THE EVOLUTION OF EVALUATION

A Way Forward for Teachers, by Teachers

June 2016

Professional Practice: CPS Framework for Teaching

Educator: Jane Smith

School: Thomas Jefferson Elementary School   Teacher Type: Elementary School
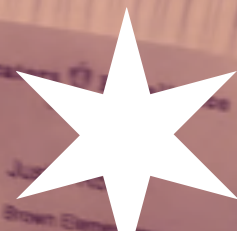Tenure Status: Non-Tenured

● Professional Practice: 75%
○ Performance Tasks: 10%
○ Value-Added: 15%

Educators 4 Excellence

Chicago

"I'm deeply troubled by the transformation of teaching from a complex profession requiring nuanced judgment to the performance of certain behaviors that can be ticked off on a checklist. In fact, I believe it's time for a major rethinking of how we structure teacher evaluation to ensure that teachers, as professionals, can benefit from numerous opportunities to continually refine their craft."

Charlotte Danielson,
author of The Framework for Teaching,
April 2016, in EdWeek

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Dear fellow Chicago educators,

As teachers, we often talk about our commitment to ensure that all students succeed, and we do not take this responsibility lightly. We set ambitious goals, communicate high expectations of our students and use student data to plan instruction. In order to be our best for our students, we also need feedback, support and opportunities to develop.

Improving our teacher evaluation system and its connection to our professional growth and development is particularly important at this time. In December 2015, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which impacts teacher evaluation systems by shifting the responsibility back to states for developing standards, assessments and accountability goals. Meanwhile, a January 2016 report from the University of Chicago Consortium documented how inequities are reflected in teachers' scores based on the data from our current teacher evaluation system, known as Recognizing Educators and Advancing Chicago's Students (REACH).[1]

We are a group of 12 teachers, who, like you, hold both our students and ourselves to the highest standards. We joined the E4E-Chicago Teacher Policy Team on Teacher Evaluation to capitalize on this pivotal moment and reimagine teacher evaluation in Chicago as an equitable tool that fosters collaboration and growth for students and teachers.

We offer recommendations based not only on research, but also on what we know to be great practices through our work with students: more frequent feedback, consultations between principals and teachers without high stakes attached, increased systems of collaboration between teachers and increased differentiation in teacher evaluation.

This paper was informed by the feedback and perspectives of hundreds of other Chicago teachers. Thank you for sharing your stories, experiences and wisdom through our surveys and focus groups. We hope you will join us in advocating for a system that supports us to be our best for our students.

With a shared commitment to our profession and our students,

The 2016 Educators 4 Excellence-Chicago Teacher Policy Team on Teacher Evaluation
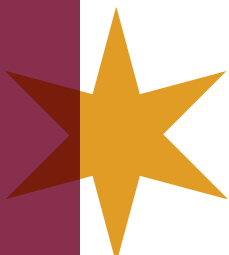
THE CURRENT REALITY

Over the last eight years, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has made a dramatic shift in the way teachers are evaluated and supported. Beginning in 2008, CPS piloted the Excellence in Teaching Project (EITP), a more robust evaluation system that was the first step in moving beyond rudimentary checkboxes that failed to delineate great teaching or to provide meaningful feedback to teachers and administrators.[2,3] In 2010, Illinois followed with Senate Bill 7 (SB 7), the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA).[4] This Act overhauled teacher evaluation throughout Illinois, and CPS introduced a teacher evaluation system tied to student performance known as Recognizing Educators and Advancing Chicago's Students (REACH). As of fall 2015, all districts in Illinois evaluate teachers under the guidelines set forth by PERA.

