Report on the Third-year Evaluation of the Professional Growth System for Teachers

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IMPLEMENTING THE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH SYSTEM IN MONTGOMERY OUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
THIRD YEAR EVALUATION REPORT

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Nearly four years ago, in 2000, the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) embarked on an ambitious education improvement strategy. The plan, called the Professional Growth System (PGS), is composed of six principal elements:

1. A common language and common framework for teaching gained primarily through the courses Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) and Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT);

2. Job-embedded professional development under the guidance of school-based Staff Development Teachers;

3. Time to participate in ongoing professional development for all teachers through the Staff Development Substitute Teacher Project;

4. Teacher-directed professional growth through individual Professional Development Plans (PDPs);

5. A Peer Assistance and Review Program for teachers new to teaching and for under-performing experienced teachers; and,

6. A teacher evaluation system based on standards of effective practice from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The goal of the PGS is to infuse throughout Montgomery County Public Schools an ethic of continuous improvement through professional learning communities of shared beliefs and accountability in which in which standards-based teaching results in consistently improving student learning.

This third and final in the series of PGS evaluation reports adheres to much the same format as previous reports in the series. The next section describes the ways in which data for this evaluation were gathered and analyzed. Following this is a set of findings derived from the data and proposed recommendations for MCPS to consider as it continues to implement the PGS.

This report is designed to serve two purposes. It covers the approximate 15-month period from February 2003 through May 2004. It also serves as the final evaluation report for the PGS implementation.

Research Design

The research design for this evaluation employs both quantitative and qualitative data. *Quantitative data* include numbers derived, for example, from survey results. These measure the reactions of a relatively large number of people on discrete, selected items. Quantitative data allow a statistical aggregation and comparison across time.

Qualitative data—primarily results of interviews, case, studies, and small group interviews (focus groups)—provide more detailed information, but of a smaller universe. Qualitative data facilitate understanding patterns and trends, though they are not able to be generalized in quite the same way as quantitative data.

Both kinds of data—*qualitative and quantitative*—combine to form a more complete picture of the circumstance or phenomenon the researcher is trying to describe. The amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative data gathered for this evaluation of Montgomery County's Professional Growth System together provide a reasonably concise but comprehensive view of the current state of implementation of the PGS.

This is a formative evaluation. It is designed to provide a snapshot of PGS implementation at this juncture point. It does not aim, nor is it intended, to provide definitive information about student achievement data, per se. Though later in the report reference is made to contributory impacts of PGS elements on improving student learning, research conducted for this evaluation does not allow definitive claims about measured student achievement gains.

Oversight Evaluation Committee

The work of the PGS evaluation was overseen by an Evaluation Oversight Committee. Composed of MCPS stakeholders and outside researchers, this collaborative committee met periodically throughout the more-than-three-year-long conduct of the evaluation to guide the work.

Participating in the Oversight Committee were MCPS central administrative staff, including members of the Office of Staff Development and Office of Shared Accountability, Office of School Performance, and Human Resources Department. Also represented were the

Montgomery County Association of Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (MCAASP); Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA); and Research for Better Teaching which has provided support and technical assistance to the district throughout the implementation of the PGS. In addition, outside researchers—Julia Koppich as well as faculty from George Washington University—were part of the Oversight Committee.

The PGS Implementation Team, composed of many of the MCPS stakeholder members of the Oversight Committee has functioned in an operational capacity, making mid-course corrections in the PGS as warranted and ensuring that the PGS remained on track.

Research Questions

The Oversight Committee developed the research questions that framed the work of this evaluation. A complete research design protocol is attached to this report as Appendix A. The basic questions under investigation were:

- What have we learned from initial years of implementation of the PGS?
- Are the initiatives improving the quality of teaching?
- Is there any way yet to see any change in student learning?
- Are the initiatives contributing to the development of professional learning communities in schools?
- To what extent has the culture of schools and the school system changed as a result of these initiatives?

Sources of Data

As previously indicated, multiple sources of data were used for this report.

Surveys:

The MCPS Office of Shared Accountability conducted mail surveys of teachers and administrators in spring 2003. A total of 1790 surveys were sent to Montgomery County teachers. This number included 703 elementary teachers, 335 middle school teachers, 727 high school teachers, and 25 special/alternative teachers. An additional 33 high school teachers were also included as part of an over-sample of nine selected schools that were part of case studies described below. Teachers who were in their first year in MCPS were not included as survey participants, nor were teachers who had completed similar surveys for the PGS evaluation in the previous year.

A total of 604 completed surveys were returned, a response rate of 34 percent. This included 219 elementary teachers, 134 middle school teachers, 219 high school teachers, and 5 special/alternative school teachers. The 34 percent response rate is considerably lower than the 50 percent response rate on last year's teacher survey. However, budget constraints this year precluded the kind of follow-up possible with survey non-respondents in previous years.

Surveys were also sent to 176 administrators, including principals at all levels and randomly selected assistant principals for those schools with one or more assistant principals. Administrators were selected from a possible universe of 345 principals and assistant principals. The administrator response rate was 56 percent. This included 56 elementary administrators, 23 middle school administrators, 16 high school administrators, and 3 special/alternative school administrators. (Last year, the administrator response rate was 78 percent.)

Case Studies:

George Washington University conducted case studies in seven high schools, each of which had a full-time (or nearly full-time) Staff Development Teacher (SDT). This emphasis was selected as a result of evaluation findings the previous year that suggested further investigation of the full-time (as opposed to the .2 FTE) high school SDT model warranted further study. Case study team members spent a minimum of seven days in each of the selected schools, interviewing between 10 and 30 teachers and administrators at each school, reviewing relevant documents, and observing school meetings and activities. Altogether, some 210 teachers were interviewed, along with each selected school's Staff Development Teacher and administrative staff.

