



# Lincoln Public Schools

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Patricia Kinsella  
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

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To: School Committee  
From: Patricia Kinsella  
Re: Year-end Report on Peer Observation Program  
Date: May 21, 2015

This report provides information about results to date of the district's new Peer Observation (PO) program. While the program has not run its full course for the year, we have compelling evidence from PO participants that all three of the district's goals for this work have been met.

## **Program Goals**

As outlined in the mid-year update, the PO program embodies one of the district's core beliefs: that educators flourish when they are given time and support to learn. To guide its work, the district established the following goals for the program:

- to sustain a professional culture of open communication, reflective practice, and collaborative inquiry;
- to lay the foundation for a longer-term shift towards a professional culture in which sharing one's practice with colleagues is standard and consistent among all LPS educators, and
- to increase educators' technical skill and comfort with providing specific and high-quality feedback to colleagues.

## **Program design and development**

There are as many versions of peer observation programs as there are schools or districts engaging in the practice. It may be helpful to recall that Lincoln's particular model centers around a belief that the first-year program should be voluntary, inquiry-based, and separate from the educator evaluation process. In addition, our model allows for faculty groupings that cross both job roles and campus locations. We use well-established group protocols to guide the observation process, and we provide support for developing skills in how to give and receive feedback.

Now that we are close to the end of this year's program, our design efforts are focused on expanding and strengthening the program for next year. The Administrative Team is using program feedback to consider design options as part of its work with the Strategic Plan. We expect to share the outline of next year's program with faculty before school breaks for the summer.

Development of the program has included the following key steps:

- developing and delivering professional development to administrative staff during their summer retreat on the how and why of peer observation programs;
- identifying district goals for the pilot program;
- drafting and building consensus around a program model;
- communicating with faculty and generating interest in the program;
- creating and implementing an application process;
- developing and implementing professional development for program participants on observation protocols and feedback techniques;
- supporting participants during program implementation, and
- creating and implementing a program assessment.

**Participation**

Nineteen educators participated in this first-year program (participant list attached). These educators work in a variety of roles, on both campuses, and are at different stages in their professional careers.

Fifty-three visits have taken place to date among fourteen program participants. One group has worked with a different time frame; that group has twelve visits planned for the second half of May and early June.

**Program feedback**

Early feedback shared with the School Committee in January indicated that program participants appreciated our respectful approach to the PO process and welcomed the opportunity to talk, learn, and share with colleagues.

We are gathering end-of-year feedback from participants via an online survey (attached), via one-on-one and small group conversations with the Assistant Superintendent, and via a final meeting of the cohort on May 21. End-of-year feedback gathered to date confirms the mid-year results: Program participants overwhelmingly endorse the goals, structure, and implementation of this work.

Respondents to the online survey answer six questions. The first three measure priority goals for the program; the second three probe for detailed insights through open-ended questions that require a written response.

Participants to date have responded with unanimous enthusiasm regarding program goals. Every respondent, on every one of the first three questions relating to goals, has endorsed the program's ability to sustain an open, reflective professional culture, to shift that culture towards more frequent sharing of practice, and to increase educator skill with giving and receiving feedback.

Written responses are equally positive and illuminate the specific reasons why the program has proved so successful. The table on the next page includes representative responses for each of the three open-ended questions.

**Peer Observation Feedback Survey: Representative Responses, 5/21/15**  
*(To maintain anonymity, we have deleted references to content area and other identifiers.)*