Excellence in Teaching Project Pilot

	2006	CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union launch the Excellence in Teaching Project Pilot in CPS
	2008-2009	Cohort 1 (44 elementary schools) pilot the EITP
	2009-2010	Cohort 2 (49 elementary schools) join the EITP

REACH Era of Evaluation

	2010	· SB7 (PERA) passes, requiring statewide evaluation changes · Chicago pilots change because of EITP experience
	2012	300 Chicago-area schools begin REACH
	2013	REACH implemented throughout CPS
	2015-2016	All schools in Illinois transition to PERA

> **[REACH is] a powerful tool for growing teachers…
> but it is punitive. If we make it more about feedback,
> then that would help."**
>
> *Sandra Johnson, fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, New Sullivan Elementary School*

An Overview of REACH

In REACH, 70 percent of a teacher's evaluation score stems from classroom observations, and 30 percent is the result of value-added measures (VAM), a tool that measures a teacher's impact on students' academic growth resulting from standardized assessments or performance tasks[5]. Observations are scored using an adaptation of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, which measures teaching across four domains: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. Principals, assistant principals and resident principals (the principal equivalent of a student teacher) conduct all evaluations in CPS. As evaluators, they are expected to hold a 45-minute pre-conference conversation with teachers to discuss the lesson's parameters, then observe the full 45-minute lesson, and within a week of the lesson, they are to engage in a 45-minute post-conference conversation to offer feedback to the teacher based on the REACH rubric.

Across the country, education stakeholders view current evaluation systems as improvements over older checkbox systems, yet these programs are works in progress, and there are many improvements that could be made.

In our focus groups with CPS teachers, we found that teachers are frustrated about:

- Observation scores reflecting less than one-half percent of their teaching time during the school year;
- Wide-ranging disparities in implementation of evaluations in schools;
- Inconsistent use of the post-conference for feedback; and
- A lack of sustained collaboration opportunities for teachers across the district to improve their practice.

Overall, Chicago teachers have a mixed impression of REACH. According to our survey, teachers strongly desire an evaluation system that encourages authentic feedback and provides the space for thoughtful reflection on goals, expectations, student achievement and data.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states will have greater autonomy over teacher evaluation starting in the 2017 school year, as federal oversight will end. According to the Aspen Institute, the passage of ESSA provides "a natural inflection point for states to review existing systems and recommit to the primary purpose of evaluation: to support teacher growth and development as one component within robust systems of talent management and instructional improvement."[7]

Student Growth Measures in REACH

VALUE-ADDED STUDENT GROWTH MEASURES:

Teachers in tested subjects and grades receive an individual value-added score. Most teachers in non-tested subjects and grades receive a schoolwide average value-added score in literacy.

PERFORMANCE TASKS:

Typically administered and scored by the teacher, performance tasks are written or hands-on assessments designed to measure students' progress toward mastery of a particular skill or standard. There are different performance tasks for each subject and grade.[6]

REACH Teacher Opinion

Satisfaction with Evaluator

30.1%	19.9%	50%

Satisfaction with Danielson Framework

29.7%	22.2%	48.2%

Satisfaction with NWEA/EPAS

63.7%	23.0%	13.3%

Satisfaction with Performance Tasks

60%	23.0%	17.1%

UNSATISFIED **NEUTRAL** **SATISFIED**

Source: E4E–Chicago survey of Chicago teachers, n=163.

Current REACH Score Calculation by Teacher Type

EDUCATORS	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE	STUDENT GROWTH	
	OBSERVATION	PERFORMANCE TASKS	STANDARDIZED TESTS
PreK-Grade 2	70%	30%	0%
Grade 3-8: Teaches Reading and/or Math	70%	10%	20% (Individual student scores)
Grade 3-8: Non-Tested Subjects	70%	20%	10% (Schoolwide avg)
High School – All	70%	30%	0%
Counselors, Service Providers, Educational Support Specialists	100%	0%	0%

Recommendations
A WAY FORWARD ON EVALUATION, BY TEACHERS

	Flexibility *Develop a more flexible teacher evaluation system*	**Teacher Growth** *Leverage REACH to promote teacher growth through collaboration*	**Align P.D.** *Align REACH to professional development*
STATE	Allow a mini-observation option, particularly for teachers previously rated in the top two tiers of REACH.	Require districts to provide systems for non-evaluative peer mentoring and coaching.	Mandate that professional development plans be aligned with growth areas for teachers.
CHICAGO	Train secondary observers who can conduct mini-observations.	Create hybrid roles for teachers to act as both mentors and teachers in their schools.	Provide training to principals on how to align REACH growth areas and professional development opportunities for their teachers.
SCHOOLS		Design schedules to provide common preparation periods for teachers to observe and collaborate.	Use REACH data to identify teachers excelling in areas where other teachers need training and provide time to share best practices.

