

Ohio pilot program rating teachers with 'value-added' used for districts

Among systems participating statewide, 12 are from Northeast Ohio

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The Green School District in Summit County has a lot of really good teachers. The Perry schools in Lake County have a bunch of bad ones.

Fair or not, judgments like that are inevitable as the *Second of two parts.* Ohio Department of Education begins rating teachers individually using a measure called value-added.

Previously used only to rate entire schools or school districts, value-added is meant to measure whether students learned as much as, more than or less than expected over a year in reading and math in grades four through eight.

This year, the rating for teachers

is only a pilot program with 30 percent of districts statewide participating, including 12 from Northeast Ohio. About a third of the ratings for Green's teachers wound up in the highest of five categories; Perry had more than 40 percent rated in the lowest, even though the district is rated Excellent overall by the state.

Two years from now, value-added ratings by teacher, by name, will be available across the state, and teacher pay could soon be tied to the ratings.

Ohio Department of Education officials cautioned against reading too much into the early results, saying that three years of data is needed before making any judgments. But Matt Cohen, the department's chief research officer,

said a pattern separating good teachers from lesser ones would become clear over time.

"You expect a teacher that is high end one year to tend toward the high end in future years," he said. "But it's probably unfair to assign a rating to a teacher based on one year of value-added data."

Teachers are cautious. Both of Ohio's major teachers unions oppose using value-added as a significant yardstick by which to measure teachers.

Representatives of the Ohio Education Association and the Ohio Federation of Teachers said that value-added is best used as a diagnostic tool to help teachers track progress to see if they should change their approach in the classroom.

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"We don't reject it out of hand," said OFT President Sue Taylor. "It has its place. But more data is needed to accurately say it reflects what students have learned and what teachers have taught."

Randy Flora, director of education policy for the OEA, said people "mischaracterize" value-added as a full representation of teacher performance, when it should be just one of many measures.

Value-added has been part of Ohio's state report cards for schools and districts since 2008. It's also part of a nationwide push to measure students' academic growth instead of their achievement.

Value-added is designed to see how much a student gains over a year relative to his or her starting point, unlike traditional measures that look solely at whether students reach certain benchmarks. It relies on Ohio Achievement Assessment scores for all of a teacher's students in reading and mathematics.

Using those scores, the state creates a baseline of what students know and predicts what they should know in a year. The state then uses the following year's scores to see if the students made the expected progress.

"We're trying to see what impact a teacher had in taking them from one point to the next point," said John White, a senior manager for SAS Inc., the company that Ohio and three other states use to calculate value-added.

This summer, the Ohio legislature ordered the state school board to create a framework for evaluating teachers that uses value-added or other growth measures as 50 percent of a teacher's rating. Some legislators are already advocating making teacher pay dependent on evaluations instead of on their years of experience and college coursework.

Last week, the state released value-added ratings for about 7,500 teachers participating in the pilot project, which leads up to the planned statewide use of the measure in teacher evaluations by 2014. Teachers who teach more than one grade or subject were rated more than once.

Statewide, about 44 percent of

Grading Northeast Ohio teachers

About 7,500 Ohio teachers, in grades four through eight, are participating in a pilot program that assigns them a "value-added" rating based on whether their students learn as much, more, or less than expected in a year. Those participating are from school districts that had already been working with Battelle for Kids to study teacher performance. Roughly 30 percent of Ohio's districts are part of the pilot. The ratings are for reading and math teachers in fourth through eighth grade. This is how teachers from the 12 Northeast Ohio districts participating fared in the rankings.

2011 Value-added data

District	County	Teacher ratings	Effectiveness level percent				
			Least effective	Approaching average	Average	Above average	Most effective
Beachwood	Cuyahoga	33	18.2%	9.1%	48.5%	21.2%	3%
Cleveland Heights-University Heights	Cuyahoga	195	6.7%	17.4%	44.6%	12.8%	18.5%
Cuyahoga Heights	Cuyahoga	22	9.1%	4.5%	68.2%	13.6%	4.5%
Green	Summit	62	6.5%	12.9%	32.3%	14.5%	33.9%
Lorain	Lorain	230	7%	17%	61.7%	11.3%	3%
Mayfield	Cuyahoga	13	0%	15.4%	53.8%	23.1%	7.7%
Mentor	Lake	145	11.7%	15.2%	43.4%	17.9%	11.7%
Olmsted Falls	Cuyahoga	69	8.7%	13%	55.1%	11.6%	11.6%
Painesville	Lake	61	27.9%	24.6%	41%	6.6%	0%
Perry	Lake	24	41.7%	16.7%	20.8%	4.2%	16.7%
Riverside	Lake	92	26.1%	18.5%	39.1%	5.4%	10.9%
Wellington	Lorain	21	19%	9.5%	33.3%	33.3%	4.8%
State totals			11.2%	12.4%	43.9%	15%	12.6%

SOURCE: Ohio Department of Education

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teacher ratings in that pilot were considered average, with about 24 percent in the two categories below that and roughly 32 percent in the two categories above.

