

Opinion: Teachers must be evaluated by what students learn

By Doug Lasken and Bill Evers

Students in California public schools are not achieving at the levels they should. Too many students are unprepared for jobs or have to take remedial courses when they start college. In California, we judge student achievement through student scores on statewide tests. These tests assess how much students know about subject-matter content that is specified in an official set of state academic-content standards. Research has long shown that effective teachers are among the best ways to bring up student achievement. But in order to improve teaching effectiveness, it is helpful to know where the challenges are.

We've heard a lot in California recently about the move to factor student test scores from statewide standards-based tests into teacher evaluations. Yet did you know that for more than a decade, it has been the law in California to do just that?

If you are a typical teacher, school administrator, school reformer or parent, you'll be surprised indeed to hear about Education Code 44662. This decade-old law says that the governing board of each school district "shall evaluate and assess" teacher performance, if possible, using the state-adopted academic-content standards "as measured by" state-adopted "criterion referenced" tests. The law says "shall," not "may" – i.e., it is required.

The standards in question are the California Academic Standards, which detail the knowledge and skills that children from kindergarten through high school are supposed to master

at each grade level. Once a year, students in grades two through 11 take the California Standards Tests. These tests measure mastery of the subject-matter content listed in the standards, grading the students' achievement at various performance levels.

And the results of these tests are required by law to be factored into teacher assessment. Yes, that's right: It is already the law that teachers must be evaluated using scores on tests that are standards based and criterion-referenced.

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