The RISE Observation System:

Evaluating and Improving Teacher Practice

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The Pathway to the Promise.™

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The RISE Observation System: Evaluating and Improving Teacher Practice

In 2008, Pittsburgh Public Schools, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, and approximately 120 teachers and administrators joined together to create a new system for evaluating and improving teacher practice through feedback, self-assessment, and meaningful professional growth.

**LENS 1:
Observation of Teacher Practice (RISE)**
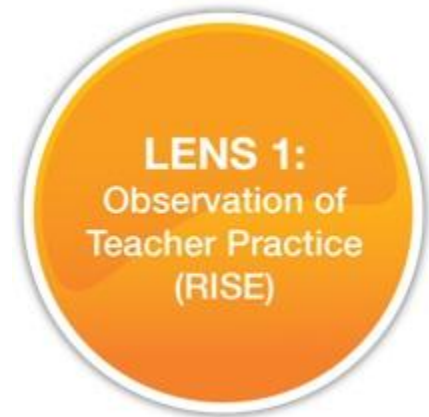
Of all school-based factors, teachers make the greatest impact on student learning and have a lasting effect on students' lifelong success. But for too long, teacher evaluation systems—in Pittsburgh and across the country—failed to accurately assess teacher quality, much less use this information to help teachers improve.

Until recently, teacher evaluation in Pittsburgh Public Schools consisted of an end-of-year satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating based on a single classroom observation by the principal. The system did not accurately reflect teaching in schools, and it did not help teachers to improve.

Teachers in Pittsburgh Public Schools had long known that their evaluation system did not work. One teacher shared, "**Before, as long as you were satisfactory and your class was quiet, you were good.**"

This belief was shared across many teachers. A survey administered by the District showed that fewer than 15 percent of teachers strongly agreed with the statement that, "Teacher evaluation in my building is rigorous and reveals what is true about teachers' practice."[1]

Leaders of the District and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (the Union) listened to Pittsburgh's educators as they expressed desires for an improved evaluation system that more effectively supports, empowers, and recognizes teacher practice.

CREATING AN EVALUATION SYSTEM *BY* AND *FOR* PITTSBURGH TEACHERS

In 2007, teachers in Pittsburgh Public Schools were involved in creating a new curriculum for the District. During this process, it became apparent to both teachers and administration that the way teachers were being evaluated did not support the way they were now being developed and asked to teach.

The previous evaluation system also failed to differentiate between varying performance levels and failed to improve teacher practice.

In response to these needs, the District and Union committed to a more effective teacher evaluation system and established the District/Union Leadership Team in fall 2008, predating the *Empowering Effective Teachers* plan.

[1] April 2009 Pittsburgh Public Schools Teaching and Working Conditions survey

The intention of the team was to collaboratively co-design a new teacher evaluation system informed by the expertise of Pittsburgh teachers, for Pittsburgh teachers.

This collaborative approach ensured co-construction, teacher voice, teacher leadership, and ownership.

A District Leadership Team member shared, "It's about how people experience it and how you bring them into it. We knew that we had to be very inclusive if we wanted a good evaluation system to be embraced."

A Union leader agreed, "The most important thing is that by getting teacher input, they can trust the process."

The Leadership Team's focus on collaboration was founded in a value for process over content, the belief that not only would a collaborative design process gain more teacher buy-in, but it would also result in a better evaluation system.

Before beginning the work with teachers to design the system, the Leadership Team first had to choose the framework that would guide the design process.

The group quickly decided on the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Both the Union and District leaders had experience with and were proponents of the Danielson framework.

DESIGNING RISE

The Leadership Team decided that teacher representatives from each school would help to design the process and then it would be implemented at schools that volunteered to pilot the program.

The Leadership Team predicted that a handful of schools would agree to design and pilot the program but 29 schools agreed to participate.[2]

During spring and summer of 2008, the design team (consisting of approximately 120 of Pittsburgh's educators, including the pilot school principals and lead teachers selected by each of the pilot schools) developed a comprehensive rubric based on the Danielson framework.

