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Chairman Brenner and members of the Ohio House Education Committee.
Thank you for the opportunity to share information as you consider deliberations around the uses, opportunities, and challenges of value-added analytics.

My name is Jim Mahoney and have served as an educator for over 40 years—first as a teacher, then principal, and superintendent for 15 years, and now as Executive Director of Battelle for Kids for 15 years.

As a school superintendent, I often teased a history teacher who taught in our school district for many years as I said to him, “You don’t really teach history—you just remember it.”

I’d like to remember, if you’ll allow me, the beginnings of value-added analysis in Ohio, which officially began with the adoption of House Bill 3 in August 2003. That particular legislation, supported by every major education and business group in Ohio, called for its inclusive use in the Ohio Accountability System. The use of value-added for improvement and accountability made sense then and still does today.

The unofficial beginning of the use of value-added began in 2001, prior to the federal No Child Left Behind legislation when 42 Ohio districts representing 125,000 urban, rural and suburban students began using value-added on a voluntary basis, from their annual tests, to determine if they could gauge, learn, and improve the progress of their students. This was the first major project of Battelle for Kids.

Our early advocacy of value-added as a growth measure was simply this: You can’t improve on a goal you don’t measure and, worse yet, you can’t improve on one you don’t have. Value-added is not another test. It’s simply a statistical method of measuring the impact we make on academic progress rates of groups of students from year to year.

Ohio adopted the EVAAS method, developed for Tennessee by Dr. William Sanders in 1992, and the only one at the time being used on a statewide basis. Dr. Sanders made many trips to Ohio in those years visiting with legislators and education groups to explain the specifics of his methodology.

I want to explain why, as a superintendent, I was so attracted to value-added methodology and while many my colleagues supported it as well. Take a look at the one-page handout I provided you, and imagine two students pictured in the first chart. Student “Adam” makes progress every year but has not passed the proficiency test. Student “Jacob” has passed the proficiency test but has digressed steadily since the third grade. If these were individual stocks, which one would you want to buy? Measuring progress is the distance between two points; while achievement represents a picture at any one time.

Now look at the chart below. It gives you a picture of both progress and achievement. We clearly have districts that make great progress and have high achievement. I could name several in central Ohio, where kids are clearly above the bar, and still making incredible growth. It's a misnomer to believe that in highly affluent suburban districts kids can't make growth.

The truth is if we're only going to measure achievement we don't need to give tests—we can simply look up zip codes because there's a strong relationship between average family income and student achievement. That has been affirmed over decades of research.

Value-added analysis, even after all these years, continues to have resonance for these reasons:

1. Value-Added is reasonable, fair and sensible. It levels the playing field for all school districts.
2. If you want to improve achievement, ratchet up progress. We've seen in many school systems that year after year, when you ratchet up progress that you eventually ratchet up achievement. It's not reasonable to expect a child to make three years' of math progress when they are three years behind. But those three years can be made up over some reasonable time period.
3. Value-added offers hope and encouragement. Why would anyone want to teach in a school district where there's a disproportionate number of low performing children if the accolades and rewards only go to high achievement? It's about taking kids to higher ground. This measures that journey and fuels hope and encouragement.

To those early adopters we provided training and support so they could use the results for diagnosis that would then change what they might do in a district or in a building. The bridge between conversation and change is capacity. In 2006 we began T-CAP, which was our first large-scale attempt to begin generating teacher reports so they might also learn from classroom reports. In 2009 we began using end of course tests so we could provide value-added reports for high schools and high school departments and teachers. We've identified then, and still do--many high progressing buildings, districts and teachers so that we can learn what works and replicate those practices.

The pushback on value-added often came for its larger use in accountability. Do I think it should count? Yes. Do I think it should be 50% of a teacher's evaluation? No. We turned learning and improvement into judgment and rating. This analytic offers incredible insights, especially when combined with other information about students. We have, in the minds of many educators, turned a tool that they wanted, into a weapon that they fear. The main value of value-added is having a metric that acknowledges growth and uses it to get better so we can identify what works and do more of it.

In 2011, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation asked us to create an independent guide

for education leaders about selecting growth measures. We did that independently and produced a report which was distributed widely to education leaders across the country. The most important factor in deciding a growth measure is deciding the purpose for which you wish to use it. There are many trade-offs for any model. What is unique about SAS EVASS is that the system provides us with robust online reporting at all grade levels, teacher levels, school levels, subject levels, etc., to help us get better

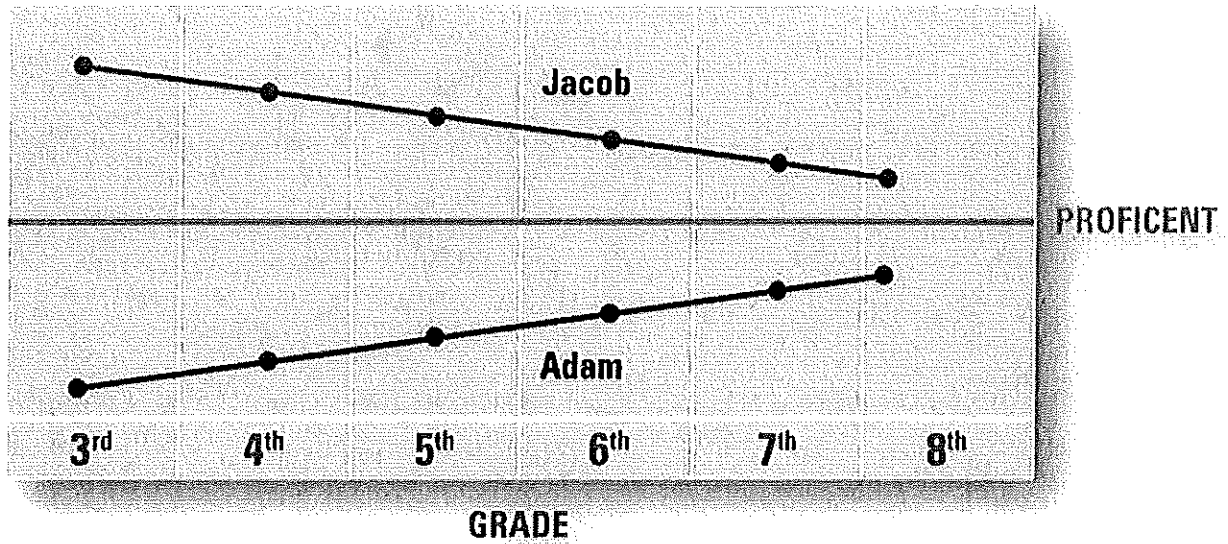
Is value-added analysis a perfect measure? Of course not. Gathered over time it can certainly distinguish extraordinary performance as well as very low performance. But the vast majority of performance is in the middle and simply can't be apportioned out precisely. That's why we need other measures to calibrate impact, and offer other sorts of feedback to teachers. In no instance should educator effectiveness be determined by just one measure, whether that measurement is students' academic growth or the number of degrees a teacher earns.

In a world where we want our information delivered in 140-character tweets, there is a tendency to want to reduce everything to its simplest form—even as something as complex as educating our children. Growing kids academically, emotionally, and socially is incredibly challenging. For example, what good is it that a student makes three years of math progress if they never want to do another math problem? The point is that this is very hard work. The picture of progress in Ohio is especially important for local education leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Being headed in the right direction matters and this measure helps explain it and the current system helps us use it robustly.

Thank you.

The Power of Two: Achievement & Progress

Achievement Only Tells Part of the Story



How do value-added measures support what we know about schools?

