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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 12/09/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### Opinion: The Teaching Evaluation Gap

Education Week

By: Willis D. Hawley & Jacqueline Jordan Irvine

December 6, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/07/13hawley.h31.html?tkn=OOOF49W3hSreMk7J5jacyr9UIDk%2BE3AdR6u2&cmp=clp-edweek>

Teacher evaluation has, until recently, been a symbolic act largely without meaning or consequence. No longer. Race to the Top requirements call for performance-based pay. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's multi-million-dollar investment to define effective teaching will produce highly specified systems of teacher evaluation. Other reforms tie tenure and leadership roles to measures of teacher effectiveness.

Attention to serious teacher evaluation is long overdue. However, most of the protocols for measuring performance give inadequate attention to teaching practices that are particularly effective with students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. By ignoring these research-based practices, generally called "culturally responsive pedagogy," or CRP, any high-stakes teaching evaluation is likely—unintentionally and ironically—to fail the very students most in need of highly effective teaching.

Current discussions of teacher evaluation often focus on performance as reflected by student test scores or value-added measurement, or VAM. Taken in isolation, VAM, which typically accounts for less than 50 percent of the evaluation, will have little effect in improving teacher performance because it does not measure teaching practices.

In contrast, research shows that well-executed evaluation based on observations of teacher behavior can increase teacher effectiveness. Giving teachers the opportunity to learn how to improve specific practices magnifies the effect. If teaching practices—such as CRP—that have been shown to be important for students from diverse backgrounds are not included or adequately assessed, the achievement of these students will be limited accordingly.

Culturally responsive teachers understand that all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, bring their culturally influenced cognition, behavior, and dispositions to school. For example, ethnically diverse students' mastery of English, pronunciation, vocabulary, and phonology (rhythm, tempo, or pitch) often differ. What is spoken and left unspoken, whether one interrupts, defers to others, or asks direct or indirect questions, can vary importantly from group to group.

Culturally responsive teachers understand how semantics, accents, dialect, and discussion modes affect face-to-face interactions. Similarly, nonverbal communications can raise questions about the cultural meanings of interpersonal space, eye contact, body language, touching, and gestures. Culturally responsive teachers not only understand differences related to race, ethnicity, culture, and language, they treat them as assets upon which to build rather than as deficits to overcome.

Culturally responsive teachers know how to adapt and employ multiple representations of subject-matter knowledge using students' everyday lived experiences. This bridges the gap between students' personal cultural knowledge and the unknown materials and concepts to be mastered. Culturally responsive teachers learn from families and community organizations and use

this knowledge to inform their teaching and help families support their children's education. Culturally responsive teachers, aware that students of color are not mere products of their culture, avoid making generalizations about group behavior or identity. Culturally responsive teachers interact with students as individuals, caring and supporting them while holding high expectations.

Unfortunately, many educators discount the effects of race and ethnicity on student learning. They may find it difficult to understand and respond to cultural differences. Many believe that race is no longer relevant or that paying attention to race is a form of discrimination. Teachers may see poverty as the main challenge, and not focus on their own behaviors or inequitable school policies and practices. The socioeconomically related experiences of students are unquestionably important, but students' race and ethnicity, in addition to their culture and language, are powerful influences on students' learning, independent of their family wealth.

Many dozens of observation protocols exist for evaluating teacher performance. While they differ in emphasis and vocabulary, the best reflect a research-based consensus that learning is influenced significantly by the readiness, beliefs, and prior experiences that students bring to any particular opportunity to learn. But research indicates that excellent teachers can be even better when they artfully employ culturally responsive practices.

Here are six examples, based on research that demonstrates how CRP enhances student learning, of how effective teaching can be measured.

#### • **Learning From Family and Community Engagement**

Teacher interacts frequently with families to inform them about their students' progress and help them support their students' learning. Teacher learns from families about the lived experiences of their students and uses this information in selecting learning resources and adapting instruction.

#### • **Developing Caring Relationships With Students**

Classroom interactions between the teacher and individual students are highly respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and sensitivity to students' cultures and levels of development. Teacher holds high expectations for all students and provides needed support. While recognizing the importance of students' racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, teacher avoids stereotypes.

