

Testimony to the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee

Presented by Elizabeth Ross

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Quality**

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Introduction

Good morning. My name is Elizabeth Ross; I am the Managing Director of State Policy at the National Council on Teacher Question (NCTQ). I am particularly pleased to be here to speak with you this morning because I spent my childhood in Roslyn, Pennsylvania, as well as in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where my parents and grandparents currently reside, so I have a particular interest in Pennsylvania schools, teachers, and students. I am also a former third grade teacher, which I offer as part of my introduction today because my classroom experience drives my passion for education and informs my research and policy work at NCTQ.

NCTQ is a non-partisan research and policy organization dedicated to ensuring that every student has access to an effective teacher and every teacher has an opportunity become effective. To advance this vision, our team researches and analyzes state-level policies that greatly influence the health of the teaching profession.

My testimony today concerns two key issues regarding state teacher policy. First, I will provide some background regarding teacher evaluation systems, as well as some context about how such systems are being implemented. Next, I will discuss the extent to which states use graduation rate data as a measure in teacher evaluation systems, as well as standardized, national exam data -- such as the SAT, ACT, NOCTI, and Armed-Services test -- as part of teacher evaluation systems.

Importance and Effectiveness of Teacher Evaluation Systems

Longstanding [research](#) clearly demonstrates that teachers are the most important in-school factor impacting student academic achievement. Evidence demonstrates that a great teacher has the ability to positively influence students' learning and lives in two critical ways: first, by helping students make above-average learning gains in the year in which those students are in that teacher's classroom and then by positively influencing those students' long-term achievements, such as a student's likelihood of attending college and ability to earn a higher salary. Great teaching matters and, as technical advances have enabled researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners to more accurately measure a teacher's contribution to student learning and growth, states have responded by incorporating those measures into formal teacher evaluation systems.

This response has been rapid and sustained. In 2009, 15 states required teacher evaluation systems to include objective measures of student growth; today, 40 states' systems require such measures. It is particularly compelling that a significant majority of states have maintained teacher evaluation systems that include objective measures of student growth in the absence of federal incentives, such as Race to the Top and ESEA flexibility, to do so.

Currently, Pennsylvania is among the significant majority of states implementing a teacher evaluation system that requires objective measures of student growth.

Objective measures of student learning and growth – such as value-added measures, student growth percentiles, value tables, and student learning objectives – provide unique and meaningful information about teacher performance and, as such, should be a substantive component within a multi-measure teacher evaluation system. According to the best-available [research](#), teacher evaluation systems that assign between 33 and 50 percent of the available weight to student growth “achieve more consistency, avoid the risk of encouraging too narrow a focus on any one aspect of teaching, and can support a broader range of learning objectives than measured by a single test.” Accordingly, a system that weights student growth any less than 33 percent fails to correspond to research-based best practices regarding the most appropriate weight for student growth measures within a teacher evaluation system. Currently, Pennsylvania is among the 20 states implementing a system that weights student growth between 33 and 50 percent.

However, ensuring that student growth is weighted at a significant or preponderant level is not necessarily sufficient to ensure that a teacher’s summative – or final -- rating reflects his or her contribution to student learning and growth. Indeed, based on a [recent analysis](#) conducted by NCTQ regarding whether a teacher’s contribution to student growth was adequately reflected in his or her summative evaluation rating, we found that only two states – Indiana and Kentucky -- ensure that a teacher cannot earn a summative rating of effective or higher unless he or she meets student growth goals. This is a surprising finding indicating that many teacher evaluation systems would benefit from additional review and improvement. Specifically, NCTQ recommends that states -- including Pennsylvania -- that do not already have such policies in place, consider implementing policies that would preclude a teacher from earning a summative rating of effective or higher if that teacher is not making the expected contributions to student learning and growth. Such policies would help to ensure that a teacher who is not making the expected contributions to student learning and growth can access the necessary supports in order to improve his or her practice.

Graduation Requirements and Standardized, National Exams as Measures in Teacher Evaluation Systems

Among the 40 states implementing multi-measure teacher evaluation systems that include objective measures of student learning and growth, six states, including Pennsylvania, are implementing systems that may include graduation rate data and that reference specific standardized, national exams. These states are as follows: Pennsylvania, Tennessee, North Dakota, Ohio, Georgia, and Illinois. Although each of these states is implementing a system

that may include graduation rate data or standardized, national exam data among multiple measures, each state incorporates these measures in various ways.

Pennsylvania requires 50 percent of a teacher's summative evaluation score to be based on multiple measures of student achievement. Of this 50 percent, 15 percent must be based on building-level data, 15 percent must be based on teacher-specific data, and 20 percent must be based on locally-developed measures. Graduation rates, along with student performance on assessments, value-added assessment system data, and promotion rates, are one example of building-level data. Standardized national exams, including SAT, ACT, AP, IB, and NOCTI, are specifically provided by Pennsylvania as examples of assessments under the category of student achievement measures. Thus, teacher evaluations in Pennsylvania may include graduation rate data as a component of the building-level data portion of a teacher's evaluation system and must include teacher-specific data, which may include standardized, national exam data.

