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**EIGHT REASONS NOT TO TIE TEACHER PAY TO
STANDARDIZED TEST RESULTS***A New Issue Brief from The Century Foundation*

New York City, October 29, 2009—Should teachers be judged by how well their students perform on standardized test? The U.S. Department of Education has determined that the answer is “yes.” In the proposed rules for the Race to the Top Fund—the federal program that is seeking to distribute \$4.3 billion in aid to states that are implementing innovative and ambitious plans for increasing student achievement—Education Secretary Arne Duncan insists that in order to receive these funds, states should be ready evaluate and compensate teachers based in part on how well their students perform on standardized tests.

In a new issue brief, *Eight Reasons Not to Tie Teacher Pay to Standardized Test Results* released today by The Century Foundation, Fellow Gordon MacInnes points out why this plan doesn’t make the grade. According to MacInnes, the problems with the plan range from the government’s rationale for the plan, to its ability to implement the rules fairly among states with widely differing educational standards. The eight reasons not to tie teacher pay to standardized test results are:

- Tying test scores to teacher compensation suggests that teachers are holding back on using their experience, expertise, and time because they are not being paid for the extra effort. However the evidence is strong that many teachers school districts, leaders, boards of education, and national and local legislators simply don’t know how improve educational prospects for poor children.
- The standardized tests in most states are poor and so are the standards they are designed to measure.
- The idea of compensating teachers individually in order to differentiate their performance from their school colleagues defeats a principal tenet of good instruction—that teachers need to learn from one another to solve difficult pedagogical challenges.
- Most teachers do not teach a grade or subject that is subject to standardized testing.
- Even reliable standardized tests are valid only when they are used for their intended purposes.
- A key assumption of using test scores to judge teachers is that students are randomly assigned, first, to schools, and, second, to classes. Neither is true.
- State data systems are in their infancy. It turns out that it is harder, is more expensive, and takes longer for states to produce reliable, accurate, and secure longitudinal data on students and teachers than widely assumed.
- The rationale for tying tests to compensation is not clear. One possible reason is to increase the effort, time, and resources devoted to teaching the content and skills to be tested. However, the consensus is very strong that the No Child Left Behind Act’s testing mandate has narrowed instruction too much already at the expense of art, music, social studies, and foreign language instruction. Another reason might be to instill better practice; however there is no evidence that such measures improve instructional practices or student outcomes.

MacInnes writes that Secretary Duncan is correct when he catalogues the weaknesses in the present system of preparing, recruiting, mentoring, retaining, inspiring, retraining, promoting, and dismissing teachers.

However, MacInnes contends, tying teacher compensation to standardized tests is not likely to produce the desired results. MacInnes recommends that the secretary revise the proposed regulations to give emphasis to other ideas—such as supporting high quality preschool that is tied to intensive early literacy in the primary grades—which have documented evidence that they can work today.

[***Eight Reasons Not to Tie Teacher Pay to Standardized Test Results***](#) can be downloaded free of charge from The Century Foundation Web site at www.tcf.org. You can also view other commentary on education issues by Gordon MacInnes [here](#).

About the Author

Gordon A. MacInnes has devoted four decades to government service and leadership on issues related to education, poverty, and urban living. Prior to becoming a fellow at The Century Foundation, he served from 2002 to April 2007 as assistant commissioner for Abbott Implementation for the New Jersey Department of Education, where he oversaw a division that was created to better coordinate the implementation of *Abbott v. Burke*, the nation's most prescriptive and sweeping state supreme court ruling on school finance, and improve academic achievement in the state's poorest cities. From 1998 to 2002, he served as president of Citizens for Better Schools, a New Jersey-based nonprofit organization. He was a member of the New Jersey State Senate from 1994 to 1998. Prior to that, he served in the New Jersey General Assembly and held positions that included chief executive of the New Jersey Network, director of the Fund for New Jersey, a special assistant to New Jersey Governor Richard J. Hughes, special assistant to the New Jersey commissioner of education, deputy director of the White House Task Force on the Cities, and director of program development for United Progress, Inc., the anti-poverty agency for Trenton, New Jersey. MacInnes is the author of *In Plain Sight: Simple, Difficult Lessons from New Jersey's Expensive Effort to Close the Achievement Gap* (a Century Foundation Report, 2009), and "Kids Who Pick the Wrong Parents and Other Victims of Voucher Schemes" (A Twentieth Century Fund/Century Foundation white paper, 1999). MacInnes has a B.A. from Occidental College and an M.P.A. from The Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, where he also served as a visiting senior fellow from 1976 to 1978 and again from 1998 to 1999.

Gordon MacInnes is available for interviews or backgrounders. For more information or to schedule an interview, contact Christy Hicks at hicks@tcf.org or (212) 452-7723.

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