Interviews and Focus Groups:

In addition to the interviews that were part of the case studies conducted by George Washington University, additional individual interviews and focus groups were conducted to gather data for this evaluation. Julia Koppich interviewed each MCPS Community Superintendent in winter 2003. Koppich also conducted one focus group each of elementary, middle school, and high school Staff Development Teachers. A total of 15 Staff Development Teachers was interviewed for this component of the work.

At the request of the school district, Julia Koppich also prepared a separate report on the Peer Assistance and Review Program. That report is a separate document, as referenced in this report. Data for the PAR report included interviews with all PAR Panel members; interviews

with approximately a dozen beginning and experienced teachers who have completed the PAR Program; the majority of Consulting Teachers in years 1, 2, and 3 of their rotations; and 20 elementary, middle school, and high school principals.

Also interviewed were the current and immediate past presidents of the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) and the Montgomery County Association of Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (MCAASP).

Impact Study Team:

The Impact Study Team was created as a means to involve administrators and teachers in collecting evaluation data through interviews and participant observations. Impact Study Team members gathered qualitative data on the impact of the PGS system on the daily practice and culture of teaching and learning in schools. These interview data were also compared with survey and case study findings as a way of "triangulating" the information and corroborating validity.

This component of the evaluation study was announced to MCPS teachers and administrators in spring 2003. Volunteer study team members were solicited by MCEA, MCAASP, and MCPS. A group of 35 teachers and 6 school administrators agreed to serve on the Study Team. These individuals participated in 15 hours of training and orientation in qualitative research methods, including practice interviewing, observing and recording.

From January through March 2004, the Impact Study Team conducted interviews and observations at more than 17 schools, talking with 85 teachers and 11 administrators. Team members wrote up notes of the interviews using a common format. Interview notes were compiled and analyzed by the Study Coordinating Team (Suzanne Merchlinsky and Margaret Donnellon of MCPS, Naomi Baden of MCEA, Sandra Spooner of Research for Better Teaching, and researcher Julia Koppich). Study Team members also participated in a debriefing session conducted by members of the Coordinating Committee

Validity Study:

In September 2003, MCPS' Office of Shared Accountability completed a study to determine the extent to which administrators' observation and evaluation reports are consistent across schools and evaluators. Rubrics used to rate the reports were based on rubrics developed for a similar study last year. Rubrics were derived from principles of the Observing and

Analyzing Teaching (OAT) course provided for school administrators and others who conduct teacher observations and evaluations.

MCPS staff, including principals and assistant principals, Office of Staff Development in-district trainers, Consulting Teachers, staff from the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs and Office of School Performance were recruited to serve as raters for the study. During training sessions, participants learned to analyze evaluation and observation reports using the rubrics and sample reports solicited from Phase 2 administrators.

A total of 126 observation reports and 41 evaluation reports were analyzed. These reports were drawn from observations of 34 teachers in 16 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, and 2 high schools. Reports were analyzed for their fidelity with the rubrics.

FINDINGS

The next section of the report presents the findings derived from the data. Where a finding is indicated, so, too, is the source of the data.

> **1. ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS CONCUR THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PGS IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.**

Survey results indicate that nearly all administrators—92% in elementary schools, 96% in middle schools, and 100% responding from high schools—believe that implementation of the PGS "is moving in the right direction." Very high percentages of teachers are of a like mind. When the question is put to them about whether implementation of the PGS is moving in the right direction, 78% of elementary teachers, as well as 75% of middle school teachers and 66% of high school teachers replied that it is.

The significance of this finding should be not underestimated. MCPS has embarked on an enormously ambitious course of action. The PGS requires substantial changes in the way teachers and administrators think about teaching and learning and in the means and methods by which they carry out their professional responsibilities. Bringing about fundamental changes in teaching and learning would be a difficult proposition in a small system. In a system the size of Montgomery County, to have, after just a few short years, the vast majority of professional staff believing that the district is moving in the right direction is an achievement of which the district should be justly proud.

Administrators and teachers cite time for teachers to plan together, the SDT program, and SD substitutes as the three most important features of the PGS. However, they place them in different priority order. Administrators select the SDT followed by SD subs and teacher collegial planning time. Teachers select time to plan with colleagues as the most important feature of the PGS, followed by SD substitutes and the SDT program.

Of interest and significance, survey results (on this general question and more broadly) were examined for differences between Focus (Title I) and non-Focus schools as well as for differences among teachers with varying levels of experience teaching in MCPS. Virtually no differences were found. In other words, implementation of the PGS across multiple dimensions

is perceived in much the same way regardless of school settings or employees' duration in the system.

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2.   THE PGS IS BRINGING ABOUT SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN TEACHING.

Data from a number of sources—surveys, interviews, and case studies—indicate that the PGS is bringing about fundamental changes in teaching in Montgomery County. Changes are noted particularly in acknowledged sources of student learning, in the increased use of data to drive instruction, and in the increased use of specific instructional strategies. The kinds of changes in instructional practices underway are those that research suggests are likely to lead to changes in student results.

Administrators and teachers point to a wide variety of evidence of student learning. When asked to provide sources they consult in terms of assessing student learning progress, both administrators and teachers offer an expansive list: rubrics, MSAs, daily journals and writing samples, in-class work and participation, and other kinds of standardized assessments. Both administrators and teachers view assessing student learning as both a formative and summative process.

