



Fact Checking the Los Angeles Times' Defense of Its Teacher Rating Reporting

Key Takeaway: A call for more transparency and candor.

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BOULDER, CO (February 17, 2011) – On February 8, 2010 the National Education Policy Center released a reanalysis of findings of the “White Paper” which the Los Angeles Times used to create its teacher ratings and which is the foundation for its reporting on the issue. Notwithstanding the decision of the Times to title its article about the reanalysis, “Separate study confirms many Los Angeles Times findings on teacher effectiveness,” the NEPC publication directly challenged the foundation of the Times’ ratings.

The NEPC reanalysis, [Due Diligence and the Evaluation of Teachers](#), found that the research on which the Times relied was not adequate to validly or reliably produce the teacher ratings it published. The reanalysis found that the Times research could not accurately place a given teacher in a given category. For the past 10 days, the Times has dug in, repeating several arguments to defend its positions regarding its initial publication in 2010 of teaching ratings as well as its recent story about the NEPC report. These arguments are encapsulated in two online postings, one by the Times’ management and one by the Times’ “readers’ representative.”

To correct the errors in the Times recent statements, NEPC has today posted a “Fact Sheet” (<http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/FactSheetTwo.pdf>). This is the second NEPC Fact Sheet; the first addressed inaccuracies and misrepresentations in the Times’ February 7 article about the NEPC study. The new fact sheet details and responds to five contentions made by the Times’ two posts on its website on February 14. Some are simply false; others are vigorous misrepresentations. “Times readers are no doubt confused,” comments NEPC publications director, Alex Molnar. “The waters are now muddied with falsehoods and misdirections. The Times is incorrect in framing the story as an esoteric ‘he said – she said’ spat between experts. This is a framing that lets the Times off the hook for constructing a journalistic project on a faulty social science foundation.”

As explained in the second Fact Sheet, the spat-between-experts argument is essentially that because one value-added model produces one set of rankings and another such model produces a different set, who is to say which expert is right? But it is precisely because the ratings are so unstable and so sensitive to different model choices that the Times should never have published individual rankings of teachers. “NEPC’s researchers have already provided in Due Diligence all of the information necessary to replicate their findings,” Molnar said. “I now call upon the Times to release complete information about the data choices of its researcher as well as the script (programming) files. Further, the Times should provide details of all steps its experts took to ensure the accuracy of the published ratings.”



“This is a question of basic accountability,” said NEPC director Kevin Welner. “It’s unseemly for a news organization to insert itself in the middle of a public policy campaign largely of its own creation, position itself as a champion of openness, and then fail to make critical information about its activities available for public inspection.”

Find the Times August 14, 2010 story here: <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-teachers-value-20100815,0,258862,full.story>

Find the Times February 7, 2011 story here: <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-teacher-study-20110207,0,2144294.story>

Find Due Diligence And The Evaluation Of Teachers here: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/due-diligence>

Find NEPC Fact Sheet #1 here: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/FactSheet.pdf>

Find the Times response to the controversy over its February 7, 2010 story here: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2011/02/times-responds-to-criticism-of-teacher-analysis.html> and <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2011/02/los-angeles-times-stands-by-its-teacher-ratings.html>

Find NEPC Fact Sheet #2 here: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/FactSheetTwo.pdf>

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