



Educator Quality

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# Uncommon Measures: Using Peer Evaluation to Leverage Teacher Talent

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NOVEMBER 2015



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In an effort to develop a balanced and valid system, states and districts increasingly have moved toward using multiple measures in educator evaluation. Certain measures, such as classroom observations and value-added models, are more commonly used or considered than others. To support innovation and build collective knowledge, this series provides guidance on alternative measures of teacher effectiveness and highlights district and state contexts where these methods are used.

This guidance document focuses on the use of teacher peer-evaluation as an alternative measure, including background information, information on its use in teacher evaluation systems, and recommendations, resources and references to support districts in their decision making and implementation of peer evaluation.

## Background

Many teachers are skilled in supporting and collaborating with their peers. Leveraging this teaching talent through peer evaluation can be a critical element of a teacher evaluation system. Since peer assistance and review (PAR) programs began in the 1980s, districts across the country have relied on peer evaluation to support the improvement of teaching. Studies of these programs suggest that peer evaluation can strengthen the link between teacher evaluation and professional development, increase transparency and teacher confidence in the evaluation system, alleviate some of the time burden placed on other evaluators, and promote a more professional learning culture (Goldstein, 2007, Johnson et al., 2010; Papay, 2009, 2011). Although peer evaluation comes with costs, this guidance document aims to provide districts with critical information and recommendations for using PAR in district performance evaluation of teachers.

## Scope of Guidance

This guidance document provides examples of how to incorporate peer evaluations as a portion of teacher performance evaluation and remediation in two ways:

- **Peer observers are used as part of performance evaluations for all teachers.** Peers observe the teacher classroom practice as part of performance evaluations that occur on a regular basis (usually annually). Peer observers only conduct observations and provide feedback in postobservation conferences as part of the performance evaluation process.
  - Peer observers usually apply for the position and are trained in both the process and their responsibilities to other teachers (i.e., giving performance feedback).
  - Evidence from peer observations is used as part of the educator’s summative performance evaluation, but an administrator determines the final evaluation and rating.

- **Consulting teachers are used as part of aligned PAR programs for novice or struggling teachers.** The PAR program is designed to support and evaluate such teachers within a school.
  - In the PAR program, mentor teachers (usually referred to as “consulting teachers”) conduct observations of teacher practice and provide coaching and mentoring support to those teachers throughout the school year.
  - Consulting teachers usually apply for the position and participate in training on both the process and their responsibilities as a mentor.
  - The consulting teacher presents midyear and end-of-year recommendations to a PAR panel composed of both union and district leadership (see page 8 for more information). The PAR panel then must decide if it wishes to retain or dismiss the teacher.
  - Districts may align an existing PAR program to a performance evaluation system used for all teachers by using evidence gathered through PAR (such as observations) as part of a teacher’s regular performance evaluation or by allowing teachers included in a PAR program to be exempt from regular performance evaluation.

## Types of Peer Evaluation

### Peer Observations in Teacher Performance Evaluations

A *peer evaluator* or *peer observer* may be a teacher serving in any role, but often is a teacher serving in a leadership capacity as an instructional leader, mentor, or other specialized role. Peer observers may or may not serve as classroom teachers during the school year in which they are conducting observations; however, they must have served as teachers for a significant period of time and meet other criteria for the position. A peer observer must not serve in an administrative or direct supervisory role but may have some responsibility over other teachers based on the position. If peer observers conduct formal evaluations for which they also must conduct post-observation conferences, they must be trained by the district in the framework used for observations. Principals or other administrators—not peer observers—should have responsibility for summative performance evaluations, although the evidence gathered by peer observers still is included in the summative rating. This evidence should be in written form and include data from the observation, any rubrics or observation forms, scoring, and any feedback or next steps provided.

