

Peer Evaluation for Teachers as a Counter to Administrator Evaluations: A Recommendation for Chicago Public Schools and other Urban Districts

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Introduction

What is good teaching? How can teachers be honestly evaluated in a fair and balanced way that promotes teacher professionalism and responsibility for student learning but also take into account the complexity of the learning process? Can peer review play a successful role in teacher evaluations? Like other industries teachers need to understand the importance of outcomes in evaluation as a profession, but it must be fair, unbiased, and done in a way that promotes capacity-building. Balancing teacher evaluation and students outcomes is fundamentally important if we are going to deliver on the high expectations and new challenges that 21st century budgets and globalization demands on us as a country. That is why it is essential to include teachers to assist in the evaluation process through peer review, which in many states including Illinois laws are being drafted to include peer review as they apply for federal Race to the Top (RTTP) funds. The RTTP was designed with the purpose of decreasing achievement gaps in reading and math (Jahng, 2011). Its four educational areas wherein states compete for federal funds include “enhancing standards and assessments, building effective use of data systems, retaining and increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution, and transforming low-performing schools” (p. 100).

Within the area of teacher effectiveness research has been done on peer review with stakes in teacher evaluations (Johnson, 2012; Jacque, 2013). The Illinois Assembly is applying for another round of the RTTP funding and if it receives approval peer review will be used in teacher evaluations (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012; Illinois State Board of Education, 2013). Therefore since peer review as a part of teacher evaluations will more than likely become state law in many places it is important to prepare for this shift as educators, unions, school boards and school districts. Understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to handling peer review and being flexible to take into account the various learning environments in large and complex urban school districts is fundamental to its adoption and success.

It is important to contextualize what is meant by flexibility in peer review. As an urban alternative public school teacher in Chicago for students who are incarcerated at our county facility for juveniles it is important to realize that myself and others who work in this setting have a set of challenges that other places do not and so peer review will look different in these and other public alternative schools in our network. My students are incarcerated for as little as a few days and up to years based on adjudication and the complexity of their cases. The students' growth and learning as well as my accountability as a teacher must be understood within this complicated setting where safety and security are paramount and education is an important but distant priority. We are not the only unique instructional setting. There are also elementary schools and high schools that have unique characteristics such as magnet schools, IB schools, military schools, performance schools, neighborhood schools that combine students from other closed down schools, selective enrollments, language academies, vocational schools and alternative schools that may have stark differences that need to be taken into account. In addition Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have such a large system broken down by networks and various boundaries making it all the more necessary for a flexible approach to peer review. For these reasons it is important to understand when implementing any teacher evaluation system to make sure that options must exist, but it still must be guided by a clear framework and streamlined process for it to have the desired instructional effect on teacher quality and student outcomes that can happen when peer review is implemented successfully (Jacque, 2013; Karp, 2013; Johnson, 2012; Kerchner, 2001; Moore-Johnson, Papay, Fiarman, Munger, & Qazilbash, 2010).

Purpose

First this paper will discuss the national context in which this conversation about teacher evaluations and its connection to peer review is taking place and locally the reason why it is relevant for CPS and other large and mid-size school districts in our state and country. Next, recommendations will be given to Chicago Public Schools leadership as well as the Chicago Teachers Union since talks are

beginning this summer for the upcoming contract negotiations for the 2015-2016 school year (Fitzpatrick, 2014). This will lay out the approaches that are recommended as teacher evaluations are discussed during the contract negotiations. Finally the conclusion will review major points of the recommendation and urge CPS

The purpose of this work is to discuss research on options for peer review as a part of teacher evaluations for Chicago Public Schools and other urban districts and then recommend an approach to peer review for the Chicago Teacher's Union and Chicago Board of Education as a starting point for preliminary discussions on the upcoming contract negotiations for 2015. It is guided by the questions above with specific emphasis on how can teachers be honestly evaluated in a fair and balanced way that promotes teacher professionalism and responsibility for student learning but also take into account the complexity of the learning process? This is written in order to urge urban teachers to work with unions and boards of education to collectively use peer review in the teacher evaluation process as one part of a larger approach to help our schools successfully grapple with the seismic changes to public education that started with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 and extends to our current federal RTTP process for federal funding. Obama's administration has created an interesting set of initiatives in lieu of the lack of progress that our national Congress has made on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As Johnston (2011) put it, "The Obama administration implemented a creative and effective way to fundamentally change the nature of the state-federal relationship through the expansion of Race to the Top and other competitive grant programs such as Investing in Innovation" (p. 6). Urban educators can embrace this moment as a time to steer the conversation away from criticizing teachers who seem to be pushing back on accountability and student outcomes. Instead we should look at research (Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2009; Moore-Johnson, Papay, Fiarman, Munger, & Qazilbash, 2010; Johnston, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Jacque, 2013; Karp, 2013) regarding teacher evaluations to explore ways that help teachers, unions and school boards to work together and exert

cooperative voices in how teacher evaluations are done in ways that help students, parents and communities that emphasize student outcomes as well as teacher retention and quality.

