

# THE WEEKLY LEAF

THE DESTINATION FOR RELEVANT NEWS, ANALYSIS AND OPINION

[ABOUT US](#) [BUSINESS](#) [COMMENTARY](#) [ECONOMY](#) [INTERNATIONAL](#) [POLITICS](#) [SOCIETY](#)

FEBRUARY 4, 2015

## What's missing from the teacher debate

 January 30, 2015 by [stevenyoder](#)  [Leave a Comment](#)

### FEATURED VIDEO

[Severine Autesserre: To solve mass violence, look to locals](#)



Over the years, advocates of many stripes have crowded under the flag of education reform. But its current incarnation is best captured by [StudentsFirst](#), headed by former Washington DC school superintendent Michelle Rhee.

The organization has a target in its sights: bad teachers. After a successful lawsuit in California last summer that could strip teachers of tenure, they've helped other groups file suits in New York and are considering new ones in Minnesota, Connecticut, New Jersey and Tennessee.

Many in the media have praised those efforts. A *Time* magazine [cover story](#) last October lauded David Welch, a wealthy tech titan who funded the California lawsuit, for “making the repair of public education something of a second career.” Welch made clear to *Time* that he wants to improve kids' prospects: “Here you have the most important aspect of society, in my mind at least—the ability to educate our children—and it's incapable of change. It's failing, and it doesn't want to acknowledge that it's failing, much less do anything about it.”

If it's not failing, our schools certainly are stuck. In the latest [international rankings](#) in 2012, the U.S. came in 27th of 34 OECD countries in math, 17th in reading, 20th in science. And that performance hasn't changed significantly over time, according to the report.

Education reformers say the focus should be squarely on improving the teacher corps by weeding out the nonperformers. “I have no doubt that what matters most is the teacher in the classroom,” former New York City schools chancellor Joel Klein told a radio show last fall.

He and others advocate identifying bad teachers by using “value-added models” that assess the effects of individual teachers or schools on student achievement. Here's

## FOLLOW THE WEEKLY LEAF

 [RSS - Posts](#)

Enter your email address to follow The Weekly Leaf and receive notifications of new articles by email.

Follow

Search

### Commentary: For Hunger Games – Mockingjay, teens are doing the marketing

December 4, 2014

By Joan Oleck – The Hunger Games:

Mockingjay—Part 1

is, for its teen fan base, a powerful lesson in marketing manipulation. For anyone not living in a cave, this third film in the series of four is based on the other successful book series by



how the Rand Corporation [explains](#) VAMs:

“Mr. Johnson teaches 6th grade math. To estimate his added value, statisticians obtain the 4th and 5th grade test scores of all his students, as well as information about their backgrounds (such as whether they were in a gifted program or a special education program). Those data are used to predict what the students’ 6th grade math scores will be. Caryn and Darren are students in Mr. Johnson’s class. Caryn’s actual score on the 6th grade test is seven points higher than predicted; Darren’s is two points lower. Mr. Johnson’s value-added estimate is the average of the differences between the actual and predicted scores of Caryn, Darren, and the rest of the class.” [In the case of Caryn and Darren, it’s +5 points.]

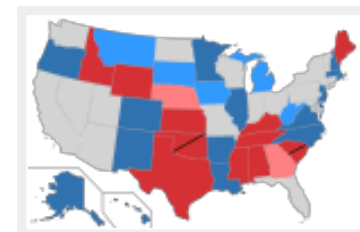
But the credibility of VAMs is fading fast. In a damning [assessment](#) last April, the American Statistical Association, no bastion of advocacy, concluded that VAMs “typically measure correlation, not causation. Effects—positive or negative—attributed to a teacher may actually be caused by other factors that are not captured in the model”—student and family background, poverty, curriculum, and unmeasured influences. “Most VAM studies,” the assessment concluded, “find that teachers account for about 1 percent to 14 percent of the variability in test scores.”

To be sure, there are problems with the teacher corps, but they generally won’t be fixed through firings, according to a number of education experts and researchers. One is what teachers get paid. In her new book on the history of American education, *The Teacher Wars*, for example, author Dana Goldstein notes that teachers’ average salary is a mere \$54,000. The gap between what teachers make and what women in other fields like lawyer, doctor, and engineer do has grown compared to that gap in western European countries. That means the profession has more trouble attracting people, especially at a time when the focus increasingly is on teaching to the test.

They also aren’t being given enough in-service training. For example, teachers have typically spent fewer than four days in training for implementing the new Common

the uber-successful book series by Suzanne Collins and weaves a compelling tale of teen survival in [...]

**Commentary:  
The 2014 US  
Midterms –  
The  
democratic  
election  
that wasn’t**



November 11, 2014

Commentary: The 2014 US Midterms – The democratic election that wasn’t American democracy is predicated on two critical pillars. The selection of political representatives by the majority via the ballot box, and the availability of timely and accurate information that is vital for voters in their assessment of candidates and policies consistent with their self-interest. [...]

**Commentary:  
International  
community  
must address  
Myanmar’s  
mistreatment  
of Rohingya  
minority at East Asian summit**



October 31, 2014

Core standards, both in language-arts and math, according to a *New York Times* story last summer.