The professional practice component of evaluations usually is measured primarily through classroom observations. Although principals often conduct classroom observations throughout the school year for a variety of purposes, they may find it challenging to conduct all necessary classroom observations for teacher evaluations. Having peers conduct observations of teacher practice can reduce the time burden on the principal and help ensure that observers have relevant pedagogical expertise. The Measures of Effective Teaching project found that having more observers increased ratings reliability (Ho & Kane, 2013). Districts can better ensure the reliability of observations by using peer observers to increase the number of observers and observations of practice. Teachers also recognize that having a peer observer contribute to



teacher performance evaluations, in addition to an administrative observer, provides the following benefits:

- Like administrators, teachers can provide high-quality, specific feedback on performance. This can increase the emphasis on improvement and development rather than accountability alone.
- Teachers can engage in professional development to learn to provide clear and specific recommendations for improving instruction that draw upon recent classroom practices.
- Teachers with similar content and grade-level experience can learn to readily recognize common classroom challenges and practices specific to a teacher’s content and grade level.
- Teachers value opportunities to have professional conversations about their instructional practices with other similarly qualified educators, including opportunities for overall improvement and ways to address the specific needs and challenges of individual students.

Districts could consider having a specific track for teacher leaders who are interested in becoming peer evaluators or peer observers; it could include specific observer training certification as well as other training relevant to this role. The district should base selection criteria on appropriate professional skills by hiring peer observers who have had a minimum number of years successfully teaching in the district and who demonstrate leadership and collegiality, communication skills, and knowledge of pedagogy. Districts also may require peer observers to have a history of high effectiveness scores, although this may not be feasible when first implementing the evaluation system.

## Peer Observer Roles

It is important to consider what types of peer observers are most compatible with the district. Peer observers may support the evaluation process in the following ways:

- Contribute to support and evaluation **or** evaluation alone.
- Conduct informal observations **or** formal observations.
- Gather evidence on some aspects of practice **or** all aspects of practice.
- Conduct some observations **or** all observations.
- Work exclusively in one school **or** across the district **or** across districts.
- Work with specific types of teachers (e.g., specific grades or subjects, veteran, novice, struggling) **or** all teachers generally.
- Serve as peer observer part time **or** full time (Osta & Grodsky, 2012).

The peer observer’s role in the overall performance evaluation can be more or less effective depending on the district’s size and culture. Districts should consider the following factors when designing the role of peer observer:

- **Financial cost.** Using peer observers requires districts to hire supplemental teaching staff to replace observers when they leave the classroom. Districts also need to train and evaluate peer observers on observation protocols and scoring to ensure that their scores are valid and that they use rubrics with fidelity. According to one study, PAR programs can cost districts between \$4,000 and \$10,000 per teacher served. However, an effective PAR system can save districts money when good teachers are retained year to year. Along with longer term cost savings, PAR programs (along with other peer-evaluation programs) have additional benefits, such as improving teacher performance, improving student outcomes, and expanding the capacity of cooperating teachers. (Papay et al., 2011)
  - Smaller districts may not have the resources to hire enough peer observers to specialize in specific subjects or grade levels. Likewise, smaller districts may not have enough teachers of specific subjects or grades to justify full-time specialized peer observers. Smaller districts may also want to consider the impact of needing to find coverage for those teachers serving in the observer/evaluator role. Smaller districts should assess carefully the number of peer observations that teachers of specific subjects and grade levels will require to determine the role of the peer observer.
  - Larger districts may be able to hire enough peer observers to specialize in specific subjects or grade levels. These types of peer observers are more likely to spend most or all of their time observing teachers in schools where they have not taught previously. Because these types of peer observers have no previous relationship with most or all of the teachers they will observe, it is important that they have opportunities to build rapport with teachers via preobservation conferences or goal-setting activities.
- **Defining and communicating roles.** Because peer observers perform some administrative functions, peer observer roles need to be negotiated into labor agreements and communicated clearly to staff. It is important that the peer observer role is carefully designed to ensure that the teacher remains a peer and does not take on additional administrative tasks.
  - In a large district, peer observers may distribute their caseload to avoid observing teachers in schools where they have previously taught.
  - In instances where there are concerns about peer observers contributing to the evaluations of teachers with whom they have previously worked, smaller districts may have peer observers conduct informal observations that contribute only to formative feedback.

