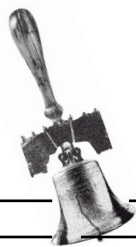


# Education Advocate



Winter Edition 2010  
Vol. 11, No. 1

A Publication of the Commonwealth Education Organization

## This issue...

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## Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS)

The Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) is one of the best tools we as educators, parents and concerned citizens have to understand what is happening in classrooms across the state. Knowing how students of all skill levels are progressing year to year, and then combining that data with the achievement level of those students, provides a complete picture of how teachers, administrators and school boards are performing in their most important task of educating students.

That was my belief over a year ago when I agreed to participate with the PA Department of Education in the production of a video that would introduce school board members across the state to the concept. I still believe that PVAAS is critical. Where the state of Pennsylvania and I differ is in who should receive this information. The Department of Education believes this information is best controlled and held only for administrators, whereas I believe that sharing this information widely amongst the consumers of education (parents, students and tax payers) can only have positive benefits.

Most readers are probably familiar with achievement tests. They measure how students perform against a standard. For example, students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade taking the Pennsylvania state exams would be expected to answer a set number of reading comprehension questions properly as an assessment of the student's ability to read and to apply what they have read. They are then scored and rated as "below basic", "proficient", "advanced" et cetera. All students would take the same exam to assign a score to that student's school based on the number of students who fall into each category. Therefore, a school might have a score showing that 94% of the students are at least proficient in reading.

In contrast, the value-added assessment becomes a more personal evaluation. When students take the same grade-appropriate evaluation each year, it is possible to measure their progress year to year. For example, when a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student takes the standard exam in the seventh

month of the school year and scores "proficient" they might have a score of "3.7". When they take the exam as a 4<sup>th</sup> grader, again in the seventh month of the year, the expectation would be they score a "4.7". This would be considered a year of adequate progress. A score less than "4.7" would suggest the student has not been developing as expected. A score of greater than "4.7" would suggest the student is developing at a rate greater than expected.

This is critical information for all students. For students "in the middle", those students not on individualized education programs (IEPs) and usually the bulk of the classroom, the tool ensures that they are receiving the appropriate education. For those students not achieving a proficient score, this tool is essential for measuring growth year to year, and their ability to catch up. Both of these groups of students will benefit, but to my mind the students who gain the most from PVAAS are the "fastest runners" in the classroom. To the extent they always score in the same category on the achievement tests, "advanced" every year or "proficient" every year; it is very easy to forget about the performance of the best students in the classroom. PVAAS allows us to track the performance of these students and provides an alert when these students are not continuing to grow at the same rate.

PVAAS also allows administrators to peer into the future and identify individual students or groups of students who are at risk of not maintaining performance in the future. This makes PVAAS a critical tool both for maximizing student achievement and for setting students on the road to success.

The PA Department of Education states PVAAS will allow districts to (1) identify the growth of student subgroups; (2) measure the impact of educational practices, curricula and professional development; and (3) make data-driven decisions about where to allocate resources. Translated, your local school district is making decisions about your children's and your grandchildren's future based on the scores they

achieve and are projected to achieve in the future. Pennsylvania is sending tax dollars to school districts based on the information contained in the PVAAS system. So where can you access this critical data for your child? For your child's classroom? For your grandchild's school? For the school district you are moving to next summer?

Unfortunately, the state of Pennsylvania does not believe you need this information. In fact, the PA Department of Education has been preventing the public from accessing this information. PVAAS, in the Department of Education's own words, is the most meaningful way to calculate the influence that districts and schools have on the academic progress of their students. However, the state has argued that parents and taxpayers have no right to see it.

Why would the state not want you to see the most objective and precise method of determining how a school district influences a student's achievement? Well, when we at CEO asked to see the data, we received a whole host of disjointed reasons and excuses, none of which make very much sense and not one that is more important than the need for school accountability.

We could find no merit in their argument about the difficulty of providing data from their administrators-only website. They also argued there is a privacy risk to students even though no individual student information is attached to the data. In addition, they debated there could be *unstated* negative effects of publicizing this data.

