

Student Achievement Data Does Not Support Retaining Mike Miles

Trustee Mike Morath recently penned an op-ed giving the public a series of broad statements indicating growth in academic achievement under the “reforms” instituted by Superintendent Mike Miles.

An examination of Morath’s arguments for academic achievement growth instead turned up more evidence against the methods employed by Superintendent Miles.

Morath pointed to gains in low income students and students of color on college-readiness indicators including Miles’ chosen benchmark, the ACT, the measure Miles uses when aligning curriculum for his consulting company. Using the data available to the public on the DISD-sponsored data portal, shocking disturbances in the percentage of low-income students taking the ACT in 2013 become apparent. Before Miles became superintendent, the push had been to increase the rate of ACT testing for all Dallas seniors.

With Miles’ appearance and decision to use the ACT as a data point for the effectiveness of his reforms, the percentage of students tested at low-income high schools such as Pinkston, Roosevelt, and Adamson declined at high rates and pushed up the average ACT scores at these schools. Bill Betzen, a local school activist, has documented this same trend of high student attrition and increasing ACT scores at Miles’ previous school district in Colorado Springs.

Here in Dallas ISD, the increase in low income and minority students’ ACT scores in 2013 was driven by significant decreases in their participation on the ACT in 2013. ACT gains came from depriving low income, high risk students’ participation in test-taking as compared to their growing participation in past years.

Trustee Morath also referenced tiny gains in student growth in some elementary and middle school STAAR indicators without citing the fact that Dallas scores are far below state averages. Morath didn’t mention the fact that on the high school End of Course exams necessary for graduation in Texas, Miles’ methods resulted in losses on five of the six tests compared to scores preceding Miles’ arrival.

Open doors, micromanaging teachers, and extended meetings had negative effects as measured by student achievement on the EOC tests that determine timely graduation rates.

Trustee Morath used the School Effectiveness Indices (SEI) to support Miles’ decisions on principal removal. Again, either the district-developed SEIs are invalid measures of principal effectiveness, or Miles’ used a random approach to principal terminations and removals totally unrelated to SEI outcomes. Samuell High School and Roosevelt had the highest effectiveness scores in the latest SEI ratings. Both were rated by TEA as among the poorest performers in the state in 2013, yet the principal of Samuell, along with the former principal of Samuell who is now Samuell’s Executive Director, remain at the campus. Roosevelt’s principal was lauded by Miles and only removed when charges of misuse of federal monies were made public.

Other principals, those at Adamson and Madison had high SEI ratings and high ratings from the researchers at Children at Risk. Yet both principals were removed by Miles.

Any argument by Trustee Morath that the SEI data were used to for principal ratings is extremely flawed and dishonest. Since student achievement data for 2013 was not even available at the time principals were either asked to leave or removed, Miles' decisions were not based on student outcomes.

Finally, Morath indirectly references the Classroom Effectiveness Indices (CEI) as supporting high rates of teacher churn in response to Miles' management practices. Morath asserted that higher performing teachers, as rated on the "peer reviewed" CEIs were remaining in Dallas schools while those teachers rated lower were leaving in higher numbers.

The CEI was determined to be an invalid measure of teacher effectiveness by former Texas Education Commissioner Scott in 2008. Scott found campus conditions could play a larger role in student achievement than teacher effectiveness. Poor campus conditions, including Miles' management techniques, drive high teacher churn, proven in the research to increase the ineffectiveness of schools. High churn kills schools.

The peer review of Dallas ISD's CEIs has also not been favorable due to criticisms of CEI methodology and assumptions. Morath certainly knows peer review does not establish authority but can invite valid criticism of models. The CEI's validity was in dispute from its inception.

Morath presented a series of achievement-related arguments to support Mike Miles. Closer examination of Morath's arguments destroy any arguments for retaining the current Superintendent based on student achievement.

There is no basis for retaining Miles based on student test data. There is plenty of support in the data, especially decreasing student ACT participation to bump up scores and decreases in EOC results, for removing Miles as Superintendent. The evidence points to decreased student achievement and damaging high rates of principal and teacher churn with Miles in leadership of the district.