<b>What have you learned about your own practice through participation in this program? What changes have you made to your practice as a result?</b>	<b>What about this program's design, resources, or implementation helped you achieve this learning?</b>	<b>What do you recommend we keep the same for next year, and what do you recommend we change for next year?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have learned that my colleague sometimes has different ideas to teach the same concept. I have been able to reflect on my practices and how they benefit my students. I have begun changing some of my curriculum choices to reflect my new learning and to further the learning of my students.</li> <li>• I have been able to increase the quality of my lessons. Being able to share ideas is helpful, but having time to personally view different activities taking place is a much nicer way to collaborate with colleagues. We were able to learn from each other and share feedback in a positive way.</li> <li>• I learned, again, how differently each teacher can interpret an activity, idea, or moment. Each interpretation and then teacher response highly influences what happens next in the situation. This idea is one that I would really enjoy looking at in a collaborative way - the more we are aware of the choices we are making, the more control we have over choosing them!</li> <li>• This program reaffirmed how much I enjoy reflecting on the craft of teaching. I have tried some of the skillful pacing techniques that I observed my colleagues using when working with my own students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having protocols to follow during the observations [was] helpful... I also thought the inquiry stance of 'we are all learning together' was helpful because nobody felt like they had to know it all or be the "best" at teaching xxx.</li> <li>• The feedback protocols are very helpful. They assist people who are hesitant and nervous about others giving feedback feel a little more at ease and give a guiding document of how to give feedback to others.</li> <li>• The two most helpful things about the peer observation program this year were having the opportunity to learn more about different observation protocols and having the time to be in other classes and to meet as a peer group to debrief what we observed.</li> <li>• Observing others teaching similar content in very different ways.</li> <li>• The flexibility to do this on our own time was extremely helpful. If we were constrained to a timeline of observations this would have felt more forced and been less productive. Given the freedom, we were able to plan around our schedule and take time to reflect and act on feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The structure of the program worked well for us, however we were persistently bothered by "so-much-to-do-so-little-time." I wonder if we could start by scheduling both observation visits and follow up meetings at the start of the program?</li> <li>• I recommend you keep the same freedom of time determined by groups and not the program. The flexibility we had on setting up observations was very helpful.</li> <li>• I think everything worked well this year. I appreciated that there wasn't a need to do lengthy write-ups. It would be nice to quickly debrief with the larger group about their discoveries to maybe inspire future observations.</li> <li>• I like the openness and ability to choose our focus and goals. I would like a little more training on types of observations and what type best fits our goal.</li> <li>• It was sometimes difficult to find the time to meet after our observations. Either we needed to do a better job of scheduling our time or there needs to be more structured time for us to meet together.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing in on what someone asks for in feedback. Reflecting back on my practice around the questions others asked. A lot more thought has really been focused on what I want my kids to learn, how do I know and how I structure xxx lessons.</li> <li>• I gained confidence that some of my techniques for teaching xxx are valid. I also learned that we share some of the same challenges across the grades and at all schools. This allowed us to problem solve as a group.</li> <li>• I am adding to my practice of teaching xxx, recognizing it is a hard skill for all students and especially for ELL.</li> <li>• It was a huge help to be able to not only observe x's lessons but to also see how similar lessons are taught at [the other campus]. As a result of this opportunity I hope that this unit will be more cohesive and will use the best practices that we observed across the district.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having opportunities to visit classrooms and to have others observe me helped me become more reflective. Learning the different types of observation will be helpful in the future as I hopefully continue to learn from other colleagues.</li> <li>• I really appreciate the opportunity to observe and be observed by respected peers. It allows for collaboration and opportunity to learn from educators you truly respect and want to hear from. It is great we were given the opportunity to have this time.</li> <li>• Reviewing different ways the group can focus observations was very helpful. Being mindful of our intent allowed us to focus on our collective and individual goals. Reviewing norms and talking about expectations and ways we all feel vulnerable was also helpful. Being flexible with how teams scheduled their time and making sure substitutes were available was also key.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I appreciated that we weren't pressured to come up with a question before leaving the training sessions and that we were allowed to continue to think about our question more so we were all clear as a team about what we hoped to see/observe/learn together.</li> <li>• One thing I wish our group had done differently was had debriefing sessions after each of our observations. We were excited to talk about what we saw/observations and connections that we made, but didn't build that time into our schedule until a complete round of observations had been done.</li> <li>• No doubt additional faculty members will want to join this important effort. Would it be necessary for everyone to work through the initial sessions, or might there be tiers so that this does not need to happen? The initial meeting was very important, but I am not sure everyone needs to repeat this. I would recommend that anyone new should work through the initial activities you designed to kick this off. How would the larger group then become one? Is that necessary?</li> </ul>
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## Next steps

While impact on teachers was positive, there are important messages in both the written feedback and the verbal feedback gathered in 1:1 and small group conversations regarding possible improvements for next year:

- start the program earlier in the year;
- provide more support for the development and refining of inquiry questions;
- front-load that support before exploring use of protocols;
- increase the amount of practice with protocols;
- schedule more in-person contact with either the entire cohort (i.e., all PO groups at one time) or with several groups at one time;
- ensure that debriefings occur shortly after observations, and
- differentiate support for groups that want and need more structure with those that will thrive with less structure.

Again, the Administrative Council will consider design options for next year in light not only of participant feedback, but also the perspective that administrators have on program impact. We look forward to expanding a high quality program that meets educator need, improves the quality of instruction our children experience, and strengthens the open and collaborative professional culture this district values.

## Peer Observation Groups, 2014 - 2015

Transition from HPS to HMS	Carolyn Baughan, HPS Gr. 3 Liz Clancy, HMS, Gr. 4 Loretta D'Alessandro, HMS, Transition Andrea Eagan, HMS, Gr. 4 Julie Johnson, HPS, Gr. 3
Storytellers as Onions (Writing and Art in Kindergarten)	Gwen Blumberg, LS, Literacy Specialist Becky Eston, LS, Gr. K Judy Merra, District, ELA Content Specialist Colleen Pearce, LS, Art
Problem-solving in Kindergarten Math	Jillian Daly, LS, Gr. K Becky Eston, LS, Gr. K Rachel Goldner, LS, Gr. K Blake Siskavich, LS, Gr. K Carol Walker, LS, Math Specialist
Literacy Centers in K	Lindsay Forsberg, HPS, Gr. K Sharon Horenstein, HPS, Gr. K
The Researchers	Cindy Matthes, LS, Instructional Tech. Specialist Nicole Putnam, HPS, Instructional Tech. Specialist Nancy Rote, HPS and HMS, Librarian Alice Sajdera, LS, Librarian