In District of Columbia Public Schools, each peer observer is estimated to cost approximately \$1,500 per evaluated teacher.

In Hillsborough County (Florida) Public Schools, peer observers cost approximately \$1,125 per evaluated teacher. Mentors, who play an extensive support role, cost approximately \$4,320 per evaluated teacher.

- All districts should look to collective bargaining agreements and seek feedback from the local union about whether and how to require peer evaluators to return to the classroom once their role ends. In addition, if local bargaining agreements specify that union members may not evaluate each other, the district should ensure that any one peer observer does not determine the majority of a teacher’s performance rating in any evaluation domain.
- If districts select the option of hiring peer observers/evaluators full time, they must consider how and when these teachers will return to the classroom and if they can return to the same school or teaching assignment they came from. All districts should consider requiring full-time peer observers to return to their roles afterward as classroom teachers to ensure that the peer observer role does not serve as a pre-administrative role and is not seen as a first step toward an administrative track.
- **Objectivity.** If teachers serve as peer observers within their own schools, their objectivity may be questioned. Whether this is a perceived or legitimate concern, high-quality training, observer monitoring, and retraining are critical to reduce subjectivity.

Table 1 provides examples of the variety of potential roles and responsibilities for peer observers in different districts. See Table 2 for more details regarding each example district.

**Table 1. Examples of Peer Observer Roles**

Peer Observer	Role and Responsibilities	Source
Master Educator: full time	Master Educators are highly qualified content experts with extensive teaching and leadership backgrounds. They serve in this role full time and do not have responsibilities outside of conducting observations and providing feedback to teachers across the district. Master Educators may be hired from within the district or externally.	<a href="#">D.C. Public Schools Master Educator information</a>
Peer Evaluator: full time or part time	Peer Evaluators are classroom teachers who are hired by the district to contribute to performance evaluations for at least one year. <b>Peer Evaluators that serve in a full-time position sometimes are required to return afterward to their role as classroom teacher to ensure they are truly “peers.”</b> Peer Evaluators may conduct observations or gather other evidence, but they do not conduct the summative evaluation. In North Carolina, only teachers in the probationary period of their teaching career are required to have a peer observation. Peer Evaluators typically are hired from within the district.	<a href="#">Alamance-Burlington (North Carolina) School System</a> <a href="#">Hillsborough County Public Schools</a>
Mentor: part time	Mentors are classroom teachers who also serve in a mentoring or coaching role for novice or struggling teachers in the district. If part of a PAR program, the mentor also conducts an evaluation and provides personnel recommendations for these teachers. <b>If part of a regular performance evaluation, the mentor only contributes to evaluations for teachers with whom they do not have a mentoring or coaching relationship.</b> Mentors spend most of their time coaching teachers and spend limited time as evaluators. Mentors are hired from within the district.	<a href="#">Hillsborough County Public Schools</a>

## Selecting and Preparing Peer Observers

The success of peer observers is highly dependent on two factors: selection of peer observers and training of those selected. Teachers who are strong candidates for peer observer roles should possess the following characteristics:

- Consistently high effectiveness ratings, especially in instructional practices
- Positive relationships with other educators in their schools
- Active participation in school wide support and collaboration opportunities

Candidates for peer observer roles often apply independently for the position several months to a year prior to taking on the peer observer role and spend substantial time in training prior to conducting observations. In aligned PAR programs, many consulting teachers observe the entire PAR process and undergo training for a full year prior to taking on the role. Regardless of their role and type of commitment, training for peer observers should include the following:

- Observation procedures, including timeline, caseload, and data security
- Observation tools, including data collection rubrics and scoring
- Best practices for ensuring consistency, accuracy, and fairness in scoring
- Curriculum and standards for the teachers being observed
- Best practices for teaching, cultural competency, and methods for avoiding personal biases and opinions in scoring
- Professional interactions with observed teachers, including **how to talk effectively about instructional practice with other teachers**. (Although principals and other administrators often have experience talking to teachers about their classroom practices, peer observers may not begin the role with this experience or the skills necessary to communicate effectively about teaching in a post-observation conference.)
- Evaluation procedures overall
- Prequalification (certification) demonstrating reliability and validity of scoring **prior** to conducting observations and periodically thereafter (at least once a year, preferably several times a year) (Peer observers should not conduct actual observations until they have passed the prequalification exam.)

