



FIVE MYTHS ABOUT TEACHING



Almost everyone's been to school. That means almost everyone has some sort of opinion about teachers and teaching. Yet these opinions are often shaped by idiosyncratic personal experiences and views that can lead to false conclusions. In honor of National Teacher Appreciation Week, we're diving into five myths and the realities that underlie them.

Myth 1: Evaluating teachers based on student test results is fair, objective, and effective.

So-called value-added models assess the growth of each teacher's students and generally compare that growth to the students of other teachers. While this on the surface may sound objective or fair, researchers such as NEPC Fellows [Jesse Rothstein](#) of UC Berkeley and [Audrey Amrein-Beardsley](#) of Arizona State University have identified a host of problems with these models. Results are, for instance, often deeply inconsistent from model and model and from year to year. Students are not randomly assigned to teachers, meaning that some teachers may voluntarily or involuntarily be assigned students who have fewer overall opportunities to learn. Models have also been found to be biased for or against certain subjects (English versus math) and grade levels (grades 4 and 8 versus grades 5 and 7). While these models are increasingly falling out of favor for these and other reasons, some jurisdictions continue to use them to make high-stakes decisions about paying and firing teachers. For more information on problems related to the use of value-added models to evaluate teachers, see Amrein-Beardsley's aptly titled blog, [VAMboozled!](#)

Myth 2: We'd get better performance out of teachers and attract better candidates to the profession if we handed out bonuses.

These bonuses, of course, would be based on student test scores. (See Myth 1.) The problem

is that there's a lot of evidence suggesting that bonuses aren't really what teachers want. Instead, they'd prefer better base salaries, more support from administrators, and higher levels of autonomy, as explained in [Creating Teacher Incentives for School Excellence and Equity](#), an NEPC brief.

Myth 3: Five or so weeks of training prepares you to start teaching.

Teach for America and other alternative programs have grown rapidly. But research evidence suggests that “under-certified” teachers are less effective than their peers who pursue more traditional pathways such as bachelor’s or master’s degrees that focus on or entail teacher education, according to [Policy Reforms and De-professionalization of Teaching](#), an NEPC brief by Fellow [H. Richard Milner IV](#) of Vanderbilt. Placing teachers in the classroom after a brief summer boot camp devalues the profession while also disproportionately impacting the nation’s most marginalized students. After all, these fast-track programs are rarely seen in pricey private schools or expensive suburbs but are often viewed as large-scale solutions in schools that serve low-income families and students of color. So-called hard-to-staff schools absolutely do need policy interventions to address issues of inexperienced and “churning” teaching forces, but this won’t be accomplished by systemically filling classrooms with inexperienced teachers who drop in to teach for two or three years.

Myth 4: Education is more equitable and more rigorous when teachers are required to use a scripted curriculum that tells them what to say and when.

Consider the proposal that a challenging, scripted course of study for everyone essentially “teacher proofs” the curriculum against bad apples. Unfortunately, students are not one-size-fits-all; they have different needs that a professional teacher comes to understand and respond to. Scripted curricula tends to narrowly focus on the material found on standardized exams in reading and math, leaving others subjects scattered across the cutting room floor, [Milner writes](#). There’s also evidence that such curricula may speed up teacher attrition as it can turn teaching into mindless, de-skilled work that may feel more like a minimum wage job at a call center than a professional calling.

Myth 5: Teaching is easy—after all, you get the summers off and you play with kids all day!

Yes, most teachers get summers off from their teaching jobs (others work second jobs or pursue professional development), but during the school year they are also unusually likely to have to work past their paid hours. As compared to places like Japan, teachers in the U.S. are not given sufficient time during their paid school day for lesson planning, grading, and other necessary work. One result is that teachers have long days and stressful jobs. A survey in 2012 found that teachers have a [53-hour work week](#).

NEPC Resources on Curriculum and Teaching

Do you have teachers in your life? In recognition of National Teacher Appreciation Week, ask them about the myths they have encountered about teaching.

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