Teacher Evaluation in CPS: What Makes Evaluator Feedback Useful?

UCHICAGO Consortium
on School Research

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Table of Contents

States and school districts across the country have dramatically changed teacher evaluation systems in the past decade, with the goal of improving student learning and outcomes. Historically, evaluations have been simple—some as simple as a checklist—and almost all teachers received high ratings. Evaluations are now more robust and typically include a combination of teacher practice and student performance measures.

Responding to an Illinois law that took effect in 2010, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), Chicago Public Schools (CPS) created and implemented the REACH (Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's Students) educator evaluation and support system. REACH was piloted in 2012-13. It is still being implemented as of the 2019-20 school year, and will continue to be implemented through June 2024, per the teachers' contract agreed upon in fall 2019. The evaluation system includes classroom observation ratings of teacher practice, as well as up to two student growth measures.

This brief addresses the research question: **What feedback did teachers report as most useful?** The data and analysis that answer this question provide insights that may help district leaders, principals, and teacher-evaluators make the most of classroom observations and ultimately drive improved teacher practice, student experiences, and student outcomes.

A series of three briefs extend previous research from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) on early REACH implementation [1] and investigate the REACH evaluation system five years after the 2012-13 rollout. The other two briefs address questions about 1) **teacher and principal perceptions of REACH** and 2) **overall REACH ratings and teacher mobility.** [2]

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[1] See https://consortium.uchicago.edu/teach-eval for the full body of Consortium research on REACH and other previous teacher evaluations in Chicago and Illinois.

[2] See https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/teacher-evaluation-in-CPS-REACH-five-years-in for all three briefs in this series.

REACH: Observation-Related Components

The heart of REACH is the classroom observation and feedback process, which ultimately results in ratings of professional practice.

The classroom observations and feedback component of REACH...

... is oriented toward improving teacher practice and student learning by:

- Using a common language to define high-quality teaching

- Supporting ongoing conversations between school leaders and teachers to encourage growth and improvement

... contains multiple components within the classroom observation process, which:

- Are outlined in the CPS Framework for Teaching rubric

- Follow a modified version of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, a rubric that defines four levels of teacher performance in multiple areas of practice like classroom management and instruction [3]

- Include pre- and post-observation feedback conferences

... is weighted most heavily in the summative rating. The other components in the summative rating, both student learning measures, are:

- Performance tasks: student growth on district-developed, content-specific, teacher-administered and -graded assessments

- Teacher-level value-added measures (or "VAMs"): constructed from student growth on the NWEA with statistical adjustments for student characteristics, and available for reading and/or math teachers in grades 3–8.

Data Used In This Brief

The findings in this brief are based on:

- Districtwide surveys of teachers in the 2017–18 school year
  - REACH-related items were included in the annual *5Essentials* surveys
- Teacher interviews.
  - Interviews were conducted in elementary and high schools over two time periods. The first interviews were conducted with 25 teachers across five schools in the spring of 2017. For the second set of interviews, two additional schools were added to our sample, resulting in 34 interviews across seven schools in the spring of 2018. In total, interviews with 44 unique teachers were included in this analysis, with most teachers interviewed over both time periods.

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3   Danielson (2009). This framework is used as a guide for coaching and mentoring teachers in schools nationwide.

Teacher Reports on REACH

Teachers Generally Reported that the REACH Observation Process Accurately Represented their Teaching Practice, Provided Opportunities to Reflect, and Ultimately Resulted in Practice Changes

While teachers reported that all elements of the REACH evaluation system represented their performance with some degree of accuracy, the feedback associated with the observation process was reported as central to improvement efforts (see Figure 1). This may be because teachers tended to view observations as more accurate and fair than the student learning measures of REACH, which were based on assessments.[4] Additionally, the observation process provided a robust framework for providing feedback (see Table 1 for the full observation feedback process), which teachers can use to guide changes to their instruction.

1. Most teachers found classroom observations to be accurate.

Recent research on teacher evaluation has found that teachers' perceptions of feedback accuracy is influential in shaping both their perceptions of how useful the feedback is and, importantly, the effect that feedback has on their practice.[5] In other words, to drive genuine improvement efforts in classrooms, feedback must be perceived by teachers as accurate.