Although peer observers may have received training in the evaluation system as part of a districtwide training for all instructional staff, it is important that they receive training specific to their role. The training for peer observers should align to the administrative training, but it also should include additional training on how to give appropriate feedback and engage teachers in conversation about practice. Therefore, peer observers must be trained in the observational frameworks used by the district, and they also must have additional training and support in giving performance feedback. Districts may use online prequalification (certification) for some calibration exercises, such as scoring of video lessons, but they should ensure that in-person calibrations are required for components such as providing feedback.

Table 2 provides more detail about example districts’ peer observation models.

**Table 2. Examples of District Models of Peer Observation**

District of Columbia Public Schools	Alamance-Burlington School System
<p>The Master Educator role was created in response to teachers’ repeated requests to be observed and evaluated by objective content experts. Master Educators do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe specific types of teachers by grade and content area and serve in their role full time.</li> <li>• Conduct two out of four formal observations for most teachers.</li> <li>• Conduct observations and gather evidence in the same way as the principal, provide written feedback to the teacher, and hold post observation conferences.</li> </ul> <p>For more information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Evaluation Guidebooks</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Master Educators</a></li> </ul>	<p>In North Carolina, all probationary teachers must have one formal observation by a peer evaluator and three formal observations by an administrator. In the Alamance-Burlington School System, all tenured teachers are trained as peer evaluators and may conduct peer observations of probationary teachers at their school. Peer observations focus on a limited number of standards within the teaching framework (specifically, standards 2, 3 and 4, which are observable in a classroom setting).</p> <p>For more information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Peer Evaluation Resources</a></li> </ul>
Hillsborough County Public Schools	
<p>In Hillsborough County (Florida) Public Schools, peer observers and mentors both conduct formal observations of teacher practice. Teachers have between three and 11 observations per year, depending on their status and previous rating. Peer observers and mentors conduct the majority of observations for novice or struggling teachers. This model also includes the following guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer observations carry greater weight than principal feedback toward the ratings of direct instructional practices. For the four Danielson domains, which are used to measure teacher practice, peer observers and mentors contribute to a greater portion of the rating for the first three domains than the principal; however, the principal is solely responsible for the fourth, “Professional Responsibilities,” rating.</li> <li>• Peer observers work full time conducting observations and providing teachers with feedback; however, mentors only spend approximately 10 percent of their time contributing to performance evaluations. The mentors are able to ensure reliability by dual-coding observations and convening workgroups to share best practices.</li> <li>• Although peer observers and mentors are not assigned to observe only teachers of specific grades or content areas as explicitly as in other districts (such as District of Columbia Public Schools), the district does provide training to align curriculum and evaluation efforts across different schools.</li> </ul> <p>For more information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Teacher Evaluation Handbook (2011)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Design and Implementation</a></li> </ul>	

### Rochester City School District

In Rochester (New York) City School District, teachers are allowed to select the option of using a peer evaluator as a part of their evaluations. Peer evaluators are recommended and trained to observe their peer teachers at least twice per month, both formally and informally, to build an understanding of the teacher's development. If the teacher chooses to use a peer evaluator, those observation scores represent 29 points of a total 60 points focused on teacher performance through observation. The remaining 31 points are designated for the supervising administrator. Peer evaluators further support teachers rated "ineffective" or "developing" by collaborating on their teacher improvement or development plans.