Teachers in K-12 and leaders in Higher Education and other stakeholders that value public education must build a consensus of acceptance of the new reality and find solutions that help us meet the expectations our country, state, or district have now placed upon it. There are several different approaches to teacher evaluations that provide teacher voice, however I am advocating for a tiered approach to peer evaluation which include utilizing school-level teachers to participate in peer review for all teacher evaluations and then using Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) for new teachers and other teachers who are basic or unsatisfactory in evaluations to help improve capacity. PAR, which was created as a collaboration between union and district officials in Toledo, Ohio (Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2009), provides a solid framework which is research-driven with strong teacher voice and a powerful way to have collaboration between district and union officials. It can assist the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Board of Education to get beyond the disheartening antagonism and opposition and focus on being positive, mutual contributors that work towards student success. PAR operates by having distinguished teachers take an official leave from the classroom to work as a peer reviewer for new teachers or teachers with basic or unsatisfactory ratings and work with them to improve teacher capacity and increase student outcomes. School-level teachers who are rated as distinguished and are department chairs, grade-level leads, lead teachers, or other teacher leaders should participate in the peer review process for other evaluations that do not include new teachers or teachers with unsatisfactory or basic ratings who will herein be called struggling teachers. This will be discussed further below.

Literature Review

In the context of teachers' unions and teacher evaluation there is a mixed and sometimes antagonistic history between unions and boards of education. "Teacher unions have a mixed history,

which includes an emphasis on professional education standards on the one hand and protection of economic rights on the other” (Lathan, 2011, p. 93). The National Education Association (NEA) began first with an emphasis on professional education association focused on standards, ethics and curriculum while the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the early 20th century with a focus on economic protections. The lines have blurred today in regards to the emphasis of these teachers’ unions but both have come out and endorsed peer review as a successful approach for evaluation and improvement (AFT, 2009; NEA, 2011).

There are serious political implications at stake for both parties and strong views are held about the effectiveness of teachers’ union and its effects on American education (Coulson, 2010; Dean, 2013; Rottman, 2013). Also important legislation and the controversies have arisen in the courts across the country (Slater, 2012, Schuster, 2012). Avoiding these extremes is essential to school boards, teachers, and unions in order for all sides can work together to collectively improve our local, state, and national education systems. Strongly siding with one or the other is not pragmatic or helpful to the broader call for teachers and school boards to work together to increase achievement, reduce the achievement gap. Instead being pragmatic about economic sustainability of our current educational milieu, improving our school system so that it serves the students and still meets the professional expectations of teachers in workplace quality and economic stability, and creating a more useful middle ground should be a collective goal. It is here where scholars, teachers, and school boards should rally (Augustine, 2012; Slotnik, 2010).

One question that has been explored throughout our educational history by teachers, school boards, and the rest of society is what is an effective teacher and how can teachers be evaluated (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007; Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011; Mangiante, 2011; Maslow & Kelley, 2012). What can be determined about this topic despite many different vantage points that one can take based on perspective is that peer review provides an approach that is endorsed by teachers,

teachers' unions, and school boards across the country (AFT, 2009; Moore-Johnson, Papay, Fiarman, Munger, & Qazilbash, 2010; NEA, 2011; Johnston, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Jacque, 2013; Karp, 2013). It is espoused in this document that peer review with stakes using a system like PAR provides the most balanced approach to administrators, school boards, teachers, and teachers' unions for the reasons that will be laid out below.

Discussion

In many places districts and organizations are implementing new teacher evaluation systems due to the federal government's Race to the Top (RTTP) initiatives over the past five years. Much of this criticism is due to the tumultuous implementation of reforms driven by local, state, and federal governments over the past few years which disrupted traditional structures of education. "NCLB, the most comprehensive federal education legislation to date, passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support but has since been the subject of widespread criticism from commentators, states, and federal officials" (McGovern, 2011). Influential organizations such as the The New Teacher Project (TNTP) and their publication *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern & Keeling, 2009) have had serious impact on the how the media portrays education which has led to serious changes in teacher preparation, retention, and evaluation. The reform-minded Karp (2012) has noted that demonizing teachers, which he connects with the corporate reform agenda for education, has not been helpful to teacher evaluation and quality. "By demonizing teachers and unions, and sharply polarizing the education debate, the corporate reform movement has actually undermined serious efforts to improve teacher quality and evaluation" (p.46). It is important to understand successful approaches to teacher evaluation that teachers, school boards, unions, and parents among other stakeholders to come to a consensus about teacher evaluation despite alternative viewpoints posited by individuals and groups with different agendas in education. This is especially pertinent in regards to best

practices in teacher evaluation, which is now essential to states and districts vying for funds from the Race to the Top reforms of the past five years.