A majority of teachers surveyed across CPS reported that observations provided an accurate representation of their teaching (see Figure 1). Teacher interviews generally confirmed this survey finding and provided a better understanding of why teachers felt this way. Ratings and feedback were often considered accurate if they matched with the ways teachers viewed themselves and their experience during the observation period. Teachers who voiced concerns about the accuracy of observations typically did so because they felt the limited number or short duration of observations restricted the potential to capture their practice in its totality. One teacher described their concerns about accuracy,

> *"I don't think it reflects the overall quality of my teaching at all because I don't think that you can sit in a class for 20 minutes one day and really get an accurate view of what goes on throughout the year."*

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4   See related brief from this series on REACH, *Teacher Evaluation in CPS: Perceptions of REACH Implementation, Five Years In* for more information about teachers' perceptions of REACH overall, as well as its components.

5   Cherasaro, Brodersen, Reale, & Yanoski (2016); Liu, Visone, Mongillo, & Lisi (2019).

FIGURE 1

Four out of Five Teachers Felt Observation Scores Accurately Represented their Effectiveness
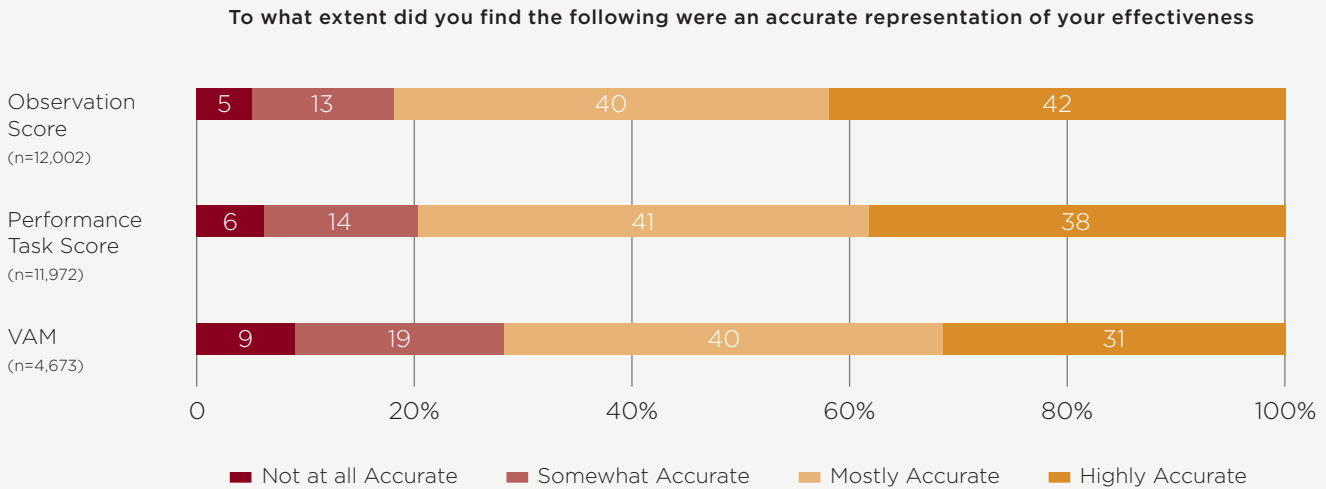
To what extent did you find the following were an accurate representation of your effectiveness

	Not at all Accurate	Somewhat Accurate	Mostly Accurate	Highly Accurate
Observation Score (n=12,002)	5	13	40	42
Performance Task Score (n=11,972)	6	14	41	38
VAM (n=4,673)	9	19	40	31

0   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Not at all Accurate   ■ Somewhat Accurate   ■ Mostly Accurate   ■ Highly Accurate

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 12,002 respondents about observation scores, 11,972 about performance tasks, and 4,673 respondents about VAMs. Only elementary school teachers who reported receiving an individual VAM were asked about VAMs.