The design team believed it was important to measure and to grow what was valued. They enhanced the framework by adding some of the District's core values: Effort-based Learning Theory[3], student achievement, cultural competency, and equity.

A participating teacher said, "I was skeptical at first and approached the design process with a critical eye. However, as it took shape, I realized that my input was valued and I truly helped create a valuable professional development tool."

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[2] 24 schools completed the pilot

[3] Effort-based Learning Theory: teaching practice based on the idea that students can increase their ability through their own effort and the reciprocal effort of their instructor.

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RISE: A DIFFERENTIATED SYSTEM OF EVALUATION

RISE (Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation), the resulting model, is a comprehensive system of teacher evaluation which ensures that every teacher receives fair support and feedback to better inform their professional growth.

Teachers are no longer simply rated as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory based on a single observation. Multiple observations throughout the year are used to collect the facts about a teacher's practice.

As a growth-oriented model, this evaluation system is differentiated to support the developmental levels of novice and experienced teachers across four performance levels: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished.

The system also does more than evaluate—RISE fosters teacher learning and promotes continuous growth of professional practice. In addition to observations, teachers self-assess their practice several times throughout the year.
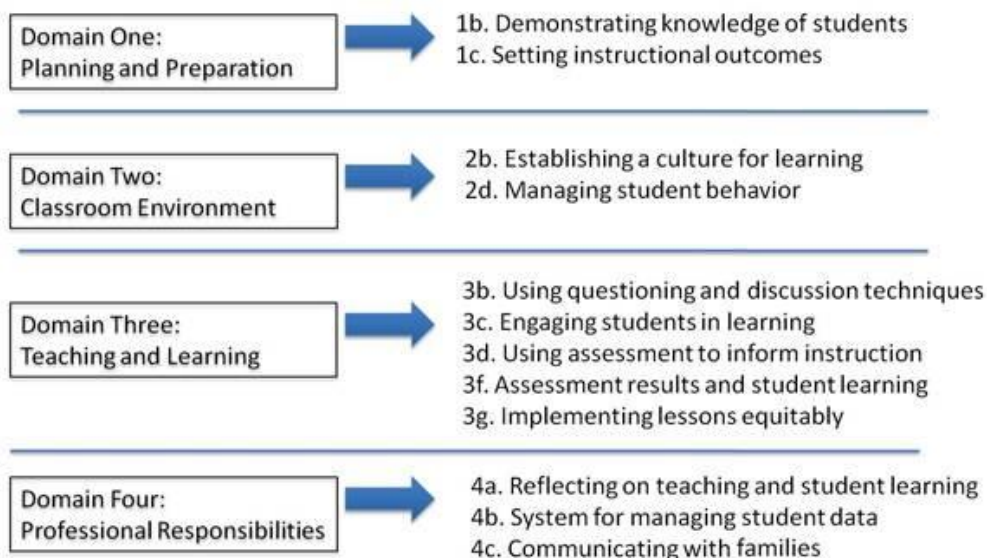
The RISE Rubric

The comprehensive RISE rubric has 24 components of teacher practice organized within four domains:

- Planning and Preparation
- Classroom Environment
- Professional Responsibilities
- Teaching and Learning

During the development of RISE, participants expressed that although all 24 components are important to teaching, there are 12 components that have the greatest impact on student learning and growth. As a result, while teachers and principals collect evidence on all 24 components of RISE, the end-of-year (summative) evaluation is based on the 12 Power Components (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: The 4 Domains and 12 Power Components of RISE

Domain One: Planning and Preparation	1b. Demonstrating knowledge of students 1c. Setting instructional outcomes
Domain Two: Classroom Environment	2b. Establishing a culture for learning 2d. Managing student behavior
Domain Three: Teaching and Learning	3b. Using questioning and discussion techniques 3c. Engaging students in learning 3d. Using assessment to inform instruction 3f. Assessment results and student learning 3g. Implementing lessons equitably
Domain Four: Professional Responsibilities	4a. Reflecting on teaching and student learning 4b. System for managing student data 4c. Communicating with families

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The RISE Process

Each year, teachers participate in one of two versions of the RISE process: the Formal Process or the Supported Growth Project. Both versions focus on growth and evidence-based practice.

