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# Shame Is Not the Solution for Teachers.

By BILL GATES

Published: February 22, 2012

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¶ Seattle



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¶ LAST week, the New York State Court of Appeals ruled that teachers' individual performance assessments could be made public. I have no opinion on the ruling as a matter of law, but as a harbinger of education policy in the United States, it is a big

mistake.

¶ I am a strong proponent of measuring teachers' effectiveness, and my foundation works with many schools to help make sure that such evaluations improve the overall quality of teaching. But publicly ranking teachers by name will not help them get better at their jobs or improve student learning. On the contrary, it will make it a lot harder to implement teacher evaluation systems that work.

¶ In most public schools today, teachers are simply rated "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory," and evaluations consist of having the principal observe a class for a few minutes a couple of times each year. Because we are just beginning to understand what makes a teacher effective, the vast majority of teachers are rated "satisfactory." Few get specific feedback or training to help them improve.

¶ Many districts and states are trying to move toward better personnel systems for evaluation and improvement. Unfortunately, some education advocates in New York, Los Angeles and other cities are claiming that a good personnel system can be based on ranking teachers according to their "value-added rating" — a measurement of their impact on students' test scores — and publicizing the names and rankings online and in the media. But shaming poorly performing teachers doesn't fix the problem because it doesn't give them specific feedback.

¶ Value-added ratings are one important piece of a complete personnel system. But student test scores alone aren't a sensitive enough measure to gauge effective teaching, nor are they diagnostic enough to identify areas of improvement. Teaching is multifaceted, complex work. A reliable evaluation system must incorporate other measures of effectiveness, like students' feedback about their teachers and classroom observations by highly trained peer evaluators and principals.

¶ Putting sophisticated personnel systems in place is going to take a serious commitment. Those who believe we can do it on the cheap — by doing things like making individual teachers' performance reports public — are underestimating the level of resources needed to spur real improvement.

¶ At Microsoft, we created a rigorous personnel system, but we would never have thought about using employee evaluations to embarrass people, much less publish them in a newspaper. A good personnel system encourages employees and managers to work together to set clear, achievable goals. Annual reviews are a diagnostic tool to help employees reflect on their performance, get honest feedback and create a plan for improvement. Many other businesses and public sector employers embrace this approach, and that's where the focus should be in education: school leaders and teachers working together to get better.

¶ Fortunately, there are a few places where teachers and school leaders are collaborating on the hard work of building robust personnel systems. My wife, Melinda, and I recently visited one of those communities, in Tampa, Fla. Teachers in Hillsborough County Public Schools receive in-depth feedback from their principal and from a peer evaluator, both of whom have been trained to analyze classroom teaching.

¶ We were blown away by how much energy people were putting into the new system — and by the results they were already seeing in the classroom. Teachers told us that they appreciated getting feedback from a peer who understood the challenges of their job and from their principal, who had a vision of success for the entire school. Principals said the

new system was encouraging them to spend more time in classrooms, which was making the culture in Tampa's schools more collaborative. For their part, the students we spoke to said they'd seen a difference, too, and liked the fact that peer observers asked for their input as part of the evaluation process.

¶ Developing a systematic way to help teachers get better is the most powerful idea in education today. The surest way to weaken it is to twist it into a capricious exercise in public shaming. Let's focus on creating a personnel system that truly helps teachers improve.