Administrators and teachers both report a much heavier and more consistent use of data to drive instruction. Survey results indicate that the majority of elementary and middle school teachers (66% and 53%, respectively) say that, as a result of the PGS, teachers use more and a wider variety of data to support instruction. Only 35% of high school teachers report an increased use of data.

Interestingly, administrators have a more expansive view of teachers' use of data. Among administrators, 82% in elementary schools, as well as 65% in middle schools and 69% in high schools say teachers use a variety of data to shape instructional practices.

Community superintendents suggest that, while schools are making better and more consistent use of data, principals would be assisted by better data compiling tools and strategies.

The PGS is prompting increased use of specific instructional practices. As **Figure 1** indicates, as a result of the PGS, teachers report increases in a number of proven instructional strategies, including "planning lessons with an emphasis on what students will learn"; "trying to increase my repertoire of teaching skills"; "using a variety of teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs"; and, "trying to use a variety of activities to reinforce leaning."

Of particular significance are the increases in every category among high school teachers who say they employ these strategies. The number of high school teachers who say they plan lessons with an emphasis on what students will learn doubled in one year from 24% on last year's survey to 48% this year. "Trying to increase my repertoire of teaching skills" jumped among high school teachers from 35% last year to 63% this year. "Analyzing my own lessons and teaching" increased in high school teachers from 38% last year indicating they employed this strategy to 48% saying they now use it.

In the category, "using a variety of teaching practices to meet diverse learning needs," whereas last year, just 25% of high school teachers said this described how they teach, on this year's survey, 60% of high school teachers said it is an accurate descriptor. And when it comes to "trying to use a variety of activities to reinforce learning," a full 67% of high school teachers say they employ this strategy this year, compared with just 25% last year.

Figure 1 Teacher-Reported Increases in Particular Instructional Strategies

Increases in…	*Elementary*	*Middle School*	*High School (2002)*	*High School (2003)*
Planning lessons with an emphasis on what students will learn	60%	52%	24%	48%
Trying to increase my repertoire of teaching skills	74%	65%	35%	63%
Analyzing my own lessons and teaching	56%	55%	38%	48%
Using a variety of teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs	60%	55%	25%	60%
Trying to use a variety of activities to reinforce learning	56%	55%	25%	67%

Peer visit with reflection was raised a good deal in Impact Study Team interviews as a positive development. This process involves inviting a peer to observe a specific aspect of teaching so together colleagues may reflect on the teaching and learning taking place. The teacher selects a focus that will help him or her meet a particular learning goal. Peer visits can also be a mutual process in which the teacher has an opportunity to observe another teacher in a similarly planned way.

Commented one teacher, "It used to be that if I asked another teacher to come to my class or [I wanted] to go to their [sic] classroom, it was a sense people were 'spying.' But now it's accepted."

Comments from the Impact Study Team interviews are telling. As one teacher commented, "I think more, and differently, about instruction now." Commented another, "Everyone is more focused on what children are learning."

Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) and Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) are having dramatic and positive impacts on instruction. Both Observing and Analyzing Teaching (OAT) and Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) are widely praised by the administrators and teachers who have participated in these courses.

Among the advantages of OAT 1 noted by administrators on surveys are "new insights about effective teaching practices" (51%); "new ideas about how to improve the way I observe teachers" (53%); "greater sense of how all the components of the Professional Growth System fit together (44%); and "greater confidence in using a wide range of evidence in the evaluation process" (47%). Among the advantages of OAT 2 noted by administrators on surveys are, in addition to those already indicated, "greater sense of how all the components of the Professional Growth System fit together (44%) and " new insights about how to apply the new teaching standards to the evaluation process" (42%).

Teachers who participated in SST were effusive in their appreciation for the course. As they told Impact Study Team members, "It changed the way I teach!" and, "It makes teaching a science, not just a bag of tricks." Teachers spoke of SST as helping them to plan better—"I learned how to frame the lesson for the most value"—and be more focused about their instruction. They say it validated their teaching practices: "Before Skillful Teacher, I think most teachers had these strategies in their pocket, but never openly discussed them. Now these strategies are front and center and have become the focus of what we do."

Teachers report that, as a result of SST, "I became more reflective about my teaching. I ask students if things are working well. In the old days, you were good if no one talked in class…." "I do a lot more looking at strategies and whether they're working for kids." "I use my time in a more focused way. I know what to teach, and what kids have to learn."

Community superintendents would like to see the course offered in different formats to make it more accessible to a wider range of teachers. Less than a third of teachers who responded

to this year's survey (29%) say they have taken or are enrolled in SST. About a third (35%) say they have never tried to enroll; another third (32%) say they do not think they are interested in the course.

As a result of the PGS, teachers increasingly seem to be assuming collective responsibility for student learning. This dimension is challenging to measure, but interview comments seem to suggest that, increasingly, teachers view instruction as a *collective* responsibility: "We all own these kids," one teacher commented to a member of the Impact Study Team.

In addition creating the sense of "joint ownership" of students, the PGS seems to be giving some number of teachers an enhanced sense of responsibility: "The PGS made me think that I'm accountable to get kids to learn the material no matter what their life is like…. I'm responsible for getting them to learn, to reach standards." From the case studies: "I used to say that every child has a right to fail. Since the PGS, I now think every child has a right to learn." As one teacher told the Impact Study Team, "The PGS [has given us a shared purpose for maintaining high standards."