Formal Process

At the beginning of the Formal RISE Process, the teacher completes a self-assessment on all 24 components of practice. This self-assessment is not shared with the administrator.

The administrator[4] then conducts an observation at the beginning of the school year and the teacher and the administrator collect evidence of the teacher's effective practice throughout the year.

Experienced teachers—those who have earned tenure[5]—are formally observed within RISE at least twice per year. Formal observations take half of a class period or longer and include a post-observation conference. The process also includes at least two annual informal observations which are generally less than half of a class period.

At least one of the formal observations includes a pre-observation conference. The other formal observation does not require advance notification.

The inclusion of conferences recognizes that all aspects of teacher practice cannot be captured through classroom observations alone. A teacher shared, "**The pre-conference and post-conference are your chance to tell everything you can about your practice to your administrator so they can understand what you did before and what you're going to do after.**"

Novice Teachers—those who have not yet earned tenure—are formally observed within RISE at least four times per year and receive a minimum of four informal observations per year.

In the middle of the school year, all teachers participating in the RISE Formal Process complete a second self-assessment of practice on all 24 components. Unlike the first self-assessment, teachers share this with their administrator.

The teacher and the administrator then continue to collect evidence of the teacher's practice throughout the school year.

At the end of the school year, the teacher completes a final self-assessment of practice. The administrator reviews this self-assessment along with all evidence of the teacher's practice. Finally, the administrator completes the teacher's end-of-year rating based on the 12 Power Components.

Supported Growth Project (Informal Process)

The Supported Growth Project is a yearlong, rigorous process in which a third of teachers participate in a targeted study focused on one of the 24 components of RISE.

Instead of working with their building administrator in the formal RISE process, teachers participating in the Supported Growth Project work with a team of peers to monitor and present their progress. This

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[4] Currently, observations within RISE are conducted by school leaders (Principals and Assistant Principals). In 2012-13, teacher leaders will join the formative and summative observation and evaluation process by serving in a new Career Ladder role, Instructional Teacher Leader 2.
[5] Tenure is Pennsylvania is granted after three years.

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supports the belief that peer collaboration can have just as much (or more) influence on growth than a process that is administrated by principals.

Teachers meet with their principals during the year for support and feedback, but formal RISE observations are not required. This also allows school leaders to focus their time on working more deeply with specific staff members, including pre-tenured teachers and teachers working on Employee Improvement Plans (EIPs).[6]

During the Supported Growth year, teachers meet monthly with a cohort of up to five peers to review their progress on the component. At the end of the year, each teacher gives a 10-12 minute presentation that summarizes the project and progress over the year. Using the RISE Rubric, peers provide an assessment and feedback to the teacher.[7]

IMPLEMENTATION

Pilot Year Implementation: 2009-10
In order to gain traction throughout the District, RISE was introduced over a two year period to provide enough time for thoughtful design and testing. The 24 pilot schools implemented RISE in the 2009-10 school year, and in 2010-11 every District school used RISE.

During the pilot year, the Leadership Team was cautious that the need for an improved evaluation system and a general awareness of RISE were not enough to guarantee its success. A District administrator explained, "You can't go from awareness to application. You need to have an intermediary period where people are studying the material, trying it, and supported in doing it."

On-site support was essential to implementation. During the pilot year, District and Union leaders and a Danielson consultant conducted monthly site visits to assist in the process.

A principal shared, "The conversation was unbelievable—it really helped us. It really taught us the process and helped us to picture what evidence really looks like in this model."

In order to continue the collaboration of RISE, assess its efficacy, and improve on the process, surveys were conducted before and after the pilot.

One teacher reported, "Before, there was little chance to self-reflect. I've seen how I've grown myself professionally as well as seen other colleagues grow. I'm reflecting on making each lesson effective."

Adjustments for District-wide Implementation: 2010-11
During the pilot year, the RISE process was managed on paper, but there was a demand across the District for it to become digital. A web-based software tool was created to manage the process digitally for the 2010-11 school year. The software captures the entire RISE Process and the end-of-year rating.

