



ATF Position on Peer Intervention Albuquerque Teachers Federation Spring 1999

Peer Intervention

Background

In our judgment, peer intervention is central to the issue of teacher quality. It significantly changes the conception of teaching work by recognizing the importance of engagement and commitment as well as skill and technique. It recognizes a legitimate role for teachers in establishing and enforcing standards in their own profession. In the twenty (20) or so districts that have tried it, peer intervention brings higher standards to teaching.

Peer intervention began in 1981 when the Toledo, Ohio Schools and the Toledo Federation of Teachers added to their collective bargaining agreement a one sentence clause by which teachers agreed to police the ranks of their own in return for the right to review the professional performance of new teachers. Since that time, peer intervention has been implemented by progressive school districts throughout the country. Peer intervention brings higher standards to teaching in two ways. First, peer intervention systems generally provide a more thorough method of evaluation than do conventional administratively-driven evaluation systems. Because of available resources, unsuccessful teachers can be provided with ample opportunities to succeed.

Second, peer intervention systems link good teaching and professional development. The traditional evaluation system captures only a sliver of a teacher's work, principally that which can be observed in a brief administrative visit to a teacher's classroom. Peer intervention, on the other hand, taps a broader segment of a teacher's professional portfolio through prolonged and extensive engagement with and observation by teaching colleagues and an emphasis on enhancing professional practice.

Available evidence suggests that peer intervention is more rigorous than conventional evaluation. There is no evidence that teachers will soft peddle evaluations in order to save the jobs of colleagues. To the contrary, unionized teachers will do whatever is necessary to safeguard teacher established standards.

Peer intervention also represents a radical departure for teacher unions from established industrial norms in which evaluation is the province of school administrators. The union's role in this scenario is to watchdog the process and protect members from violations of their due process rights. Under peer intervention, the union's role becomes one of balancing protection of individual teachers with the protection of teaching.

Finally, it should be noted that ATF has been working since 1998 to establish a peer intervention system in this district as a means of assuring that the highest level of support is available for our teachers. We remain committed to that ongoing effort.

Excerpts of the background adapted from and taken directly from a paper prepared for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. It is adapted from United Mind Workers: Teaching in a Knowledge Society, by Charles Taylor Kerchner, Julia E. Koppich, and Joseph W. Weeres, published by Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.

Recommendations

The Albuquerque Teachers Federation recommends the establishment of a Peer Intervention System that would be added to the current intensive evaluation language in the Negotiated Agreement Between the Albuquerque Public Schools and the Albuquerque Teachers Federation. Participation in this program would be voluntary. This program would be an alternative to an existing system that many believe does not work and is inherently flawed. The intent is to develop a system that is fair, equitable and humane. This system would either provide intervention to help the teacher become successful or counsel the teacher out of the teaching profession. The following is a recommended framework for the Peer Intervention System.

(For particulars, refer to the questions and answers at the end of this section.)

1. Referral to the Peer Intervention Team may be made by:
 - ? the principal;
 - ? colleagues;
 - ? self.

2. The Peer Intervention Team:
 - ? selection should be objective;
 - ? should be made up of administrators and teachers representing a broad experience base;
 - ? members should rotate and serve no more than three (3) years;
 - ? members should have recognized mentoring experience and be recognized educational leaders.

3. Within the Peer Intervention Team structure:
 - ? there should be a district-wide team of 15-20 teachers;
 - ? the intervention team should be a subset of the larger team;
 - ? the larger team should decide on the protocol for working with individuals;
 - ? teachers undergoing intervention should be assigned a mentor from the intervention team;
 - ? mentor teams should develop an intervention plan for the teacher;
 - ? mentors will provide intense one-on-one help and support.

4. The intervention process:
 - ? should be a helping mechanism with an emphasis on the "fix" ;
 - ? should provide a customized plan for the individual, and the Intervention Team should have the autonomy to make recommendations;
 - ? should be a maximum of one school year in length;
 - ? should be confidential;
 - ? recommendations may include : training; content courses; mentor teacher modeling; mentor teacher subs while the teacher observes others; resources and readings; referral to the EAP.