Teacher conversations increasingly are focused on teaching and learning. Administrators and teachers both report that teacher professional conversations increasingly are focused on teaching and learning. Community superintendents note that, "The PGS is improving the quality of conversations in teacher lounges about teaching and learning."

Teacher comments are telling as well. From Impact Study Team interviews: "Conversations are turning toward student learning." "Teachers are talking and sharing ideas." "We are more focused on how students will get where they need to be rather than [on] their background."

On the survey, 94% of administrators say teachers engage more openly with one another in professional dialogue about instruction and student learning; just above half of teachers (53%) concur, but this is an increase from 38% last year.

> ### 3. THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT TEACHER PROGRAM GIVES FORM AND SUBSTANCE TO THE PGS.

In most school districts, professional development tends to be a rather hit-and-miss affair. Research suggests that effective professional development is school-based, largely teacher-driven and directed, standards-based, and related to what teachers do in their schools and classrooms. In many districts, professional development strays far from this ideal.

Montgomery County's Staff Development Teacher Program attempts to rectify the usual deficiencies in teacher staff development. Job-embedded, school-based professional development is the hallmark of this PGS component, which receives high marks from both administrators and teachers.

"The SDT is the driving force behind getting us to think differently about teaching." This quote from an Impact Study Team interview nicely summarizes teachers' (and administrators') views of the significance of the SDT Program.

In terms of administrators, fully 89% in elementary schools, 78% in middle schools, and 68% in high schools assigned high marks to "positive interactions between SDTs and teachers." On this same dimension, 77% of elementary teachers, 67% of middle school teachers, and 62% of high school teachers reported positive interactions with SDTs.

According to case studies, interviews, and survey results, SDTs serve as mentors and coaches. They provide one-on-one assistance and group and team support.

Survey results reveal that among the highest participation rates for SDT activities were team planning sessions and one-on-one coaching (65% and 53% participation rates for elementary and middle school teachers, respectively; though just 20% for high school teachers).

Of these activities, large majorities of teachers found team planning sessions very or somewhat helpful (96% elementary, 93% middle school, 79% high school), with similar results for the usefulness of SDT coaching (95% elementary, 98% middle school, 89% high school).

Large majorities of teachers—86% elementary, 79% middle school, and 66% high school—report that SDTs employ collaborative practices for instructional improvement, and nearly equally large percentages (81% in elementary schools, 70% in middle schools, and 52% in high schools) report that SDTs work with teachers to use data to improve instruction. As Impact Study Team members were told, "We didn't have time as teachers to sit and talk to each other before. The SDT makes time for us to do this."

As **Figure 2** shows, on other important dimensions, including availability, reliability, and expertise, SDTs are rated extremely highly by teachers across the board.

Figure 2 My SDT…

	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Is available when needed	89%	81%	77%
Reliably follows through on requests	91%	83%	75%
Has sufficient expertise	88%	83%	73%
Provides useful information on teaching skills	79%	77%	63%
Respects teachers' expertise	90%	84%	76%

While the SDT program receives solid reviews from administrators and teachers, some dilemmas attached to the program remain. One dilemma is that ***the high school component of the SDT Program does not function as smoothly as it might.***

There has been a continuing issue with regard to the most effective SDT model for high schools. The district has experimented with two basic models: the .2 FTE, in which an individual (usually a Resource Teacher) is provided an additional period for SDT work. The other model provides a single full-time (or nearly full-time) SDT for a high school. Neither model is ideal, and available data make it difficult to make a definitive determination about which model (if either) is more effective in the high school setting.

Case studies suggest that, at a minimum, if more than one person occupies the SDT role, a lead SDT needs to coordinate professional growth activities. A similar recommendation was made in the July 2001 report of the Joint Work Group on the High School Staff Development Teacher Position.

However, coordination does not resolve the subject area specialization dilemma. In other words, there is a question, given the important focus on subject matter content, about the extent to which an SDT whose field is English, for example, can be helpful to a group of science or mathematics teachers. Moreover, in a large high school, there is a question about how much a single person actually can accomplish under any circumstances. (This suggests that perhaps FTE equivalency needs to be more a function of the size of the school than the kind of school.)

However, the .2 FTE model carries its own problems. As interviews with multiple teachers and administrators suggest, in the .2 FTE model, there seems to be little distinction between RT and SDT responsibilities. Resource teachers simply use the added time to fulfill their RT obligations.

As indicated by the figure below, increasing numbers of secondary schools (middle and high schools) have adopted the FTE Staff Development Teacher model. It is anticipated that, with additional experience, even larger numbers of secondary schools will select this model.

SDT MODEL USEAGE YEARS 1 – 5
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

	Year 1 1.0	Year 1 Other*	**Year 4 1.0**	Year 4 Other*	**Predicted: Year 5 1.0**	Predicted: Year 5 Other*
Middle Schools	**18**	18	**28**	8	**29**	7
High Schools	**2**	22	**9**	15	**16** (including 1 new school)	9

*Other = anything from all .2 allocations to a .4, .6, .8 allocation sharing the position with one, two, or three .2 allocations

In addition, particularly in high schools, as evident from case study data, there exists a fair amount of tension among SDTs, PAR Consulting Teachers, and other staff whose role it is to provide teacher support. Tension occurs because school-based SDTs have responsibility to assist teachers to implement the instructional goals set by the school. Consulting Teachers, assigned to novice and under-performing teachers from the Peer Assistance and Review Program, adhere to the standards of effective teaching embedded in PAR. While individual school and PAR standards of good teaching should not, in principle, be in conflict, different interpretations of these standards and their application can result in tension among various staff members with responsibility for assisting a given group of teachers.

