
Using Peer Review Evaluation as an Alternate Measure of Educator Effectiveness

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The 2016–17 budget bill for Ohio includes provisions that modify the alternative framework for teacher evaluation beginning in the 2015–16 school year. Districts may still use the original teacher evaluation framework, but for those electing to use the alternative framework, one or any combination of the following components shall be 15 percent of each teacher’s evaluation: student surveys, teacher self-evaluations, peer review evaluations, student portfolios, or a district-determined component. This document provides guidance regarding teacher peer review evaluations, which are a set of observations, meeting notes, and other documents based on the work a peer does with the teacher being evaluated, which are then used to arrive at a final summative teacher evaluation score. Included in this document are examples of how peer review evaluations are used in teacher evaluation systems around the country, the benefits and limitations of their use, and steps for the design of a system that uses the peer review evaluation as a separate component of the overall education evaluation system.

Scope of Guidance

This guidance document includes information on the following two approaches to peer review evaluations:

- **Approach 1: Peer reviewers are used as part of performance evaluations for all teachers.** Peers observe teachers’ classroom practices as part of performance evaluations that occur on a regular basis, usually annually. Peer reviewers conduct observations and provide feedback in postobservation conferences, which are part of the alternative component in the teacher evaluation process. If allowed, peer reviewers also provide a final summative evaluation rating based on a review of collected artifacts from those observations.
 - Peer reviewers usually apply for the position and participate in training on both the process and their responsibilities to other teachers (i.e., giving performance feedback).
 - Evidence from observations conducted by peer reviewers is used to give a rating from 1 to 4. This rating is worth 15 percent of an educator’s final summative rating.
- **Approach 2: Consulting teachers are used as part of aligned peer assistance and review (PAR) programs for novice and/or struggling teachers.** The PAR program is designed to support and evaluate novice or struggling 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. The PAR panel must then 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.

In addition, this guidance document provides considerations for creating a peer observation system, selecting peer reviewers or mentor teachers, and examples of districts implementing peer reviews as part of teacher evaluations in other states.

Selecting Peer Reviewers

Approach 1: Peer Reviewers in Teacher Performance Evaluations

As outlined above, in this model, any teacher could elect to be evaluated through the peer reviewer evaluation system. In this model, a peer reviewer may be a teacher with any title, but is often a teacher serving in a leadership capacity as an instructional leader, as a mentor, or in another specialized role. Peer reviewers 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 in the past and must meet other criteria for the position. A peer reviewer should not serve in an administrative or direct supervisory role but may have some responsibility over other teachers based on the position. For example, a teacher who leads a professional learning community or grade-level team may serve as a peer reviewer, whereas a full-time department head may not be appropriate as a peer reviewer. For teachers in dual or hybrid teaching and leadership positions (especially those in smaller schools or districts), it may or may not be appropriate to serve as a peer reviewer given the existing culture of collaboration and feedback.

It is important for peer reviewers to receive training specific to their responsibilities, such as choosing and scheduling observation sessions, using the observation framework, reviewing artifacts, and providing constructive feedback. Principals or other administrators—not peer observers—should have responsibility for summative performance evaluations, although the evidence gathered by peer reviewers is still included in the summative rating. The evidence that is gathered by peer reviewers to be used as part of a summative evaluation should be in written form and include data from the observation, rubrics or observation forms, scoring, feedback, or next steps. All of these documents will become part of the artifact set that is used when assigning a final summative score for evaluation. One decision point to consider is whether every teacher observation and meeting document that a peer reviewer has needs to be included in the set of artifacts for final submission, or if only a select set of those documents needs to be included.

To focus the work that a peer reviewer does with the teacher being evaluated, it is recommended that the observations, meetings, and other work is aligned with the professional practice framework used in the district, and it should align with the standards for Ohio educators. By aligning the work of the peer reviewer to these standards, districts can better ensure the reliability of observations by increasing the number of observers and observations of practice by the peer observers (Ho & Kane, 2013). Teachers also recognize that having peer reviewers contribute to teacher performance evaluations, in addition to an administrative observer, provides the following benefits (Sullivan, 2012):

- Higher teacher confidence that the evaluation system is both fair and supportive rather than punitive.
- An increased level of collegiality and common purpose between teachers across a system.
- Potentially higher retention rates of teaching staff.
- Increased alignment between teachers and administrators on expectations for classroom teachers.