Peer review in teacher evaluations has become debated topic and organizations such as the American Institutes for Research have compiled important resources about approaches to this (Jacques, 2013). In order for peer review and other changes to be made successfully a new generation of pragmatic teacher leaders are necessary to lead unions to help make this transition to a public education system that understands how to redefine 21st century teaching with a more reform-oriented, outcome friendly, teacher driven profession. Kerchner (2001) raises this point clearly when he states,

Many of those who believe that unions can't lead reform also believe that they shouldn't. On the contrary, I believe teacher unions should have both the right and the responsibility to engage in education reform. This belief is rooted in my beliefs about teaching and schooling. I believe that teaching is hard and skilled work: a mixture of craft, art, and profession. It follows that teachers should be organized as mind workers and not around the assumption that they are industrial workers subject to micromanagement. (p. 46).

In other words, teachers and teachers unions must make sure to understand the importance of teacher evaluations that are connected in some way to outcomes, but teachers must make sure that checks and balances are in place to counteract the potential abuse and misguided simplistic approach to teacher evaluations. Both major teacher unions have made positive statements and policy recommendations concerning peer review over the last few years as well (AFT, 2009; NEA, 2011). Providing teacher voice in evaluations can be done by utilizing peer review as many other professions do. Kerchner's idea of using unions to help leverage this reality is helpful and places teachers and union teacher leaders to leverage this accepted system to help facilitate this shift. He states "Performance review by colleagues is a hallmark of a profession, both for entrance into an occupation and for the ongoing assessment of a

professional's performance. In higher education it is the norm. Union-sanctioned peer review for elementary and secondary school teachers has a record long enough for reasonable claims to be made for its success...evidence suggests that peer review provides a more thorough system of inducting and evaluating novices than is currently used in most school districts. Peer review also seems to be more effective than administrative evaluation in the remediation or removal of veteran teachers with serious performance problems" (2001, p. 48).

Many districts and states throughout the country have high stakes testing for students with serious implications for student and teacher evaluations based on growth and effectiveness. It is true that most states and districts have adopted multiple measures for student growth and teacher effectiveness. Education managers look to these scores to make important decisions including student placement in magnet or special schools as well as retaining or letting teachers go due to effectiveness, or lack thereof. It is necessary to analyze how peer review can be used in evaluation systems to improve teaching and learning instead of being another failed reform effort. This type of accountability is new to many teachers throughout the country, but due to new laws it is now an inevitable part of teaching, so it is best that teachers stop fighting this accountability and instead focus their attentions on raising the professionalism of education by leading the conversation on how teachers should be accountable, especially in participating in guiding the conversation on teacher evaluations, which must have teacher voice and union buy-in if it is going to be adopted and successful.

Recommendations of Peer Review for CPS Elementary, High School & Alternative Schools

Implementing Peer Review in CPS

Recommendations for CPS include reviewing the purpose and importance of peer review, a discussion of the potential costs, its benefits, criteria for peer review teachers, and options for implementation in elementary, high school, vocational and military school, and alternative school

settings. These will serve as a recommendation for this approach and it is acknowledged that further information and exploration is needed to guide decisions. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of teacher evaluation and the importance of peer review and PAR as part of it, but rather a recommendation by teachers who are committed to having unions and school boards work together to improve educational outcomes and further the professionalization of K-12 education (Kerchner, New Teachers Project).

Costs

Below are examples of costs, but it must be stated that there is a significant cost that must be taken into account for PAR to provide the demonstrated research benefit. Also there are areas of merging existing budgetary allocations to PAR and new teacher mentoring that comes along with PAR, which means not all the money for this program would have to be found, it would just have to be re-allocated. This includes redefining funds and roles to integrate the Chicago New Teacher Center (CNTC) with the PAR program. It is expected that Illinois will be passing a law requiring all school districts to adopt some form of peer review in teacher evaluations if Illinois received RTTP funds (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012), so even with a potentially significant investment in PAR it would be wise strategic planning to begin planning for this program since it seems that our state is already leaning towards making this shift necessary in the near future.

