



**Partnership**  
for  
**Music Education**  
**Policy Development**

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**A MICHIGAN THINK TANK**

September 6, 2013

Dear Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness,

The Partnership for Music Education Policy Development (PMEPD) would like to congratulate and thank the MCEE for their work on the recently released “Building an Improvement-Focused System of Educator Evaluation in Michigan.” On behalf of all teachers and students in Michigan, we also applaud you for recognizing arts educators as an important component of the recommendations. The PMEPD has been established for the purpose of reviewing actions by the state, including legislative action, and in particular its impact on music educators in Michigan.

We strongly support many of the committee’s recommendations, including:

- a) The choice of four observation tools (p. 10)
- b) Limiting certification classification (teacher ratings) to three categories (p. 2-3)
- c) Insisting that evaluations are confidential personnel information, and stressing that “the goal is improvement not embarrassment” of teachers (p. 6)
- d) Recommending that there be no connection between evaluation and merit pay (p. 6)
- e) Stating that at least one observation should be by someone who has expertise in the subject matter or the specialized responsibility of the teacher (p. 11)
- f) Offering flexibility with regards to measuring student growth, and suggesting the use of a “suite of tools” (p. 14)

However, as music educators we have the following concerns:

- 1) We would like the committee to place more emphasis on the need for content specialists as qualified peer observers. There are many questions involved in determining the criteria of a qualified peer observer, including training and funding. Although the recommendations have sufficient language regarding the training of administrators and observers, we are concerned whether these evaluation tools and vendor training programs will include sufficient specifics to music and other non-core content areas.
- 2) Though the MCEE recognizes that there are considerable scientific concerns about Value Added Modeling, we have two specific concerns about what the MCEE is proposing.

First, the report states, that “State provided VAM or growth data in core content areas may be used in a teacher’s evaluation using information from that teacher’s students, even if the teacher does not teach in one of the core content areas. This means that teachers may be evaluated, in part, for the learning of their own students, even in subject areas that they do not directly teach. This may be done as long as

the teacher knows that he or she is expected to be contributing to students' growth in core content areas and there is a reasonable connection of the core content to the teacher's actual teaching assignment." (p. 21)

While we as music educators recognize that we are part of a team of educators responsible for educating the whole child, we are unclear about the issues raised in the above statement, specifically:

- How will music educators know of this proposed expectation?
- Who defines the reasonable connection of music to the core content?
- How will the practices of music educators need to change to meet this requirement? Who will train them?

Second, the report further notes that "In order to promote collective work on instruction within school buildings, school-level VAMs may be used for individual teachers' evaluations if there is a reasonable connection of the core content to the teacher's evaluations if there is a reasonable connection of the core content to the teacher's actual teaching assignment. This means that teachers may be evaluated, in part, for the learning of students whom they do not directly teach. However, school-level VAMs may not comprise more than 10% of the individual teacher's student growth component." (p. 21)

This statement is in direct contradiction with the opening statement in the Executive Summary, which states that "the evaluation of teachers' performance is to be composed of evidence about two key aspects of their work: (1) their practice and (2) their students' growth" (p. 1) It is unclear as to how any teacher can improve their practice from the results of students with whom they have had no contact.

Finally, while we recognize the increased reliability of the VAMs, we agree with the majority of educational experts who have pointed out serious concerns with the validity of Value Added Measures. Reliability is only important to the extent that it contributes to the validity, so the fact that these measures are more reliable but less valid is cause for concern.

The Partnership for Music Education Policy Development is interested in assisting the MCEE in further developing the teacher evaluation recommendations so as to strengthen the usefulness of these policies for music teaching and learning at all levels in Michigan. We thank you for your time reading these reactions and hope to have a response from you with regard to our concerns.

Sincerely,



Rick Catherman

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