2. The observation process provided teachers with multiple opportunities for meaningful feedback and reflection.

The observation element of REACH ensures that administrators are in classrooms with teachers. This presence was welcomed by a number of teachers who appreciated a "second set of eyes" in the classroom, to see their practice in ways that they themselves hadn't.

In addition to putting teachers and administrators in dialogue about teaching practice, the observation process included tools, such as the *Protocols for the Pre- and Post-Observation Conference* and the CPS Framework for Teaching, that facilitated teachers' reflections about their planning, practice, and instructional goals. The observation process also provided teachers with numerical ratings, which

many reported as helpful for identifying their areas of strength and challenge.

The pre- and post- observation conferences were the core structures of the observation process; they provided opportunities for teachers to receive direct verbal feedback from their evaluators. However, not all teachers in our interview sample reported the opportunity to engage in these structures. Four teachers in our sample of 44 reported that they did not have an opportunity for formal feedback because they either did not have an observation at all, or did not have a post-observation conference with their evaluator.

While the majority of this brief focuses on teachers' experiences with the post-observation conference and the conditions which shaped whether or not they perceived feedback as useful, it is important

TABLE 1

Teachers Described their Experiences with Each Step of the REACH Observation Process

Step in Observation Process & REACH Best Practices	Teachers' Reported Experiences, From Teacher Interviews
Step: Observation Preparation **Best Practice:** Complete and submit the *Protocol for the Pre-Observation Conference* and a lesson or unit plan	Pre-conference protocols helped some teachers productively reflect on their planning and organizational practices, though a few teachers voiced frustration that it did not seem like evaluators reviewed their submissions before the pre-observation conference.
Step: Pre-Observation Conference **Best Practice:** • Reference & summarize the *Protocol for the Pre-Observation Conference* • Discuss practice aligned to Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation)	Teachers appreciated having the opportunity to • provide evaluators with some context about the class and lesson they would be observing • share their instructional and professional goals • gain clarity about what evaluators were looking for during the observation
Step: Formal Observation **Best Practice:** Observe and capture evidence, focusing on Domain 2 (The Classroom Environment) and Domain 3 (Instruction)	While most teachers valued formal observations as providing information about their practice, those that felt the observation period was not a typical class or was not long enough to demonstrate each component in the Framework for Teaching typically did not view the process as useful to their practice.
Step: Ratings & Evidence **Best Practice:** Ratings and evidence made available on the *Reflect and Learn* platform allowing teachers time to review before their conference	Teachers frequently reported judging the accuracy and fairness of ratings by comparing the ratings they received to their self-perceived ratings. Several teachers recalled how ratings affirmed their instructional competencies in some areas while lower ratings signaled a need to attend to a specific component of their practice. Notably, some teachers reported that ratings in recent years were only made available directly preceding or during the post-observation conference.
Step: Post-Observation Conference Preparation **Best Practice:** Complete the *Protocol for the Post-Observation Conference* & gather additional evidence from observation period	Some teachers reported that filling out this protocol helped prepare them for their conference and resulted in a more productive post-observation conference. Teachers also appreciated the opportunity to collect and share additional evidence from the observation period.
Step: Post-Observation Conference **Best Practice:** Discussion and reflection on the evidence of the educator's practice	Several conditions shaped how useful teachers perceived their post-observation conference; they are discussed starting on page 9, and summarized in Figure 4 on page 11.

Note: Steps in observation process and REACH best practices are sourced from the CPS Educator Evaluation Handbook, 2019–20.

