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Teachers for Coverups

The Wall Street Journal applauds the L.A. Times's decision to publish evaluations of public school teachers.

The fight for teacher accountability is gaining traction around the country, and the latest evidence is that the unions are objecting to a newspaper bold enough to report . . . the news. That's the story out of Los Angeles, where on Sunday the Los Angeles Times published evaluations of some 6,000 city school teachers based on how well their students performed on standardized tests.

The paper is defending its publication of the database as a public service amid union boycott threats, and rightly so. Since 1990, K-12 education spending has grown by 191% and now consumes more than 40% of the state budget. The Cato Institute reports that L.A. spends almost \$30,000 per pupil, including capital costs for school buildings, yet the high school graduation rate is 40.6%, the second worst among large school districts in the U.S.

After decades of measuring education results only by money spent, with little to show for it, parents are finally looking for an objective measure to judge teacher effectiveness. Taxpayers also deserve to know whether the money they're paying teachers is having any impact on learning or merely financing fat pay and pensions in return for mediocrity. The database generated 230,000 page views within hours of being published on the paper's website, so the public would appear to want this information.

The Times rated teachers using a "value added" analysis that has been popular in education research for years. To account for the fact that children in the same class often start the school year with different abilities, the value-added approach looks at individual student progress from year to year. An instructor is credited or faulted based on how much progress the student makes under that instructor.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten told ABC News that she objects to the Times publishing the database because it's an "unreliable" gauge of teacher effectiveness and shouldn't be used "in isolation of everything else." And the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the local union, is upset enough that it is planning a protest outside of the Times building later this month.

But no one is arguing that student test scores be the sole basis for determining whether a teacher is doing a good job. What proponents, including L.A. school district officials, have said is that value-added assessments should be a part of any evaluation.

Currently, less than 2% of teachers are denied tenure in L.A., and teacher evaluations don't take into account whether students are learning. Ms. Weingarten prefers to continue a system of meaningless teacher assessments that almost never result in an instructor being fired for performance. So she wants to shoot the messenger for telling readers

things they clearly want to know.

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