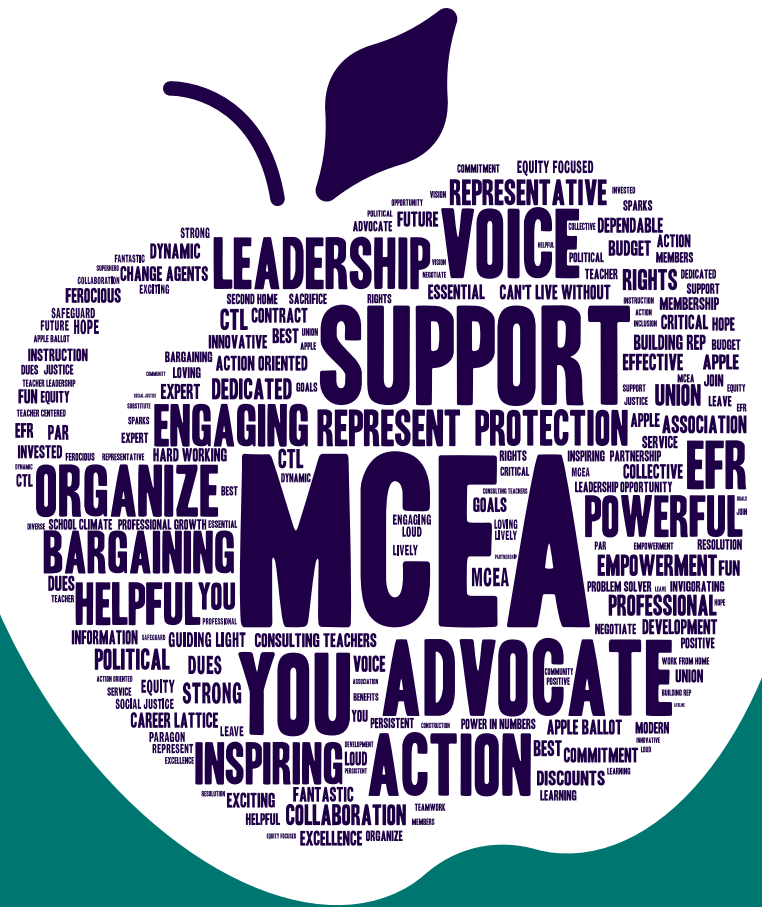


PEER ASSISTANCE AND REVIEW PROGRAM

A GUIDE TO THE PEER ASSISTANCE & REVIEW PROGRAM AND THE TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM



THE GOAL

A growing body of research indicates that nothing in a school is more important for student success than the quality of teaching. MCEA partners with MCPS in overseeing a carefully designed program for the recognition and support of teachers. Teaching is more complex—and more demanding—than most non-educators realize. Teaching requires not only a rich understanding of content, but also a broad range of skills for differentiating instruction and meeting the varying needs of all students. High quality teaching requires a commitment to continuous reflection and improvement. This guide is designed to help MCPS teachers understand the Peer Assistance and Review Program.

WHAT IS THE PEER ASSISTANCE & REVIEW (PAR) PROGRAM?

The PAR Program is a cornerstone of the evaluation process within the Professional Growth System. It is administered by a joint Panel of eight teachers recommended by MCEA and eight principals recommended by the principals’ association, MCAAP. PAR represents a shared commitment to supporting and evaluating teachers, where both educators and administrators have an equal stake in the evaluation process.

WHOM DOES THE PAR PROGRAM SERVE?

The PAR Program serves two groups of teachers:

- NOVICE TEACHERS**—new teachers with no prior teaching experience.
- EXPERIENCED TEACHERS** who receive a below standard evaluation from their principal.

For both novice and experienced teachers, the PAR Program provides intensive assistance, and is responsible for an independent assessment and recommendation for continued employment, continued assistance, non-renewal or dismissal.

THE TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

The PAR Program is just one part of the overall teacher evaluation system.