We could however, identify a whole host of benefits for Pennsylvanians:

1. Parents can see how individual teachers perform year to year against their peers in the same school and across school districts. This information can only lead to more informed discussions when students are assigned to classrooms over the summer.
2. Taxpayers can see how efficiently tax dollars are being spent on education.
3. Parents can make intelligent decisions as to whether their children are well-served by being in the public school district or whether they should choose alternative education.
4. Incoming residents can make more intelligent decisions about which districts are appropriate for their children.

The bottom line is the state of Pennsylvania has spent millions of dollars to develop this program because they realize how important it could be to our students. In the opinion of the state, the information is in the hands of those folks who need to make what Education Secretary Gerald Zahorchak has called "data-driven decisions"; administrators, teachers and school board members. In my opinion and the opinion of CEO, the list of important decision makers should also include parents, students and taxpayers.

*Article written by Rich Herko, who serves as a board member at CEO. He also is a board member of the Pine-Richland School District.*

\* In Tennessee, Value Added information is provided for public review. Please check out [education-consumers.org](http://education-consumers.org) for more information on this topic.

## You're Teaching My Child What?

Dear CEO Readers,

There is no doubt 2009 was a year to be vigilant. With healthcare, cap and trade, bailouts and budget issues, all of our attention was turned away from education. While our minds were directed elsewhere, Harrisburg and Washington were quietly working on issues that will have a profound impact on our children and their schools.

On December 9, 2009, there was a hearing in Harrisburg on House Bills 1162 and 1163. Very few people were aware of this hearing, and many of you might not be aware of the content of these pieces of legislation. House Bill 1162 "provides for parental notification concerning abstinence-only-until-marriage programs or instruction in public school curricula in grades 6 through 12. Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are instruction that emphasizes abstinence from sex to the *exclusion of all other types of sexual and reproductive health education, particularly regarding safe sex through the use of contraception and condoms for the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. This type of instruction promotes abstinence until marriage and either avoids any discussion about the use of contraceptives and condoms or only reveals failure associated with such use*". Wording

within any legislation can be very telling, and gives a blatant hint to the legislators' feelings about a program.

House Bill 1163 is a compatible piece of legislation which was also initially introduced in April of 2009. The text of this legislation states, "Pennsylvania's schools and other community groups have a responsibility to help ensure youth have *the knowledge and skills necessary to enable them to make responsible life decisions, to protect their sexual and reproductive health, and to prevent unintended pregnancy and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections. Research has identified effective sex education and HIV prevention programs that affect multiple behaviors and achieve positive health impacts. Lowering STI and pregnancy rates may reduce costs for Pennsylvania's health care delivery system.*" It is also very telling to note the very different choice of words in this bill as compared to what was found in House Bill 1162.

At the Commonwealth Education Organization, we found these pieces of legislation very interesting given the topic of our Women's Conference held this past October. Dr. Miriam Grossman, a physician, psychiatrist, and our speaker for the evening had worked at a major university health center and was deeply concerned with the many is-

*Continued on next page*

sues her patients were having directly related to their sexual choices. She saw the fallout from their decisions and realized the level of misinformation they had been receiving. From her experiences she wrote the book, *Unprotected: A Campus Psychiatrist Reveals How Political Correctness Endangers Every Student*. Dr. Grossman discovered the students were receiving better and more accurate information about smoking and cholesterol than they were receiving about sex. She traced back where the students were receiving this information, and in the summer of 2009 released a new book, *You're Teaching My Child What? A Physician Exposes the Lies of Sex Education and How They Harm Your Child*.

In one section of her new book, Dr. Grossman talks about a program that incorporates sex education into the concept of teaching across the curriculum where, "Effective communication is a key goal of effective sexuality education - a goal shared with language arts programs. Why not, then, teach the concepts and values of sexuality by employing such methodologies as reading books, writing poetry, talking with others - in short, by building upon the components of language arts programs? Viewing sexuality as part of life allows us to teach elementary sexuality without concern..." Was the concept of teaching across the curriculum meant to really include the intertwining of academic based subjects with sex education?

Also within the introduction to her new book, Dr. Grossman reveals that "the sex education establishment would like to lull us into thinking they know best - but the epidemic of transmitted infections in young people today is testimony to a system that has gone mad." Shouldn't this prompt us to ask the same question as Dr. Grossman, "You are teaching my child what?"