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[6] Teachers participating in an Employee Improvement Plan (EIP) do not participate in RISE. The RISE process is kept separate from EIPs to ensure that the primary purpose of RISE is to improve teacher practice, and in order to best create a culture where it acceptable to have a mix of performance levels in order to grow teacher practice.

[7] The principal reviews these assessments, along with the teacher's self-reflection and evidence collected by the teacher throughout the year, and uses these as a guide when completing the teacher's end-of-year summative evaluation.

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Another addition to the District-wide implementation was the pairing of each RISE pilot school with at least one school that was new to RISE. Throughout the year, teachers from the pilot school provided support to the RISE leadership teachers from their partner school.

Adjustments for Year Two of District-wide Implementation: 2011-12

As with many new initiatives, the implementation of RISE across the District was inconsistent. In the first year of District-wide implementation, it became clear that the understanding and use of the RISE Process was inconsistent across schools.

In response, site-based support was differentiated for 2011-12. Schools self-identified their level of need and were grouped accordingly—high-need schools received monthly visits, schools with average needs were visited every other month, and low-need schools were responsible for soliciting help from administration as needed.

Adjustments were also made to the RISE Rubric. In 2011-12, the District launched several Career Ladder teacher roles. A fifth domain was added to RISE to evaluate these new teacher leadership roles.

In 2011-12, the District also began work to further ensure the quality of the observation process. To establish rater accuracy and reliability across raters, the District developed the Instructional Quality Assurance and Certification Process (IQA-C).

Every RISE evaluator participates in the two-year IQA-C Process, including school leaders and Career Ladder teachers in the Instructional Teacher Leader 2 role.[8]

The first year of IQA-C focuses on ensuring the accuracy and consistency of ratings across classroom observers (Level I Certification). Observers learn to identify evidence, align evidence with the Rubric, and assign the evidence to a performance level. The second year focuses on quality of instructional feedback that grows teacher practice and support in the RISE Process (Level II Certification).

As of spring 2012, more than 90% of professionals who are responsible for teacher observations are now certified in the first level of the IQA-C Process. These evaluators demonstrated their ability to accurately identify evidence of effective teaching, and accurately score evidence using the RISE Rubric. They will continue on to Level II training in 2012-13.

Future Plans for RISE

The required number of observations for the RISE Process is currently being refined. Starting in 2012-13, the number of observations required for each teacher will be based on his/her performance level as determined by the RISE Rubric. Teachers whose practice earns a higher score will require fewer observations and those with lower scores will receive a greater number of observations. This differentiated process will be more sensitive to teacher needs, allowing more time and resources to be focused on teachers who need the most support.

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[8] Instructional Teacher Leaders 2 (ITL2s): Career Ladder teachers who serve as content experts, ensure instructional quality and support teacher effectiveness at secondary schools (grades 6-12 and 9-12) and K-8 schools. In addition to teaching 3-4 periods per day, ITL2s are responsible for formatively evaluating their content peers in their school, designing and delivering customized/differentiated professional development based on those formative evaluations, and serving as a RISE rater of teachers in their content area at other schools.

ONE MEASURE IS NOT ENOUGH

Thanks to the hard work of more than 120 educators, teacher practice in every classroom in Pittsburgh Public Schools is being evaluated in in a way that is far superior to the previous evaluation system.

The RISE rubric and process has greatly strengthened the measure of teacher practice—the knowledge, skills, techniques, strategies and actions teachers bring to their classroom every day. But teaching is complex and no single measure can accurately capture the true range of what makes an effective teacher.

In 2011-12, RISE was complemented by additional measures of teacher practice including student learning and growth (captured by value-added[9]) and other student outcomes (captured by the Tripod student survey[10]).

These two measures help the District to understand the contribution of each teacher to his/her students' academic growth and to other student outcomes that are known to impact a students' ability to succeed after high school.

