

Two New Think Tank Reviews Published ... Elsewhere

This past week, two new reviews of think tank reports were published online: by *Teacher Magazine* and by *Teachers College Record*. Neither of these reviews was published as part of The [Think Twice](#) think tank review project, but both further the project's goal of advancing discussions by providing the public, policy makers, and the press with timely reviews of think-tank publications.

Innovation "Report Card" - On December 16th, *Teacher Magazine* published a review by Alaska 2009 Teacher of the Year Bob Williams, who examined the goals and methods underlying a report that had assigned each state an "innovation" letter grade. The report, called "Leaders and Laggards," was a follow-up to a 2007 report from the same group had been published in November by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce along with the Center for American Process and the American Enterprise Institute's Rick Hess.

Williams focuses his review on aspects of the report concerning alternative teacher certification and teacher tenure. He notes that the report's authors begin with the premise that "improving education requires weakening teacher tenure and union influence while supporting alternative certification and national programs to place inexperienced people ... into teaching positions with minimal training." Williams explains how the report distorts the data in order to create state-by-state ratings that fit the authors' pre-determined agenda. The 'innovation' ratings are really little more than a façade for the authors' advocacy for privatization and marketization of public education.

The Williams review can be accessed through the [website of Teacher Magazine](#), which requires (free) registration.

Fordham Detracking Report - On December 14th, the journal *Teachers College Record* published a commentary by University of Colorado at Boulder Professor Kevin Welner, who co-directs the Think Twice project. Welner provides a brief review of a new report authored by Brookings' Dr. Tom Loveless and published by the Fordham Institute. Loveless' key conclusion is that each additional track in eighth-grade mathematics in Massachusetts is associated (in a regression model he presents) with a 3 percentage-point rise in students scoring at the advanced level on the state exam, after holding constant the school-level percentage of students receiving free- or reduced-price lunch, which he calls "socioeconomic status".

Welner's review describes how the Loveless report combines weak data with questionable analyses to manufacture an argument against detracking. For instance, even using just the limited control of free- or reduced-price lunch rates, the purported benefit to high-achieving students disappears when one compares the option of a school with two math tracks versus an untracked school. Overall, better treatment of these same data would likely show that high-achieving Massachusetts middle school students in heterogeneous, untracked schools do as well or better than those in two-tracked schools – certainly in language arts (English) and maybe even in mathematics. Welner concludes

that the report misleads in an attempt to convince policymakers to maintain tracking policies.

The Welner review is [available here](#). It can also be accessed through [the website of Teachers College Record](#) (subscription required).