Unfortunately, due to limited space in this edition of our newsletter, we are unable to address additional relevant information pertaining to a related topic, The "Science of Sex". Dr. Grossman does address this issue in her books. In addition, Dr. Joseph McIlhaney and Dr. Freda McKissic Bush also address this topic in their book, *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children*. This information is important in light of this legislation, and emphasizes information that is not shared with our students. We encourage you to learn more about this subject.

During 2010, the Commonwealth Education Organization (CEO) will continue to monitor programs at both the federal and state level that will impact our children and their schools. It is difficult for many people to have their eyes on what is happening at all levels of government, but CEO will strive to continue to provide you with current and important information related to education. We encourage you to use our website at [www.ceopa.org](http://www.ceopa.org).

Sincerely,

**The CEO Staff**

## Common Core Standards or National Standards

Over the past year, a major education/standards initiative led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief States School Officers has started to attract nationwide attention. As this process moves forward, states will be given an opportunity in January to review the standards and give input prior to acceptance. Issues related to these standards such as assessment, curriculum, professional development and communication with various public communities will eventually be addressed. It appears a state's ability to receive certain federal grants may well hinge on their adoption of the *Common Core Standards*. As our organization becomes more aware of the actual standards, and the related issues such as curriculum and assessment, we will continue to post updated information to our website. We will also be monitoring the standards to determine if this is really a back door effort to create a nationalized system, and will this program really lower or raise the standards for all students. **We would like to refer you to updated News Articles on our website, and the Issues Section of our site, as well as the Newsletter Section at [www.ceopa.org](http://www.ceopa.org).**

**Yes, I want to help! I would like to contribute for the start of 2010. My donation will help in the following areas:**

- Teacher and Staff Professional Development for Private, Parochial and Public Schools
- 8th Grade US History essay contest
- Educational forums and events
- Website and Newsletter
- General Operating Funds

**Gift Amount/Payment**

\$25  \$30  \$50  \$100  Other

You can send a check to 90 Beta Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15238 or pay online using PayPal. Please visit our newly expanded website for a description of all our programs at [www.ceopa.org](http://www.ceopa.org).

**Thanks for your support!**

*CEO is an IRS-approved 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Your donation qualifies as a charitable deduction.*

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## ***2009 Women of Character Awards Update***

On October 27, 2009, the **Commonwealth Education Organization** held its 2<sup>nd</sup> Women of Character Conference. One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of awards given to four women chosen based on the characteristics of a respected mind, nurturing heart, serving hand, and faithful spirit. We would like to again acknowledge the recipients of the awards for 2009.

**Kimberly Geyer** is the founder of the Mars Research and Retrieval Services, and the President of the Mars Area School Board. As a wife and mother, she manages to take time out of her busy schedule to give expert testimony before various committees in Harrisburg related to education issues and programs that will have a profound impact on our schools, our students, our communities, and our state.

**Kathie Ingram** started her career as a registered nurse, but is now the director of the AW Beattie Career Center. The center serves nine school districts within the North Hills of Pittsburgh providing vocational training for the students. In addition to Kathie's responsibilities of working with the various districts, the students and staff, she is also responsible for the oversight of a major renovation project. Kathie is a wife, mother, and grandmother.

**Dr. Pat Mason** started her ministry walking the streets of Pittsburgh preaching where she went. She left to go to Georgia where she continued her ministry working with various groups including counseling at a prison. Now back in Pittsburgh since retiring, she works as a counselor with Twogether Pittsburgh, a federally funded project aimed at strengthening marriages and families in the region. She continues to preach and teach at a program at the YMCA in Penn Hills. Pat is a mother and grandmother.

*A very special recognition was given this year from the Board of the Commonwealth Education Organization (CEO). Because of her many years of continued support of CEO and its work on education issues, **Patricia D. Dolan** was also honored. Mrs. Dolan is a founding member of CEO, and continues to hold the position of Executive Director. Her ongoing efforts permit the Commonwealth Education Organization to continue to provide programs such as the 2009 Women of Character Conference.*