

# TEACH +PLUS

Opportunities for Teachers,  
Results for Urban Students

## Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Implementation Teachers Will Support

### Ten Recommendations from MCS Teachers for the Effective Design and Implementation of PAR

Recognizing the skills of exemplary teachers has the potential to positively impact the development and retention of effective teachers. As teachers who believe in the potential of Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), we support its implementation in Memphis City Schools. As MCS implements Phase I of PAR in the spring semester (2012), the goal of the implementation should be clear — to support selected district teachers and align PAR with the new Teacher Effectiveness Measure. We applaud district policymakers for this effort. We propose the following recommendations for effective design and implementation of Phase I of PAR in order for teachers to see PAR as we do — as support for an effective teacher in every classroom every day.

#### 1. Communicate now for smooth implementation.

In order to ensure teacher buy-in and support, it is important to communicate clearly with teachers before Phase I implementation begins. What do teachers want to know?

- The meaning of PAR
- Its purpose and goals
- The timeline for Phase I and full implementation
- Which teachers will be part of the spring 2012 Phase I Implementation
- How Consulting Teachers will be selected and their specific role
- How PAR will align with (or be separate from) the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM)
- Which rubrics PAR consulting teachers will use

We recommend several opportunities for the district to communicate PAR to teachers:

- Send an email blast to teachers explaining PAR; include resources that will help teachers understand PAR easily and include opportunities for them to learn more.
- Include information on the TEI website.
- Develop a media site video that explains PAR and answers the above questions.
- Send ambassador teachers to meet with teachers across MCS to explain and advocate for PAR.

#### 2. Engage teachers in PAR roll-out.

Teachers want to know, and they want to contribute ideas! Teachers have consistently shown an interest in being a part of the conversation as they have engaged in working groups, leadership programs, surveys, etc. They have made it clear that they want their voice to be heard. Allow teachers to inform the implementation in a variety of ways:

- Collaborate with Teach Plus to engage groups of teachers in the implementation (focus groups, survey, T+ Network Event).
- Form a PAR oversight committee that includes teachers.

### **3. Recruit non-classroom teachers for the Consulting Teacher role this spring. Bring on current teachers for full implementation next year.**

We find the Consulting Teacher (CT) role very appealing as a means of supporting our colleagues and as a mechanism for teacher leadership and career differentiation. However, this year, because the Phase I implementation begins in the middle of a school year, there is great concern about pulling teachers out of the classroom. Although there are many teachers who would see the CT role as a career pathway opportunity, there are other effective teachers like us who would be deeply concerned about leaving our students mid-year and just before state assessments. *This year, we recommend the district recruit Consulting Teachers from a pool of recently retired teachers and district literacy specialists and content coaches.* Next year, we would like to see this position offered to experienced, effective teachers throughout the district. The sustainability of PAR must begin with having the right people in place and ready for full implementation in the 2012-13 school year.

### **4. Hire the best: Ensure Consulting Teachers meet specific qualifications.**

First, the district should settle on a set of proven qualities of Consulting Teachers using other district experiences as a model. Second, the district should hire Consulting Teachers to meet the various content needs of selected teachers in the program. We recommend using as an example the criteria used by the MCS Fine Arts department to select mentor teachers. Even though this is Phase I of PAR implementation, the selection of Consulting Teachers is very important. Criteria for those who are selected as Consulting Teachers should include, at minimum, the following:

- Successful classroom teaching experience of at least five years;
- Satisfactory evaluations over those five years;
- Data that demonstrate the applicant's success with his/her students (could be a variety of data sources, including, but not limited to, TVAAS and TCAP, but could also include a variety of measures of student performance);
- Recommendation letters from most recent principal and two teacher peers.

We recognize and appreciate the fact that these criteria may (and should) change with full implementation. That change should be in alignment with the current teacher evaluation. Finally, there should be complete transparency for any criteria and selection process used.

### **5. Offer PAR to those teachers who need it the most.**

Novice teachers should participate in PAR their first year. There should be a clear exit plan, specifically for effective first year teachers, though teachers could stay in PAR up to 3 years if necessary. Tenured teachers should have more than one year in PAR, if needed, to prove proficiency. For the Phase I implementation, tenured teachers should self-select or be recommended by principals. Consideration of TEM scores (in observations that have been conducted thus far) should also be a factor of teacher participation as well as TVAAS levels.

### **6. Provide aligned professional development for participating PAR teachers.**

Create strategic professional development that targets specific TEM indicators and is aligned to the PAR observation rubric. Provide opportunities to visit classrooms of teachers who are skilled in the areas that the teacher participating in PAR is lacking. Teachers have continuously asked for professional development that is aligned to their specific areas of need; this is an opportunity to offer that prescriptive professional development.

### **7. Select a diverse governance board.**

In other PAR programs across the nation, the Governance Board is critical to the success of the PAR program. The Governance Board should include an odd number of members with the majority represented by the teachers' representative body (MEA) and the remaining members represented by district management. MEA should appoint

teachers who span grades and subjects while the district representatives should include Labor Relations, Human Resources, and School Operations. The governance board should undergo an intensive training during Phase I implementation in order to learn how to select, train, and determine accountability system for consulting teachers.

### **8. Design a study and report publicly on the impact of the Phase I implementation.**

It is critically important to learn from the Spring 2012 implementation. We urge the district to consult with teachers and to report publicly on the success and growth areas of PAR. We recommend:

- An external review board that includes outside experts (such as Dal Lawrence and Julie Koppich);
- Feedback from teachers, such as: T+ Network events, surveys of participating teachers, focus groups with participating teachers, focus groups with non-participating teachers, review of PAR teacher documents to track teacher improvement;
- A rubric for consulting teachers to ensure inter-rater reliability;
- Representatives from districts where PAR is currently implemented come to critique/train (or send potential consulting teachers to those districts);
- Pre and post observations of teachers receiving PAR to determine impact.

### **9. Share results of pilot with teachers.**

The results of the Phase I implementation should be transparent to teachers. Teachers need to know how this program has proven beneficial for increasing teacher effectiveness. Teachers also need to be aware of the areas for improvement. Knowing how it affects teaching will encourage teacher interest and support. The district should share outcomes with teachers before school is dismissed for the year.

### **10. Involve teachers in PAR design for full implementation.**

Teachers are the ones who will participate in and benefit from PAR. We recommend frequent updates from MCS district administrators on the implementation and impact of PAR; a stakeholder committee that includes teachers, the district, and the union that meets regularly to discuss progress and to problem-solve; and a PAR website hosted on the MCS website that takes advantage of technology to communicate the specifics of PAR (such as posting a “mock” video of a consulting teacher conversation, the rubrics, the biographies of consulting teachers, and the application to become a consulting teacher).

In closing, we see implementation of PAR as a way to offer support to teachers in an effort to help them become more effective in the classroom. If the overall goal is truly having an effective teacher in every classroom every day, this program can help make that happen — with effective design and implementation.

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