In addition, *SDTs continue to be assigned multiple (ancillary) responsibilities.* Especially in large elementary schools with no assistant principals, Staff Development Teachers continue to be assigned multiple duties that would seem to fall well beyond the bounds of SDT work. "I'm pulled into administrative projects a lot," and, "I'm a real administrative asset" were prototypical comments of SDTs who were interviewed by the Impact Study Team. Even in high

schools, full-time SDTs who participated in a focus group for this study said they "function very much like assistant principals."

Survey results confirm the beyond-staff-development responsibilities of SDTs. More than half of elementary principals (55%) say the SDT functions as the school's testing coordinator. This compares to approximately one-quarter (22%) of principals in middle schools and a smaller number (19%) in high schools who assign the SDT to this role. Moreover, more than a third of elementary principals (37%), compared to no middle or high school principal survey respondents, report that SDTs are responsible for identifying gifted and talented students

In addition, SDTs report that they continue to devote a good deal to time and attention to new and under-performing teachers. While this role might be thought to fall to Consulting Teachers in the PAR program, SDTs report that principals are usually quite insistent that SDTs do what they can to mitigate instructional problems rather than using the PAR route. [See separate report on PAR for a more complete exploration of this issue.] As one SDT explained it, "The principal told me that if we secure CTs especially for under-performing teachers, we will have to keep those teachers and good teachers might be surplused from the building."

Sometimes, SDTs say, they feel as if they are the intermediaries between what the principal wants and what teachers say they need. One SDT described the space between teachers' and principals' wishes as the "demilitarized zone." Another said, "I'm tired of the Kissinger part" [shuttle diplomacy}."

SDTs become master jugglers: "I had to learn to treat every [teacher] request as an urgent request," commented one SDT to the Impact Study Team. "My typical day is always unpredictable," noted another. In schools with reform agendas packed even more full than is typical in MCPS (e.g.. title I schools), SDTs have the added task of integrating the school's ongoing reform agenda with the PGS.

Finally, *some SDTs have raised questions about the training they receive.* In focus groups conducted for this evaluation, SDTs raised some questions about their training. Experienced SDTs report that more intensive attention to modeling, coaching, and the tenets of effective professional development would benefit their new colleagues. SDTs also note that their training often is dictated by the district's staff development office (sometimes necessary, particularly the case this year in the implementation of new curriculum), not by their school's needs. SDTs interviewed for this study indicated that, while some of the training they receive is

useful, they believe too much of it is jargon-laden and too process oriented. These comments come from a relatively small group of approximately 15 SDTs, but their comments may be worth keeping a watchful eye on over time.

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4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT SUBSTITUTES ARE CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PGS.

Staff Development substitutes are proving to be essential to a smoothly functioning PGS Program. As previously indicated, Staff Development substitutes are one of the three most critical features of the PGS, as indicated by both administrators and teachers.

Substitutes provide the time for teachers to meet and plan together, time they might not otherwise have. Schools that have the services of a stable cadre of SD substitutes (and the same substitutes over time) are even more appreciative of this feature as, with known substitutes who are conversant both with the students and their subjects, teachers say they are more willing to leave their classes for professional development activities.

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5. IMPLEMENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS IS IMPROVING, BUT IS NOT YET SMOOTH AND CONSISTENT ACROSS THE DISTRICT.

As part of the PGS, each tenured teacher designs a multi-year Professional Development Plan (PDP) for continuous improvement. The focus of the PDP is to support professional development activities that are of value to teachers and that are planned to improve student and school results. Survey data suggest that a large number of teachers find value in the PDPs.

Because MCPS is so large, the PGS was implemented in three successive phases. In 2000-2001, 34 schools became Phase I schools. The next year, in 2001-2002, 91 schools joined the PGS as Phase II. And in 2002-2003, the remaining 62 schools joined the PGS as Phase III.

As **Figure 3** indicates, teachers across all phases believe that "my PDP is focused on content important to my teaching"; "accomplishing my PDP will lead to improved student learning"; "my PDP lays out a multi-year plan for professional growth"; and "my PDP is a living document that will change as I work toward my professional development goals."

Figure 3 My PDP…

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Is focused on content important to my teaching	79%	74%	73%
Accomplishing my PDP will lead to improved student learning.	78%	69%	68%
Lays out a multi-year plan for professional growth	65%	63%	63%
Is a living document that will change as I work toward my professional development goals.	66%	66%	66%

Figure 4 indicates the factors that teachers, by level, consider most important in developing their PDPs. As the data show, those factors are the school's improvement plan; "goals of my grade or subject area team"; "input from my SDT"; student progress data; "lessons learned from developing my PDP last year"; and, "self-reflection on my teaching practices".

Figure 4 Teacher-selected Factors Important in Developing PDPs

	Elementary	Middle School	High School
School's improvement plan	86%	82%	82%
Goal of my grade or subject area team	79%	77%	78%
Input from my SDT	68%	75%	63%
Student progress data	79%	71%	78%
Lessons learned from developing my PDP last year	58%	64%	58%
Self-reflection on my teaching practices	89%	95%	87%

However, Professional Development Plans, designed to assist teachers to tailor professional growth to their own constantly changing needs, continue to receive somewhat mixed reviews from teachers. Substantial numbers of teachers consider the PDP a kind of busy work that takes time away from their teaching. When asked if the PDP "is just administrative

paperwork," 48% of teachers in Phase 1 schools, a well as 47% and 40% each in Phase 2 and 3 schools, respectively, replied in the affirmative.