For more information:

- [Teacher Evaluation Guide \(2014–15\)](#)

## Consulting Teachers' Observations in Aligned PAR Programs

Several districts across the country have implemented PAR programs during the last three decades. Some districts have chosen to align the PAR program with their performance evaluation system, which is one way to use peer evaluators in performance evaluations. A PAR program is a professional induction and support system that is jointly controlled by the local union and district administrators. PAR programs involve a panel of union representatives (teachers or union staff) and district administrators, usually with a slight union majority, and expert "consulting" teachers who serve as mentors. Principals may be asked to refer struggling teachers based on professional judgment or evaluation results. Teachers in the PAR program receive support through activities such as observation, modeling, coaching, and guided study with their consulting teacher. The consulting teacher also conducts a formal evaluation of the teacher and presents recommendations—which may include dismissal, continued PAR participation, or successful completion of the program—to the PAR panel. Consulting teachers differ from those who are assigned to assist teachers on a remediation plan; PAR consulting teachers only work with teachers enrolled in the PAR program, who may or may not have a remediation plan depending on the program's design. PAR programs vary widely based on the teachers served (novice, struggling, or both), the role of school administrators, and alignment to districtwide performance evaluations. Different PAR programs have different criteria for consulting teacher positions, but consulting teachers usually apply for the position and submit a portfolio demonstrating their teaching expertise, positive staff relationships, and communication skills.

PAR programs have many benefits, including the following:

- Emphasis on improving teaching quality
- Savings through the retention of effective educators and reductions in contested dismissals
- Practice-focused professional development and specific, high-quality feedback for teachers
- Meaningful union involvement in ensuring teaching quality
- Leadership opportunities for effective teachers
- Promotion of a professional culture of teaching (Goldstein, 2007; Johnson et al, 2010; Papay, 2009, 2011) PAR programs usually have strong support where they are implemented from

teachers, union leaders, and district leaders. Teachers especially tend to see PAR programs as fair and effective because they allow teachers to be involved in all steps of the process. In order to implement a PAR program effectively, districts should take several challenges into account:

- PAR programs require a significant initial investment: They may cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$9,000 for each teacher enrolled (Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2012). These costs can be offset or mitigated, however, by increased retention rates because each teacher who leaves can cost the district between approximately \$5,000 and nearly \$18,000 (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007).
- PAR programs can help build positive relationships between districts and unions, but they also require active cooperation among school administrators, district administrators, and union leaders.
- Peer review elevates the level of dialogue about teaching and learning. Although peer review may be controversial for experienced teachers if their peer reviewer has recently worked as a fellow classroom teacher at the same school, PAR programs that assign consulting teachers with care may avoid this issue.

Prior to the recent widespread changes in teacher evaluation policies, PAR programs sometimes were aligned to district performance evaluation systems but more often functioned separately. Most districts with long-established PAR programs have not integrated those programs into updated evaluation systems that include student growth or more frequent evaluations. Aligning the district PAR program (or similar mentoring or induction program) to performance evaluations can help support novice teachers in becoming proficient and provide remediation for teachers with areas needing improvement. Aligned PAR programs should do the following:

- Include formal processes for sharing formative and summative feedback based on the same practice standards as performance evaluations.
- Have a clear and rigorous process for selecting consulting teachers based on evaluation results and other qualifications. Consulting teachers and peer observers may have similar roles and responsibilities or even serve in a dual role in smaller districts.
- Clearly outline the intersection between the PAR program and the districtwide performance evaluation process. This may be done in one or more of the following ways:
  - PAR and performance evaluations may be aligned, or PAR evaluations may take the place of performance evaluations.
  - Observations conducted and evidence gathered through PAR processes also may count for performance evaluations (where appropriate and if the observations meet other local or state requirements) to reduce the burden on evaluators.
  - Novice teachers may be exempt from summative performance evaluations until they have successfully exited the PAR program.
  - Struggling teachers may be identified for participation in PAR programs through performance evaluation results and may be exempt from regular performance evaluations during their participation in the PAR program.

Table 3 provides examples of how different districts align PAR programs with their regular performance evaluation process.

