



A Union of Professionals



IMPACT Flaws Affect Teachers, Students and Parents

Newly reported mathematical errors in the calculations of D.C. public school teachers' IMPACT scores call the entire teacher evaluation system into question.

BACKGROUND

Over the objections of parents and teachers, former District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Chancellor Michelle Rhee instituted IMPACT, a teacher evaluation system that relies heavily on standardized test scores. The Washington Teachers' Union negotiated checks and balances in the contract that mitigate some of the harm caused by IMPACT, but teachers' input is limited by a District law that gives the chancellor control over teacher evaluations. Chancellor Kaya Henderson has modified IMPACT to make it *somewhat* less dependent on test scores. However, IMPACT remains an arbitrary and fundamentally flawed formula, and Henderson continues to use it to make decisions about teacher pay and teacher firings.

Now DCPS is telling us there are two different errors in the way the District has calculated IMPACT scores. Some teachers who got high scores weren't that good, and some teachers who received low scores weren't that bad. In other words, we now know that IMPACT's flaws are even worse than we feared. As AFT President Randi Weingarten said following the revelation of these miscalculations, it should be clear to all now that you can't simply take data, apply an algorithm, and use whatever pops out of a black box to judge teachers, students and our schools.

WHY THIS MATTERS

These miscalculations have created a significant problem for everyone in the community—teachers, students and parents—because IMPACT scores determine which teachers are retained, rewarded and even fired. Nearly 600 DCPS teachers have been fired in recent years, according to education reporter John Merrow, most because of IMPACT scores. High IMPACT scores can earn teachers a bonus of up to \$25,000, and the annual cost of the program, according to the *Washington Post*, is \$7.2 million. Some teachers' IMPACT scores aren't affected by student test results because their students are in untested grades or subjects. This arithmetic mistake appears to have affected 1 out of 10 teachers whose evaluations include student test results.

By making decisions based on IMPACT scores, Chancellor Henderson is wasting tax dollars and turning teacher quality into a roll of the dice. Roll a six and the teacher gets a bonus, roll a one and the teacher is fired. Either way, your child loses.

THE PATTERN

This is just the latest example of the top-down approach that started under Michelle Rhee, who brazenly ignored the needs and opinions of community members. DCPS needs to listen to parents and teachers, and focus on getting things right from now on.

The "my way or the highway" approach led to mass teacher firings and school closings. We've seen budget miscalculations that led to the firing of hundreds of teachers, and we've seen fake estimates of the costs of closing schools used to justify ripping the heart—the neighborhood schools—out of many of our city's neighborhoods.

Under Rhee and Henderson, the mantra has been, “Trust us, let us worry about the details, and don’t ask questions about how we make decisions.” This latest miscalculation—and the apparent attempt to release the news when parents are focused on the holidays and family get-togethers—shows that DCPS leadership can’t be trusted to make the right decisions.

Releasing bad news at this time of year is a tried-and-true PR trick to bury bad news during the holiday season. Two years ago, after what a *Washington Post* reporter described as “months” of freedom of information requests and “general nagging,” city officials released a report on erasures on student tests—an indicator of cheating. Although the report was dated July 2011, officials delayed the release until New Year’s Eve. This year, the bad news comes just days before Christmas.

THE SOLUTION

DCPS needs to work with teachers and parents—not with technocrats and bean counters—to figure out how we can help provide better schools for all children in D.C.

Ask Chancellor Henderson and Mayor Vincent Gray to change the high-handed way DCPS operates and involve teachers and parents in the decision-making process.

- We deserve to know which teachers were fired or forced out because of these miscalculations.
- We deserve to know which teachers were allowed to remain, or were rewarded, because of these miscalculations.
- Chancellor Henderson needs to investigate the mistakes, address the consequences and take responsibility for the actions that have hurt the quality of teaching in the city.
- Going forward, DCPS has to set up a better, more formal way to work with parents and teachers to develop a better school system and evaluation system to improve teaching and learning in D.C.’s public schools so that we can make sure this doesn’t happen again.

SAVE THE DATE: The Washington Teachers’ Union invites parents and community members to join us in February at our “Getting Teacher Evaluation Right” conference to discuss IMPACT and other issues that affect teacher quality. Details to follow.