And because of pay differentials, poor districts have trouble attracting the best teachers. Research in 2007 by Heather Hill and her colleagues, for example, showed that math teachers in high-poverty schools have a lower level of math knowledge than their counterparts in more advantaged schools.

And then there are those other factors, which the ASA says account for 86 to 99 percent of test-score variability. Across the country, there's a clear negative relationship between child poverty and reading and math test scores, as Duke University economist Helen Ladd described in a 2012 [paper](#) in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. A wealth of research, she notes, documents the range of factors correlated with poor educational outcomes: poor health, limited access to home environments with rich language and experiences, low birth weight, limited access to high quality pre-school opportunities, and little participation in summer and after-school activities.

Rather, says Ladd and others, addressing our teacher problems mostly requires putting more resources into the ones we have. Goldstein would like to see providing better teacher training, giving each new teacher a mentor, and allowing teachers to observe each other and share ideas.

For example, better training of kindergarten through third-grade teachers, under a program called the Children's Literacy Initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, has produced good outcomes. An evaluation of the first two years of the program found large and statistically significant positive results for students of teachers in the program versus a control group—the percentage of students reaching at least the national average at Chicago schools with the program increased by 25 percent.

And the systemic issues will require focusing resources on poorer districts says Ladd.

As Myanmar, a country with an incipient democracy and alarming human rights record, prepares to host a prestigious regional issues summit in coming weeks, the Southeast Asian nation's galling treatment of its ethnic minority populations is receiving renewed attention. It's an inopportune time for the country's president, Thein Sein, for these issues to be resurfacing in [...]

**Commentary:  
Bandwagon  
outrage over  
Brunei's strict  
Islamic  
criminal  
code all  
but gone**



October 18, 2014

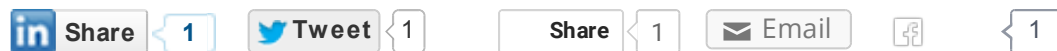
When Brunei became the first Southeast Asian country to nationally adopt a strict Islamic penal code known as Sharia earlier this year, the world was outraged. News and social media told us so in such headlines as “Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry” and “Ellen DeGeneres backs boycott of Brunei-owned hotels over ‘stone the [...]”

Those include early childhood and preschool programs, school-based health clinics and social services, after-school and summer programs, and higher pay in poor districts to attract good teachers.

At a time when Congress has no appetite for spending new money on programs for poor kids, focusing on firing bad teachers sounds proactive. Reformers like Klein argue that school leaders can't control the systemic problems, but they can control who teaches our kids.

It's the equivalent of the battles between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. If that debate is any guide, the teacher wars could well continue for the next hundred years.

Share this:



## FOLLOW THE WEEKLY LEAF ON TWITTER

My Tweets



Filed Under: [Education](#), [Latest From The Weekly Leaf](#), [Society](#) Tagged With: [Dana Goldstein](#), [education reform](#), [Michelle Rhee](#), [StudentsFirst](#), [value-added models](#)

« [Why girls are pouring over the border into the U.S.: It's worse than you think](#)

## PREVIOUS TOP STORIES

- » [Will strife in Pakistan lead to an Egypt-like revolution](#)
- » [Can states be pro-business while taking care of their most vulnerable](#)
- » [The excessive time Millennials spend on cell phones](#)
- » [NATO approves new force to counter future Russian aggression](#)
- » [The cause of those horrific highway truck crashes](#)
- » [When 'bad cops' get new jobs](#)
- » [Scottish business leaders still divided on economics of independence](#)
- » [Study identifies another approach to cutting gun deaths](#)
- » [China executes eight for 'terrorist' attacks in latest crackdown on ethnic unrest in Xinjiang](#)
- » [Pressure mounts for US to attack ISIS 'sanctuary' in Syria](#)
- » [ADA lawsuits: A case study in lack of](#)

## Leave a Reply

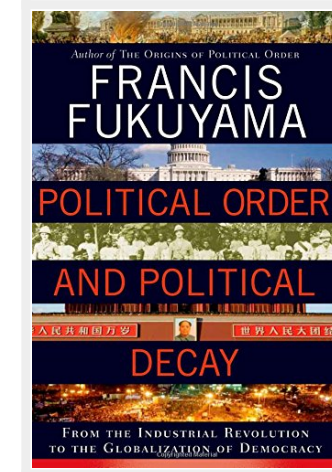
Enter your comment here...

governance

- ✦ The fight against Boko Haram: Has the world forgotten “our girls”?
- ✦ ISIS and mass female genital mutilation
- ✦ Hobby Lobby ruling prompts satanists to seek religious exemption
- ✦ The Eric Cantor loss – voting and not voting really matters

### Book recommendation: Political Order and Political Decay

[Amazon](#)



### Book recommendation:

[Amazon](#)





**Terms of use – © Copyright, The Weekly Leaf 2014. All Rights Reserved**

TERMS OF SERVICE Effective August 11, 2014 A. About Us. Welcome to the theweekleaf.com blog (the “Website”). The Weekly Leaf LLC (“TWL”, “us”, “we”, or “our”) is the owner and operator of the Website. The Website is an aggregator of news from TWL-owned resources and Third Party Content (defined below) as well as a [...]