Some teachers report that PDPs are "the school's plan, not mine." One teacher, interviewed by the Impact Study Team, renamed the PDP the "political development plan." Some teachers complain that, despite their work developing plans, once completed, plans are rarely reviewed or revisited by the teachers themselves or their principals.

5. MCPS' TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM IS A SIGNIFICANT STEP FORWARD.

Montgomery County's standards-based teacher evaluation system endeavors to tackle some of the most vexing dilemmas plaguing performance appraisal. The system is grounded in standards of effective teaching derived from the core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It is organized to assess the quality of instruction, not just the performance of specified routines. And it is based on the notion that a primary purpose of evaluation is improvement; the system is designed to help teachers get better at what they do.

Teacher evaluation in most school districts in the United States fall into the category of what has been called "common law assessment". Undertaken to meet state mandates and local requirements, evaluations generally are variations on a common theme and format that rate teachers on the basis of observable skills and accepted practices.

Typically, these systems involve brief observations of teaching by the principal or other school administrator, with observation results recorded on a form often organized as a kind of checklist. The evaluator assesses overall teacher performance using a pre-determined rating scale.

Common law evaluations have been the subject of substantial criticism. These systems are generally top-down, requiring little involvement on the part of teachers. They apply the same standards and criteria (which often are unclear or unstated) to all teachers regardless of years of experience. Principals are often not well trained to carry out the evaluations. The process does not assess the quality of instruction and ratings often have little to do with improving instruction. Yet this system persists, and nearly everyone is judged competent.

This commonly used evaluation rubric was derived from the process-product research of the 1970s, when teaching was thought to be a set of learned, codifiable skills. Learning outcomes

were associated with whatever could be counted in the classroom (teachers' behaviors, the minutes students engaged in academic work, etc.). The same set of teaching skills applied to any group of students was presumed to produce the same learning results.

More sophisticated understanding of how humans learn has revealed that teaching quality cannot be appraised on the basis of generic skills or competencies. High quality teaching is not simply a matter applying a predetermined set of technical skills or procedures to predictable problems. Teaching is much more complex, involving the exercise of judgment to diagnose student learning needs, select the appropriate strategies and alternative solutions in often uncertain situations, develop interventions when strategies are not successful, and assess student progress.[1]

Better than 75% of administrators responding to the survey reported that Montgomery County's evaluation system has "enabled me to be a more effective administrator." Large majorities of teachers—91% in elementaries, 81% in middle schools, and 75% in high schools— find the evaluation process "highly effective." As one teacher commented to case study researchers, "The evaluation system has prompted a harder look at how my teaching affects my students."

Administrators report using a variety of data to support their evaluations. As one principal commented to the Impact Study Team, "I now understand the value of data to drive instruction. Data is now a useful tool."

While the use of multiple indicators would appear to be on the rise, this is a case in which principals' and teachers' perceptions differ. Among administrators, 80% in elementary schools, 83% in middle schools, and 81% in high schools report using multiple sources of data. When the same question was posed to teachers, they had a somewhat different take. About 60% of elementary teachers, 55% of middle school teachers, and 46% of high school teachers believe their principals use multiple sources of data in preparing evaluations.

On a related dimension, when administrators were asked if they incorporate discussion of PDPs into teacher evaluations, 70% of elementary administrators, along with 76% and 94% of

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[1] For a more complete explanation, see, for example, the following: Darling-Hammond L. and Millman, J. (1990). *Handbook of Teacher Evaluatio*n. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press; Medley, D.M. and Coker, H. (1987). The accuracy of principals' judgments of teacher performance. *Journal of Educational Research*. 80:242-247; Millman, J. (ed.) (1997). *Grading teachers, grading the schools: Is student achievement a valid evaluation measure?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing; Shulman, L. (1988). A union of insufficiencies: Strategies for teacher assessment in a period of education reform. *Educational Leadership*. 46 (3) 36-41.

their middle and high school colleagues, respectively, said they do. However, when teachers were asked if PDPs are raised in their evaluations, just 48% of elementary, 45% of middle school, and 48% of high school teachers said this was the case.

In preparing observation and evaluation reports, administrators are particularly adept at illustrating their understanding of performance standards, providing evidence from multiple sources, drawing conclusions supported by data, and providing final ratings justified by evidence. This is the principal finding of the most recent validity study. The study also cites adequate evidence to support comments in each of the six standards, and conveying a clear sense of the teacher's professional growth as areas in which administrators were found to be doing moderately well. The areas the study found lacking were providing a context section that presents adequate information about the class, and consideration of the teacher's self-evaluation and plans for growth.

Time to complete observations write-ups continues to be an issue for many administrators. Completing observation write-ups and evaluation reports is time-consuming, even overwhelming for some administrators. On the survey, better than 80% of elementary, middle, and high school principals report that a single post-observation report can take from one to three hours to complete. Some administrators say have gained speed with experience; others report they have invented short-cuts that do not short-change the process. The dilemma is particularly difficult in schools (or during years) in which there are a large number of teachers for a single administrator to evaluate.

> **6. MCPS' PEER ASSISTANCE AND REVIEW PROGRAM SEEMS TO BE OFF TO A SMOOTH AND PRODUCTIVE START.**

At the request of MCPS, Julia Koppich conducted a separate comprehensive evaluation of the district's Peer Assistance and Review Program (PAR). That evaluation is contained in a separate report presented to the Board of Education and simply referenced here as part of the more inclusive PGS review.