|	**Feedback** *Ensure timely feedback*	**Evidence** *Expand evidence and reflect on best practices*	**Differentiation** *Differentiate approaches to teacher evaluation*
STATE	Enforce that districts send teachers summative evaluation data no later than July 15.	Expand guidance for districts to develop and incentivize the use of evidence-based portfolios.	Establish supplementary guidance for observers to use in different classroom contexts and for differentiating performance tasks.
CHICAGO	Guarantee accurate summative data is provided to teachers in enough time for them to adjust their lesson plans and goals during the summer.	Promote expanded artifact collection in all domains of REACH in order to create a library of exceptional work.	Organize diverse teacher teams to prioritize the additional addenda and performance tasks that are needed. Flag when an addendum exists and certify that all evaluators are trained on and utilize the addenda.
SCHOOLS	Emphasize the importance of post-conference feedback meetings and certify that they are occurring in a timely manner.	Designate time for teachers to collaborate on lessons they have identified as best practices.	

"To do **REACH** the right way, it takes six hours per teacher—to read everything, conduct a pre-conference, observe, tag all the notes, decide the score and conduct a post-conference. It's 180 hours of observations for me, not counting new teachers, who have to have four evaluations."

Assistant Principal, Southwest Side

RECOMMENDATIONS
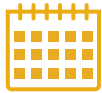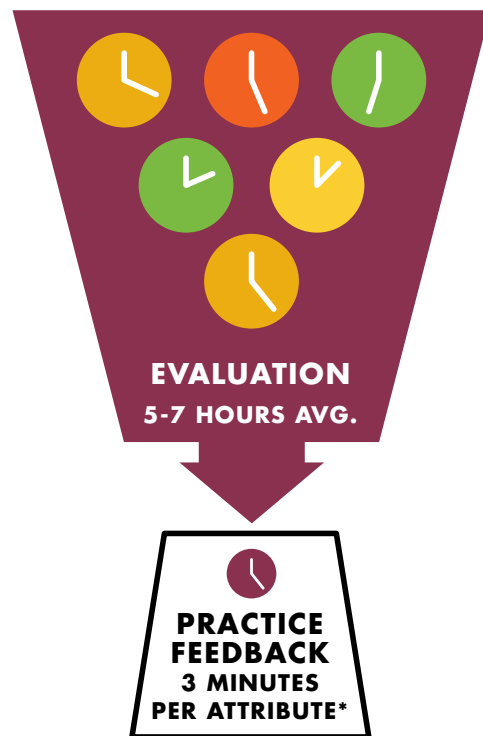
Develop a more flexible teacher evaluation system

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

The amount of time on which teachers are being "graded" is a minuscule percentage of the work they complete over the course of a year. One elementary school teacher stated, "You're in here for nine months – blood, sweat and tears – and they get a 45-minute glimpse of it." A high school teacher summed it up quantitatively, noting that his evaluation equates to between .2 and .4 percent of his time spent in the classroom. This calculation doesn't reflect any of his additional time planning, grading or engaging in the myriad tasks that are essential for great teaching.

REACH is also overly burdensome for principals, while providing only a small glimpse into the totality of a teacher's practice. One administrator we interviewed estimated that she spends five hours on each observation to prepare, observe and execute the post-conference. Given her load of 40 observations per year, she spends 200 hours a year solely on REACH. Of that time, only a small fraction is dedicated to coaching teachers on best practices and reflecting on the portions of a lesson that worked particularly well for students. An August 2015 Chicago Public Education Fund brief found that more than half of CPS administrators are spending over 280 hours a year on teacher evaluation.[8]

The frustration from the teachers and the administrators creates an understandable sense of tension and anxiety, because REACH observations are a high-stakes system that could impact a teacher's career. This anxiety was a predominant theme throughout the focus groups we conducted.

Comparing evaluator inputs to outputs

EVALUATION
5-7 HOURS AVG.