It is important to consider what types of peer reviewers are most compatible with the district's existing culture, structure, and goals. Decisions should be made about how reviewers support the evaluation process on the following dimensions (Osta & Grodsky, 2012):

- Contribute to support and evaluation **or** evaluation alone.
- Conduct informal observations, formal observations, **or** both.
- Gather evidence on some **or** all aspects of practice.
- Work exclusively in one school, 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 reviewers part-time **or** full-time.

Districts in Ohio might consider having a specific career track for teacher-leaders who are interested in becoming peer reviewers. These teachers could receive observer training that is aligned with the observer training received by administrators. The district could base selection criteria on appropriate professional skills by hiring peer reviewers who have had a minimum number of years successfully teaching in the district, evidenced by high effectiveness ratings or other criteria, and who demonstrate leadership, collegiality, communication skills, and knowledge of pedagogy.

Approach 2: Consulting Teachers' Observations in Aligned PAR Programs

Background

Districts across the country began relying on PAR programs in the 1980s to support instructional improvement. Some districts have chosen to align their PAR program with their performance evaluation system, using consulting teachers as peer observers 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 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 and/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 to the PAR panel. Recommendations may include dismissal, continued PAR participation, or successful completion of the program. Consulting teachers in PAR 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, and these teachers may or may not have a remediation plan, depending on the design of the PAR program. 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 (Goldstein, 2007; Payay, 2011):

- 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.

PAR programs, where they are implemented, usually have strong support 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 the following challenges into account:

- PAR programs require a significant initial investment, as they may cost anywhere from \$1,500 to \$10,000 for each teacher enrolled (Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2012). These costs can be offset or mitigated, however, by increased retention rates because each teacher who leaves can cost the district approximately \$5,000 to nearly \$18,000 to replace (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 on 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 were sometimes aligned to district performance evaluation systems, but they more often functioned separately. Some districts that have long-established PAR programs have not moved to integrate their PAR program 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 by

providing remediation for teachers who have areas that need improvement. Many of the PAR programs reviewed for this document had the following features:

- 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 alternative component process. This may be done in a few different ways:
 - PAR and an alternative component may be aligned, or PAR evaluations may take the place of an alternative component.
 - Observations conducted and evidence gathered through PAR processes may also count for performance evaluations 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 a PAR program through performance evaluation results and may be exempt from regular performance evaluations during their participation in the PAR program.

Considerations for Creating a Peer Observation System

The effectiveness of peer observers is affected by a district’s size, organization, and culture. Districts should consider the following factors when designing the role of peer observer:

Financial costs. One of the greatest challenges in calculating the costs for such a program in a given district is how to monetarize all of the costs and benefits. Using peer observers requires districts to hire supplemental teaching staff to replace observers who must leave the classroom for their new positions. 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. Costs for PAR programs vary widely; PAR programs can cost districts between \$1,500 and \$10,000 per teacher served. The costs of supporting teachers who have more years of experience but require more extensive supports and mentoring are higher due to the higher level of resources needed for these more experienced teachers. Costs for veteran teachers range between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per teacher. There are also cost differences between programs in smaller districts versus larger districts (<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/par/resources/>).

In District of Columbia Public Schools in 2013, each peer observer was estimated to cost approximately \$1,500 per evaluated teacher.

In the Toledo (Ohio) PAR program, the average cost to support 140 teachers in 2008 was approximately \$5,700 per teacher served (Papay & Johnson, 2012).

Other factors that can impact the cost of a peer observer or PAR program include:

- Additional stipends to be paid to cooperating teachers or peer observers.
- The number of days that cooperating teachers or peer observers are expected to be out of their classrooms (for observations, pre- or post-observation conferences, trainings, and other related activities) for which substitutes will need to be provided.
- The central office staff time needed to coordinate PAR program or peer observation activities.
- The cost of additional observer trainings for all cooperating teachers or peer observers.