The combined three measures—observation of teacher practice, student learning and growth, and other student outcomes—create a system of multiple measures of teacher effectiveness (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2: Pittsburgh's System of Multiple Measures of Teacher Effectiveness

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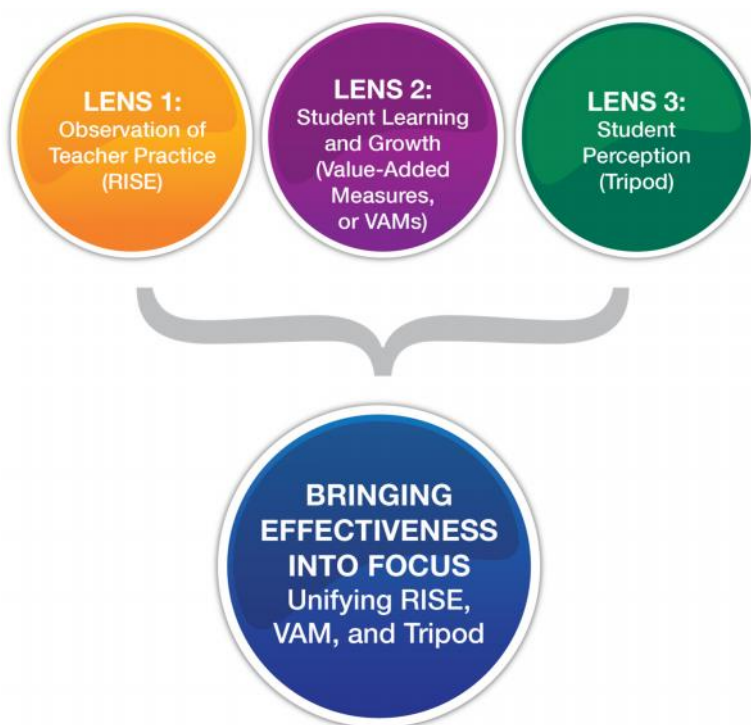
[9] Value-added measures: a rigorous statistical method of measurement that examines the trajectory of achievement of a student or group of students (school-wide or classroom-wide) from a baseline, while accounting for other factors (e.g., prior performance, socioeconomic status, and special education designations) that may affect student achievement but are outside the control of schools or teachers.

[10] Tripod student survey: measure of the classroom environment and how students are engaged in this experience.

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A District administrator said, "Having multiple measures allows us to give teachers very specific and actionable information to improve their practice."

Multiple measures help teachers and administrators to understand and respond to the impact of a teacher's practice on student outcomes. They also help to better identify and ultimately share excellent teaching practices, while providing teachers with tailored insights on what they do best and ways to continue to grow their practice.

LESSONS LEARNED: THEMES ARTICULATED THROUGH INTERVIEWS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Teachers and administrators must have a voice in the design and implementation of the evaluation process.
Not only does this collaboration increase teacher buy-in but it results in a better system of evaluation.

Use the pilot group when moving a project system-wide.
During District-wide implementation, schools that were new to the RISE process were paired with a pilot school to support them through their first year of implementation.

Differentiate site-based support.
Just like students need varying levels and types of support, support from school leaders needs to be differentiated across schools based on need.

RISE elevates the quality of conversation between teachers and administrators.
RISE creates a shared language for discussing teacher effectiveness and a shared definition of effective teaching.

Celebrate, and appeal to the heart.
In May 2010, the 24 RISE Pilot Schools, District administration, and Union leadership hosted a celebratory RISE Induction Event for schools beginning RISE the next school year. Events like this are important for recognizing and celebrating the challenging work that takes place.

Timeline (as of May 2012)

- **2008**: District/Union Leadership Team forms
- **2011-12**: Second year of district-wide implementation of RISE
- **Spring 2011**: RISE Rubric begins to be used for Career Ladder selection
- **2010-11**: RISE rubric revised with Charlotte Danielson's feedback and finalized for 2011-12
- **2010 -11**: A fifth Domain on characteristics of teacher leadership developed to evaluate Career Ladder Teachers
- **Spring 2012**: 90% of principals and teachers in Career Ladder roles are certified Level I observers through the IQA-C Process
- **2012-13**: Instructional Teacher Leader 2s (ITL2s) serve as an additional resources for growing teacher practice.