PRACTICE FEEDBACK
3 MINUTES PER ATTRIBUTE*

* The CPS Framework for Teaching has 4 domains and 19 total attributes across those domains.

OUR VISION

We envision a more flexible evaluation system that will be more impactful for our teaching and our students' learning. Teachers deserve more meaningful, reliable and less high-stakes feedback on their practice. Administrators deserve more effective coaching interactions with teachers. Both deserve a better return on the amount of time they invest into REACH. According to the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Report *Seeing it Clearly,* having faster access to consistent, actionable feedback has proven to alleviate anxiety and provide more reliable feedback to teachers.[9] It looked at more than 20,000 observations from 3,000 teacher volunteers over three years and confirmed that shorter, more targeted observations maintain high-quality feedback while simultaneously alleviating the time burden on administrators and teachers. Additionally, principals who have successfully instituted a culture of feedback in their schools and implemented more frequent, less high-stakes evaluations have seen a decrease in their teachers' anxiety.[10]

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) should allow an option for shorter, more targeted, flexible observations, particularly for tenured teachers in the top two tiers of REACH.[11] These unannounced mini-observations of 10-15 minutes would target areas REACH previously identified for improvement. The feedback provided should be more specific, in-depth and actionable, and should be delivered soon after the observation.

CPS should train secondary observers, such as instructional supervisors or department heads, who can conduct these mini-observations in order to increase the quantity of feedback and also foster a more collaborative culture between teachers and evaluators. Further, it will allow the administrators to concentrate on coaching teachers with higher needs.

Proposed Mini-Observation Schedules

CURRENT	OUR VISION	RESULTS
Non-Tenured = 4 full evaluation observations (6 hours per evaluation, 24 hours total) **Tenured =** 2 full evaluation observations (6 hours per evaluation, 12 hours total) *All evaluations are done by principals, assistant principals and resident principals*	**Non-Tenured =** 4 full evaluation observations (6 hours per evaluation, 24 hours in total) **Tenured/Bottom 2 tiers =** 2 full evaluation observations (6 hours per evaluation, 12 hours total, or mini-observations as determined by school administration) **Tenured/Top 2 tiers =** 4 mini-observations (1 hour each, 4 hours total)	**Thorough data and feedback:** beginning and lower-rated teachers **Targeted data and actionable feedback:** teachers who have demonstrated proficiency
Median administrator is responsible for 47 evaluations per year	**Full observations =** 40% **Mini-observations =** 60% *Department heads share the evaluation load*	**Content-specific and diverse feedback**
Over 200 hours of administrator time spent on REACH	**More Time:** 8 fewer hours of evaluation time per tenured, proficient teacher **More evaluators:** 3-6 more evaluators in the building	**Fewer total REACH hours divided among more evaluators**

Leverage REACH to promote teacher growth through collaboration

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

REACH includes two variables that are known to create inaccurate results: the small sample size of overall job performance and the subjectivity of evaluations conducted by a single observer.[12] These factors decrease the level of trust teachers have in REACH and their administrators while increasing their anxiety.

For many teachers, feedback on their practice is limited to only two formal observations a year. Teachers are only given a summative score, with very few checkpoints for feedback on how to improve that score. The process also discourages teachers from seeking feedback on the areas of their practice they'd most like to improve. They feel it is risky to ask for assistance within growth areas and fear that showing weakness during the two annual evaluations will have a negative consequence.

OUR VISION

We envision mentoring and coaching structures that would foster a collaborative culture in schools while increasing the diversity of perspectives and the amount of feedback teachers receive. The MET study confirms that having feedback from multiple evaluators is critical to ensuring the validity and reliability of any evaluation system.[13]

In our survey, more than 75 percent of CPS teachers indicated that regular, non-evaluative feedback would be helpful to their practice. This is aligned with a Teach Plus Policy Fellows Poll of CPS teachers, which showed that 88 percent of teachers would find observation feedback

from a colleague with similar content expertise helpful.[14] But there was also an important distinction in our survey data. Whereas 66 percent of teachers indicated that they'd prefer peer evaluation for the purposes of mentoring and coaching, only 40 percent want peer evaluation calculated into their summative REACH score.

