement Council, a new state agency, wants to test 11th [...]

The post [Not ready for college: Will Common Core help?](#) appeared first on [Community College Spotlight](#).

[What do teachers want even more than new technology? Training on how to use it](#)

Austin, TX. – With apps for everything from annotating poetry to understanding literature through hip hop, it might have seemed teachers in attendance at the sprawling South by Southwest.edu (SXSW) festival last week were hungry for new tools and technology. After all, a dizzying menu of new classroom technology prevailed; there was even an interactive [...]

The post [What do teachers want even more than new technology? Training on how to use it](#) appeared first on [Hechinger Report](#).

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