



Education Consumers Foundation

Prioritized Teacher Rating System¹

Education Consumers Foundation

www.education-consumers.org

January 10, 2010

One way to include a variety of performance indicators while respecting the primacy of student achievement gain is to use a variant of a rating methodology developed by the nonprofit Education Consumers Foundation (www.education-consumers.org). It assigns teachers a letter grade (A-F) for each performance indicator and then reports these grades as a single multi-letter rating, e.g., AAA (a top-performing teacher in a system that uses 3 indicators).

The first letter grade to the left represents the most important indicator, the second from the left represents the second most important, and so forth.

Given Tennessee's emphasis on student achievement gain, the leftmost letter grade would ideally represent a teacher's TVAAS teacher-effect average (or an alternate achievement gain measure) and the letter grade to its immediate right would represent the next lower priority performance indicator—perhaps the principal's assessment of the teacher's performance. The third echelon indicator, i.e., the third place to the right, might indicate peer ratings of a teacher's performance or some other lower order indicator.

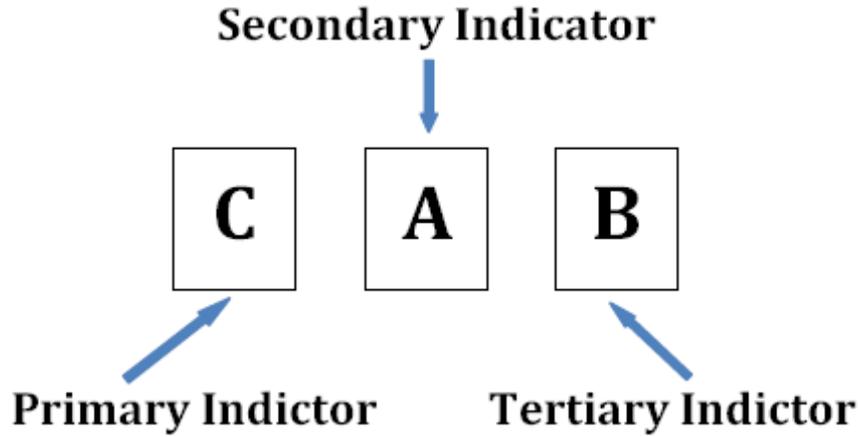
Also, if needed, the ECF methodology permits multiple indicators of equal priority to be combined into a single letter grade. For example, given Tennessee's decision to weight teacher achievement gain 35% and school gain 15%, the first letter grade to the left could be a 35/15 blend of those two indicators.

The great advantage of this system is that it permits the inclusion of an open-ended number of indicators without allowing the more important indicators to be diluted by the less important ones. The first letter grade to the left is always the highest priority indicator and the second from the left is always the second highest priority, etc., no matter what other measures of teacher performance are included in the overall rating scheme.

Another significant advantage is that it assigns teachers an overall rating on which they can be ranked without losing the discrete information about their strengths and weaknesses. With a rating scale comprised of 3 indicators, for example, teacher ratings would range from a highest possible rating of AAA to a low of FFF.

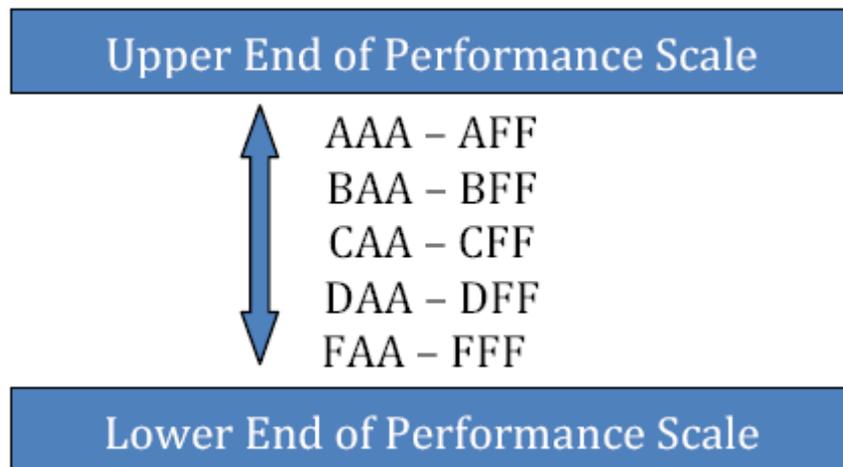
¹ Reported in Owen, Justin (2010, January 11) Evaluating Education Reforms for the Extraordinary Session. *Tennessee Center for Policy Research Policy Brief*, 10-01.

As an illustration, if TVAAS teacher-effect scores, principal's rating, and peer ratings were the first, second, and third place indicators respectively, a teacher with a C rating on teacher-effect, an A rating for the principal's evaluation, and a B rating from peers would have an overall rating of CAB.



This teacher's rating would be higher than that of any teacher with a TVAAS teacher-effect rating of D or F and lower than that of any teacher with a teacher-effect rating of A or B, regardless of his or her performance as rated by his or her principal or peers. To carry the example a step forward, a teacher with a DAA rating would be ranked lower than the CAB teacher regardless of the DAA teacher's superior peer ratings. Among other teachers with a TVAAS rating of C, however, the CAB teacher would be ranked below those teachers rated CAA.

In short, the prioritized rating system protects the priorities assigned to its components by its designers. In the 3-component example used above, teachers are inexorably ranked first on achievement gain, second on the principal's evaluation, and third on peer assessment, regardless of the differences among the component letter grades.



The ECF methodology is similar to that used by *Consumer Reports*. Below is a snapshot of ratings of brokerage firms reported by CR in its May 2009 issue.



In this example, each brokerage firm was given an overall score as well as a score for each of four indicators: account service, website, phone service, and personal service. The indicators were prioritized from left to right, with account service representing the most important of the four indicators. This method ensures that the overall ratings of products and services the consumer’s priorities.

The use of the Prioritized Teacher Rating System accomplishes the same thing with teacher evaluations. Parents, policymakers, and taxpayers are most concerned about a teacher’s ability to bring about learning, so that component is recorded to the left, and thereby assures its top priority. Components of lesser importance are recorded to the right thereby preserving their intended priority.

Teacher quality would benefit from the use of this method: it incorporates multiple factors without obscuring the critical information on which professional development would be based. Users could quickly identify not only a teacher’s overall rating, but also the individual components that make up that rating. Thus, this method would more accurately and completely delineate a teacher’s performance level without the blurring created by a composite value, in which the subjective and incidental are blended with the objective and essential.

An emphasis on teacher accountability for increasing student achievement is critical to improving Tennessee’s educational outcomes. Extrapolating from the data available in

Tennessee's teacher preparation report card, the state has something like 12,000 teachers who are producing significantly less than one year of achievement growth per school year.

A teacher assessment methodology based on the above recommendations would clearly highlight those teachers whose practices should be imitated and those who need help.

Tennessee's TVAAS system is at the cutting edge of national education reform. The policy governing its inclusion in teacher evaluation should be equally forward thinking.

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