How do you gauge teacher effectiveness? That question faces principals every year as they look to place top-notch instructors in every classroom. Initial findings from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Measure of Effective Teaching (MET) study indicate that teachers’ value-added histories—composite measures based on student test scores and teachers’ perceived ability to present challenging material—are strong indicators of future classroom performance.

The preliminary findings are based on data from five school districts across the country. Using value-added modeling, a team of researchers analyzed the test scores of students from these districts. The modeling aims to attribute gains to specific teachers by taking into account students’ past performance and other factors. The researchers also incorporated results from a Tri-pod survey that asked students to rate teachers’ abilities to emphasize the point of lessons and present material in different ways.

The analysis indicates that value-added histories are predictive of teachers’ future classroom performance. The findings also refute the notion that teachers can boost test scores by “teaching to the test.”

Read the full report, titled “Learning About Teaching,” and learn more about the MET study at www.gatesfoundation.org.

Gaps Might Take Decades to Close

NARROWING ACHIEVEMENT gaps between students of different races and income levels remains a challenge for the U.S. education system. A new report from the Center on Education Policy indicates that under the current pace of progress, it could take decades for lagging students to match the performance of their top-performing counterparts.

Based on a study of more than 40 states, “State Test Score Trends through 2008-09, Part 2: Slow and Uneven Progress in Narrowing Gaps” compares student performance on state tests and state-level results from

**Fast Fact:** Many charter schools are unprepared for leadership turnover; only one-half of respondents reported having succession plans, and many of those plans are weak.


**MY TWO CENTS**

Does your school or district have a policy about staff use of social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)? If so, what restrictions are in place?

Our system does not have an official policy about staff use of social networks. Our system does block Facebook, Twitter, etc., for use on school computers. My unofficial statements to faculty have always been to use good professional judgment when using the sites. It would not be good professional judgment to “friend” a student. Additionally, professional confidential information should never be shared on these sites.

**CATHY VASILE,** Principal, Blossomwood Elementary School, Huntsville, Alabama
the National Assessment of Education Progress. While students from the majority of the states analyzed posted achievement gains and narrowed gaps, the gaps for students of different races, ethnicities, and income levels remain large. The percentage of black students who scored at the proficient level on state tests was 20 to 30 points less than white students and similar gaps exist between Native American students and white students and students from low-income families and more advantaged students.

The authors argue that it is possible to reduce achievement gaps, and they illustrate that gaps between Latino and white students have narrowed at a faster rate than gaps for other groups. But under the current rate of progress, it could take decades to close most of these achievement gaps.

Read the full report, which includes tables with performance trends by state and more detailed overviews of the findings, at www.cep-dc.org.

We are looking at adding a board policy addressing these issues in the near future. We are now working with staff and making them aware of potential problems that can arise from the use of these social networks. We see the good and bad possibilities of these networks.

GARY MELDREM, Assistant Principal, Grinnell Middle School, Grinnell, Iowa

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**Member in the Spotlight**

**CONGRATULATIONS TO** principal Jeff Coulter whose school, Whatcom Middle School in Bellingham, Washington, won the national School Pride Web Competition. The contest awards a needy school with a state-of-the-art computer lab. In November 2009, Whatcom Middle School was destroyed in a fire, losing everything to fire and water damage, including a modern library and up-to-date technology throughout the school. Now when the school reopens in the fall of 2012, it will be outfitted with a new computer lab furnished by the competition.

If you would like to nominate a member who is making local or national news, or has received a unique award or recognition, please submit his or her name to publications@naesp.org.

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**Promising Practice**

**IT IS OUR BELIEF** that if members of our community see what takes place at our school and can be involved in the learning process, then they are more likely to respect the work that we do and support school funding. Grandparents and Special Friends’ Day has now become a tradition at Barlow Park Elementary School and is held on the Friday prior to Mother’s Day. On this day, students invite their grandparents or special friends to join them at school for a part of the day. Teachers plan special lessons and activities to showcase our instructional program and involve visitors. Since this event takes place toward the end of the year, students are often able to take the lead in demonstrating skills they have acquired throughout the year to their guests.

As part of this day, many students are taken out for lunch and our PTO provides snacks for students and guests. Second-grade students are often secured as tour guides to help visitors get to the appropriate classrooms. We typically get more than 400 visitors. Not only do our extended family and community members get a chance to see all that we do to engage our students in the learning process, but they also see firsthand how their tax dollars are used to support their community’s education.

*Myra Misles-Krhin*

Principal, Barlow Park Elementary School  
Ripon, Wisconsin

Learn more promising practices at www.naesp.org/promising-practices.

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**At a Glance**

**ONLY ABOUT ONE-THIRD** of teachers agree strongly that their schools offer them training to help children who have learning disabilities compared with more than half of administrators who feel the same.

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*Fast Fact:*

Many charter schools are unprepared for leadership turnover; only one-half of respondents reported having succession plans, and many of those plans are weak.


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*Read more responses— and submit your own— by visiting the Principals’ Office at www.naesp.org/blog. Click on “My Two Cents.”*

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*SOURCE: 2010 Tremaine Foundation Study on Attitudes About Learning Disabilities*