Chapter 30
Taken by the Numbers
How Value-Added Measures Distort Our View of Teachers’ Work.

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ABSTRACT
A debate is currently being waged across the United States over the value of teacher experience and education. Multiple states have introduced new methods of calculating teacher pay based on how much growth has occurred on students’ standardized test scores. Survey results from 300 principals illustrate the value of teacher experience and education, questioning the oversimplified view of teacher performance represented only by value-added measures (VAM). Legislators and some VAM researchers have been captivated by the idea of a single metric of teacher effectiveness, viewing VAM as a silver bullet for school reform. However, other than ranking teachers, there is little evidence that VAM supports teacher or school development. Alternative approaches to VAM’s focus on individual teacher performance are considered.

INTRODUCTION
Think about any profession and ask yourself if you believe experience and education add value to its practitioners. Certainly the reflexive and emphatic response is yes. Experience yields a practical knowledge base upon which professionals draw, while advanced education, ideally, offers professionals the newest research and theory and an opportunity to reflect on their experience. For teachers, professionals historically tied to salary schedules, experience and education have been acknowledged and rewarded with increased pay. However, in states across the US, the long-held practice of rewarding experience and advanced education for teachers is being questioned. In states, salary schedules are being rewritten to remove or modify longevity and education incentives and to compensate teachers based on their im-

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pact on student growth on standardized tests. While few would disagree with the premise that teachers should be held accountable for the value they add in classrooms, current debates about value are focused squarely on standardized test results. This redefinition of teacher value has created a seemingly narrow view of the work of teachers. This chapter presents literature on the changing paradigm in teacher pay, historic research efforts to understand what constitutes teacher effectiveness, and a look at the literature surrounding value-added modeling (VAM). In addition, this chapter reports findings from a research study of nearly 300 principals in North Carolina that attempted to identify the broader value added by teachers gaining years of experience and education. Finally, the authors offer suggestions for teacher compensation plans.

A Changing Paradigm

Historically, two core beliefs have underpinned the teaching profession and formed the basis for teacher compensation across the nation. First, experience is beneficial to the development of an individual teacher’s craft and experienced teachers are an important resource to a school. Second, pursuing advanced degrees is an essential way for teachers to expand their knowledge and skills and to ensure that teachers remain current in their field. As Corcoran and Roy (2009) note, “School districts have long paid teachers according to the ‘single salary’ schedule, a fixed-pay schedule based primarily on education and years of experience.” The oft stated benefits of compensating teachers based on experience and advanced education is that it ensures teachers with the same qualifications are paid the same salary regardless of grade level taught, gender or race and “the bases for paying differential salary amounts were objective, measurable and not subject to administrative whim” (Department of Education, 1995).

Questioning the value of teacher experience and advanced education has its roots in the major policy paradigm shift that emerged with the 1983 report issued by the US Department of Education, *A Nation at Risk* (Mehta, 2013). Mehta states that American educational policy was transformed between 1980 and 2001, with standards and accountability rising to the top of the state and federal political agenda; Democrats and Republicans were largely united in these educational reforms. This “powerful paradigm” included several key ideas: “schooling’s economic importance, the need for across-the-board improvement, the responsibility of schools rather than society for tackling the reform challenges, and measurement of success by test scores” (p.314). The main message in short was that the country’s economic viability, and in particular its ability to respond to global changes, depended upon significant improvements in educational performance. The growing emphasis on the connection between the economy and the public education system provided increased opportunities for state legislators’ involvement in educational policy and teachers, supported by teachers’ unions, were often depicted as defenders of the failing status quo (Mehta, 2013).

The increased priority on student performance and test scores, which was highlighted in *A Nation at Risk*, became a central element in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Despite NCLBs commendable focus on the academic achievement of all students, the legislation required a significant increase in annual standardized testing to measure students’ performance. Accountability policies were extended in 2009 with US Department of Education, Race to the Top grants requiring states to measure the impact of individual teachers on their students’ achievements. Thirty states now require that teacher evaluations include evidence of student learning with evaluations affecting teacher compensation, tenure, promotion, and firing decisions.