Among the highlights of this study are the following findings:

- *PAR is earning high marks from principals*—Principals by and large see the PAR Program as an important contributor to the district's ongoing efforts to improve the quality of teaching.

- *Consulting Teachers are valued for their professionalism and expertise*—Principals and teachers who have experience with the PAR Program concur that Consulting Teachers are instructional experts who make PAR work. CT support is intensive and consistent. It allows new teachers to hit the ground running and provides experienced under-performing teachers with an opportunity to improve their practice.

- *MCPS' PAR Program is designed for teachers in serious professional jeopardy.*—In MCPS, a tenured teacher who is identified for PAR is considered one whose job is in substantial jeopardy. Being placed in PAR in Montgomery County serves as a clear signal that a teacher is on the verge of being terminated.

- *PAR reflects collaboration on multiple productive levels*—Implementation of PAR seems to be having a positive impact on furthering MCPS' efforts to infuse professional collaboration throughout the system.

7. THE PGS IS PROMOTING THE EVOLUTION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN MCPS SCHOOLS, THOUGH THIS EVOLUTION IS NOT YET COMPLETE.

The development of professional learning communities—shared norms and values, a common language about teaching and learning, collaboration around content and planning—is an essential component of the PGS. Data suggests that, on a number of dimensions, professional learning communities are evolving in MCPS schools.

When asked on the survey whether "a professional learning community is evolving at your school," 94% of elementary administrators, and 89% and 80%, respectively, of their middle and high school colleagues said that it is. When the same question was put to teachers, 70% of elementary, as well as 63% of middle school and 48% of high school teachers replied in the affirmative.

In interviews, teachers spoke of the PGS as, "moving me from focusing only on my content to the … focus of the school (reading strategies, multicultural issues, etc.)." Teachers and administrators both spoke to the Impact Study Team about the sense that the PGS has fostered a "common language, agenda, itinerary, expectations, and instructional goals."

However, it is important to note that on a number of significant dimensions, administrators and teachers see the world of PGS implementation somewhat differently. For example, when asked the extent to which administrators and teachers share a common vision, 54% of elementary administrators, as well as 51% in middle schools and 69% in high schools said that they do. When the same question was put to teachers, 41% each in elementary schools and middle schools, and 26% in high schools said that they and their administrators share a common vision.

When asked the extent to which teachers use a common conceptual framework to discuss teaching and learning (and whether the use of this common conceptual framework has increased since the introduction of the PGS), administrators by wide majorities—81% in elementary schools, 100% in middle schools, and 75% in high schools—said this was the case. Among teachers, results were less positive. About two-thirds of elementary teachers (64%), 58% of

middle school teachers, and just 39% of high school teachers say they use a common conceptual framework.

Another area of difference is in teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the extent to which professional growth activities are tailored to teachers' needs. Among administrators, 75% in elementary, 86% in middle school, and 75% high school administrators report that professional growth is keyed to teachers' needs. Teachers think differently: just 48% in elementary, 47% in middle school, and 37% of high school teachers believe PGS professional growth is tailored to their needs.

As **Figures 5 and 6** display, on other dimensions important to the development of professional learning communities—collegiality between teachers and administrators, the extent to which the school's atmosphere is conducive to continuous improvement, and the sense of school as community—teachers' and administrators' perceptions differ.

Figure 5 Administrators Who Reported That the PGS is Contributing to…

	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Stronger sense of community at the school	79%	80%	8%
Relationships between teachers and administrators more collegial	77%	76%	53%
School's atmosphere conducive to continuous improvement	66%	87%	75%

Figure 6 Teachers Who Reported That the PGS is Contributing to…

	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Stronger sense of community at the school	50%	48%	31%
Relationships between teachers and administrators more collegial	43%	40%	24%
School's atmosphere conducive to continuous improvement	47%	46%	34%

Among the most substantial differences between administrators' and teachers' perceptions is on the question of the extent to which administrators and teaches engage together

in conversations about instruction. Fully 87% of administrators say such conversations take place; just 24% of teachers say they do.

The fact that teachers and principals see their professional worlds somewhat differently is perhaps not surprising. The most recent Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, titled "An Examination of School Leadership," revealed a schism between principals' and teachers' views in areas such as priority tasks and collegiality.[2]

OBSERVATIONS

At the conclusion of this evaluation, three observations seem warranted. These observations are derived from interviews and focus groups. They represent themes and trends that recurred with some frequency, though it is not possible to attach to them the kinds of quantitative data that emanate from survey results.

Nevertheless, these observations are offered for MCPS' consideration:

- ***The messages principals communicate about the PGS components and their implementation are critical.*** In debriefing sessions with members of the Impact Study Team, when they were asked what was the one point about which they would be disappointed if it did not make it into the final report, they replied that they believed, from their interviews, it was important to stress the criticality of consistency in terms of the messages principals convey.

This is a very large district. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that what may begin as a single message becomes transmuted in the application. For example, as Impact Study Team members were told, some principals required teachers to maintain extensive professional portfolios in a particular format. Teachers in these schools were told such portfolios were a PGS requirement. In other schools, no such demand was made on teachers' time.

As the case studies showed, what the principal communicates about the role of the SDT shapes professional growth at the school: "Where the principal is visibly committed to improving instructional practice, SDTs are more likely to be featured in staff meetings and other venues and the PGS receives greatest support." What the principal communicates about the role of the Consulting Teacher shapes the faculty's view of PAR. All in all, the

[2] For more information, see *The Metropolitan Survey of the American Teacher: An Examination of School Leadership* (2004). http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/20781259951075837470V1F2003%20Survey.pdf

principal is the central transmitter of the district's messages about the PGS. To the extent that principals hear and communicate the same messages, PGS implementation can proceed similarly across different schools.

