



Hemphill: It's time to 'out' substandard teachers

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Congratulations to the Los Angeles Times for defining transparency! They plan to publish stories on the effectiveness of 6,000 teachers they have statistically tracked for many years.

With Wikileaks, and the Bell city fiasco being outed, it is time to out poor teachers.

The head of the L.A. teachers union, 40,000 strong, has announced a "massive boycott" of the L.A. Times for telling the truth.

Here is the short of it: The main difference in student performance is not money, or race, or class size — it is good teachers and bad teachers. Teachers right down the hall have dramatically different results, using the same books and teaching the same demographic mix of students.

"With Miguel Aguilar, students consistently have made striking gains on state standardized tests, many of them vaulting from the bottom third of students in Los Angeles schools to well above average," according to a Times analysis. "John Smith's pupils next door have started out slightly ahead of Aguilar's but by the end of the year have been far behind."

This is no Eureka! moment for most of us, or even for the unions — but the unions still pretend that all teachers are equally effective.

According to the Times, "In Los Angeles and across the country, education officials have long known of the often huge disparities among teachers. They've seen the indelible effects, for good and ill, on children. But rather than analyze and address these disparities, they have opted mostly to ignore them.

"Most districts act as though one teacher is about as good as another."

The Times has shown what is necessary for metropolitan newspapers to maintain viability — they broke news! The Times also broke the Bell city fiasco, but even that does not have the national impact of their multi-year examination of teacher effectiveness.

Naming names is important, but their early released conclusions are unavoidable. Everyone knows who the good and bad teachers are: The teachers know, the students know, the administration knows and the parents of students know.

Several times I sat in the Poway Unified School District classroom of a math teacher that my children identified as a bad, bad teacher. He was bad. Nothing could be done except get my kids a transfer, but I remember his name to this day from 35 years ago. He was legendarily terrible. I suspect many people remember his name. Only the taxpayers who pay the majority of the bills do not know that we employ, pay, advance and retire really bad teachers.

A teachers' union's "massive boycott" of the newspaper is not designed to punish the newspaper, it is designed to fire a warning shot across the bow of other newspapers — and with 300,000 union members who are California teachers, not to mention their families, that is a potent economic force.

But journalists in Mexico have lost 11 reporters this year to the drug cartels and many continue to publish, so perhaps, just perhaps, we can get other metropolitan newspapers to dedicate some of their staff to do what is the first four letters in the word "newspaper."
Transparency. Please?