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September 16, 2013

Appendix

Morath's claim:

Has there been an exodus of good teachers? The district's research-based measure of teacher effectiveness has been peer-reviewed, with data going back more than two decades. These figures show

the average performance of returning teachers this year is better than the average of those who departed in the last year. It truly saddens me to see any good teacher leave our district, but the data is clear: The district is effectively retaining high-quality teachers.

While Morath offers no real proof of the claim that increases in teacher churn are being offset by retaining high-quality teachers, the literature is clear on teacher and principal churn. Churn hurts schools. Miles continues to claim that high churn is the hallmark of superintendent effectiveness. There is no research support for that belief.

As far as Morath's claim that, "The district's research-based measure of teacher effectiveness has been peer-reviewed, with data going back more than two decades," Morath is disingenuous in leaving out the widespread criticism of DISD's CEI (Classroom Effectiveness Indices) that DISD purports shows a teacher's value add to the instructional process.

FACT: CEI and Existent VAMs (Value-Added Measures)

The use of the Dallas ISD CEI as a tool in teacher termination was the focus of a grievance heard by former Commissioner Scott of the Texas Education Agency in 2008. Dallas ISD argued the validity of its CEI only to be admonished that the context of learning, including leadership and management of a campus, can have far greater impact on student achievement than the instructional effectiveness of the teacher. DISD lost its case using its CEI as a method of identifying teachers for termination, yet Morath is using the same measure to identify "average performance" of returning teachers. If the CEI is not valid as a measure of teacher performance, then it's not valid, period.

As stated in the Findings of Fact in the case of a Kimball High School teacher whose grievance reached the Commissioner of Education, "the Findings of Fact establish that the school's environment not Petitioner was the cause of the lack of achievement."

TEA's ruling pointed to the weakness in all Value Added Measures of teacher effectiveness: context is totally missing from all existing VAMs, including DISD's CEI which assumes student learning occurs in a vacuum with each learning environment being identical. The known effects of peer culture are missing in Dallas's CEI which results in pitting teachers of students in highly filtered magnets against teachers on campuses with high teacher, student, and leadership turnover. The real-life example of a Dallas teacher at a comprehensive high school improving his Advanced Placement student pass rates from a 5% passing rate at Sunset High School to a 60% passing rate by simply moving to Booker T. Washington provides a window into the strong peer effects on student achievement, the importance of resources and stability at Dallas ISD magnet schools, and the unfair advantage given all teachers at magnet schools in Dallas compared to teachers at comprehensive and neighborhood schools.

Mendro and Webster's work has been peer reviewed, true, with resulting criticism of leading researchers in the field, including the father of VAMs, Dr. William Sanders. Sanders' model of measuring teacher effectiveness was the pioneer in the field and required 3 years of student growth on a similar instrument, such as the ITBS, and defined growth as growth of a student year over year. Mendro and Webster's work has been criticized for regressing variables related to zip codes and demographics to predict student growth. The valid criticism of Dallas's CEI model never impacted its design or use. DISD continued to use it as a reference point, valid or not.

As far as Morath's statement, "the average performance of returning teachers this year is better than the average of those who departed in the last year," **Dallas ISD has the least churn in its highest performing magnet schools and on its better performing campuses.** With that one fact, churn in the teacher ranks will usually come from teachers on unstable campuses with leadership also churning and many less resources than DISD's magnet campuses.

Since TEA has already identified campus culture, climate, and student management as having an important impact on student learning, it can be expected that these campuses will have the greatest amount of teacher churn. These campuses are not good places to work.

Morath can make the same statement every year: Dallas loses potential teacher talent by under-resourcing its most vulnerable schools while blaming lower test scores on teachers. Teachers at the magnets and better schools stay while lower performing schools churn out teachers, further destabilizing them. Morath, cherry picking his data points, doesn't understand he just made the argument against excessive teacher churn.

The under resourcing of campuses in need of extra support goes to the heart of Morath's bragging about increasing the fund balance during a downturn in state financing.

Morath's Claim:

Historically, achievement gains have come slower for students of color than their white peers. With respect to SAT and ACT scores, Dallas ISD's students of color underperformed their white peers by 34 percent the year before Miles arrived in Dallas, much worse than the 23 percent spread a decade ago. In Miles' first year, the achievement gap shrank by 2.5 percent.

