



## Why The Uproar Over Unjust Teacher Evaluations Is A Sham

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Recently, Sheri Lederman, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, filed a [lawsuit](#) against the New York State Department of Education on the grounds that the metrics used to appraise her performance are fundamentally flawed.

Despite a bevy of sincere accolades from students and parents that stretch the length of her esteemed 17 year career, she was deemed “ineffective” as an educator based on her value-added modeling (VAM) evaluation. This complaint follows three other [lawsuits](#) which evidence mounting resistance among educators to this approach of measuring performance. In response, defenders cite a body of [scientific research](#) that went into developing the assessment protocol.

While critics are undeniably correct about certain fundamental problems with VAM – it does not take a genius to realize that if students get high scores on a test, there is little room for measured growth – teachers’ unmitigated hypocrisy undermines any reason to acknowledge the legitimacy of their grievances.

The central complaint in each of the existing lawsuits challenges the arbitrariness of the ratings. Lederman reasonably asserts that the evaluations are problematic because they are defamatory, impugn reputations, have the potential to adversely impact salary, and are generally demoralization. Overlooked in all of the reporting on these cases is that teachers’ jobs are founded on dispensing precisely this very same kind of injustice, only worse.

The VAM was [conceived](#) by respected education researcher Eric Hanushek working out of Stamford, and the concept was further refined by Richard Murnane of Harvard University. After extensive development, the evaluation process was subjected to a [longitudinal study](#) designed to scrutinize and assess its capacity to identify quality teachers. Regardless of whether these processes are wholly successful, no such evaluation and review process goes into the tests teachers design and impose and their students. The tests that teachers author are not founded on any objective research, especially when [studies](#) show that the very act testing can potentially undermine education.

Even more disturbing is that, unlike the teacher evaluation process, there is no objectivity in the grading process. The teacher grades the tests they create, they know whose work they are reviewing, and their grading metrics do not adhere to any well-defined science-based approach that is open to independent review. For example, a student could be proficient in calculus, but if she misses a class or arrives late, behaves in manner that teacher does not like, has issues at home that distract her during a test, does not raise her hand often enough, is thought to be disruptive, missed a homework assignment, or the teacher simply does not like her, her grade may suffer.

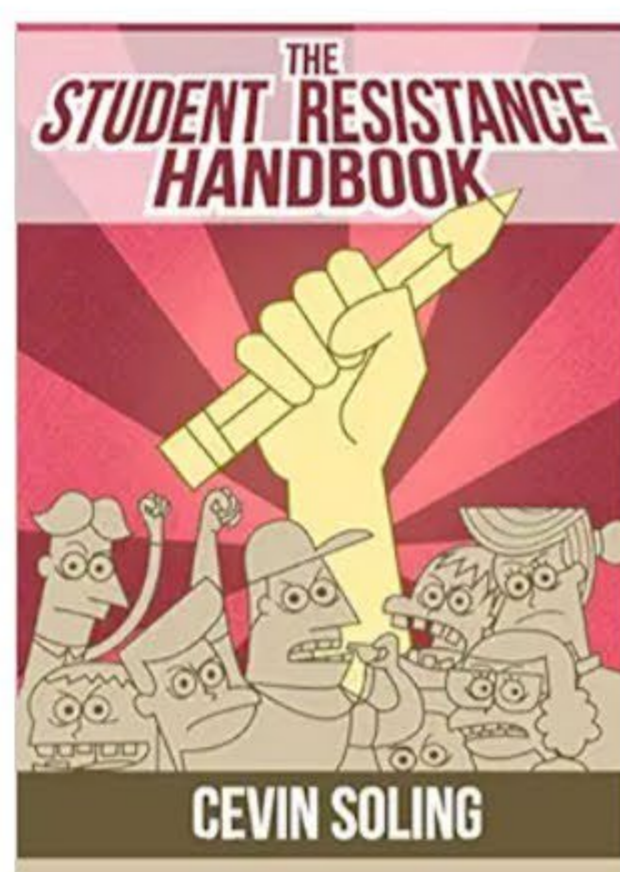
The student’s grade can “legitimately” reveal absolutely nothing about her capacity to understand, perform, and excel at calculus if the teacher capriciously decides to weigh any external factors that the teacher thinks is relevant.

If a student can demonstrate high level proficiency in a subject, yet their skills are not reflected by their grade, should not the student sue their school? Would teachers support this analogous proposition at mitigating the injustice of a flawed assessment? Every objection raised by Lederman applies in this scenario as well.

In addition to having arbitrary evaluative practices foisted upon them, the outcomes for students of unwarranted poor grades are the same – defamation, impugned reputation, potential to impact salary, and general demoralization.

Students routinely have their grades unfairly diminished and one would be hard pressed to find many people who did not feel that in at least one class in their school history that they were treated unjustly. The difference, though, is that students are often barred by state law from suing over these kinds of glaring injustices. For instance, California Education Codes states that the teacher’s grade is final except where there is [“clerical or mechanical mistake, fraud, bad faith, or incompetency.”](#)

There is absolutely no moral reason why society should extend judicial reprieve to a population that flaunts its disregard for even a semblance of equity when it comes to the people they lord over. Rather than address the blatant problems with the VAM, states should instead enact laws that prohibit teachers from suing in response to grossly inappropriate evaluations. For teachers to suffer the humiliating injustice of capricious testing and the degrading consequences is simply the chickens coming home to roost.



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