5. If there is a recommendation for dismissal:
 - ? two-thirds of the district-wide team must support that recommendation from the Intervention Team;
 - ? the teacher may appeal to due process with a neutral third party arbitrator (per state law);
 - ? the decision is binding unless an appeal is upheld.

6. A teacher recommended for continued employment:
 - ? must exhibit successful teaching;

- ? proceeds to function autonomously;
 - ? may receive follow-up support at intervals of time which would decrease over time.
7. Additionally:
- ? teachers in the intervention process cannot be administratively transferred during the process and for a period of two years following the intervention;
 - ? the Peer Intervention Team can advise transferring the person to a job for which they may be better suited, e.g., a different level, subject or specialty area.
8. District support entails:
- ? FTEs for the Peer Intervention Team; cooperation in negotiating changes in the evaluation and compensation systems.

Questions and Answers Concerning Peer Intervention

Q. *What is intervention?*

A. Intervention is a component of the Peer Intervention System designed to help improve the performance of experienced teachers who are having serious difficulties in the performance of their professional responsibilities. The goal of intervention services is to improve the performance of experienced teachers through peer assistance. Intervention provides teachers experiencing serious difficulties in the classroom or other professional settings with a constructive alternative to traditional evaluation actions. Entry into intervention may be voluntary or recommended by a principal or peer. **One goal of the Peer Intervention System is to develop and maintain the highest caliber teaching staff.**

Q. *How does intervention fit into the existing evaluation process?*

A. Intervention would be incorporated into [Article 9](#), E. (Intensive Evaluation) of the negotiated agreement. If a supervisor has concerns about a teacher's performance, he/she would recommend that the teacher enter intervention instead of the traditional intensive evaluation system. The principal would document those concerns and the attempts made to provide assistance and support for change. Formal observations are appropriate when supervisors are aware that a teacher is experiencing difficulties. The observations are documented and comments would then indicate the supervisor's assessment that the teacher involved is not meeting professional standards.

Q. *Who administers the intervention?*

A. The peer intervention team would be composed of 16 members. One-fourth of the membership would be administrative members appointed by the superintendent and 3/4 would be appointed by the ATF president. The team is responsible for administering all aspects of the teacher intervention. The team:

- ? develops policies, procedures and standards with respect to intervention consistent with the parameters established by contractual negotiations.
- ? reviews and acts upon recommendations for intervention.
- ? assigns peer assistance and professional support
- ? Determines the duration of such assistance.
- ? reviews all intervention status reports and other pertinent materials submitted to the team.
- ? determines whether intervention was successful.
- ? recommends the case disposition, in writing, to the superintendent and ATF president.

Q. *Who is eligible for intervention services?*

A. Members of the teacher bargaining unit with more than two years of experience in all certification areas are eligible and may be recommended for intervention services. Eligible employees must be experiencing serious difficulties in the performance of their professional duties, and reasonable efforts to improve their performance must already have been made.

Q. *Who recommends intervention services?*

A. The process of recommending and enrolling a teacher in intervention begins whenever a school principal and/or other appropriate supervisory personnel reports to the Peer Intervention Team, in writing, that a teacher is experiencing serious difficulty with teaching performance and may benefit from intervention. The teacher may refer himself or herself, or a peer may refer a colleague to the principal or supervisor. The referral may then be sent on to the Peer Intervention Team.

Q. Can intervention be recommended for a teacher for minor problems?

A. No. A teacher may be referred only for serious difficulties with teaching performance which, if continued, could lead to dismissal or severe disciplinary action. Minor problems should be addressed through the existing evaluation and PDP process.