Of participating Northeast Ohio districts, Green had the highest percentage of top ratings. Superintendent Michael Nutter said the results don't surprise him and that he's proud of his staff and students for scoring so well.

"I think it's a pretty good indicator," Nutter said. "I think it shows we're pretty spot on as a teaching staff as to where we're headed."

Perry Superintendent Jack Thompson said the number of low-rated teachers was alarming, just like any other results that show schools are not living up to standards. But he cautioned that value-added is just one measure the district is using to improve performance and judge how it's doing. He said he's waiting for more years of data before drawing conclusions.

Beachwood, a high-achieving district, had a large number of average and above-average teachers, but only 3 percent rated "Most Effective" and more than 18 percent were in the lowest category of "Least Effective."

Mayfield, which had far fewer teachers in the pilot, had no

teachers in the bottom category and the Painesville city schools had none in the top. In Painesville, almost 28 percent of ratings were at the bottom.

Beachwood Superintendent Richard Markwardt said he'll use the results to emphasize to his staff that the state will judge them and the district based on both achievement and growth.

"The results convey a powerful message," he said. "High-performing districts like Beachwood are not exempt from the expectation that all students, including the high percentage of students who are accelerated and advanced, should chart significant academic gains. We need to do our best to make sure that happens."

The Ohio Board of Education may vote this week on the easy half of the state teacher evaluation plan — using factors like observations by principals and a teacher's conduct in dealing with parents and the public. But state board member Tom Gunlock, who heads the committee working on the plan, said the controversial half using growth measures like value-added may not be settled until next summer.

That's partly because Ohio currently calculates value-added only for reading and math and for grades four through eight.

That leaves out 70 percent of the state's teachers, who teach other grades or other subjects like social studies, science, music and art. Gunlock said the board is researching other growth measures that districts can use along with value-added by next summer.

Also next summer, value-added scores will be calculated for teachers in half the state's districts, up from the 30 percent this year.

Using measures like value-added to rate teachers has created major controversies in other communities and promises to spark debate here. Teachers union officials raised several issues, some of which are similar to those raised by district officials:

Value-added is based entirely on standardized tests, not a portfolio of work or another type of test that might better reflect a student's knowledge. If Advanced Placement tests include writing samples that can be graded in large numbers, Ohio could include similar ones, the union officials say.

It now measures only two subjects, so teachers get no credit for their work on other subjects like social studies and science.

Conditions in students' lives outside school can affect their performance in class.

Teachers have to figure out what percentage they are responsible for in a student's gains when they teach in teams or have aides or long-term substitutes who share in teaching.

With a smaller number of students per classroom — as opposed to a schoolwide or district measure — there is more chance of error or odd circumstances skewing results for an individual teacher. White from SAS Inc. said the measure is accurate with as few as six students.

The formula to calculate value-added is too complicated for teachers and parents to understand, so they will not trust it.

Former Cleveland State University professor Douglas Clay said the complicated formula and a calculation process that SAS keeps secret are a concern, especially if pay is eventually tied to ratings.

"It will go to court the first time someone is denied a raise," he predicted.

White said a simpler calculation of subtracting students' scores on the state achievement tests from the previous year's scores would be easy to understand, but would be so simplistic it would ignore many factors and misclassify many teachers.

Kenston Superintendent Bob Lee is among the educators who are hesitant about applying value-added to individual teachers because of constant shifting or "stabilization" of test scores by the state and changes to the range of scores that meet, exceed or fall short of the standard. He said most legislators and even fellow superintendents do not understand all those details.

"I'm worried it's being rolled out with very little understanding at the state level of how it behaves," he said.

Clay said value-added is an important step toward recognizing districts and teachers who help students progress, along with pointing out those who do not. But he said Ohio needs to involve teachers and make the formula and process transparent so teachers can understand and trust it.

"You have to measure right, and Ohio is still finding its way," Clay said. "I'm terrified that it's going to be done badly and there will be a reaction against it and we won't go back to it for 20 years. That will be a terrible opportunity lost."