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New research shows most Chicago Public Schools teachers and administrators agree that teacher evaluation improved instructional practice and student learning
However, teacher satisfaction with the evaluation process varies widely across schools and the research identifies strategies to improve feedback

Teacher evaluation reform was mandated by the Illinois legislature in 2010. Evaluations can be expensive and time consuming for districts to implement, but are they achieving policy goals and leading to improved instruction and student learning? According to new research from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, 83 percent of teachers and 93 percent of administrators in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) said the teacher evaluation process has helped them improve classroom instruction. About 70 percent of CPS teachers and administrators agreed that the teacher evaluation system improved student learning. These findings suggest that teacher evaluations can be effective given the right conditions.

In 2012-13, CPS implemented the REACH (Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's Students) teacher evaluation system in response to the 2010 Illinois law and amid a national movement to reform how teachers are evaluated. New laws required that performance evaluation systems include a measure of student growth. Nearly a decade later, the effectiveness of teacher evaluation has come into question across the country, with some states rolling back requirements primarily related to the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers, [according to data from the National Council on Teacher Quality](#).

According to approximately 12,000 CPS teachers surveyed, observation feedback scores were the most accurate at representing their teaching effectiveness and value-added measures (VAMs), based on student growth on standardized tests, were the least accurate. Although, approximately 70 percent of teachers said that VAMs were mostly or highly accurate.

While most teachers reported that the classroom observation process was influential on their practice, researchers note that some feedback was more useful. "Teachers consistently told us that how and what feedback is provided matters," said UChicago Consortium research analysts, Andria Shyjka and Vanessa Gutiérrez. "Teachers said that for feedback to be meaningful and useful, it must be specific, actionable, task-focused, relevant, balanced, and collaborative."

Across the district, most teachers and administrators were satisfied with the REACH evaluation process on the whole. However, there was wide variation across schools. "School-wide teacher satisfaction likely indicates strong teacher buy-in and a school culture that supports feedback and coaching," said Lauren Sartain, affiliated researcher with the UChicago Consortium. "In schools where teachers are largely unsatisfied with the evaluation process, school leaders may need support to develop their coaching skills and to implement evaluations in a way that encourages instructional improvement."

While there was general agreement among teachers and administrators that REACH improved instructional practice and student learning, there were diverging views on how evaluation ratings should influence personnel decisions. Most teachers felt that REACH should not be used to determine dismissal or tenure attainment, while most administrators (85 percent) were supportive of using REACH for making personnel decisions.

Research Questions and Key Findings

What are teachers and administrators' perceptions and opinions of REACH after 5 years of implementation?

- Most teachers and administrators reported that REACH improved instructional practice and student learning.
- Of all REACH elements, including classroom observations, performance tasks, and value-added measures, administrators and teachers felt that observation scores most accurately captured teacher effectiveness.
- Teachers and administrators had very different views on how evaluation rating should influence personnel decisions.
- About 60 percent of teachers and 70 percent of administrators were satisfied with the REACH evaluation process as a whole. However, there is wide variation in teachers' satisfaction with REACH across schools.

What feedback did teachers report they found most useful?

- Teachers generally reported that the REACH observation process accurately represented their teaching practice, provided opportunities to reflect, and ultimately resulted in practice changes.
- What and how evaluators gave feedback mattered. Teachers said that for feedback to be meaningful and useful, it must be specific, actionable, task-focused, relevant, balanced, and collaborative.

What proportion of teachers received high and low ratings under REACH, and how did that change over time?

- Nearly 9 in 10 CPS teachers received one of the top two evaluation ratings in 2016-17.
- REACH evaluation ratings in CPS increased over time. In 2014-15, 26 percent of teachers received the highest rating, compared to 40 percent in 2016-17.

How many low-rated teachers exited CPS or switched schools under REACH, compared to high-rated teachers? How have classroom assignments within the school changed under REACH?

- The lower the evaluation rating, the more likely teachers were to leave their schools.
- More than one-half of teachers who received "unsatisfactory" ratings exited CPS and an additional 16 percent switched schools within CPS.
- Teachers with low value-added measures (VAMs) were less likely than teachers with high VAMs to be teaching in a tested grade/subject the subsequent year.

Cite as:

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Shyjka, A. & Gutiérrez, V. (2020). *Teacher Evaluation in CPS: What Makes Evaluator Feedback Useful?* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

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About the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

The UChicago Consortium conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. The Consortium seeks to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. The UChicago Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice but does not advocate for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

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