These achievement gap gains are reflected in metrics beyond the SAT and ACT. Something different really did happen this year, and that is shout-from-the-rooftops good news, especially given our history.

FACT: ACT Scores as the High School Benchmark

Miles plans on using ACT scores as one benchmark of high school college readiness. As noted by Bill Betzen in his analysis of Harrison's increase in ACT scores, attrition seemed to have played a major role in small increases in ACT scores during Miles' tenure in Colorado schools, but Miles never mentions attrition as a factor in the rise in ACT scores in Harrison 2 school district.

Miles seems to have already signaled his high school principals in Dallas that increases in ACT scores can come from simply testing a smaller percentage of their senior students. In the first year of Miles' tenure in Dallas, the percentage of seniors tested on the ACT dropped with the concomitant expected increase in ACT scores at two Dallas comprehensive high schools with high minority student enrollment:

Composite ACT Increases Due to Fewer Students Tested in 2013*

	% Tested	Average ACT	Year
Roosevelt	40	13	2011
Roosevelt	22	16	2013
Pinkston	53.2	15	2012
Pinkston	38.7	16	2013
DISD	35.6	17	2011
DISD	37.1	17	2012
DISD-Miles	29.3	18	2013

***DISD Campus Data Packets**

These sample decreases in ACT scores may have their foundation in the practice of cherry picking students who were tested on the ACT. **There is no evidence of increased achievement in Harrison or in Dallas ISD under Miles without lowering the percentage or number of students tested.**

Other high-poverty, comprehensive high schools that decreased their percentages of students tested in 2013 include Lincoln, Kimball, Sunset, White, Thomas Jefferson, South Oak Cliff, Carter, Madison, and Adamson. Many of these decreases were substantial.

Adamson, **low income and primarily Hispanic**, is another example of severely decreasing the number of students tested to provoke an uptick in average ACT scores. Conrad also slightly decreased the percentage tested and got a gain in average ACT scores.

Adamson	42.7	15	2011
	43.8	15	2012
	14.5	16	2013

Molina increased ACT testing with no drop in scores and North Dallas remained stable.

Booker T. Washington, with a large middle class, anglo student population did not decrease the percentage of students tested on the ACT. TAG increased the percentage taking and decreased their average ACT score in 2013. Science and Engineering Magnet decreased the percentage taking and decreased their average.

The decrease in students taking the ACT seemed to occur primarily in low income, minority, and comprehensive high schools and had the impact of usually increasing ACT scores for those groups.

Before Miles became Superintendent in Dallas, the strong trend was to increase the percentages of high school students tested on the ACT. Only after Miles became superintendent did the drastic drop in the percentage of low income students tested on the ACT occur. Any improvement in ACT scores for the 2013 school year can be attributed to decreased numbers of low income, minority students taking the test, especially in high schools regarded as low performing.

Morath's Claims on the SEI:

Principal performance: Much has been reported about the fact that 62 principals were replaced in the last year. Less has been said about the unprecedented levels of support given to principals under Miles, including a new leadership structure delivering high quality professional development and a game-changing principal evaluation system focused on improving the lives of students. Looking solely at principal replacements, the data is remarkably positive. On both the student-growth focused School Effectiveness Index and on the district's new principal evaluation system, those 62 departing principals have a markedly lower average score than those who stayed.

FACT: The School Effectiveness Indices (SEI) was another DISD formula concocted by Webster and Mendro to estimate the effectiveness of campus leadership. Millions in awards were handed out to schools that achieved high SEI ratings with no preventive measures regarding cheating on testing and dropout figures. In the early years of the SEI ratings, campus principals regularly reported dropout rates of less than 5% while their completion rates for incoming freshmen cohorts four years later were less than 40%.

Outcomes on the district-developed ACPs, or semester tests, were heavily weighted along with attendance, state accountability results, and participation in Advanced Placement tests to give an estimate of how effectively the campus' leadership team promotes student achievement.