**Table 3. Examples of Alignment Between PAR Programs and Performance Evaluations**

<b>219 Niles Township (Illinois) PAR Program</b>
<p>The Niles Township (Illinois) PAR program is fully aligned to performance evaluations in the district. The district has four full-time consultant teachers who serve first-year, second-year, and struggling teachers in the district, which has about 400 teachers overall. Each consulting teacher must go through the Growth Through Learning evaluator prequalification training and has a caseload of no more than 15 teachers. If the consulting teacher works with a struggling, tenured teacher, that teacher counts as two teachers for the caseload. The Niles Township PAR panel has five teachers and four administrators who hear evaluation reports, discuss progress, and make a final recommendation for retention or release to the superintendent. The consulting teachers also make recommendations for retention or release for the first- and second-year teachers, but the PAR panel makes the sole recommendation for retention or release for struggling tenured teachers.</p> <p>Consulting teachers conduct several observations throughout the year; however, they also consider evidence from observations conducted by administrators. The consulting teacher gives up to three reports per year to the PAR panel on a teacher’s performance and is responsible for giving the final, summative evaluation rating to a teacher. In this system, the PAR process serves as the regular performance evaluation with the addition of the administrator’s observation evidence, which usually would be included in performance evaluations.</p> <p>Webinars, as well as other resources providing more information on the Niles Township PAR and other peer review programs, are available on the Illinois Race to the Top website:  <a href="http://www.isbe.net/racetothetop/htmls/resources.htm">http://www.isbe.net/racetothetop/htmls/resources.htm</a></p>
<b>South Carolina ADEPT Cycle 1</b>
<p>Although the South Carolina Department of Education does not require a PAR program statewide, the ADEPT statewide evaluation system includes similar induction and mentoring support for new and struggling educators. All first-year teachers undergo a process similar to peer assistance, in which they are assigned a mentor teacher who provides coaching, helps with goal setting, and gathers performance evidence including student growth. First-year educators only receive a formative evaluation; educators receive a summative evaluation at the end of their second year of teaching. The district’s decision on whether to grant tenure is based on evidence gathered from the induction and mentoring process; this is similar to most PAR programs.</p> <p>For more information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">South Carolina Educator Effectiveness Homepage</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">South Carolina Induction and Mentoring Program: Homepage</a></li> <li>• </li> </ul>
<b>Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools</b>
<p>Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools’ PAR program is fully aligned with the district’s performance evaluation system. All novice teachers participate in the PAR program. Experienced teachers who receive an unsatisfactory overall rating also participate in the PAR program if, after review, the need for assistance is confirmed. Teachers participating in the PAR program also continue to undergo the standard performance evaluation process; evidence gathered for standard performance evaluations may be used to help provide feedback and assistance to teachers.</p> <p>For more information: <a href="#">MCEA/MCPS Peer Assistance &amp; Review Program</a></p>



## Escambia County (Florida) Public Schools

Escambia County (Florida) Public School's PAR program, Successful Teachers Assisting Rising Teachers, which also is known as START, is fully aligned with its performance evaluation system and uses a rigorous, multistage process to recruit and select consulting teachers. Consulting teachers work full time to conduct observations and provide feedback on all aspects of the performance evaluation, including student performance, with the exception of the professional responsibilities domain of the practice component. To ensure that a consulting teacher is an actual peer observer, not a quasi-administrator, teachers can serve as a consulting teacher for a maximum of five years (not necessarily continuously) during their careers. In addition, the district guarantees that the teacher can return to the same teaching assignment he or she left when activated to serve as a consulting teacher.

### **The Consulting Teacher Selection Process and Recruitment**

In December, district leaders give presentations in schools to explain the PAR program, the job of a consulting teacher, and the necessary qualities and skills expected in the role. A current consulting teacher shares his or her experiences and challenges in the role and is available to answer candidate questions during each presentation.

**Application process.** Candidates complete an application and obtain a letter of recommendation from their principal and their building's union representative. The candidate asks two colleagues to complete a survey about his or her abilities as a teacher, peer, and colleague, as well as his or her contributions to the school. To encourage candor among the staff, all recommendation letters and survey responses are collected anonymously.