More than half of the teachers we surveyed indicated that, while they recognize there are scheduling limitations, it would help their practice if they could select times to have peer evaluators with specific content expertise provide feedback.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

ISBE should ensure that excellent teachers have the opportunity to lead and provide feedback to their peers by requiring districts to provide systems for non-evaluative peer mentoring and coaching.

CPS should create hybrid roles for effective teachers and provide the time for them to act as both mentors and teachers in their schools.

Schools should design schedules to provide common preparation periods for teachers to observe each other and collaborate. This would also empower teachers to share the elements of their practice that they have honed over many years and offer them leadership opportunities, which have been previously identified as critical to retaining top teachers.[15]

A note about time

Overwhelmingly, in surveys and focus groups, the largest concern teachers, administrators and other experts expressed about REACH revolved around the amount of time the current system demands. As the MET study noted, any evaluation system will require large amounts of time, so it is incumbent on teachers to use this precious resource in ways that ensure they get the most collaboration and feedback possible. We are cognizant that some of our recommendations require time; however, we believe this will be a more efficient time investment with more valuable outcomes than the current REACH system.

Most popular recommendations ranked on a 1-10 scale.

TEACHERS WERE ASKED TO SCORE EACH RECOMMENDATION FROM 1-10 WITH 1 BEING LEAST FAVORABLE AND 10 BEING MOST FAVORABLE.

THERE SHOULD BE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME WITHIN SCHOOLS ON AREAS IDENTIFIED BY REACH AS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

| 10.7% | 12.6% | 34% | 42.7% |

TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO REGULAR NON-EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK ON THEIR CLASSES

| 9.7% | 11.7% | 40.8% | 37.9% |

TEACHER EVALUATIONS SHOULD BE MORE DIFFERENTIATED BY CONTENT AREA OR SPECIALIZATION

| 6.8% | 18.4% | 38.8% | 36% |

WITHIN REASON, TEACHERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO REQUEST A SPECIFIC TIME SLOT FOR EVALUATION IN ORDER TO GET FEEDBACK ON SPECIFIC LESSONS.

| 6.7% | 17.3% | 43.3% | 32.7% |

WITHIN REASON, TEACHERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO REQUEST THEIR EVALUATOR IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE PERCEIVED BIAS WITHIN THE REACH SYSTEM.

| 13.6% | 19.4% | 43.7% | 23.3% |

TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO PEER EVALUATION FOR THE PURPOSES OF MENTORING AND COACHING

| 18.4% | 16.6% | 43.7% | 21.4% |

THE REACH SYSTEM SHOULD INCLUDE A PORTFOLIO COMPONENT SO THAT TEACHERS CAN SUBMIT EVIDENCE AND ARTIFACTS IN DIFFERENT DOMAINS

| 28.2% | 24.3% | 27.2% | 20.4% |

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO EVALUATE OTHER TEACHERS

| 33.7% | 20.2% | 34.6% | 11.5% |

PEER EVALUATION SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN MY REACH EVALUATION

| 35.6% | 22.8% | 31.7% | 9.9% |

Legend: ■ 1-3 ■ 4-6 ■ 7-9 ■ 10

Source: E4E-Chicago survey of Chicago teachers, n=163.

Align REACH to professional development

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

Professional development is a sizable investment. It is difficult to determine the total amount spent by CPS, because money is allocated to numerous budget line items and principals have discretion on how some of this money is spent. However, the most recent estimate from the CPS Professional Development Project put the cost at 5 percent of the district's budget, or $190-200 million in 2001-02[16]. This is a huge amount of money, and so it is imperative that we spend it where it can be most impactful for teachers and students.

REACH provides data on areas where teachers are currently excelling and need to grow, yet that data has not been effectively utilized to ensure teachers are getting the professional development they need. There have been attempts to improve professional development quality and access, such as the Framework Specialist program, which is a highly selective cohort of teacher leaders across the district creating professional development resources and videos to support teachers. However, this impressive collection of best practices has been limited and is not currently effectively distributed to schools and teachers.