#### • **Engaging and Motivating Students**

Learning activities build on the lived experiences of diverse learners and support instructional outcomes. Teacher engages students in high-level cognitive activities that are differentiated, as appropriate, for individual learners. Teacher takes into account differences in semantics, accents, dialects, and language facility, as well as differences in student responsiveness to different types of rewards for high achievement.

#### • **Assessing Student Performance**

Assessments are based on a variety of measures of student learning that take into account differences in students' cultural experiences and language facility. Attention is paid to the possibility that students' performance will be based on their confidence about doing well, rather than their actual knowledge of the content being assessed.

#### • **Grouping Students for Instruction**

Various grouping strategies are flexibly used. Groups based on prior achievement are used sparingly and for specific purposes. Racially and ethnically homogeneous grouping is minimized, and student differences in readiness to contribute to group learning are taken into account.

#### • **Selecting and Effectively Using Learning Resources**

Learning resources engage all students in higher-order intellectual challenges. They incorporate a variety of materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the school, the community, the nation, and the world.

The measures identified here for assessing culturally responsive teaching describe the practice of all effective teachers, regardless of the characteristics of their students. All students bring their race, ethnicity, culture, and language facility with them to school. But these characteristics are not equally relevant to the learning opportunities of all students or to educators' dispositions about, and understandings of, student behavior and readiness to learn. Because of their family histories, the racially isolated character of their communities, and the likelihood that their skin color has resulted in subtle or overt discrimination that has influenced their lives, the experiences of most students of color are often different from those of most white students.

It is essential to include explicit measures of CRP throughout teacher-evaluation programs. The specific measures (i.e., rubrics) in evaluation instruments will become the accepted definitions of effective teaching. If culturally responsive practices are not explicitly included, or CRP is referred to only vaguely, we should not expect to see improvements in teacher capacity to meet the particular needs of students from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Moreover, if exceptional effectiveness can be achieved and rewarded without expertise in CRP, teachers seeking to improve will not be motivated or get the support they need to develop culturally responsive expertise.

Students from diverse backgrounds need the opportunity to learn from highly effective teachers who have the capacity for CRP in

their repertoires of professional expertise. Unless CRP becomes an essential part of the teacher evaluation process as well as the training and professional development of all teachers, it is likely that closing the achievement gap will continue to be our greatest educational challenge.

*Willis D. Hawley is a professor emeritus of education and public policy at the University of Maryland and the director of the Teaching Diverse Students Initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center, in Montgomery, Ala. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine is the Charles Howard Candler professor emerita of urban education at Emory University, in Atlanta.*

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## NEA Stakes a Claim in Teacher Effectiveness Debate

Education Week

By: Liana Heitin

December 8, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching\\_now/2011/12/nea\\_stakes\\_a\\_claim\\_in\\_teacher\\_effectiveness\\_debate.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2011/12/nea_stakes_a_claim_in_teacher_effectiveness_debate.html)

A National Education Association commission issued a report today with specific recommendations for upping pre-service requirements, establishing career paths for teachers, and developing new evaluation systems.

[The commission](#), assembled last summer by NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, was charged with examining options and making recommendations about how to help the union promote effective teaching practices.

At a press event this morning, Van Roekel promised that his union would begin a number of new initiatives based on the commission's findings—though how much sway the pronouncement will have on state and local affiliates has yet to be determined.

In a prepared statement, Van Roekel said NEA will support national standards for teacher preparation and licensing. All teacher candidates should have one full year of teaching residency, and pass [a performance-based assessment](#) before entering the classroom.

The NEA has supported teacher residency programs in the past, but has not specifically called for all teacher education programs to embrace them. It has long spoken out against alternative-certification routes that permit teachers to learn on the job without a supervised student-teaching experience.

Van Roekel called specifically for the implementation of 50 new residency programs and adoption of performance assessments in at least 10 state licensure systems.

Van Roekel also said NEA would support a career ladder for teachers, with steps including Novice, Professional, and Master Teacher. Those in leadership roles would be evaluated less frequently and earn a higher salary in exchange for working longer hours, mentoring colleagues, and taking on more challenging teaching assignments. In addition, Van Roekel said NEA will help interested affiliates adopt peer-assistance and -review teacher evaluation programs.

