

The CEA Voice

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A mentor program, “par” excellence

“It’s scary, but I’m not here for me. I’m here to give these kids what they need.”

This is one of the quotes by first-year Columbus music teacher Cory Velazco captured by *NEA Today*’s piece on the district’s PAR (Peer Assistance and Review) program. Velazco, as the piece notes, is the fifth teacher in as many years to tackle the music program at his middle school. He utilizes the PAR program for help and support.



Valazco’s quote refers to classroom observations by PAR mentor Dale Alkula, also a music teacher. As the piece also notes, PAR is helping Velazco become a better teacher.

PAR is the district’s program to evaluate and assist entry-year teachers or experienced teachers having particular difficulties. Experienced teachers may be referred to PAR by peers or principals; however, most refer themselves.

Sometimes it’s easy to forget how significant this program has become. Introduced in 1986, Columbus’ program is a national model in a climate where teacher performance is the main topic of professional (and legislative) discussion these days. We’re ahead of the pack.

If you have participated in PAR, then you know what the NEA is talking about. If you have not, check it out. Read the *NEA Today* article, “Peer Review: Colleague, Mentor - Judge?” You can find it at <http://www.nea.org/home/38150.htm>.

Welcome back, Rhonda and Sally!

The members have spoken. CEA President Rhonda Johnson and Vice President Sally Oldham have retained their positions. Johnson won by 80 percent. Oldham won with 82 percent of the vote.

“I am elated by the confidence you all have placed in me to provide you leadership,” said Johnson. “We have so much important work to do. We have laid the groundwork for many projects, and I’m thrilled to be able to see them through.”

“I am honored to be your vice president,” said Oldham. “Teachers are central figures in the life of a student and a school district.”

The pair was reelected because of their leadership abilities. Both have been at the forefront of difficult negotiations and shown great strength in championing the good work that our Association members do. A tiny portion of initiatives they have helped develop and committees they have served on include: Joint Labor/Management Committee,

Ohio Teacher Evaluation Committee, 1-Mill Club, United Way campaign, reinstatement of Art, Music and Phys-Ed, Teacher Union Reform Network, NEA Teacher Quality Advisory Committee, Gainsharing Committee and the PAR Panel.

Both women possess a unique vision, backed by many years of experience in the classroom and the boardroom, focused on improving working relationships. Because of their hard work, CEA and CCS work together smoothly in many matters, with their minds and hearts focused on the well-being of our students.

Always, Johnson and Oldham have been willing to put in the extra hours to make sure that the outcomes in given situations benefit our teachers and our students. Both women have been involved in key district, regional and state decisions. Most recently, the pair helped apply for the \$1.25 million NEA Foundation grant awarded to help teachers improve academic progress.

Using the Reform Panel

The Reform Panel (Art. 1503) is a joint committee consisting of CEA and administration. The panel seeks to improve educational processes by considering requests for variances to the *CEA Master Agreement* or board policy. The panel also forms committees on some state-mandated issues. Specific information about variance request procedures is found in our contract on pages 244–246.

Spring is when schools usually come to the Reform Panel to ask for variances from the contract. For example, if a middle school wants a schedule different from the eight-period day, or if a high school or middle school special education teacher wants to teach six periods rather than five in lieu of a duty, teachers could develop a proposal to submit to the Reform Panel. If teachers at a particular school want to institute school uniforms or segregate classes by gender, the School Leadership Team (SLT) can do research on the issue and create a proposal and rationale. If two-thirds of the staff approves the request, it may be presented to the Reform Panel. A majority of Reform Panel members must approve variance requests. The CEA President and the CCS Superintendent must agree to the changes.

You may begin the variance process by making a suggestion to your ABC. The Senior Faculty Representative conducts a building vote, then refers it to the Reform Panel with signatures from both the principal and Senior FR.

Create a cadre of staff members and parents to seek new and innovative programs that would benefit your students. Do your research and make a proposal. The Reform Panel will also help you define potential problems and recommend further steps.

We encourage you to make requests that you think will benefit your school’s effectiveness. This process allows you to create a new learning environment not limited by Board policies or the CEA contract.

Champions working for Champion

Champion MS has been identified as the high-needs school where teachers who interview and are selected will receive a \$4,000 stipend. Current Champion Middle School teachers who were previously interviewed and were selected are also eligible for the \$4,000 stipend if they recommit to working there.

The stipend is also for teachers placed at Champion MS by HR, or who received the assignment through the Job Fair—as long as they agree to interview and are selected. If they choose not to interview, they can remain at Champion but are not eligible for the \$4,000.

