

Myths & Facts about Value-Added Analysis

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MYTHS

FACTS

“Value-added isn’t fair to teachers who work in high-need schools, where students tend to lag far behind academically.”

Value-added controls for students’ past academic performance and demographic factors.¹ It considers the progress students make over the course of the year instead of a single score on a single day, and it accounts for factors like a student’s poverty level or class size. That means teachers get the credit they deserve for helping all their students improve—even those who start the year far behind grade level—and aren’t penalized for the effects of factors beyond their control.

“Value-added scores are **too volatile** from year-to-year to be trusted.”

Value-added scores are about as stable as batting averages in baseball and other widely-accepted performance measures.² It’s true that a teacher’s value-added score could change from year to year. Teachers aren’t equally effective with every class, and any measure has some degree of uncertainty. However, teachers who earn very high value-added scores early in their career rarely go on to earn low scores later, and vice versa.³ No single measure of performance is reliable in isolation, but value-added provides objective information to support or act as a check against classroom observations.

“There’s no research behind value-added.”

Value-added is the product of nearly three decades of research by leading academics and economists. Its use by school districts dates back to the early 1990s.⁴ Many researchers have specifically endorsed including value-added in teacher evaluations. For example, six leading experts from Stanford, Dartmouth and the University of Chicago wrote last year that “value-added has an important role to play in teacher evaluation systems.”⁵

“Using value-added means that teachers will be evaluated based **solely on standardized test scores.**”

Evaluations that include value-added also use other measures of teacher performance, such as classroom observations. Like a baseball player’s batting average, value-added is a telling detail, but it doesn’t tell the whole story—no single measure can. That’s why no states or school districts evaluate teachers based solely on value-added scores.⁶ Every evaluation system that includes value-added also uses other measures.

“Value-added is useless because it’s **imperfect**—it has a margin of error.”

Measures of teacher performance don’t have to be perfect to be useful. No measure of teacher performance is perfect, and value-added is no exception. However, it provides crucial information on how well teachers are doing at their most important job: helping students learn. Used alongside classroom observations and other indicators, it can paint a much clearer picture of teacher performance than most current evaluation systems, which rate 99% of teachers “satisfactory” regardless of how much their students learn.⁷

¹ Ballou, Sanders & Wright (2004). *Controlling for Student Background in Value-Added Assessment of Teachers*. Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics.

² Glazerman, Loeb, Goldhaber, et al. (2010). *Evaluating Teachers: The Important Role of Value-Added*. Brookings Institution.

³ McCaffrey, Sass, Lockwood & Mihaly (2009). *The Inter-Temporal Variability of Teacher Effect Estimates*. National Center on Performance Incentives.

⁴ Sanders & Horn (1998). *Research Findings from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) Database: Implications for Educational Evaluation and Research*. Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education.

⁵ Glazerman, Loeb, Goldhaber, et al. (2010). *Evaluating Teachers: The Important Role of Value-Added*. Brookings Institution.

⁶ National Council on Teacher Quality (2010). *State of the States*.

⁷ Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling (2009). *The Widget Effect*. The New Teacher Project.