

Task 4 Teachers: Observations - Variance Details & Assurances

Variance Details

Standards and Procedures:

The Troy City School District respectfully submits this APPR Variance application and seeks to do the following:

- Reduce the number of observations for tenured teachers to one unannounced observation;
- Reduce the number of observations for probationary teachers to one announced observation and one unannounced observation, for a total of two observations;
- Waive the local practice of scoring every component of the Danielson 2013 rubric for every teacher over the course of the year; and
- Demonstrate flexibility in using independent evaluators as lead evaluators.

Our current instructional models in Troy include in person instruction, fully remote instruction, and a variety of hybrids.

Rationale:

The Troy City School District is requesting an APPR variance for a period of two years that will essentially reduce the total number of observations required for both tenured and probationary teachers **so that we can build the capacity of teachers and leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students**. We are seeking to waive the local practice that all rubric components must be observed for every teacher by the end of the year. Instead, we are asking that certified lead evaluators only score those components of the rubric that are observed. Finally, in an effort to minimize the number of visitors in our school buildings and the number of administrators traveling between schools, we are requesting an independent evaluator hardship waiver for the same two year period. As a result, teachers may receive observations performed by certified lead evaluators who work within the same school with the same BEDS code, and/or an independent evaluator acting as a lead evaluator.

We believe the requested modifications to our APPR process will reduce the amount of time needed to schedule and complete all of the observations conducted in the traditional format, including pre-observation conferences, observations, and post-observation conferences. Reducing the number and frequency of observations for the purposes of APPR will allow school leaders, district leaders, teachers and staff to have more time to spend on all matters related to shifting to a variety of new models of teaching, learning and supervising. The teaching and learning in Troy is synchronous daily for all students, with some asynchronous portions, resulting in multiple "classroom" formats at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Each of these formats requires modifications and/or accommodations for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners. In addition, the district has prioritized engaging families as partners in both fully remote and hybrid learning environments and ensuring students' overall well being. As a result, we continue to invest heavily in the areas of integrating social emotional learning (SEL), utilizing trauma-sensitive strategies and culturally responsive practices as they relate to each of the formats for teaching and learning noted above. The variance request would allow more time to fully achieve the priority goals outlined above.

Rigor:

We believe the requested variance will allow the Troy City School District to design and deliver a rigorous Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) model - one that delivers honest, evidence-based feedback to teachers that is aligned to the rubric, coupled with extensive embedded classroom support designed to improve teacher practice. We are not asking to make any changes to our approved rubric, as Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (2013 version) is a rigorous articulation of what teachers should know and be able to do in the exercise of their profession. We also recognize during remote teaching that some of the components of the rubric may be more readily observed as noted in Danielson's The Framework for

Remote Teaching (2020).

The teacher observation process in the district will continue to be both rigorous and iterative. First teachers are observed by lead evaluators trained in evidence-based observational practices. The evidence collected is then aligned to the components of Danielson's 2013 rubric and aligned to the appropriate performance level. Teachers are asked to reflect upon their practice, noting changes they would make with regard to a lesson or unit, identifying ways that the school and district may support their improvement. Lead evaluators provide feedback to teachers, noting strengths, weaknesses and explicit ways to improve teacher practice to move to a higher performance level in a given component or group of components. A plan for support is included in the feedback to teachers. Teachers are empowered to use the wealth of resources available to them to respond to those components identified as needing improvement (i.e. time with instructional coaches/technology coaches, use of embedded staff developers, and participation in forums/workshops/conferences to name a few). This represents the ways in which the district identifies support needed at the teacher and classroom level, based upon observation data. Additionally, school and district leaders analyze data at the system level by monitoring teacher practice strengths and weaknesses across all schools throughout the year. As such, district and school leaders examine teacher practice data in real time to identify common areas of need across schools and the district as a whole. Both the Annual Professional Performance Review Committee and the Professional Development Planning Committee utilize this data to monitor teachers' progress and set up district-wide training and support that responds to the demonstrated needs. For example, a careful examination of our most recent teacher observation and evaluation data in Troy (covering last year through March 2020) revealed that the top three components in need of improvement include Danielson's components 3b, 3c and 3d. As a result, the monthly professional forums and paid work in the summer of 2020 focused on developing teacher capacity related to those areas. This process takes place every year and will continue. In that tenured teachers are only receiving one observation for the purposes of APPR, we will work to ensure that any feedback/suggestions/support are followed up by school leaders as they conduct additional classroom visits throughout the year.