While the costs for implementing a PAR program or peer evaluation program might seem prohibitive, an effective PAR system can save districts money in multiple ways. First, some of the costs associated with starting and maintaining a PAR program can be shared by other, existing onboarding programs. For example, the cost for new teacher induction programs can be moved to a new teacher PAR program. Office space and other fixed costs can often be absorbed by existing structures and programs. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that PAR programs reduce teacher turnover, which reduces the costs incurred when recruiting and hiring new staff. Also, some PAR programs have been shown to reduce the number of nonrenewals of teachers, which can often produce similar cost savings. Along with longer term cost savings, PAR programs (along with other peer evaluation programs) have additional impacts and benefits, such as improving teacher performance, and can reduce administrative costs (Papay & Johnson, 2012). There are also some issues to consider, including the following:

- Challenges exist for smaller districts, which may not have the resources needed to hire enough peer evaluators or may lack peer evaluators who can provide evaluations for all subject areas. Smaller districts need to be aware of the impact of pulling peer evaluators from their classrooms and providing coverage for their classes if peer evaluators remain in the classroom.
- While larger districts may be able to identify enough peer evaluators for many of the subject areas and grade levels needed, they too need to consider the impact on the classrooms of the peer evaluators if they are expected to miss teaching time due to the requirements of the peer evaluator role. Larger districts may have the flexibility to hire full-time peer evaluators, who can serve in the evaluator role for a set number of years before returning to their teaching duties.

Defining and communicating roles. Because peer evaluators perform some administrative functions, the peer evaluator roles need to be negotiated into labor agreements and clearly communicated to teachers and administrators. These include the following:

- If possible, consider having peer evaluators work with teachers who do not work at the same school. 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
- Districts need to consider how long the peer evaluators will serve and when they will return to full-time teaching.

- If districts decide to create full-time peer evaluator positions and to hire evaluators from their current teaching pool, considerations need to be made for how these teachers will return to their classrooms, and if teachers are guaranteed to return to their same school at the end of their peer evaluator position.

Selecting and Training Peer Reviewers for PAR Programs

The success of a peer reviewer is highly dependent on two factors: selection and training. In many of the districts where PAR programs have been well established, teachers selected to participate as peer reviewers have the following characteristics:

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

Candidates for peer reviewer roles often apply for the position from several months to a year prior to taking on the role, and they 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. Common training topics include:

- 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; principals and other administrators often have experience talking to teachers about their classroom practices, but peer observers may not begin the role with this experience or the skills necessary to communicate effectively about teaching in a postobservation conference
- Overall evaluation procedures
- 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 reviewers may have received training in the evaluation system as part of a districtwide training for all instructional staff, it is important that they receive specialized training specific to their role. In many of the PAR program sites, the training for peer reviewers

aligns not only to administrative training, but also to additional training on how to give appropriate feedback and how to engage teachers in conversation about practice. 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.

Examples of District Peer Observation Systems in Teacher Evaluations

<p style="text-align: center;">Minneapolis, Minnesota</p> <p>In Minneapolis, teachers are placed on one of three “tracks” that define the number and type of observations they are required to have during their evaluation cycle. First-year teachers are required to have four observations per year—one full-class period observation and one shorter observation performed by the building administrator, and one “focused” and one short observation performed by a secondary reviewer. For newly hired teachers who have a PAR mentor, that person serves as their secondary observer.</p> <p>For teachers who have more years of experience, the number of observations and the length of the observations vary. Again, for teachers who have been assigned mentors through the PAR program, those mentors serve as their secondary observer. Other certified teachers with specific training can also serve as secondary observers.</p> <p>For more information: Teacher Evaluation Guidebook</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Alamance-Burlington School System, North Carolina</p> <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 during classroom observations).</p> <p>For more information: Peer Evaluation Resources</p>
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Rochester (New York) School District

In the Rochester school district, the peer mentoring program is targeted at four different levels of support:

1. All new teachers, referred to as intern teachers, are assigned a mentor-teacher responsible for making twice-monthly visits and for providing support and resources for the new teacher. The recommendations from the peer mentors are factored into the end-of-year decision to either retain the teacher for continued employment or to release the teacher.
2. Experienced teachers can select peer observation as one part of their professional practice evaluation. The 60 points used to calculate the professional practice portion of a teacher's overall evaluation score is composed of the peer evaluator's observations (29 points) and the supervising administrator's observations (31 points). As of the 2015–16 school year, 263 teachers had selected this option.
3. Experienced teachers whose performances are deemed in need of additional support are also served by the PAR program. Administrators can recommend that an experienced teacher begin to receive peer-mentoring support on an as-needed basis. The documentation by the peer evaluator is considered when contract renewal decisions are being made.
4. Experienced teachers who believe they would benefit from the support of a peer mentor can request that support in a nonevaluative model. In the 2015–16 school year, approximately 100 teachers requested this type of support.