OUR VISION

We envision a teacher evaluation system that capitalizes on the wealth of data provided through REACH in order to target and align professional development opportunities

for teachers with both their strengths and their areas for growth. The state, district and schools should work to ensure opportunities for effective teacher leaders to emerge so they can share their best practices with their colleagues.

Teacher leadership can provide both flexibility in professional learning and cost savings for schools. For example, teachers can lead targeted professional development designed around growth areas. These small groups would engage in collaborative work on lessons and teaching strategies that would be immediately applicable in the classroom. The 2015 E4E-Chicago Teacher Action Team on Professional Development[17] designed a collaborative professional development model utilizing teacher leaders. (See illustration below.)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

ISBE should mandate that valuable professional development plans be aligned to growth areas for teachers.

CPS should provide training to principals on how to align REACH growth areas and professional development opportunities for their teachers.

Schools should use data from REACH to identify teachers currently excelling in areas where other teachers need training and provide time for those teachers to share best practices.

TRADITIONAL PD MODEL
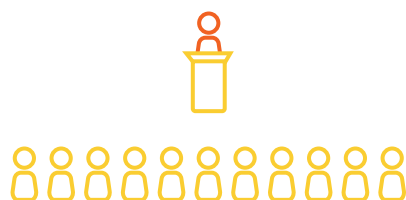
Lecture hall with dozens of teachers in a room and one person talking at them.

NEW MODEL
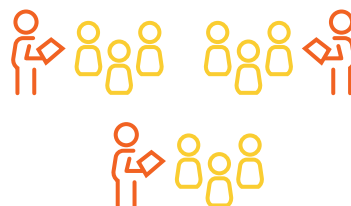
Ongoing clusters of teachers, grouped together based on REACH data and teachers' self-identified PD needs, working with a teacher leader to improve high-quality assignments they have reflected on, including reviewing student data.

Ensure timely feedback

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

REACH does not provide data to educators in a timely way. The 2012 contract explicitly states that summative evaluations should be made available to teachers "no later than the last day of student attendance."[18] However, teachers do not currently receive their previous year's evaluation data until well into the next school year. In school year 2015-16, teachers did not receive their REACH data until late October 2015. Since the implementation of REACH, the earliest scores have been released was late September.[19]

Further, post-conference discussions vary widely. In focus groups with educators, we learned that some administrators stress their importance, and others make them optional for informal evaluations. Unfortunately, when teacher evaluation feedback is delayed, teachers miss out on the opportunity to reflect on strengths, to address weaknesses and to improve lesson plans and instruction accordingly.

OUR VISION

We envision a teacher evaluation system where educators receive the same timely and relevant feedback that we are expected to provide our students. Feedback is the crux of teacher improvement in an evaluation system. Teachers need feedback on growth areas to redesign lesson plans, assessments and activities effectively. Ensuring an emphasis on high-quality and timely feedback allows both the teacher and administrator to focus on specific and actionable improvements from the observation.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

ISBE should ensure that all Illinois teachers receive their summative evaluation data by July 15 or by the day agreed upon by their district's joint commission, whichever is earlier. There should be accountability measures put in place for districts that do not meet the deadlines, including tying them to a district's ability to act on retention decisions.

CPS should guarantee that accurate summative data is provided to teachers in enough time for them adjust their lesson plans and goals during the summer. Additionally, the district should prioritize the release of summative data for high-needs schools.

Schools should emphasize the importance of post-conference feedback meetings and certify that they are occurring in a timely manner.

A note about high-needs schools

While all teachers would benefit from timely and accurate feedback, delays in feedback have magnified impacts on student populations who are often already behind grade-level targets. High-needs schools often have the highest concentration of non-tenured teachers, who often need more feedback and would benefit from more time to make the changes that are critical to turning around student performance.[20] CPS needs to equip teachers in high-needs schools with early and frequent feedback to allow for additional planning and timely adjustments.

Expand evidence and reflect on best practices

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

During our focus groups, teachers reported that the observation system is too limited to capture their practice because artifacts, such as lesson plans, student work and unit activities, are not always included. Thus, the scope and quality of feedback teachers receive is too limited in helping us better serve our students.