We believe the requested variance will allow us to spend less time conducting observations and more time providing expert professional development and embedded coaching support in classrooms that target the demonstrated needs in our district right now and recognize the changing nature of the evidence we are collecting. We are confident that we can speak to teacher practice at the individual level and collectively in real time throughout the year. Understanding where each component of teacher practice falls on the levels of performance ensures that we are better able to target improvements. We believe that this model will result in more rigorous teaching, learning and supervision practices.

Professional Learning:

The APPR process in the Troy City School District is connected to a robust and dynamic system for professional learning. Teacher practice data is carefully analyzed by district and building leaders and used to drive improvement efforts. The Board of Education and district leaders remain intensely committed to supporting teachers' growth. As a result, teachers have access to a wealth of professional learning opportunities that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Conferences at the local, state, national and international levels;
- Embedded coaching support provided by ten district-wide instructional coaches;
- Embedded technology support provided by two district-wide instructional technology coaches;
- Embedded literacy support provided by staff developers as a result of a district partnership with Lucy Calkins' - Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (the district has purchased fifty days of embedded support);
- Embedded mathematics support provided by staff developers as a result of a district partnership with Bank Street;
- Extensive induction and mentoring support for all teachers in the initial years of the profession (including ten monthly forums over the course of the year that respond to the demonstrated needs of each cohort, respectively);
- Opportunities to shadow expert teachers within the district; and
- Opportunities to conduct scouting missions to visit innovative classrooms and programs outside the

district.

Additionally, a reduction of the total number of observations required for both tenured and probationary teachers will allow the Troy City School District an opportunity to build on the gains our teachers and leaders have made examining data related to our APPR process and implementing various professional development opportunities that help our students to be more successful. We look forward to working as a school community to foster improved student achievement and provide opportunities for our staff to work collaboratively in order to achieve that goal.

Effectiveness of Implementation:

The goal of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process is to improve the quality of instruction and the delivery of programs and services in our schools leading to improved student outcomes across many areas: academic achievement, social emotional well being, attendance, behavior, and college, career and civic readiness. As noted in a previous section, the goal of the requested variance is to reduce the total number of observations required for both tenured and probationary teachers so that we can build the capacity of teachers and leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. We will assess the effectiveness of implementation by using all of the following:

- District leaders will analyze teacher practice data from Frontline Professional Growth (the software used in the district for teacher observation/evaluation) at the teacher (classroom), school and district levels to best identify strengths and weaknesses over time;
- The Professional Development Planning Committee will examine teacher practice data from 20-21, noting year over year trends (i.e. Did we make improvements upon those areas identified in need of improvement based on the 2019-2020 analysis of teacher evaluation data?);
- The district will administer surveys to faculty, staff, students and parents related to school leadership, teaching and learning, curriculum, social emotional support and learning and family engagement. This data will be carefully examined with a specific emphasis on those items related to teaching and learning to assess whether improvements have been made.
- Both the Professional Development Planning Committee and the Annual Professional Performance Review Committee will meet to discuss the extent to which the goals of the APPR process were achieved during the 2020-2021 school year.

It is worth noting that the bulleted practices noted above are yearly practices taking place in the Troy City School District as part of the evaluation of programs and services. We examine district-level and school-based data each year to better understand how we can improve the delivery of programs and services in Troy. In the Spring of 2021, we will work to carefully analyze all available data (teacher practice data, survey data, student outcome data, etc.) related to the effectiveness of the APPR process this year so that we can make recommendations to either keep the plan as is, make modifications to the plan and submit a new variance request or revert back to the plan approved prior to the submission of the 20-21 variance request. At that point, we will use all of the available evidence to make a determination about the best plan moving forward into the following year, and we will reach out to the New York State Education Department as appropriate.