Career ladders are permissible under NEA policies, but for a decade, the union opposed nearly all differentiated-compensation programs. That prohibition, [listed in resolution F-10](#), was [removed](#) during the union's Representative Assembly in 2011.

The resolution still opposes linking teacher evaluation to additional compensation. One of the recommendations in the Commission's report suggests linking peer review to higher salaries; it was not immediately clear whether the national union will seek to alter this resolution.

Van Roekel's statement did not mention the role of test scores in teacher evaluations. At its Representative Assembly in 2011, the union [opened the door to linking the two](#), but said [current tests are not high-quality enough](#).

The commission report, meanwhile, says teacher should be able to produce student learning outcomes as measured by "classroom, school, district, or state assessments" as evidence of their effectiveness.

Though billed as an independent body, many of the 21 educators and academics chosen to sit on the commission [have held leadership positions within NEA affiliates](#). That said, the commission was provided assistance by an advisory committee, including Tim Daly, president of the New Teacher Project, and Frederick Hess, director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute. Both of them have disputed NEA's positions on teacher policy in the past.

*Stephen Sawchuk contributed.*

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## Most Teachers See the Curriculum Narrowing, Survey Finds

Education Week

By: Erik Robelen

December 8, 2011

You've heard it before, and now a new set of survey results drives the point home: Most teachers believe that in the era of high-stakes testing in math and English/language arts, other important subjects are getting pushed out of the classroom.

At the same time, nearly half of those polled believe the extra focus on math and English is helping to boost students' "skills and knowledge" in one or both subjects.

The [results](#) released today show that about two-thirds of the 1,001 public school teachers surveyed said disciplines such as art, science, and social studies are getting crowded out of the school day. The national survey of a random sample of educators was commissioned by [Common Core](#), a Washington-based research and advocacy group that has long raised concerns about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on the curriculum.

Nearly all of the teachers who see time for English and math pushing other subjects aside say the main reason is state tests. In fact, 60 percent say their school is devoting more time in recent years to test-taking skills. And, the extra time for English and math is not simply for struggling students, but affects all students, conclude 77 percent of respondents.

"During the past decade, our public schools have focused—almost exclusively—on reading and math instruction" in an effort to make "adequate yearly progress" under No Child Left Behind, said Lynn Munson, the president and executive director of Common Core, in a [press release](#). She notes that the federal law "clearly identifies our 'core curriculum' as reading, math, science, social studies, and even the arts," but says many of these subjects have been "abandoned."

"As a result, we are denying our students the complete education they deserve and the law demands," she said.

That said, a lot of the teachers surveyed do seem to perceive some benefit from the additional time for English and math. Nearly half (46 percent) said students' "skills and knowledge" have improved in one or both subjects as a result, while 32 percent disagreed and 22 percent were not sure.

The survey sought to probe more deeply exactly which subjects were taking a hit in the curriculum. To keep things simple, I'll just identify the percent of teachers who said a particular subject is getting LESS time than it used to. Most readers won't be surprised to learn that art and music have been hit the hardest.

- Art: 51 percent say it gets less time.
- Music: 48 percent
- Foreign languages: 40 percent
- Social studies: 36 percent
- Physical education: 33 percent
- Science: 27 percent

I will say that it's a little curious that at least some teachers, though a small minority, say reading and math are actually getting less attention. Of those surveyed, 12 percent said English/language arts was taking a hit, and 10 percent said math.

By the way, science educators may be heartened to know that 24 percent of educators say this subject is getting MORE time, far more than any other subject besides English and math.

You can dive into the complete list of survey questions and responses [here](#).

I'll close with a few other random tidbits:

- 90 percent of high school teachers say the typical student will have read a play by Shakespeare by the time they graduate;
- 71 percent say they will have read the Constitution;
- 92 percent will have learned who fought whom in World War II; and
- 82 percent will have studied the structure of DNA.

Finally, for all you fans of the award-winning children's novel *Charlotte's Web*, rest easy. Almost two-thirds of elementary teachers say a typical student reads it in school.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **New Mexico Voters Strongly Support Creation of Tax-credit Scholarships for Students**

The Sacramento Bee

By: American Federation for Children

December 8, 2011

<http://www.sacbee.com/2011/12/08/4109864/new-mexico-voters-strongly-support.html>

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M., Dec. 8, 2011 -- Survey results show large majorities in favor of creating programs that would allow children to attend schools of their parents' choice

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M., Dec. 8, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- [New Mexico](#) voters strongly support tax-credit scholarships for students to attend the school of their choice, including private schools, parochial schools, and public schools, according to a survey sponsored by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and conducted by Braun Research, Inc.