While there is currently an option to provide artifacts for REACH's Domain 4 (Professional Responsibilities), the types of artifacts vary wildly across schools. Additionally, artifacts that reflect teacher practice in multiple domains, such as Individual Education Plans, specific assignments and graded student work, are often not included. Teaching is substantially more than lesson delivery, and currently, those crucial elements are not being captured in evaluations.

OUR VISION

We envision a robust portfolio system that not only provides guidelines about types of artifacts that could be included, but also encourages teachers to share their best practices. Evidence of rigorous instruction, especially as described in REACH's Domains 1 and 3, is the actual work that students are doing – close reads, labs, writing prompts and other tasks. The quality of student tasks and the accompanying student work are key pieces of evidence that should be incorporated into evaluation.

Qualitative measures should not replace quantitative measures of student growth, but they would add much-needed color, particularly for the 74 percent of teachers whose practice isn't measured by standardized tests in subjects they teach.[21] Our vision reflects norms for great portfolio systems such as those established for National Board Certified Teachers, which have demonstrated a correlation between their measures of teacher effectiveness and student achievement.[22]

In order to make portfolios actionable and support student learning, teachers could submit an assortment of work from different students (high, medium and low achieving) in an effort to highlight their growth. These artifacts would provide evidence of both a teacher's grading practice and also be used in small teacher groups to spark discussions on best practices.[23]

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

ISBE should expand on its guidance for districts to develop and incentivize the use of evidence-based portfolios. PERA currently allows for district flexibility in adopting the use of portfolios, but they are currently not an encouraged or widely used practice.

CPS should promote expanded artifact collection in all domains of REACH in order to create a library of exceptional work. These catalogues of exemplary evidence can be used to create new professional development resources and to identify and implement best practices.

Schools should designate time for teachers to collaborate on lessons and reflect on student work they have identified as best practices.

Equipping observers to provide accurate and meaningful feedback through rich conversation is essential for improving teaching and learning...The overall quality of teaching in the vast majority of classrooms— perhaps 90 percent—is near the middle in terms of performance. Significant progress in achievement will require that every teacher gets the individualized feedback and support he or she needs to change practice in ways that better promote student learning.[24]

MET Study - "Seeing it Clearly"

2013 CPS Framework for Teaching with Critical Attributes

DOMAIN 1
Planning and Preparation

- Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
- Demonstrating Knowledge of Students
- Content Standards within and across Grade Levels
- Selecting Learning Objectives
- Designing Coherent Instruction
- Designing Student Assessment

DOMAIN 2
The Classroom Environment

- Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport
- Establishing a Culture for Learning
- Managing Classroom Procedures

DOMAIN 3
Instruction

- Communicating with Students
- Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
- Engaging Students in Learning
- Using Assessment in Instruction
- Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness

DOMAIN 4
Professional Responsibilities

- Reflecting on Teaching and Learning
- Maintaining Accurate Records
- Communicating with Families
- Growing and Developing Professionally
- Demonstrating Professionalism

Source: Abridged from the 2013 CPS Framework for Teaching with Critical Attributes.

Differentiate approaches to teacher evaluation

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

REACH is currently a one-size-fits-all evaluation system that ignores differentiation for different types of teachers. While CPS has a few addenda to differentiate guidance for evaluating specialists, such as special education, arts, physical education, preschool and English-language learners, [25] all other teachers are categorized under the heading "teacher" regardless of whether they teach reading or science. Grouping them together ignores the importance of content expertise in improving student achievement.[26] Administrators frequently observe outside their own areas of content expertise, and without content-specific addenda, it further hinders effective feedback for teachers. Additionally, based on our conversations with administrators, we found that the addenda are only sporadically used; some administrators shared that they are not trained on how to use addenda, while others admitted to not even being aware of specialist addenda.

The performance tasks used to evaluate student growth for teachers in non-tested subjects have also not been adequately adjusted to meet the needs of our classrooms. While we agree that students should be held to high standards, we need to recognize that not all students start from the same baseline. As one science teacher of diverse learners noted, her students' reading ability limits their participation in the performance task designed for junior chemistry. Therefore, that task cannot possibly be an accurate measure of the student growth she accomplished over the course of the year.