to note that other stages of the observation cycle were also feedback opportunities. As such, findings related to teachers' experiences with each stage of the observation process are presented in Table 1. These findings are intentionally shared alongside the associated domains and selected best practices from the REACH Handbook to allow for comparison between expectations for evaluator practice (in the left column) and teachers' reported experiences (in the right column).
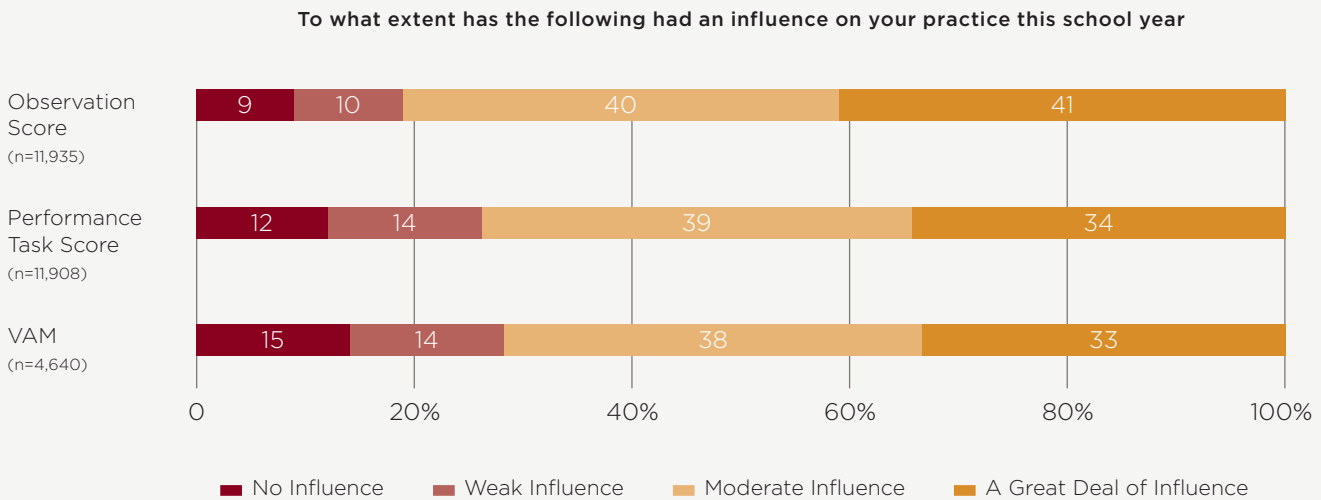
3. Most teachers found classroom observations influential to their practice.

In a districtwide survey, 81 percent of teachers reported that observations had a moderate to great deal of influence on their practice (see Figure 2). Observations produced a lot of data for teachers about their specific practice, and had the potential to generate and support instructional improvement in the context of their particular classes, subjects, and student bodies. The feedback provided in the observation process was generally viewed as the most useful for guiding instructional improvement because of this grounding in classroom practice. In describing the importance of this structure, one teacher said:

"I think the most useful is the actual observations because they're [the evaluators] in your classroom; they're seeing you teach, they're seeing your students, they know who they are... So I think that their feedback during my observation is the most helpful for me..."

Most teachers reported making positive changes to their classroom practice as a result of the teacher evaluation process (see Figure 3). This finding, paired with the findings that teachers found observations to be the most influential component of the evaluation process and to provide the most helpful feedback, suggests that observations are the core mechanism by which REACH can support teacher development.
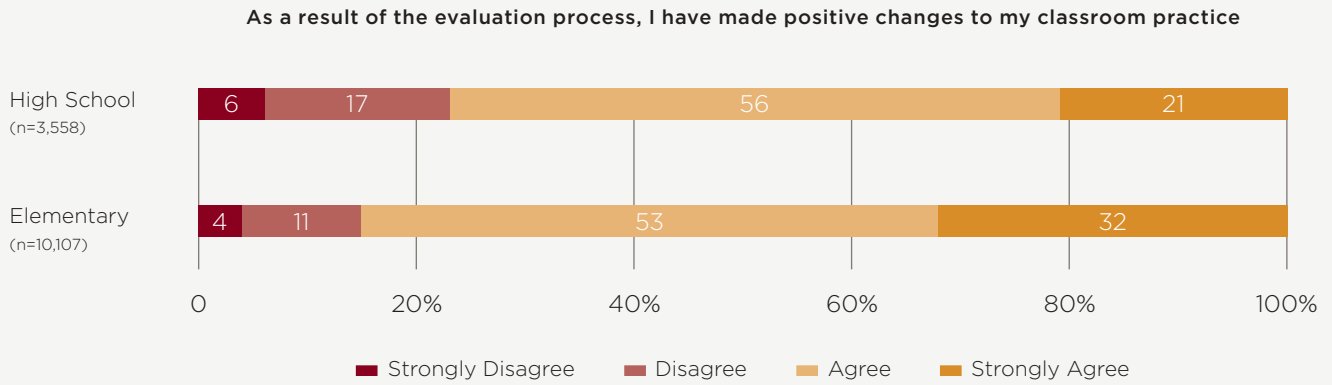
FIGURE 2
Teachers Reported that Observations Were the Most Influential to Their Practice