The American Federation for Children—the nation's voice for school choice—praised the survey, in which registered voters were asked about a legislative proposal to allow individuals and corporations to receive [tax credits](#) for donating to scholarship funds for New Mexico students. The scholarship funds would then create scholarships for students who want to go to schools better suited to their needs.

Supporters of the tax-credit scholarship bills have advocated on behalf of special needs students and low income students, in the hope that the scholarships will help them find schools better suited to their individual challenges. Last year, over 120,000 students were enrolled in nine different scholarship tax credit programs nationwide.

"These programs help reduce the [dropout rate](#) by getting kids out of failing situations and into schools that can help them succeed and, ultimately, graduate in higher numbers," said Malcom Glenn, the National Communications Director at the American Federation for Children. "The voters of New Mexico have made clear that they're staunchly behind creating a scholarship tax credit program to give children the opportunities they deserve."

In addition, special needs students could use the scholarships to attend schools that better suit their needs. A total of 77 percent of New Mexico voters support a tax-credit scholarship system for special needs students (48 percent strongly favorable, 29 percent somewhat favorable). One such program has existed in Arizona since 2009.

On the question of creating a [scholarship fund](#) using tax credits for low- and middle-income students, 62 percent of registered voters either strongly favor (23 percent) or somewhat favor (39 percent) a tax-credit scholarship program for New Mexico students.

Two scholarship tax credit bills were introduced in the Senate last session. Both the Equal Opportunity Scholarship Act and the Special Needs Student Scholarship Act failed to emerge from the Senate and House Education Committee. Similar bills will be presented in early 2012 at the start of the next session.

The poll, conducted September 12-18, 2011, surveyed 808 registered voters via telephone.

SOURCE American Federation for Children

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## **Nevada: Students with limited English skills pose challenge for high school**

The Las Vegas Sun

By: Paul Takahashi

December 9, 2011

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2011/dec/09/students-limited-english-skills/>

*This is another in a yearlong series of stories tracking Clark County School District's efforts to turn around five failing schools.*

Edgar Acosta faces a daunting task as a teacher charged with improving reading test scores among some of the most challenging students in Clark County. They're the ones who don't speak English at home.

For the past two years, the remedial English teacher has worked day and night with immigrant children and their parents from mainly Latin American countries, helping them master a new language and adapt to a different country.

It's a Sisyphean endeavor for Acosta's Western High School, a turnaround school with one of the largest populations in the valley of students who are Hispanic and categorized as "English Language Learners."

The once homogeneous high school experienced a dramatic demographic shift as the nation's foreign-born population tripled in the past three decades. Earlier this year, Hispanics became the largest student group in Nevada, creating a greater sense of urgency for English teachers like Acosta.

Nevada's low education statistics are sobering, he says, but even grimmer for its Hispanic students, less than a third of whom graduated in 2008, according to Education Week. At Western, the need to reach out to Latinos — who represent 65 percent of the entire student body — has become a necessity, he says.

“It’s very easy for this population to fall through the cracks,” Acosta says. “We want to make sure they have the opportunity to do what they intended to do when they came here.”

...

As a turnaround school, Western received nearly a million dollars in federal stimulus funding this year to implement a bevy of changes — from starting a new math and science academy to replacing half of its staff.

The catch? Western must improve its graduation rate and test scores, which are among the lowest in the county. The key to turning around Western’s test scores is helping students who are learning English. They account for nearly a quarter of the student body.

They are usually foreign-born students who take English as a Second Language classes. They are the fastest growing segment of the student population and comprise about 10 percent of the nation’s K-12 enrollment, according to the National Council of Teachers of English.

Although there is a tendency to lump together all English-learning students, they bring different cultures and varying degrees of educational attainment to Western.

This diversity presents a unique challenge for teachers. Some students adapt more easily to a new language and culture, while others find it more difficult, whether it’s because of socioeconomic factors or cultural differences.