Q. *When may a teacher be referred for intervention?*

A. The teacher may be referred for intervention at any time during the school year.

Q. *What happens if the teacher doesn't agree with the recommendation for intervention?*

A. The teacher will be required to sign the Recommendation for Intervention form. The teacher's signature would indicate that he/she has been informed that his/her name has been submitted for consideration, but does not imply that the teacher has agreed to participate in the program. The teacher may respond in writing to the Peer Intervention Team at the time he/she is recommended for intervention. If the teacher wishes to meet with the team to discuss his/her situation, the team will accommodate such a request.

Q. *What happens after the team receives the recommendation for intervention?*

A. The team will review the Recommendation for Intervention and may request an opportunity to observe the teacher's performance in the classroom. Any teacher who is recommended for intervention will be afforded the opportunity to meet with the team or a team member to discuss the recommendation. A similar meeting will be held with the building administrator. Based upon the appropriateness of the referral, the team will accept or reject the recommendation in writing. If accepted, the notice is sent to the teacher, appropriate administrator, and the district superintendent. If rejected, the notice and rationale will be sent to the parties above.

Q. *Can the decision of the team be appealed?*

A. The team will reconsider their decision based on the presentation of substantial new evidence or documentation. A teacher who wishes to appeal a decision should contact the chairperson, in writing, indicating that he/she wishes to appeal, briefly stating the basis for the appeal.

- Q.** *Must a teacher who is accepted for intervention participate in the program?*
- A.** No. A teacher accepted by the team has the option of volunteering for the program or declining to participate. After receiving notice of acceptance into intervention, the teacher must agree in writing to participate in the process; otherwise, intervention services will not be provided.
- Q.** *What happens if a teacher does not volunteer for intervention?*
- A.** If a teacher rejects the team's recommendation for intervention, he/she must do so in writing. The teacher's decision will be noted in the teacher's personnel file. Intensive evaluation as outlined in [Article 9, E](#) will then be in effect.
- Q.** *How is the human resources department notified about intervention cases?*
- A.** The team will notify the Department for Human Resources in writing: (a) that the teacher was recommended for intervention, (b) what the team's decision was, and (c) whether the teacher volunteered to participate in the program. This written notice will be maintained in the teacher's personnel file.
- Q.** *How long will the teachers participating in intervention receive assistance?*
- A.** Teachers participating in intervention will continue to receive assistance until the team determines that no further assistance is needed or would be productive. The duration of the intervention program for any one teacher shall not extend beyond the start of the third full semester from the date of the initiation of the assistance program. Typically, intervention services will be provided for at least two full semesters.
- Q.** *Who will provide intervention assistance?*
- A.** Mentor teachers selected from within the team will provide intervention assistance. If necessary, a person with expertise in a specific field may be called upon to join the process. A mentor teacher/intervention specialist will be assigned to each intervention case.
- Q.** *Will the mentor teacher assigned be in the same licensure area as the teacher in intervention?*
- A.** Every effort will be made to match teachers in the same licensure areas. In some cases, the team may assign a mentor teacher from a different licensure area. The team will use whatever resources are available and deemed appropriate to ensure the success of intervention.
- Q.** *Will the same mentor teacher be assigned for the entire intervention period?*
- A.** The team will make every effort to assign one mentor teacher for the entire period of intervention. There may be situations which call for reassignment of a mentor teacher. That decision rests solely with the Peer Intervention Team. If such a reassignment is made, the term of the intervention will not be extended without separate Peer Intervention Team action.
- Q.** *What types of assistance will mentor teachers provide?*
- A.** The type of intervention assistance provided will vary based on the teacher's needs for improvement. Mentor teachers will support the implementation of plans for assistance for teachers who choose to participate in intervention. Mentor teachers will develop written performance goals with the teacher (an Intervention

Plan), offer support, and monitor the progress of the teacher. Mentor teachers may provide suggestions for training, course work, resources, or readings. The mentor may model teaching techniques for the teacher or substitute so that the teacher can observe others. Other school personnel may assist in the intervention program when needed and when invited to do so by the mentor teacher.