The stipend is for three school years (2010–11, 2011–12 and 2012–13). Teachers and other certificated staff who work less than full time at Champion will receive a prorated amount based on the time they are assigned.

We are pleased that Champion has been identified. CEA believes this will attract and retain staff, bringing back stability to the school. We hope this will be the formula for improved academic achievement.

Testing Tips

The OGT test dates are Mar 15–19 and the OAA test dates are Apr. 19–21. Errors in testing or breaches of test security on high stakes tests can result in the loss of a student's scores and/or the loss of a teacher's license.

What do you need to know and what do you need to do? Here's a quick checklist:

- Participate in the test security training.
- Ask questions.
- Be clear on what your role is during testing. This is especially true if you will be working with students with disabilities or students with limited English proficiency.
- Review the "Directions to Administer" in advance.
- On testing day your job is a test administrator (or proctor), NOT a teacher. This means that you cannot "help" the students or answer any questions (other than procedural ones, such as, "May I have a pencil," or "May I go to the restroom?").
- Observe students at all times to ensure that they are in the correct section of the test booklet and answer document, and are using the correct writing instrument. You are NOT to read, grade papers or engage in any non-test-related activities.
- Both state rules and district policy prohibit the use of personal electronic devices during testing. You and your students must turn all of them off. We strongly advise collecting the students' phones.
- If a suspected irregularity occurs, immediately report it to your building test coordinator or principal. Do not take any action yourself.

Remember the following:

- All test materials must be kept secure.
- Neither test materials nor students may be left unattended.
- Teachers are never to look at the content of the test (unless reading it to students as per their IEPs).
- The test must be administered exactly as specified in the directions.

Staff reductions draconian

The Board of Education made a number of promises to the community when it was campaigning for passage of the combined bond/levy issue in the fall of 2008. In keeping with a levy promise to close at least six schools, the Board

voted this past December to close nine schools at the end of this school year. As a result of the closures, the Board also re-assigned thousands of students to more than 40 new schools to improve the district's efficiency.

Following the instructions of the district's Human Resources (HR) department, principals and supervisors throughout the district notified hundreds of CEA members that they were staff reduced on Monday, Mar. 1. All staff members at the nine schools slated to close were automatically staff reduced, along with more than 160 new teachers.

Fewer than 800 students left CCS for charter schools this year, a continuation of a multi-year slowing of district enrollment loss to charters. The district projects it will lose approximately 2,500 students due to the closures and student reassignment plan, resulting in a towering number of staff reductions from HR.

"I think that the district is being draconian in the number of teachers it is staff reducing," said CEA President Rhonda Johnson. "In my opinion, they've staff reduced too many teachers."

Teachers' Dream Grant

All CCS teachers are eligible to apply for the Teachers' Dream Grant. Applicants could receive awards ranging from \$500 to \$5,000. Grant topics may include: focusing on academic enrichment, increasing student achievement, closing the achievement gap, improving school/community relations and improving classroom learning climate.

Applications must be submitted online to the CCS Development Office by Monday, Apr. 12, at 4 p.m. Go to: <http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/dreamgrant> to access the online application. For further information, contact the Development Office at 365-8733.

Quarterly diagnostics survey coming

At the conclusion of the first quarter of the 2009–2010 school year, members participated in a survey that identified errors on district-mandated quarterly diagnostic tests. CEA presented the survey results at the Joint Labor-Management meeting in December.

CEA will be administering another electronic survey to obtain additional feedback about the third quarter assessments. This short survey will ask members to provide specific information regarding diagnostics administration, grading, scanning and any errors encountered on the tests. Please complete this survey after you have administered the diagnostics to your students. Also, make sure you have copies of the tests to refer to when you take the survey.

The link to the survey will be sent to members' personal e-mail addresses on Wednesday, Mar. 17. Members cannot take the survey on a district computer or while connected to the CCS network. Participants' identities will remain anonymous. If you have questions, please send an e-mail to phayes@ceaohio.org.

Special notes

- Senior FRs must submit requests by fax (253-0465) for **alternative interview panels** to the CEA President **prior to interviewing**. These are the buildings/units that have been approved since the last edition of *The Voice*: **Clinton MS, Duxberry Park ES, Huy ES/A.G. Bell Program, Linden-McKinley STEM Academy, Northland HS, Nurses, Ohio Ave. ES, Parkmoor ES, Scottwood ES, Wedgewood MS, Westmoor MS and Woodcrest ES.**
- Friday, May 7, at 5 p.m.** is the **deadline** for applications for **CEA scholarships**. Go to <http://bit.ly/98fROO> to download an application.