“Some students come here with very little schooling,” Acosta says. “Some kids are raised on a farm and it takes a lot longer to get them up to speed. That’s a big problem.”

Complicating matters is funding for English-language teachers like Acosta. Amid the economic recession, the School District cut those jobs back, raising class sizes.

“We’re cutting those positions at precisely the moment in time there’s a spike in that student population,” Gary Peck, executive director of the Nevada State Education Association, said at an education town hall last month. “I’m deeply troubled by all of that because of the implications it has on our state and our ability to compete in the global economy.”

...

Regardless of the highly politicized debate surrounding immigration and despite the budget cuts to English-language instruction, Acosta is focused on one goal: Get his students to graduate and become productive members in a city decimated by the worst recession since the Great Depression.

“I don’t care what country you’re from,” he says of his students. “As a teacher, my goal is to get kids to do better in school.”

For Acosta, this challenge is all too familiar. The 14-year veteran teacher was born in California to Mexican immigrants who knew little English. In the 1970s — when Acosta was growing up — there were no programs to help English-deficient students catch up, he said.

“I was basically thrown to the wolves,” he said. “I learned English through osmosis.”

When he was a teenager, Acosta spent a summer helping his construction manager father build parking garages in San Francisco.

“After mixing cement all summer, I knew I didn’t want to be in construction,” he said. “I told myself, ‘I’ll go to college.’”

He graduated from Pepperdine University near Los Angeles and now hopes to instill the same drive in his students. He fears what will happen to them if they drop out, or fail to learn English by the time they graduate.

“Reading is an important skill,” he says. “If you don’t know how to read, it knocks you out of a lot of jobs.”

...

On a recent morning, Acosta walks around a small group of students perched on desks pushed together in the middle of his classroom. He peers over students’ shoulders at the textbook they are reading aloud from.

“Maribel, traduce por favor,” Acosta tells a student. “Strange. Como es en Español?”

The girl mumbles its definition.

“Right,” says Acosta, who seamlessly shifts from speaking in English to Spanish and back again. “Something is strange when it’s different from what you’re used to.”

Try, try, try, he tells a Cuban boy with a heavy Spanish accent who is struggling to pronounce the word, "island" while reading another passage. "It's eye-land, not is-land," he says. "El 's' es silencio."

A girl on a nearby computer is stumped on a question, and the software won't let her go on. Acosta rushes over to give her a hint. He notices a student on another computer who is wearing his hood in violation of the dress code. "Take your hood off," he tells him.

A few minutes later, a boy walks into the class late with a note. Again, Acosta's lesson is paused.

"It's hard to give everyone individual attention," he says with a sigh. "But this is better than nothing."

One year, that's all these students get in Acosta's class. Afterward, they are shuffled off to regular and remedial classes, mixed in with native English speakers where it may be easier to fall behind without specialized instruction and engagement.

Time is ticking.

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## **A Fourth Education Option in Georgia**

SuwaneePatch

By: Melanie Fleury

December 8, 2011

<http://suwanee.patch.com/articles/a-fourth-schooling-option>

Perhaps you have been thinking about homeschooling but are worried that you don't have or don't know where to find resources. Maybe your child needs special accommodations or you want the help of a teacher when needed. Private school may be too expensive, public school may not have worked for your child, and homeschool may scare you. Whatever the case, there is a fourth option available in the state of Georgia: online schooling.

In Georgia, there are two online school options available that are considered "public school." That means that they are funded by the state and your child is enrolled as a public school student. Curriculum is provided, teachers offer online lessons and support, and homework is often mailed or scanned in for teacher grading.

As a public school, students will have to take tests that are mandated by the state of Georgia, like the CRCT, but for most of the year they are at home learning with parent or other learning coach and online access to teachers.

Georgia Cyber Academy has been around for several years. Most teachers are located around Georgia and work from home offices. The curriculum provider is K12.com. For more information visit [www.k12.com/gca](http://www.k12.com/gca).

Georgia Connections Academy, GACA, is a new school that just opened this fall. With less than 900 students currently enrolled, it is still small but is looking to expand in the following years. For more information visit [www.connectionsacademy.com](http://www.connectionsacademy.com)

Both choices offer a homeschool type learning while still allowing parents to have access to public school resources.

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