(In what can only be deemed comical, Webster and Mendro decided overcrowding was an important variable in lowering the quality of a school environment. WT White and Greiner Middle School are two of Dallas ISD's most overcrowded schools and two of its most high performing. The least crowded schools in Dallas ISD are also some of the lowest performing.)

Roosevelt High School and Samuell High School, with the highest 2012 School Effectiveness Indices for comprehensive high schools, are good examples of the lack of validity of the SEI ratings. The principal of Samuell was promoted to an Executive Director position, so he remained in a supervisory capacity for the Samuell campus in 2012-2013 after having been the campus leader for many years. Certainly if the SEI ratings were valid, having the same star principal as the ED for the campus would help Samuell maintain its high quality as defined in its high SEI ratings.

Weighted heavily with the DISD's ACP tests, Roosevelt was also deemed a highly effective school for several years with DISD's in-house SEI regression analysis and earned the highest effectiveness ratings for comprehensive high schools in 2012. Roosevelt's principal was feted by Superintendent Mike Miles and had a photo opportunity with the current Commissioner of Education who toured the "successful" campus with Miles in the fall of 2012.

Both Samuell and Roosevelt, defined as the top effective comprehensive high school campuses in 2012 by the SEI, were labeled as part of the lowest performing schools in the state in the TEA ratings released in 2013. These "top" schools as defined by more of Mendro and Webster's original formulas are half the lowest rated high schools in DISD by TEA's definition and it's TEA's definition that matters, not DISD's SEI ratings. (The SEI ratings for Samuell and Roosevelt can be viewed on the mydata portal for DISD.)

On the other hand, if Morath wishes to make the SEI the standard for removing principals, both the principals at Adamson High School and James Madison had high 2012 SEI ratings, and both were removed by Miles. Children at Risk, a Houston non-profit with an excellent staff of researchers, identified both Adamson and James Madison as “Best Urban Comprehensive High Schools” for 2013 (<http://childrenatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/North-Texas-2013-Sub-Lists.pdf>).

Indeed, Miles seems to have carpet-bombed Dallas ISD’s campus leadership in a campaign of random removals in order to inspire fear. **There is no pattern based on school ratings (SEI) or achievement data that can consistently be used as a pattern for Miles’ removal of principals.**

As far as any other subjective rating data based on Miles’ own interpretations of principal effectiveness, that information has not been presented to the public. It has been disclosed to the public that Miles told principals and Executive Directors to downgrade teacher observations on subjective measures devised by Miles. None of Miles’ measures have been subjected to research or peer scrutiny and by professional research standards, no claims of validity of Miles’ “spot obs” can be made by trustee Morath.

Morath’s Claim:

I was certainly sad to see some good principals leave last year, but the overall district-wide data are unmistakably clear: Principal changes substantially raised the collective bar, likely marking the biggest improvement in the history of Dallas.

Conrad’s Dr. Lucy Hackemack, principal of Conrad High School, one of the few comprehensive Dallas high schools receiving commendations by TEA in 2013 for student achievement, has publically stated she was bullied out of her position Anthony Tovar, principal of Sunset High School, moved the school from having a reputation for being a dropout factory, to a school with extremely high completion rates was also targeted. The principal of Dallas’ premier Talented and Gifted Academy retired early and was replaced with a TFA person who will now be used for marketing purposes by TFA. Several principals at the prestigious Townview also decided to retire.

The principal at Samuell is still the campus leader, even after being named a low performing campus by TEA. Until the principal of Roosevelt was investigated for misusing federal funds, she was considered a rising star according to Miles.

There is no evidence that the changes in campus leadership were done on the basis of student achievement data. Instead, there seemed to be an agenda of removing effective principals and replacing them with former Uplift administrators with no experience in urban schools, with principals with no track record of student achievement, and with TFA. The principal at Roosevelt was only moved after allegations of misuse of federal funds and nepotism were highlighted in local media.

Morath's Claim:

Student performance: Dallas ISD students outpaced statewide gains in 10 of the 14 subjects tested in the crucial elementary and middle school grades, where so many of life's foundations are laid. Of particular note, DISD students gained 8.3 percent over their peers in eighth-grade mathematics, and DISD was one of only two districts in Dallas County to show any gains in third-grade reading.