**Candidate selection process.** A joint team of district and union representatives reviews all of the applications and selects the final candidates according to the following process:

- First stage: After reviewing and scoring applications, recommendations, and peer survey responses, the joint team decides which applicants move on to the next stage.
- Second stage: The applicant's principal and building representative each select two staff members to complete surveys about the applicant's communication, teamwork, and instructional skills. The surveys are used to generate applicant ratings, which the joint team combines with ratings from the first stage to make another cut.
- Third stage: The joint team carries out unannounced classroom observations and rates the performance of each applicant using the district's evaluation framework. Usually, one district representative and one union representative complete the observation as a pair. The joint team reviews all of the information collected as well as the district's grade-level and specialization needs relative to the remaining applicant pool. The joint team requires a consensus agreement on each applicant selected for the interview.
- Fourth stage: The joint team conducts an in-person interview with each remaining applicant.
  - Performance task. The applicant watches a short classroom video of a second-year teacher and takes notes on the teacher's strengths and areas for improvement.
  - During the interview, the applicant is asked to demonstrate how he or she would conference with the teacher in the video and provide feedback on performance.

After the interview concludes, the joint team collects the applicant's observation notes and compares them with the master scorer's notes for the same video. In addition to the performance task, the joint team asks the applicant a series of questions that assess the applicant's skill and passion for coaching and mentoring. After all of the interviews have been completed (usually in early April), the joint team reviews all of the information gathered on each remaining applicant and reaches a consensus decision on which applicants to select as consulting teachers. Successful applicants receive extensive training and are then included in the district's pool of consulting teachers. Each year, depending on subject-area and grade-level needs, teachers are activated from the pool to serve as full-time consulting teachers.

Sources: Interview with Dr. Karen Owen, director of staff development, Escambia County School District, April 16, 2013; Professional Learning Department: Additional E3/START Information—START Update Presentation (<http://ecsd-fl.schoolloop.com/pl>)

## Recommendations to Districts on Peer Observation

The following is a summary of guidance and recommendations to districts on using peer observation in teacher performance evaluations:

- Tie peer evaluation to the district’s framework for teaching. Ensure that the same standards and expectations are communicated clearly among administrators, instructional leaders, mentors, evaluators, and teachers.
- Tailor the design to meet the district’s needs and conditions in the following ways:
  - If there is a PAR program or a similar induction or mentoring program in place, consider ways to align it to performance evaluations based on other models. The program may be used in conjunction with or in place of standard performance evaluations.
  - Consider the district’s size and administrators’ capacity when defining the scope of work for peer observers. Smaller districts may consider allowing peer observers to continue teaching in the classroom, while larger districts may consider allowing teachers to serve solely as observers and support staff for a specified period. All districts may consider giving peer observers more responsibility for assessing instructional aspects of the district’s framework for teaching.
- Include teachers, principals, and union leaders in planning for the system. For example:
  - Provide forums for teachers and principals to share their views on peer observers and raise questions prior to finalizing the system’s design.
  - Provide clear examples of how a certain type of peer observation would look in practice, addressing any concerns that may come up from practitioners and emphasizing fairness.
- Incorporate the following best practices:
  - Peers should conduct observations and provide formative feedback. Data collected by peers should be included in the calculation of the summative performance evaluation, but peers should not be responsible for conducting the summative evaluation.
  - Peer observers should be selected through a rigorous process. At the very least, they should demonstrate positive evaluation results and commitment to the school community and have demonstrated their ability to provide teaching that meets the standards in the framework for teaching being used in the district.
  - Peer observers should undergo initial training specific to their role, including how to collect evidence, reduce bias, and effectively consult with teachers about their practice. They should continue to participate in recalibration exercises for reliability and troubleshooting.

- The work to implement the teacher evaluation system can occur simultaneously with peer observation planning. Peer observations may serve only as formative feedback in the first year, depending on training capacity at the district level.
- Involve principals and other evaluators early in the design process. Training should ground observation in the district’s standards for teaching and evaluation expectations. Create opportunities for ongoing training and collaboration among administrators and peer observers.
- Consider the union’s role in designing and communicating about the system. The district and union could issue a joint statement or otherwise collaborate on communication to enhance stakeholder support and understanding.

## Resources and References

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