Q. *What is expected of teachers in intervention?*

A. A teacher who is in intervention is expected to confer with the mentor teacher assigned and to participate actively in efforts to improve his/her instructional performance. The teacher in intervention has a responsibility to make every effort to implement suggestions and to use resources offered during this process.

Q. *How is the progress of a teacher in intervention monitored?*

A. The mentor teacher submits Intervention Status Reports to the Intervention Team. The reports should include the following:

- ? Dates and times of observations and conferences;
- ? Issues and concerns being addressed;
- ? Methods, practices, etc. being employed to improve instruction;
- ? Reference to involvement of others in improving instruction;
- ? Professional development courses, in-services, etc. attended by the teacher;
- ? A clear statement of the mentor teacher's assessment of the intervention case's progress or lack of it with references to specific instructional areas;
- ? Other pertinent information.

Intervention status reports should be signed by both the mentor and the teacher in intervention. If the teacher wishes to comment, he/she has that right. Comments should be forwarded to the Peer Intervention Team in a timely way or attached to the status report.

Q. *May others conduct observations during intervention?*

A. Yes, with reasonable limits set to protect the teacher from unnecessary and/or excessive disruptions. Copies of all observation forms should be sent to human resources. No disciplinary action for teaching performance may commence until intervention is concluded and the team's final report is issued. Upon request of the mentor teacher, a team member may conduct an observation during the period of intervention.

Q. *Will the Intervention Team be made aware of administrators' observations and evaluation which occur during intervention?*

A. Yes. Human resources will forward copies of the observation and evaluation forms to the team. Copies of these forms will be maintained in the teacher's intervention file.

Q. *Can any disciplinary action be initiated during intervention?*

A. Nothing prohibits the district from bringing disciplinary action against any participating teacher for cause other than teaching performance. Further, nothing prohibits action from being brought against a participating teacher at the conclusion of intervention except as limited by the specific terms of the Peer Intervention Agreement.

- Q.** *What should an administrator do if he or she feels that the performance of a teacher in intervention has continued to decline?*
- A.** During the intervention process, any of the parties of interest may request a meeting with the team, mentor teacher and teacher in intervention. Administrators should also conduct reasonable classroom observations and submit a summative evaluation to human resources. If satisfactory progress is not reported during intervention, the team may recommend other action to the superintendent.
- Q.** *What happens at the conclusion of intervention?*
- A.** At the conclusion of a teacher's intervention, the Peer Review Team will review all status reports and other information, including observations and evaluations, submitted to the team. If the determination of the team is that intervention was successful, the team will issue a written report to the superintendent, the ATF President and the teacher in intervention. The teacher may receive or request follow up support at intervals of time which would decrease over time. If the determination of the team is that intervention was not successful, the team will issue a written report to the superintendent, the ATF President and the teacher in intervention. The teacher must sign the report and may attach comments. The team will inform the administrator that intervention has been terminated and that a report to the superintendent has been issued. The recommendation for dismissal is binding unless there is an appeal. The teacher may request due process through an appeal with a neutral third party arbitrator, as per state law. An appeal would focus on the rights and due process of the teacher and not their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities as this has already been determined by the Peer Intervention Team.
- Q.** *Can a teacher be administratively transferred during an intervention?*
- A.** The Peer Intervention Team can advise transferring the teacher to a job for which he/she may be better suited. Teachers in the intervention process cannot be administratively transferred during the process and for a period of two years following the intervention without the recommendation of the Peer Intervention Team.

The federation developed this proposal by adapting programs being used by local affiliates across the country. Much of our proposed plan is very similar to the Rochester City School District/Rochester Teachers Association Career in Teaching Program.

All of the questions and answers about the proposed Peer Intervention System have not been reviewed in this document. The Career In Teaching Program has additional information. After the Peer Intervention Team is selected for the Albuquerque Public Schools, their first responsibility would be to edit this document, review all other information about peer intervention systems, establish guidelines and protocols and work with the district and the federation to answer additional questions.