Morath's refusal to disclose how far behind Dallas students were on STAAR exams sets the stage for a focus on growth rather than pass levels compared to the state average. When compared with state averages in all categories, Dallas is far below state pass rates. Only when minimal growth rates are compared with the state does Dallas seem to improve from the first round of testing.

State gains on the second year of STAAR testing were largely flat, so DISD gains over the lack of state gains at the elementary and middle schools are not indicative of impressive student achievement. As ISD posted on its own web site:

The percentage of students passing the EOC Reading I test increased by 2.6 points, compared to a gain of 2.2 points at the state level, showing Dallas ISD students closing the gap. District students also outpaced the gains at the state level on the Biology test, with an additional 1.4 percent of students passing the test versus gains of 0.9 percentage points throughout the state.

What this DISD-issued press released doesn't disclose is that EOC scores for Dallas are way below the state average. Gains in terms of growth of .4 more than state gains are inconsequential when viewed from the perspective of massive failures on the EOC tests that may result in less than 50% of students graduating on time from DISD's comprehensive high schools. The district's response for remediation of these failing students the first year EOC exams were given was to post learning packets on the district web site in order that students might remediate themselves.

Dallas ISD's Research department has not posted the number or percentage of freshmen or sophomore students from the past school year who are NOT on track to graduate because of failure of at least one EOC exam required for graduation.

This lack of honest disclosure may be catastrophic since a sharp decrease in graduation rates will mean the entire Dallas district will receive a low performing label in 2015!! The students who decide to continue their education in order to attempt passing the EOC required exams will find Dallas comprehensive high school campuses do not have the physical or instructional capacity to remediate 50% of each incoming cohort.

The EOC pass rates did not increase in 2013 when Miles' Open Door, micromanaging of teacher instructional plans for DOLs or MRS, or increases in the school day for teachers were new policies with the exception of English II. Miles' "reform" efforts resulted in losses in every other category:

**Comparison of Dallas ISD End of Course Exams
2012 and Miles' Reform 2013**

	Algebra I	Biology	English I	Writing I	English II	Writing II
2012 Pass Rates	75%	83%	56%	43%	56%	44%
2013 Pass Rates	68%	81%	54%	37%	72%	43%
"Reform" 2013	-7%	-2%	-2%	-6%	16%	-1%
State Pass Rates						
2013	78%	85%	65%	48%	78%	52%
DISD v State 2013	-10%	-4%	-11%	-11%	-6%	-9%

The percentage of 3rd grade students passing the STAAR exam in both Reading and Mathematics increased, outpacing similar gains throughout the state. In Reading, the percentage of Dallas ISD students passing grew by 4.1% (2.7% gain statewide). In Mathematics, the percentage of Dallas ISD students passing increased by 2.1 percent (1.4% statewide).

Again, Morath is celebrating a .7 increase in gains!

Sixth grade results, however, show a decline. The percentage of Dallas 6th grade students passing both the Reading and Mathematics test dropped by 5.8 percent, compared to declines of 3.4% in Reading statewide and 3.7 in Mathematics.

Morath's Claim:

Teachers: Miles' change-oriented approach has raised anecdotal concerns about teacher departures, but districtwide data is very positive. At the start of school this year, the district had the lowest number of teacher vacancies in at least five years. Clearly, work to improve HR in the past year has paid off.

Fact:

Dallas ISD had over 525 posted openings when school opened in the fall of 2013. Houston ISD had 160 openings at the same time. When school opened in fall of 2012, huge numbers of vacancies were reported by teachers and parents, but the district refused to release numbers of openings that matched the openings on campuses.

Miles 2013-2014 budget tried to remove 65 middle school teachers from campuses with an increase in class sizes. When the board refused Miles' staffing formulas, those 65 teaching positions were supposed

to be put back in middle schools. Whether that occurred, teachers report a lack of substitutes on campuses and huge numbers of openings.

There is no evidence that there are fewer openings or that HR is working effectively since most employees report huge backloads.

When DISD teachers continued to leave the district for openings in other school districts during the summer, central administrators sent out emails threatening to revoke teacher certifications if teachers did not make the deadline for reporting their resignations in order to take other positions. This has never happened in the history of Dallas schools.