

Late Testimony

TESTIMONY for the Hawai'i State Board of Education
Student Achievement Committee, Tues. Sept. 6, 2016 10:00 am

Agenda item: Standards-based education, including assessment

Dear Chairman Mr. Williams and members of the committee,

My name is Mireille Ellsworth, and I have been teaching English at Waiakea High School in Hilo for 12 years. I would like to provide input on how standards-based education and the Educator Effectiveness System affect student achievement and how an amendment to Board Policy 203-4 to eliminate the "Student Learning and Growth" component of the EES is necessary.

SLOs are time-consuming, negatively affect student achievement, and are legal liability to the Department as well as to the Board.

How Are Psychic Abilities a Measure of Teacher Quality?

The procedure for doing SLOs is that a teacher selects a class and a standard, then he or she must create a pre-assessment to evaluate students on the standard chosen. Next, the teacher must gather at least two types of data on each student in order to PREDICT how each of these students will do on a final teacher-created assessment. If the teacher does not predict correctly, then that teacher is marked lower on EES. Never have I understood how being psychic is an indication of good teaching.

The Pygmalion Effect

The troublesome part is that teachers who do not attain an "Effective" rating do not receive pay increases or bonuses. Teachers who have been properly educated know about the Pygmalion effect, that is, students perform better when teachers have high expectations of them. In fact, the whole push for establishing standards is based on this simple concept! But the lowest paid teachers in the nation, that is, teachers in Hawai'i's public schools, are put in the position of choosing between best practices and risking their chances of getting a raise (that they so desperately need to survive). This is not right. In order to prove themselves, teachers cannot set high expectations because if students fall short, teachers lose money.

If I have students with learning disabilities, and we're talking diagnosed dyslexia, attention deficit disorders, and other challenges, I am setting myself up for failure on my evaluation if I set high expectations for these students. Yet the Pygmalion effect tells me having high expectations is a great way to increase these students' levels of achievement. There is a clear disconnect in best practices here. What a horrible dilemma to put our teachers through! To actually put in my professional record that I have less than high expectations for certain students is the opposite from what standards-based education is trying to achieve! Is this the best way to improve teacher quality in Hawai'i? It clearly is NOT!

SLOs Are a Risk Legally

SLOs are also a violation of our present contract. It never specifies that SLOs must be a part of a teacher's evaluation, but it DOES specify that the measures must be valid and reliable. Why would the Board risk lawsuits when teachers are denied pay because of a poorly designed, invalid, and unreliable component to the evaluation system? No one wants to be involved in a lawsuit, but there is absolutely no evidence that supports the use of SLOs in teacher evaluations. In fact, in my written testimony, I have provided the most recent sources showing that SLOs are impossible to make valid and reliable!

References to places in the HSTA Bargaining Unit 05 contract:

See page 104 "Evaluation systems must be...validated" and "The evaluation design must include multiple, valid measures." Also, on page 109 "The Hawaii Department of Education (Department) and Association agree to form a joint committee that shall review the design, validity, and reliability of the performance evaluation system."

According to the Reform Support Network, a company that was created because of the mandates of Race to the Top to help states set up SLOs as a measure of teacher and principal quality, they clearly state in their toolkit that SLOs are impossible to consider valid or reliable. This excerpt is directly quoted from their "Toolkit for Implementing High-Quality Student Learning Objectives 2.0" on pages 5-6 published in May 2014 (<https://rtt.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=4504>):

"SLO Challenges

Unlike value-added measures that are standardized and statistically based, teachers write SLOs in most jurisdictions, and they may use different assessments and different growth targets depending on where their students are starting academically. Because of this variability, States and school districts face the challenges of ensuring the quality, rigor and comparability of SLOs across classrooms, districts and entire States.

Yet, States and school districts cannot expect their SLOs to yield the same scientific validity and reliability that value-added measures based on high-quality, standardized State assessments produce. That is simply not possible. Nevertheless, there is strong precedent in other fields for using goal setting in a consistent, credible manner. Employers and employees in many American industries sit down together annually to set objectives and identify the metrics they will use to determine whether they have been met. Employers make decisions about their employees—whether to sign them up for training or to promote them, for instance—based on the results of the objectives. And they do so without using psychometric methods to prove that the metrics are relevant, or that expectations have been met. Still, employees, including teachers, should expect a fair, rigorous and high-quality process of setting objectives and implementing them."

A survey of all academic research done on SLOs for use in teacher evaluation systems was released by the U.S. Department of Education in September of 2013 conducted by Brian Gill, Julie Bruch, and Kevin Booker of Mathematica Policy Research (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED544205.pdf>):

"no studies have looked at SLO reliability...More research is needed as states roll out SLOs as teacher evaluation measures...Until some of the research gaps are filled, districts that intend to use SLOs may want to roll them out for instructional planning before using them in high-stakes teacher evaluations...SLOs are difficult to make valid and reliable."

The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences and REL Mid-Atlantic, Regional Educational Laboratory, and ICF International also put their names on this report.

So I urge the Board to recognize how student achievement is compromised by continuing to use this invalid and unreliable method to evaluate the quality of classroom teachers.

Instead, allow teachers to showcase their strengths and reflect upon areas of improvement in a system of professional collaboration with their administrators and with each other. Give teachers the time they so desperately need to IMPROVE their practice instead of burdening them with pointless tasks, like SLOs, that erode teacher morale and sabotage students. Bring back differentiation and back off on standardization of curriculum which goes against what we know about student engagement.

Teachers need to have flexibility, which is now encouraged in the new federal law for a very good reason. Teachers must be allowed to maximize student engagement by getting to know their students, highlighting their strengths, and then using students' interests to guide them to work on their weaknesses. SLOs are only perpetuating a punishing model of "not reaching goals" instead of a positive, proactive approach. Let's stop this data-driven model which sets our teachers up for failure.

Thank you for your time... Please amend Board Policy 203-4.

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