Growth Modeling and Teacher Quality

In my opinion we have a perfect storm in education. There is political pressure to change education to assure that students are prepared for work or college after high school. There is substantial funding to establish national standards (misleadingly called Common Core State Standards) and what will essentially be national tests.

Research that links teacher evaluation with student performance is gaining credibility, and technology continues to advance to allow longitudinal data analyses. This sets the stage for a coming revolution in education in which the evaluation of teachers is based primarily on large-scale student test performance on common standards.

The current press to tie teacher effectiveness to student learning on standardized tests is ubiquitous. Virginia, for example, has adopted an approach that uses Student Growth Percentiles (SGP). This statistical technique examines progress from the beginning to the end of the year, taking into account historical SOL data.

In a MERC literature review being conducted by Dr. Reardon, issues, trends, and research on growth modeling are examined and summarized, with implications for what will occur here in Virginia. Based on the experience of other states, research, and expert opinion, Dr. Reardon presents information that will be very useful for all of us who are interested in how student growth data can be used appropriately in helping us understand the impact of teachers on student learning and not misused.

I recommend his report (scheduled for release on the MERC website at the end of the summer) to give you insight into this vexing and contentious issue that clearly will be a part of our education system within the next year or two.

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Research in Progress

Currently MERC has two full studies and two reviews of literature in progress:

• Formative Assessment Practices with Benchmark Testing - Phase 2, directed by Lisa Abrams and Jim McMillan. The online survey for this phase has been pilot tested and distributed to the school divisions, with responses due back in late spring. Analyses of the results will be completed in early fall.

• Technology and Online Instruction, directed by Jonathan Becker and Charol Shakeshaft. The pilot tested survey will be distributed statewide as soon as IRB approval is obtained. Results are scheduled for this fall.

• Student Self-Monitoring and Motivation, directed by Sharon Zumbrunn. Dr. Zumbrunn’s review of literature and best practice concerning student engagement with motivation has been initiated, with a report scheduled for this fall.

• Value-Added Teacher Evaluation, directed by Martin Reardon. Dr. Reardon will present his review of literature findings at the June 2nd meeting of the MERC Policy and Planning Council meeting.

Saying Good-bye. . . and Thanks!

After nearly thirty-five years as a public educator and sixteen years as both Hanover County Superintendent, and member of the MERC Policy and Planning Council, Dr. Stewart Roberson is retiring to pursue other interests. Dr. Roberson has served as Chair of the Policy and Planning Council several times and has been an active supporter of MERC’s mission and meetings. His influential involvement with MERC has made a great impact, and we appreciate very much his active engagement. Our best wishes to Stewart for his future - He will be missed!

Likewise, Dr. Winston Odom is retiring after serving eight years as Superintendent of Hopewell City Public Schools, and as a member of our MERC Policy and Planning Council. Dr. Odom has been a strong MERC supporter, and his contributions will be missed. We wish him all the best in his new pursuits.

Welcome New MERC Council Members

We are pleased to announce the appointment of four new MERC Council members. We welcome you and appreciate your participation and support.

• Dr. Traci Teasley, Executive Director of Research & Planning for Chesterfield County Public Schools
• Cheryl Webb, Supervisor of Compensatory Education & Testing for Hopewell Public Schools
• Dr. Dawn Page, Richmond Public Schools School Board Member
• Pam Bell, Executive Director of Elementary Education for Henrico County Public Schools
Eighth Annual MERC Conference

MERC’s eighth annual conference was held at VCU on March 17th, and attended by nearly 100 educators. Dr. Chris Gareis from the College of William and Mary was the keynote speaker and his presentation, Reclaiming the Ancient Art of Assessment, kept the audience engaged. After the opening session there were 12 different presentations in break-out sessions by both educators from MERC’s eight school districts and VCU faculty. At the close of the conference a panel discussion was held by six area principals titled How Good Assessment Improves Student Learning: Views of Principals. For more information, see PowerPoints of presentations on the MERC website.

Keynote speaker, Dr. Chris Gareis from the College of William and Mary.

Photos at left and at right: Breakout Sessions

The Principal Panel, (from left) Sara Calveric, Hanover County Schools; Valerie Wiggins, Colonial Heights Schools; Francie Ball, Goochland County Schools; Lynne Clavion-Prince, Powhatan County
MERC’s WORK

MERC’s WORK is published two times a year.

Director.................................Jim McMillan
Managing Director......................Gwen Hipp
MERC Research Assistants.............Jesse Senechal
and Leigh Pottle

How to Contact MERC

If you would like to participate in a study group, attend a seminar, or receive MERC documents, please contact your school division representative or call or email the MERC office at tel. 804-828-0478, ghipp@vcu.edu (fax: 804-828-0479).

How to Order MERC Reports

Upon completion of a research topic, copies of complete studies are sent to each superintendent’s office and are posted on the MERC website.

Additional copies can be obtained at no cost to members by either calling or emailing the MERC office at 804-828-0478, ghipp@vcu.edu.

See our website at: http://www.soe.vcu.edu/merc/ for accessing completed studies and reviews of literature electronically.