

SRI International and J. Koppich & Associates

Peer Review

Getting Serious About Teacher
Support and Evaluation

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

SRI International and J. Koppich & Associates examined the peer assistance and review (PAR) programs in the Poway and San Juan school districts in California. This is not the first study of these exemplary programs. Indeed, one of the reasons we selected the PAR programs at these sites was because of their reputations for excellence. Given the current tumultuous policy environment, we believed a fresh look at these programs was in order.

Policymakers Are Looking For Effective Solutions for Evaluating Teachers

Teacher effectiveness and evaluation are topics in high policy relief. Policymakers continue to seek means to appropriately support and gauge the efficacy of teachers' classroom practice and strategies to ensure that successful teachers are in the classroom. How to accomplish this is an ongoing policy and practice dilemma. We believed that an intensive examination of these programs might point toward possible solutions.

Both Poway and San Juan gave us extraordinary access to their programs and participants. Most important, the unions and the districts provided us with redacted files that documented the support and evaluation work of the Consulting Teachers and the progress of participating teachers. In addition, the districts provided us with the principals' evaluations of the participating teachers so that we could compare traditional evaluation methods with peer review.

Peer Assistance and Review Programs Provide Rigorous Evaluation and Support

All this led us to two key conclusions about the work of the Consulting Teachers, those carefully selected experienced teachers who provide intensive support and conduct the evaluations of teachers in PAR:

- **Peer support and evaluation can and should coexist.** The experience of Poway and San Juan illustrates that integrating support and evaluation can be a more effective approach to improving instructional practice than isolating one from the other.
- **The programs in Poway and San Juan clearly show that PAR is a rigorous alternative to traditional forms of teacher evaluation and development.** In an era when policymakers are calling for better teacher evaluation, our research shows that peer review is far superior to principals' evaluations in terms of rigor and comprehensiveness. Equally important, peer review offers a possible solution to the lack of capacity of the current system to both provide adequate teacher support and conduct thorough performance evaluations.

Governance Boards Lead to Better Collaboration between Districts and Unions

While we were not surprised by the quality of the Consulting Teachers' work, we were surprised about the central role of the programs' Governance Boards. The Governance Boards not only ensured that the Consulting Teachers' evaluation of participating teachers were based on solid evidence, but also that the Consulting Teachers' focus was on improving instruction. Most

surprisingly, the Governance Boards turned out to be problem solving forums where district officials and union leaders collaboratively addressed routine operational and policy problems.

Finally, we found that these districts built their PAR work on strong foundations of labor-management cooperation. More than simple collaborative efforts, the partnerships developed through PAR enabled union and management together to make high-stakes decisions about teacher practice and evaluation.

Recommendations for State Policymakers, Districts and Unions

This study points to some important policy and practice changes for the state, and districts and their local unions to consider. These changes could lead to markedly improved opportunities to ensure effective teachers in California classrooms.

- **The state should eliminate current statutory barriers to comprehensive PAR programs.** At present, the Education Code section on PAR (Section 44500) allows the program for only tenured teachers. This policy could be broadened to enable support and evaluation for all teachers to come under PAR.
- **Local districts and unions interested in the PAR model should reexamine their teacher evaluation policies.** This reexamination should have an eye toward implementing the kinds of in-depth support and evaluation that are the hallmarks of these exemplary programs in Poway and San Juan. Districts and unions can work to refine their practices around individualized support for beginning and struggling tenured teachers and look to experienced teachers to expand the pool of professionals available to do this work. They can use what they learn about new ways to support and appraise beginning and underperforming tenured teachers to rethink their evaluation systems for all teachers.
- **Local districts and their unions should use lessons learned from the work of the Poway and San Juan Governance Boards to improve labor-management collaboration.** They can work to form cooperative union-management partnerships authorized to make decisions about high-stakes matters. Such partnerships would imbue these labor-management relationships with a “share the wealth, share the pain” significance that could render tough choices fair, credible, and workable.

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