Tennessee requires, for teachers of tested grades and subjects, that student growth count for 50 percent of the evaluation score. Of this 50 percent, 35 percent must be based on Tennessee's value-added measure – TVAAS – and 15 percent must be based on achievement from one of the following: state assessments; school- or systemwide TVAAS, ACT, SAT, or other assessments; AP or IB suites of assessments; industry certifications; and graduation rates. Tennessee's system further specifies that: “[t]he decision on how to weight the graduation rate as an achievement measure is a local-level decision and administrators and teachers should discuss the weightings.” Accordingly, districts in Tennessee may elect to include graduation rate data and/or standardized, national exam data as 15 percent or less of a teacher's evaluation rating.

North Dakota's teacher evaluation guidelines read: “[a]n adopted or developed teacher evaluation model must incorporate multiple valid measures, which are clearly related to increasing the standards-based teaching competencies, including a meaningful level of student growth, student academic achievement, and school performance.” These multiple measures include, among others, district and school graduation rates and district and school ACT, SAT, and WorkKeys achievement data. Therefore, districts in North Dakota may include district and school graduation rate data, as well as standardized national exam data, among other measures.

Ohio's teacher evaluation system framework does not explicitly mention graduation rates as an evaluation component; however, the Ohio State Department of Education's website includes information about the district-determined component of its teacher evaluation system. On this website, Ohio explicitly provides a link to North Dakota's teacher evaluation guidelines, described above, which specifically include the example of district and school graduation rates

and standardized, national exams. Thus, districts in Ohio may elect to include graduation rate data and standardized, national exam data as an evaluation component.

Georgia's teacher evaluation system specifies that for teachers of non-tested grades and subjects, student growth is comprised of district-determined measures, which include "additional measures identified or developed and implemented by the [district]." Georgia's system further requires that any measure used in teacher evaluation should provide pre- and post-data that can be used to establish targets and determine growth. Accordingly, Georgia's districts may incorporate graduation rates as one among multiple measures if they are calculating growth in graduation rates. Georgia's teacher evaluation system does not specifically reference standardized, national exams.

Finally, the student growth portion of Illinois' teacher evaluation system requires the use of at least two assessments which are categorized as Type I, Type II, and Type III assessments. Examples of Type I assessments include the SAT, ACT, AP, and IB exams. Therefore, teachers in Illinois may be assessed using standardized, national exam data.

Based on our research of the 40 states that are currently implementing teacher evaluation systems that include objective measures of student learning and growth, we found that only Pennsylvania's system explicitly includes reference to the NOCTI career and technical education exam, although other systems, including Tennessee's (described above) include general reference to industry certification exams. Among the states we reviewed, we did not find any examples of teacher evaluation systems that explicitly include reference to the Armed-Services test.

[Research](#) demonstrates that teachers have an impact on graduation rates; however, there are certain technical challenges that must be considered when graduation rate data are included as one among multiple measures in a teacher evaluation system. For example, it may be difficult to disentangle a specific teacher's influence from the influence of state, district, and school initiatives that target students at risk of dropping out, such as alternate assignments and summer school opportunities. Additionally, at the secondary level, almost every student will be taught by multiple teachers, which weakens the "credit" each teacher can claim for each outcome. Furthermore, the gap between when a teacher has a student and when that student should graduate may be several years; any individual teacher could become more effective in that intervening time period.

However, perhaps the most important consideration when implementing a teacher evaluation system that includes graduation rate data as one among multiple measures is whether such a system will have the unintended consequence of discouraging the most effective teachers from teaching in the highest-need schools. Because graduation rate is generally construed as an

achievement or an attainment measure, rather than a growth measure, including it in an evaluation system without guardrails may incentivize an effective teacher to elect to teach in a low-need, high-graduation rate school, rather than in a high-need, low-graduation rate school. This is a serious concern that is worthy of careful consideration and may inadvertently result in a teacher evaluation system that undermines state, district, and school efforts to ensure that historically disadvantaged students have access to the most effective teachers.

Conclusion

In closing, I applaud Pennsylvania for its leadership in implementing a teacher evaluation system that includes, among multiple measures, objective measures of student learning and growth and emphasize the importance of continuing to build on this important work for Pennsylvania's students and schools. I am impressed by Pennsylvania's continued examination of its teacher evaluation system and am confident that this commitment to continuous improvement will help to ensure that every Pennsylvania teacher has the opportunity to become effective and every Pennsylvania student is taught by an effective teacher.

Thank you for your time today. Please know that I look forward to your questions.