OUR VISION

We envision an evaluation system that leverages teacher teams to design specialized observation tools for different grade levels, content areas and special student populations. The tools would provide teachers with specific and relevant feedback. Differentiating content for students is considered a cornerstone of the proficient teacher; in fact, the REACH framework evaluates whether teachers are differentiating in multiple places. We should expect the same differentiation in our evaluation that we use to evaluate our students.[27]

A benefit of teachers redesigning addenda and performance tasks will be the inclusion of great teaching practices that REACH doesn't currently capture. For example, in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), the Teacher Working Team model successfully added culturally responsive teaching into teachers' performance tasks. Additionally, the teacher-led model increased teacher confidence in the teacher evaluation system.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

ISBE should establish supplementary guidance for observers to use in different classroom contexts and provide guidance for differentiating performance tasks to accurately capture the growth of students and effectiveness of teachers.

CPS should act on ISBE's guidance by organizing teacher teams that represent different subject and age-level groups across the district to prioritize and create the additional addenda that are needed. These teams should also identify areas where performance tasks can be amended and enhanced to ensure that student growth and teacher effectiveness are accurately and fairly measured.

CPS should certify that all evaluators are trained on and utilize the addenda for all specialty and content areas. Further, the Reflect and Learn System, which is the computer system used to track teacher evaluation data, should be updated to automatically flag for an observer when an addendum exists for an educator.

Teacher Working Team Model:
How Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District leveraged the power and expertise of its teachers to build components of its evaluation system.[28]

APPLICATION PROCESS
Teachers were solicited from across the district via an application process. Teachers were selected who represented diverse content areas, student populations, grade levels, school types and demographics.

TEAMS
Teachers were sorted into teams based on particular areas of the evaluation, such Student Learning Objectives (their equivalent of the performance task).

RESEARCH
Teams researched possible policies surrounding these issues and produced pilots that CMS could test to determine their effectiveness.

EVALUATION
These pilots were used to determine key elements of the evaluation system.

CONCLUSION

As teachers, we believe in constantly working to improve our craft for our students. We are eager to receive robust and actionable feedback on our practice and to have the space and time to collaborate with one another to make our classrooms as engaging as possible.

REACH was an improvement over an antiquated system that administrators and teachers agreed did not provide meaningful feedback. But with the passing of ESSA and the increased knowledge of inequities in the system, we believe it is the right time for teachers to present their recommendations on how to ensure REACH and its data are continuously used to create cultures of collaboration, feedback and reflection.

We strongly urge stakeholders to increase flexibility, promote collaboration, align with professional development, improve timely feedback, expand evidence collection and differentiate approaches in order to make REACH live up to its promise of Recognizing Educators and Advancing Chicago's Students.

Methodology

Identifying our topic

Educators 4 Excellence-Chicago staff began surveying CPS teachers at school visits and networking events at the end of the 2014-15 school year to identify the issues that were most important for CPS teachers. After collecting over 750 surveys, 35 teacher leaders gathered to discuss the top issues and, through a caucus process, determined that our focus would be teacher evaluation.

Reviewing existing research

Our Teacher Policy Team met for eight weeks to review research on different state and local teacher evaluation systems and implementation strategies. We also reviewed research on REACH and its implementation in Chicago. We discussed our findings with local education policy experts from CPS, the Quest Center, the University of Chicago Consortium, the Chicago Public Education Fund, the Consortium for Educational Change in Illinois, the Illinois State Board of Education, the New Teacher Center, the American Institutes for Research, Teach Plus and other city and state experts on the teacher evaluation system.

Conducting research and gathering feedback

We collected more than 150 teacher surveys to gather critical feedback on REACH and our recommendations. We also held more than 20 focus groups attended by more than 200 CPS teachers to listen to their experiences with teacher evaluation and the ways that our recommendations could be most meaningful to their practice. This research pushed our Teacher Policy Team to revise and rework policy recommendations to meet key needs and concerns among our peers. Lastly, we interviewed school administrators to better understand the challenges that evaluators face with REACH and ensure that our recommendations took those concerns into consideration.

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