The system also includes:

- CLEAR** performance standards for teachers
- FORMAL** evaluations on a schedule
- IN-DEPTH** classroom observations
- EMPHASIS** on ongoing professional growth

The performance standards for teachers are modeled on the standards developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The performance standards that undergird the evaluation system are:

- TEACHERS ARE COMMITTED** to students and their learning.
- TEACHERS KNOW THE SUBJECTS** they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- TEACHERS ARE RESPONSIBLE** for establishing and managing student learning in a positive learning environment.
- TEACHERS CONTINUALLY ASSESS** student progress, analyze the results and adapt instruction to improve student achievement.
- TEACHERS ARE COMMITTED** to continuous improvement and professional development.
- TEACHERS EXHIBIT** a high degree of professionalism.

WHO ARE CONSULTING TEACHERS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

PAR assistance comes from a fellow teacher, not from a ‘specialist’ or administrator. This peer educator, called a Consulting Teacher (CT), is an accomplished teacher on leave from the classroom for three years. These master teachers, hired by the joint PAR Panel, are skilled in peer coaching, counseling, and adult learning. In order to apply to be a CT, a teacher must not only submit recommendations from his or her administrator, but from the MCEA building rep and teacher colleagues as well. Upon completing their three-year service to the PAR Program, CTs return to the classroom.



Consulting Teachers work full-time providing assistance to colleagues. They support a caseload of approximately 16-18 teachers. They can:

- HELP TEACHERS PLAN** lessons and review student work
- MODEL LESSONS** & recommend instructional strategies
- RECOMMEND RESOURCES** to support planning, lesson delivery & assesment
- TEAM-TEACH** lessons to model & support best practices
- CONDUCT OBSERVATIONS** and provide feedback
- ARRANGE FOR TEACHERS TO OBSERVE** other teachers in the classroom

HOW DO EXPERIENCED TEACHERS GET INTO PAR?

Experienced teachers are referred to PAR only after receiving a “Below Standard” rating on a formal evaluation by their principal. Referral, however, is not an automatic inclusion into the program. Upon referral to the PAR Program, the PAR Panel assigns a consulting teacher to review the case. The CT is responsible for conducting an independent assessment of the teacher’s skills. The CT completes two observations and then makes a recommendation to the PAR Panel for inclusion or non-inclusion into the program. The PAR Panel makes the final decision after reviewing the documentation and recommendations from the consulting teacher and the principal. If the PAR Panel concludes that the principal’s evaluation is not an accurate reflection of the teacher’s performance and the teacher is not included in PAR, then the Office of Human Resources assists the principal in revising the evaluation to reflect a “Meets Standard” rating. In this way, the PAR referral process serves as a check-and-balance to the principal’s evaluation.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

All principals and other qualified observers have been trained in how to conduct in-depth classroom observations. Each has spent a total of 36 hours in the “Observing and Analyzing Teaching” courses. This training ensures that all observers have the skills necessary to conduct meaningful observations—and to engage in meaningful dialogue with teachers about their teaching. Both observations and post-observation conferences focus on substantive issues related to classroom instruction and professional teaching standards. For a tenured teacher or a probationary teacher not assigned a Consulting Teacher, a minimum of two observations is required in an evaluation year. While formal observations are not required during non-evaluation years, teachers may be observed both formally and informally. For a probationary teacher in PAR and assigned a Consulting

Teacher, at least two observations by the administrator or qualified observer must take place, as well as at least three observations by the CT. Observations must last at least 30 minutes, and at least one of the observations must be announced and include a pre-observation conference. The post-observation conference (required for all observations) must be held within three days of the actual observation, unless delayed by mutual consent. The post-observation conference may include such elements as: reflection on the lesson, clarifications, general dialogue, and goal setting. The actual observation report must be written after the conference to allow inclusion of conference discussion and should be submitted within 10 days of the post-observation conference, unless delayed by mutual consent.

