



PROJECT ON THE
NEXT GENERATION
OF TEACHERS

A User's Guide to Peer Assistance and Review

What is PAR?

Costs and benefits
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PAR in Toledo: Continuity through Change

PAR in practice

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About the Study

Where It All Began

Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) is the brainchild of Dal Lawrence, former president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers (TFT). His proposal, first bargained in 1973, was radical, not only because it would have teachers reviewing the work of their peers, but also because it came from a union leader. Lawrence was convinced that teaching would become a profession only when teachers, themselves, set standards for their work and decided who met those standards and deserved to teach. Initially, he set out to change the work and status of teachers in the Toledo Public Schools (TPS). Now, more than a quarter century later, his vision and the program he developed with Toledo's administrators continue to inspire change in districts across the nation.

Toledo Public Schools

Number of students:	30,423
Number of teachers:	1,852
Year program began:	1981
Program Type:	Novice, Intervention, Voluntary
Length of CT term:	3 years
Title of CT Role:	Intern Consultant
Name of Panel:	Intern Board of Review
Composition of Panel:	5 teachers, 4 administrators



*Dal Lawrence,
Former TFT
President*

Lawrence's proposal for PAR, which included only novice teachers, did not receive immediate acceptance. In fact, he took it to the bargaining table in three different rounds of negotiation before it was accepted. At the start, Toledo's principals opposed the plan, believing that losing the right to evaluate teachers would undermine their authority. A former principal recalled his own reservations: "It was like the union now is taking over part of the administrator's responsibility and authority."

Ironically, Toledo finally adopted PAR in the midst of conflict rather than calm. After contentious negotiations led the teachers to strike in 1978, the district hired a new superintendent and School Board negotiator. In the bargaining that followed, Lawrence's PAR proposal was back on the table, but this time it drew the interest of management's new negotiator, a lawyer familiar with peer review in his own profession. In response to the union's PAR proposal, which included only novice teachers, the district's negotiator countered with a proposal to expand PAR to include tenured teachers who were failing. Thus, the parties agreed that PAR in Toledo would not only regulate entry to teaching through its novice component, but would review the ranks of tenured teachers through an intervention component. Even today, it is this intervention component that evokes the most surprise and interest among those who learn about PAR.

The Program

The basic structure of Toledo's PAR program, which was instituted in 1981, remains essentially unchanged today. It has served as the template for programs in districts across the country. The program is administered by a PAR Panel—called the Intern Board of Review in Toledo—composed of four administrators and five teachers. Unlike most other districts, teachers have a majority on the Panel, although in practice it doesn't seem to matter since the group doesn't split by role when it votes. The TFT President—today Fran Lawrence, Dal's wife—and the TPS Chief of Staff serve as the panel's co-chairs, who hold joint responsibility for managing the program. PAR in Toledo includes both novice teachers, who participate in PAR as an induction program, and experienced teachers who have been referred to Intervention because they are struggling or have been judged to be unsatisfactory. Consulting Teachers (CTs), called Intern Consultants in Toledo, each provide intensive assistance to a caseload of teachers in the program. After several months of mentoring and continuing evaluation, the CTs advise the PAR Panel about whether the teachers they assist should be renewed or dismissed. In turn, the PAR Panel decides each case and recommends re-employment or dismissal to the Superintendent.

Every new teacher is assigned to work with a CT, typically someone who teaches the same subject and grade level. Toledo's CTs have sole responsibility for evaluating teachers during their first year in the district. Based on the CTs' assessments and recommendations to the PAR Panel, 8%-10% of new teachers choose to resign or do not receive renewal contracts. After the first year, principals conduct the evaluations and can decide to dismiss teachers before they receive permanent contracts or tenure. Experienced teachers with serious performance problems are referred to the Intervention component of PAR by principals and/or building committees. The number of teachers assigned to Intervention is small, usually no more than two to three per year. However, dismissal rates of both novice teachers and tenured teachers exceed those in the period before PAR, when administrators were solely responsible for evaluation.

A Stable Program in a Challenging Context

Since its inception, PAR in Toledo has encountered several important challenges. Like many districts, the TPS labor-management relationship has periodically veered between collaboration and conflict. The original agreement allowed either party to cancel PAR at any time and, in 1995-96, the union withdrew from the program for a year in response to a contract dispute over an unrelated issue. The following year, both sides committed to reinstating the program and it has continued without interruption ever since.

The district also has experienced severe budget problems as a result of enrollment declines and a shrinking industrial economy. At the same time, suburban districts and charter schools compete for TPS students. With the loss of students come reductions in state aid, making it hard to fund the program's rather significant cost from a shrinking budget.

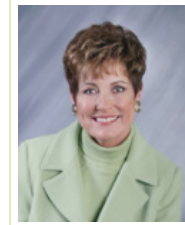
In addition, individuals have filed challenges. The union has been sued in federal court three times on charges that they have failed to fairly represent a

teacher; each time the union won its case. In the late 1990's, an African-American teacher who was recommended for dismissal by the PAR Panel appealed the decision. Although the teacher ultimately retained his job, the case highlighted racial tensions among teachers in relation to PAR. To address these concerns, the PAR Panel hired an external researcher to investigate whether there was evidence of racial bias in the program. She found no evidence of discrimination, although the issue continues to be of concern among those responsible for the program.

Today the Toledo Plan differs from its initial 1981 structure in only two ways. First, it includes a voluntary component—called School Consultation—for veteran teachers who decide to seek assistance on their own. Second, a seat on the PAR Panel, once reserved for a central office administrator, now is assigned to a principal. Previously, no principals had been on the Panel. Neither change has substantially altered the program. PAR's established structures have proven to be effective and sturdy. The PAR Panel has earned the respect of administrators and teachers as a careful and deliberate body that takes its responsibility seriously. Although trust and collaboration may waver in other aspects of labor-management relations, the PAR panel is truly a joint endeavor, committed to improving the quality of teaching in Toledo. The role of CT, which is one of the only specialized roles that the district offers teachers, also has won respect and gained stability over time, due both to the competitive selection process and the consistent quality of the CTs' exceptionally hard work.

Like most urban school districts, Toledo has had a series of superintendents since PAR was established. Some have seen value in PAR and been committed to it from the start, while others have taken it for granted or withheld their support. Repeated turnover at the top of the district continues to threaten the program's stability. Recently, the Superintendent who, along with TFT leaders, accepted a national award for PAR in 2001, left to head another Ohio district, taking 10 central office administrators with him and making it necessary to rebuild understanding of and commitment to PAR. John Foley, the current superintendent who recalls the program from when he was a teacher, endorses PAR.

Throughout periods of administrative turnover, there has been continuity in union leadership. Dal Lawrence served as TFT president for thirty years (1967-1997) and Fran Lawrence has been president for the last eleven (1997-2008). Thus there has been a consistent vision and commitment to PAR, sustaining the program through difficult times. As Fran Lawrence explained, "The union has had a vision over the last forty years, the professionalization of teaching, and [PAR] is the fundamental, integral part of it."



*Fran Lawrence,
TFT President*



CTs Gloria Wise and Sharon Clark