One Lens for Understanding Effective Teaching: Observation of Teacher Practice

Through the observation of teacher practice, we can see the complex interactions between the students, the teacher, and the subject matter in the classroom, all of which contribute to growing Promise-Ready students across all grades. Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) uses the Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE) to observe teacher practice in the classroom as one lens to understand teacher effectiveness.

ABOUT RISE
In 2009, leaders from PPS and Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT), and approximately 120 teachers and administrators, joined together to create RISE. Defining effective teaching across four domains and 24 components of practice, RISE is a differentiated system of teacher evaluation. Each year, teachers participate in one of two versions of the RISE process: the Formal Process or the Supported Growth Project, which allows a deep focus on one component of the RISE rubric through action research.

The comprehensive RISE rubric is based upon Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*. The framework represents all aspects of a teacher’s work and is derived from the latest theoretical and empirical research about teaching. The four domains of the framework are briefly described below.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation
The components in Domain 1 address how a teacher plans and prepares for lessons by identifying what is important for students to learn and designing instruction that enables students to achieve those learning goals. Domain 1 work designs the plans implemented in Domain 3.

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment
The components in Domain 2 address the conditions that a teacher creates in order for learning to take place. These conditions are necessary for the components of Domain 3 to be effectively put in place.

Domain 3: Teaching and Learning
The components in Domain 3 address how a teacher actually engages students with the content. In this domain, the teacher implements the plans designed in Domain 1.

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities
The components in Domain 4 identify professional skills and responsibilities that are not visible in the classroom, but are crucial for successful classroom teaching and for enhancing the overall profession of teaching.

WHY OBSERVATION OF TEACHER PRACTICE IS IMPORTANT
Teaching involves a complex set of skills and practices. PPS teachers must know their students, content, and the curriculum thoroughly—and have a broad repertoire of content-specific, culturally responsive strategies and activities to use with students to meet rigorous learning goals. Teachers must be flexible given students’ learning needs and the dynamics of the classroom, and use formative assessment to adapt instruction to maximize learning opportunities for all students. Effective teachers have established rituals and routines that foster a safe learning environment where effort is privileged, allowing students to fully engage in instructional activities, ask questions, and take part in class discussions. Effective teachers continuously work to improve their practice and knowledge of students while acting as a resource for others in their professional learning community.
RISE provides a comprehensive rubric for understanding effective teaching practice across many components, and a common language for discussing them. RISE is just one of the District’s multiple measures used to collect evidence about a teacher’s practice to inform and guide continuous professional growth.

HOW WE USE RISE

Accelerating Student Learning and Growth
The mission of RISE is to ensure PPS students are Promise-Ready by continuously advancing the professional practice of our teachers. RISE aims to identify and assess effective teaching practice in order to accelerate student learning and growth.

Supporting Professional Practice and Growth
The RISE evaluation system does more than evaluate: it fosters teacher learning and promotes ongoing growth of professional practice. As a growth-oriented model, RISE is differentiated to support novice and experienced teachers across four performance levels: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished. Supervision within the system is differentiated based on tenure status, performance level, and the status of the professional as a Career Ladder teacher. Furthermore, teachers whose overall performance is currently unsatisfactory step outside of the RISE process altogether to receive intensive support through an Employee Improvement Plan (EIP).

Informing the Summative Rating
Since 2010–11, teacher summative ratings have been based on RISE. Beginning in 2013–14 in alignment with state legislation (Act 82 of 2012), the District will combine multiple measures to reach summative ratings. RISE or EIP results will be included as a measure for observation of teacher practice, comprising 50% of the combined measure used to determine teacher summative ratings.

Providing Feedback
In spring 2012, 80% of PPS teachers said they are using feedback from observations to improve teaching and determine areas of growth. We also know that many schools are using RISE to open classroom doors and facilitate peer-to-peer collaboration.

The Story of RISE
Teachers were once evaluated in PPS through a single rating of either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. The old system rated 99% of teachers as Satisfactory. There was no way to give teachers information to improve their practice, and no way to recognize excellence in practice.

As the Empowering Effective Teachers plan evolved, it was crucial to anchor the work in an equitable, fair and rigorous evaluation system. RISE is a powerful and comprehensive tool to ensure that every teacher receives fair and differentiated support and feedback to better inform their professional growth. RISE also seeks to create a system of teacher evaluation based on the continual improvement of teaching practice and the value that a teacher adds to student growth over time.

RISE was the first of the District’s multiple measures to be designed and implemented District-wide and was initially introduced over a two-year period to provide enough time for thoughtful design and testing. In the 2009–10 school year, 24 schools chose to participate in the pilot of RISE, and in 2010–11, every PPS school implemented RISE. In 2011–12, about 1,600 teachers received ratings through RISE. The RISE ratings differentiate teachers across four performance categories.

RISE has been put in place hand-in-hand with PPS educators. The District continues to involve teachers in the annual revision process, working in 2012–13 with a teacher member of the RISE Leadership Team from every school.