FINAL EVALUATIONS

The formal evaluation process is intended to be collegial and fully participatory. Teachers are encouraged to bring information and data to the process. Formal work on Professional Development Plans (PDPs) is suspended in an evaluation year to provide time for reflection on personal review of practice.

The culminating document in an evaluation year is a written formal evaluation. The evaluation summary is based on formal observations, Professional Development Plans, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), and any additional data relevant to teacher or student growth, including the use of any data maintained by the teacher. This data may be kept in a portfolio, or any method that is most useful to the individual.

The final evaluation summary concludes with a holistic rating of either 'Meets Standard' or 'Below Standard'. The evaluation provides the detailed feedback educators can use to become better education practitioners.



MCEA/MCPS PEER ASSISTANCE AND REVIEW PROGRAM

TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER TO
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER PAR PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS?

Teachers who successfully complete the PAR Program receive a "Meets Standard" evaluation and return to the Professional Growth Cycle of evaluations. Others who require more support but who have shown progress may receive a second year of PAR support.

Teachers being recommended for dismissal have the right to appeal to—and appear before—the PAR Panel. If they are still recommended for dismissal, they have a right to a meeting with the Superintendent (or his designee). If the Superintendent still recommends dismissal, the teacher can appeal to the County Board of Education, and a decision of the County Board can be appealed to the State Board of Education. MCEA members are entitled to assistance from MCEA staff throughout the PAR process and in case of appeal.

Because such adverse personnel actions are not made solely by administrators—nor based solely on a single principal's evaluation—teachers' rights are better protected. Arbitrary and capricious recommendations for dismissal are unlikely, because teachers are guaranteed a "second opinion" from an independent CT, and they are also guaranteed almost a year of intensive support before any dismissal recommendation is made.

In a workforce as large as this, with approximately 13,000 classroom teachers, there are difficult decisions that have to be made. The Peer Assistance and Review Program is designed to ensure that there are adequate safeguards and the appropriate checks and balances, so that the right judgments are made.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE YEAR OF PAR SUPPORT?

Following the year of assistance, the PAR Panel makes a recommendation for continued employment, another year of PAR support, non-renewal, or dismissal. The employment recommendation is made by the joint PAR Panel and is facilitated by the Office of Human Resources. The CT provides an independent performance assessment—a "second opinion" so to speak.

This system provides far more safeguards against arbitrary or capricious action than traditional evaluation systems. It also is based on the premise that other classroom teachers may be in the best position to judge whether a teacher's performance is adequate or not. Unless a teacher has had the opportunity for PAR support, no one is dismissed or non-renewed by the school system for classroom performance issues.

CONCLUSION

For MCEA, improving the quality of teaching and learning is a central part of our mission. Teachers succeed when our students succeed. Collectively, we must be part of the solution to the challenges facing public education.

In this collaborative approach to evaluation, MCEA has been an equal partner in the design and implementation of the evaluation system in MCPS. As a result, our educators not only have an evaluation system with adequate safeguards and intensive assistance to those who need it, but also one that recognizes the professionalism of teachers and our collective role in improving student achievement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

THE MCPS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH SYSTEM HANDBOOK
www.mceanea.org/publications/teachers-guide-to-par/

THE MCEA WEBSITE
www.mceanea.org

THE MCPS OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES WEBSITE
www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/personnel/

LOOK UP YOUR MCEA UNISERV DIRECTOR
www.mceanea.org/who-we-are/staff/

SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The MCPS Professional Growth System supports individual growth. In addition to PAR and the evaluation system, it includes:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS
individual and multi-year

STAFF DEVELOPMENT TEACHERS
at every school

**JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT** to support continual
learning.

SKILLFUL TEACHING

All teachers can also enroll in the companion course, Studying Skillful Teaching, to learn the language and frameworks being used to describe the complexity of teaching skills.

For more information on this course call the MCPS Center for Skillful Teaching at 301-840-6740.



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