To what extent has the following had an influence on your practice this school year

	No Influence	Weak Influence	Moderate Influence	A Great Deal of Influence
Observation Score (n=11,935)	9	10	40	41
Performance Task Score (n=11,908)	12	14	39	34
VAM (n=4,640)	15	14	38	33

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 11,935 respondents about observation scores, 11,908 about performance tasks, and 4,640 respondents about VAMs. Only elementary school teachers who reported receiving an individual VAM were asked about VAMs.

FIGURE 3
Most CPS Teachers Reported Making Positive Changes to Their Practice as a Result of REACH

As a result of the evaluation process, I have made positive changes to my classroom practice

High School (n=3,558): Strongly Disagree 6, Disagree 17, Agree 56, Strongly Agree 21

Elementary (n=10,107): Strongly Disagree 4, Disagree 11, Agree 53, Strongly Agree 32

Legend: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,558 high school educator respondents and 10,107 elementary educator respondents.

Teachers' Mindsets Towards REACH

Some Teachers were More Open to REACH Feedback than Others

One condition that may have impacted how useful teachers found their REACH observation feedback was their learning orientation toward REACH. In interviews, teachers discussed REACH in ways that could be categorized as either having a "continuous improvement orientation" or an "improvement fatigue orientation."

Continuous Improvement Orientation

Some teachers saw REACH feedback as a tool they could use for their continuous improvement. They discussed being open to REACH feedback, regardless of the content of feedback, because they believed it would help them improve their practice.

One high school teacher explained how REACH feedback could be used as a tool for continuous improvement:

> *"[REACH is] a process and you know it's like any process. You get out of it what you put into it. So if you walk into it with an open mind and an open set of ideas...with the idea [that] I'm going to improve what I do, then you can learn something."*

This teacher later went on to elaborate that they decided to *"listen"* to their REACH feedback because of their continuous improvement orientation: *"So that was the approach I took and it's changed my practice significantly."*

Improvement Fatigue Orientation

Other teachers expressed fatigue or reluctance to engage in reflections about their REACH feedback. They discussed not believing they could improve through the REACH observation process or said that they had decided to stop trying to make practice improvements based on their REACH feedback. As one elementary school teacher said

> *"I'm not really concerned with all of these things that they bring about in how you should perform here, perform there."*

There were reasons external to the REACH observation process that contributed to these teachers' reluctance to improve their practice using REACH feedback. One teacher explained that their improvement fatigue orientation was, in part, spurred by the lack of support they received around issues at the school, such as student discipline:

> *"Why do anything, why do I have to worry? And it's horrible, 'cause you become cynical, but you know, what is that saying,* la mula no era arisca, los palos la hicieron..."

This teacher uses a Spanish *dicho* (saying) that literally translates to "the mule was not mean, the sticks made them that way." The teacher used this to explain the circumstances that led them to stop being concerned with improving through REACH.

WHAT Feedback Evaluators Gave Mattered

Teachers valued specific, transferable, and applicable feedback

In the post-observation conference, teachers met with their evaluators to receive verbal feedback and information about what was observed during their observation. This provided a formal opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice and consider making instructional changes in the classroom.

