

Use student data in evaluations

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Oregon schools should be a great place to learn and a great place to be taught. To get there, Oregon needs to evaluate and compensate its teachers based on more than years of service and degrees held. Teachers need to be judged on how well they teach.

Senate Bill 290 would nudge Oregon in the right direction. The bill requires the State Board of Education to develop statewide performance standards to determine teacher and administrator effectiveness. The standards must include student performance data, and may include things like graduation rates and attendance. Each school district could customize how the standards were used, although they would have to include the standards.

It's somewhat surprising that the state's teachers union, the Oregon Education Association, has not opposed the bill.

"Our members are hungry to be treated as professionals, paid as professionals and have real professional career paths," Jeston Black of the OEA said in legislative testimony. That's no endorsement. It's also not outright opposition.

That's because the bill does not essentially conflict with the OEA's position. The OEA has been skeptical of basing teacher pay and evaluations on student test data. It argues in a "fact sheet" that student test data can be used to provide useful feedback, and "teachers can then be later evaluated based on the growth and/or improvement of their practice, skills, and knowledge — not student learning data."

If the bill is passed, it may be that the standards customized by school districts will be toothless on student test data. While it would be foolish to base pay and evaluations only on student test data, it would be equally foolish not to give the data serious weight.

Using student data is not to punish teachers and administrators. It helps them understand where they are achieving and where they are not. And what better predictor is there of future performance in the classroom than past performance?

It's not unfair to use student data. It's unfair to students not to.

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