Examples of Costs

- In District of Columbia Public Schools, each peer observer is estimated to cost approximately \$1,500 per evaluated teacher.
- In Hillsborough County Public Schools (Florida), peer observers cost approximately \$1,125 per evaluated teacher. Mentors, who play an extensive support role, cost approximately \$4,320 per evaluated teacher.
- Estimates of program costs range from approximately \$4,000 to \$7,000 per participant. By far,

the largest expense is the cost of hiring teachers to fill the classes that CTs leave.

(See following for more budgetary examples: Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2009; Moore Johnson, Papay, Fiarman, Munger, & Qazilbash, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Jacques, 2013;)

Benefits

Also the benefits of having PAR as well as a tiered approach to work with new and struggling teachers include processes that reduce administrators' burden of frequent teacher observations (Jacques, 2013), reducing hierarchical approaches to evaluations that feel negative to a more coaching, capacity-building for teachers which may reduce anxiety, increase quality and on the job learning, and feel more productive. It also increases the credibility of evaluations (Jacques, 2013) because peer reviewers will be from similar backgrounds and content areas. Finally it provides pathways to teacher leadership that do not include administration, keeping quality and effective teachers connected to the classroom (Jacques, 2013, Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2009). Obviously there are challenges that include budgetary cost, training, and initial program start-up costs like defining and communicating roles, selecting candidates for peer reviewers, and making sure peer reviewers have accurate and reliable evaluation data since they do play a role in removing unsuccessful new and struggling teachers from the classroom (Jacques, 2013). Below are the recommendations for CPS and the Chicago Board of Education to adopt PAR and school-level peer reviewers.

Recommendations for CPS Policies Regarding Peer Review

Criteria for Peer Review Teachers

- All peer review teachers must be tenured and received a distinguished rating.
- All peer review teachers should be reviewing peers in areas of experience, certification and endorsements.

- Elementary, middle, high school, and alternative school teachers should be reviewed by peers with experience in those areas.
- If a version of PAR is adopted peer reviewers should:
 - Serve 1-3 years and then return to the classroom.
 - Not come back into the system as administrators for at least on year.

Elementary Teachers

- K-2, 3-5, and 6-8 teachers could participate in peer review in groups within schools or clusters/networks
- Specialist teachers (Music, Computer Science, Art, Physical Education, etc...) could participate in peer review within schools or clusters/networks.
- SpEd teachers could participate in peer review within schools or clusters/networks.
- All peer reviewers would work alongside the administration with the goal of capacity-building for all teachers for improvement of the quality of teaching and student learning locally and district-wide.

High School Teachers

- Core content area teachers could participate in content peer review in groups within schools or clusters/networks
- Specialist teachers (Music, Computer Science, Art, Physical Education, etc...) could participate in peer review within schools or clusters/networks.
- SpEd teachers could participate in peer review within schools or clusters/networks.
- All peer reviewers would work alongside the administration with the goal of capacity-building for all teachers for improvement of the quality of teaching and student learning locally and district-wide.

Alternative School Teachers

- Core content area teachers could participate in content peer review in groups within schools or

clusters/networks

- Specialist teachers (Music, Computer Science, Art, Physical Education, etc...) could participate in peer review within schools or clusters/networks.
- SpEd teachers could participate in peer review within schools or clusters/networks.
- All peer reviewers would work alongside the administration with the goal of capacity-building for all teachers for improvement of the quality of teaching and student learning locally and district-wide.

Conclusion

In our current educational milieu peer review should be inextricably connected with teacher evaluations. In order for educators to teach effectively and students to learn successfully it is essential to use peer review to improve novice and underperforming veteran teachers. In addition providing teachers who have proven to be successful in the classroom with incentives and leadership opportunities that keep them in classrooms instead of moving into administration. Shared leadership is essential to school improvement, as stated by Advance Illinois' report, "shared leadership starts with the objective identification of teachers who have the skills to work alongside school administrators to model teaching practice, analyze data, lead collaborative teams, or observe and coach other teachers" (Transforming Teacher Work, 2011, p. 8). This connects peer review with an overall strategy of a holistic school improvement effort that keeps quality teachers with proven records of success in classrooms working alongside of successful administrators that can lead to better student outcomes. The well-documented PAR process adopted by places such as Hillsborough County Public Schools, Escambia Public Schools, and Montgomery County Public Schools (Jacques, 2013) and Elgin, Illinois U-46 district is a great example of a successful a peer review system that leads to improved teacher quality and evaluation and promotes positive teacher growth, which in turn leads to better student outcomes. The

PAR system also rewards effective teachers by giving options and financial incentives to receive more responsibility so they can remain working as teachers helping other teachers improve in the classroom instead of being tempted to move to an administrative or district-level job. This is one approach that if applied will help retain high quality teachers by providing ladders of responsibility that can enable them to continue to be leaders without leaving becoming administrators or district-level leaders so that they can return to the classroom.

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