

The Power of Peer Assistance and Review

PEER REVIEW: Getting Serious about Teacher Support and Evaluation takes a detailed look at peer assistance and review (PAR) in two California school districts, revealing how and why it works far better than traditional approaches to professional development and teacher evaluation. PAR releases “consulting” teachers, who have



excelled in the classroom, from teaching duties so they can mentor new teachers and support struggling veteran teachers, as well as make recommendations to a district-union committee on whether the teachers they are working with are ready to work independently, need further assistance, or should not remain in the profession. This report focuses on three crucial elements of PAR: the role of consulting teachers, the inner workings of the joint district-union committees, and the collaboration required in this labor-management effort.

“In an era when policy-makers are calling for better teacher evaluation, our research shows that peer review is far superior to principals’ evaluations in terms of rigor and comprehensiveness,” the authors write. The report is based on interviews with district administrators, union leaders, and teachers; access to redacted files that outline consulting teachers’ work with participating teachers; and access to principals’ evaluations of participating teachers.

The consulting teachers were particularly impressive “because of their demonstrated knowledge of teaching, their ability to collect and analyze data on teachers’ practice, and their determination to improve teaching in their districts,” the authors write. “They know how to have difficult and sensitive conversations about a teacher’s job performance in ways that engender trust and acceptance while holding constant their commitment to students’ learning.” The report gives examples of such conversations by including logs of classroom observations and conferences by one consulting teacher. The notes show the consulting teacher’s focus on improving the participating teacher’s knowledge and skills, not on simply identifying problems.

Visit http://policyweb.sri.com/cep/publications/PAR_PeerReviewReport_2011.pdf to download the full report. To learn more about PAR, see the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/Goldstein.pdf.



The Rise of Poverty

RECORD NUMBERS of Americans spent 2010 in deep poverty and without health insurance, according to an analysis of Census Bureau statistics conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. In 2010, 15.1 percent of Americans, and 22.0 percent of children, lived in poverty—rates that hadn’t been reached since 1993. Since 1965, the poverty rate has exceeded 15.1 percent only once: in 1983, it reached 15.2 percent. Meanwhile, the number of Americans earning incomes below the official poverty line (\$22,314 for a family of four) increased by 2.6 million to 46.2 million. Worse, the number of Americans in “deep poverty,” those with incomes below half of the poverty line, reached the highest level on record: 20.5 million people or 6.7 percent of the population.

Poverty rates are especially high among African Americans—at 27.4 percent—and Hispanics—at 26.6. By comparison, the poverty rate among non-Hispanic whites is 9.9 percent.

Also in 2010, the number of people without health insurance increased to a record high of 49.9 million, which the center attributes to a decline in employer-provided health coverage. On a more positive note, Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program actually covered a greater percentage of children in

2010 than in 2007 (before the recession began). The federal government expanded both programs, offsetting the decrease in employer coverage.

Citing government assistance in the form of unemployment insurance, the earned income tax credit, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food



stamps), among other programs in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the center calls for further government intervention. “These data, and the continuing weakness in the labor market in 2011, underscore the need to bolster both job creation and the safety net in order both to shore up the economy and to ease hardship.” The full report is available at www.cbpp.org/files/9-14-11pov.pdf.