Mentor teachers are selected from teachers who have a minimum of seven years of teaching experience and who have completed a rigorous selection process that includes providing multiple references from colleagues, undergoing multiple interviews, and successfully completing the observation training. Mentors are provided with release time and a stipend.

The Rochester model is funded through Title 2 federal funding as well as through smaller state grants and grants from local nonprofit organizations. The role of the peer evaluation process is part of the negotiated contract and is supported by both the district and the union.

For more information: [Rochester Career in Teaching \(CIT\) resource page](#)

Niles Township (Illinois) PAR Program

The Niles Township's 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 PAR panel in Niles Township comprises five teachers and four administrators, who hear evaluation reports, discuss progress, and make final recommendations for retention or release to the superintendent. The consulting teachers make recommendations for retention or release for the first- and second-year teachers, but the PAR panel makes the recommendations for retention or release for struggling tenured teachers.

Consulting teachers conduct several observations throughout the year; however, they also consider evidence from observations conducted by administrators. Each consulting teacher gives up to three reports per year to the PAR panel on each 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 would usually be included in performance evaluations.

For information: [Illinois Peer Evaluation initiative](#)

South Carolina ADEPT Cycle 1

Although the South Carolina Department of Education does not require a PAR program statewide, the statewide evaluation system (ADEPT) 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 receive only a formative evaluation; educators receive a summative evaluation at the end of their second year of teaching. The district's decision to grant or not grant tenure is based on evidence gathered from the induction and mentoring processes, similar to most PAR programs.

For more information:

[South Carolina Induction and Mentoring Program: Homepage](#)

Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools

Montgomery County 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 overall unsatisfactory 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.

For more information:

- [Montgomery County Public School System](#)
- [Montgomery County Education Association](#)

Escambia County (Florida) Public Schools

Escambia County Public School's PAR program, Successful Teachers Assisting Rising Teachers (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 consulting teachers are actual peer observers, not quasi-administrators, teachers can serve as consulting teachers only for a maximum of five years (not necessarily continuously) over the course of their careers. In addition, the district guarantees that each teacher can return to the same teaching assignment he or she left when activated to serve as a consulting teacher.

The START program selects consulting teachers using the following process:

- District leaders present information sessions to potential mentor-teachers in or around December. These presentations 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 candidates' questions during each presentation.
- Each candidate completes an application and obtains letters of recommendation from his or her principal and 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 contributions to the school.
- To encourage the staff to be candid, all recommendation letters and survey responses are collected anonymously.

- 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 to move on to the next stage.
 - **Second stage.** An 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. It is common for one district representative and one union representative to observe 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.
 - *Demonstration.* 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 each 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 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 Kelly Krostag, Chief Negotiator, Employee Services Coordinator, Escambia County School District, March 3, 2016. For more information, contact Ms. Krostag at kkrostag@escambia.k12.fl.us

Recommendations to Districts on Peer Review Evaluations

Based on reviews of the literature and of programs from other states and districts, the Ohio Department of Education has identified the following recommendations for districts that choose to include peer review as the alternative component:

- Make the selection process for peer reviewers rigorous and based on multiple sources of data including but not limited to:
 - Peer recommendations
 - Administrator recommendations
 - Observation(s) of classroom practice and review of planning documents
 - Structured interviews
 - Successful completion of observation training
- Identify current and potential training programs for potential peer reviewers.
- Evaluate the capacity to support reviewers/mentors who might need release time from their current teaching positions
- Work with building-level administrators to ensure clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the peer reviewers
- Define clearly the expectations for the number of classroom visits and pre- and post-visit conferences that peer reviewers will make for each of the teachers they are evaluating
- Limit the overall caseload for peer reviewers to ensure that, based on their other duties, they are able to complete the required observations and follow-up conferences.
- Consider the addition of a program coordinator who can work on the selection process as well as match peer reviewers with the teachers with whom they will work.
- Include all stakeholders in communications about the peer review evaluation model and process, including teachers, administrators, and district staff.
- Consider and clarify how teachers are selected for the peer review process and make this selection process transparent.

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