- ***MCPS may have reached a kind of saturation point in terms of implementing new initiatives that require additional significant change on the part of MCPS professional staff.*** MCPS teachers and administrators have embraced a large number of changes in a very short period of time. Many of these changes require professional staff to learn new skills and develop new means by which they do their work. The district might now do well to allow those changes that form the sum and substance of the PGS to become institutionalized before launching yet more new initiatives that require intensive change on the part of MCPS staff.

- ***MCPS will need to send a consistent stay-the-PGS-course message as it continues on the road to full PGS implementation.*** It is clear from interviews and focus groups that administrators and teachers, many of whom have served in the district for many years, are wary that the PGS will be here one day and gone the next. Some say they have seen various educational fads come and go. If MCPS is sincere that the PGS is not a fad but is a new way of doing business, it will need consistently and over a long period of time to communicate that serious message to its employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The next section of the report offers recommendations for MCPS to consider as it continues to implement the Professional Growth System.

1. **Continue implementation of the PGS.**

   Evaluation results suggest MCPS should continue on its current PGS implementation path. Implementation is proceeding smoothly on many dimensions and continued attention to implementation likely will have additional salutary benefits over time.

2. **Consider making Studying Skillful Teaching (SST) available in different formats and venues to make it more widely accessible to teachers.**

   Data show that the SST is widely praised by teachers who participate in it. Teachers say the course changes their instructional practices and even their views of student learning. The district has begun to offer SST has begun to offer SST in tailored formats (e,g,, for algebra teachers) and should consider additional such tailored formats for other subjects.

3. **Take steps to more fully Implement the PGS in high schools with a continuing eye to discovering the most successful model(s).**

   As evaluation data suggest, problems with implementing the Staff Development Teacher program in high schools have not be been completely resolved. The district should continue to monitor implementation of the SDT in high schools and continue to study means by which to make the program most effective at the high school level.

4. **Continue the Staff Development Substitute component of the PGS.**

   Evaluation data display the importance of the Staff Development Substitute. The district should ensure that this component of the PGS is maintained.

5. **Take steps to ensure that SDTs are focused on the primary responsibilities of as indicated in their job descriptions.**

   As evaluation data indicate, principals, especially elementary principals, often assign SDTs to tasks (e,g,, testing coordinator) that fall well outside the bounds of their job description. While there may be instances in which "job creep" is

inevitable, to the extent possible, principals should refrain from assigning SDTs to regular jobs that stray from their staff development role.

6. Continue to monitor the development and implementation of PDPs with an eye toward additional changes that might be warranted.

Evaluation data suggest that, while increasing numbers of teachers are finding value in the PDPs, not all teachers accept PDPs as valuable. The district should continue to work with principals and teachers to ensure that PDPs become valuable tools for improving teacher professional growth.

7. Take steps to resolve the evaluator dilemma of MCPS' PAR Program.

The PAR dilemma in MCPS revolves around who ultimately is responsible for preparing the first year teacher's summative report. In practice, this task falls to the Consulting Teacher. However, principals continue to write an evaluation, even if they concur with the CT's report, thus making added work for the principal.

In cases in which the principal and CT agree with the CT's report, there is no need for the principal also to write a summative review. The CT's summative review can stand as the data as the PAR Panel considers the teacher's continuing job status.

8. Consider adding a CT Assist component to PAR.

As is indicated in the PAR report, other PAR programs offer a voluntary CT Assist component for teachers who do not need PAR, but would benefit from the services of a CT. MCPS has many services available to teachers, including SDTs and reading and mathematics coaches. Nevertheless, as the budget permits, the district should examine the PAR structure and CT availability with an eye toward offering a voluntary CT Assist component of PAR.

9. Continue monitoring development of professional learning communities in MCPS.

The formally contracted evaluation may have come to an end. But this does not mean that MCPS should cease evaluating its PGS implementation efforts. Regular checks on multiple and various aspects of program implementation across various sectors of the district should be built into the continuing work of the PGS.

CONCLUSION

Data from the multiple sources employed in this evaluation lead to a number of important conclusions. Data confirm that the Professional Growth System is substantially impacting teaching in positive ways in Montgomery County. Teachers and principals report that they are more conscious about instructional technique and strategy and about the impact of instruction on all learners. Professional learning communities are beginning to evolve.

While it will likely take somewhat more time before the district can say with assurance precise ways in which the PGS is altering student learning results, preliminary data are encouraging. Research suggests that focusing on the elements that compose the PGS—teacher professional growth, standards-based evaluation, and an emphasis on academic rigor and continuous improvement for students will contribute to improved results. If the data from the initial years of PGS implementation are a bellwether, MCPS seems well on its way to its goal of ensuring a productive learning environment for all of its students.

Between 1999, before MCPS initiated the PGS, and 2003, the increase in the number of Advanced Placement tests taken by MCPS students increased by 137%. Over approximately this same period, the SAT participation rate increased slightly from 79% to 81%.

Even more significantly, perhaps, Montgomery County over the last four years has become increasingly heterogeneous, increasingly the academic home to students from poverty households and homes in which English in not the native language. Nevertheless, on the 2003 Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), Montgomery County second grade students from all racial and ethnic groups performed at or above the 60th national percentile, in other words, outperformed 60 percent of students nationally. The district can reasonably attribute this gain to its reform efforts over the last four years.