A majority of teachers reported that their observation-based conversations focused on improvement (see Figure 4). While focusing feedback on improvement was essential if the evaluation process was going to support teacher development, the specific content of post-observation conferences influenced how useful they were for improving teachers' practice. Teachers described feedback as most useful for instructional improvement when evaluators:

1. Suggested specific strategies for changing practice;

2. Connected suggestions to an area of improvement or a transferable instructional concept;

3. Framed improvement efforts with the Danielson-based CPS Framework for Teaching;

4. Related evaluation conversations to teachers' own professional goals.

In order for the evaluation process to successfully contribute to teacher development, it must provide useful and quality feedback: "A school system shouldn't leave it to chance whether or not feedback is successful."[A]

Research finds that useful and high-quality feedback:

- Is specific, practical, and focused on improvement[B]

- Provides specific improvement suggestions and instructional strategies[C]

- Explains how to put strategies into immediate use (actionable)[D]

- Sharpens teacher's own abilities to analyze their own practice[E]

- Focuses on the task and process and not the individual

- Provides resources and suggestions for professional development[F]

A Archer, Cantrell, Holtzman, Joe, Tocci, & Wood (2016).
B Archer et al. (2016).
C Liu et al. (2019); Chersaro et al. (2016).
D Archer et al. (2019).
E Archer et al. (2019).
F Liu et al. (2019).

1. Suggested specific strategies for changing practice.

Almost all teachers reported that the kinds of suggestions their evaluators shared in the post-observation conferences influenced how useful they found the feedback to be. Districtwide surveys found that 90 percent of elementary teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their observation feedback included specific steps to improve their instruction. Somewhat fewer high school teachers responded as positively as elementary grade teachers (see Figure 5). Teacher interviews affirmed this finding; the majority of teachers said that they received specific suggestions and described how useful the suggestions provided by their evaluators were for informing instructional change. Several teachers explicitly stated that the level of detail provided in evaluator suggestions was helpful for making changes to practice. For example, one teacher valued feedback from their evaluator because it contained practical suggestions about how to improve their bell ringer activity at the start of the class:

> *"**Have the students work on the bell ringer together** and before I solve the bell ringer **have the students discuss how they got the answers** and how they came up with the answers."*
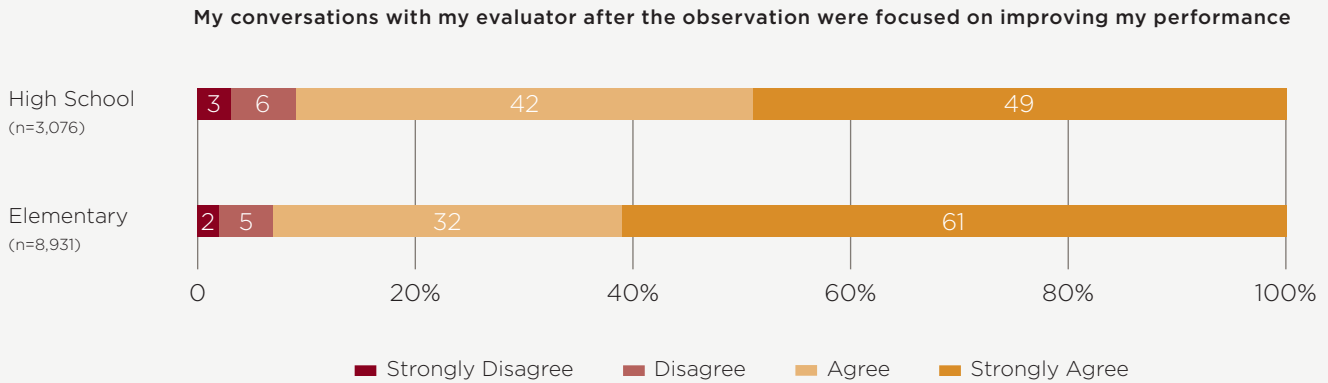
Though most teachers found specific suggestions from their evaluator useful, this was not true for all teachers. For example, teachers did not find suggestions helpful when they found them inappropriate for their particular class, content area, students, or a particular lesson. The mismatch between a suggested change and the class or content area taught was most commonly reported by teachers of specials (e.g., art, physical education) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. As noted on page 16, the background and expertise of the evaluator also influenced teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of their feedback.

Teachers who did not receive specific suggestions to guide improvement noted its absence. One teacher expressed how the lack of suggestions hindered improvement efforts:

> *"**I don't think they gave me strategies, the whole evaluation system doesn't give me strategies on what to do.** It kind of tells me what to do. They say, 'I want to see this.' And I've got to do it somehow."*
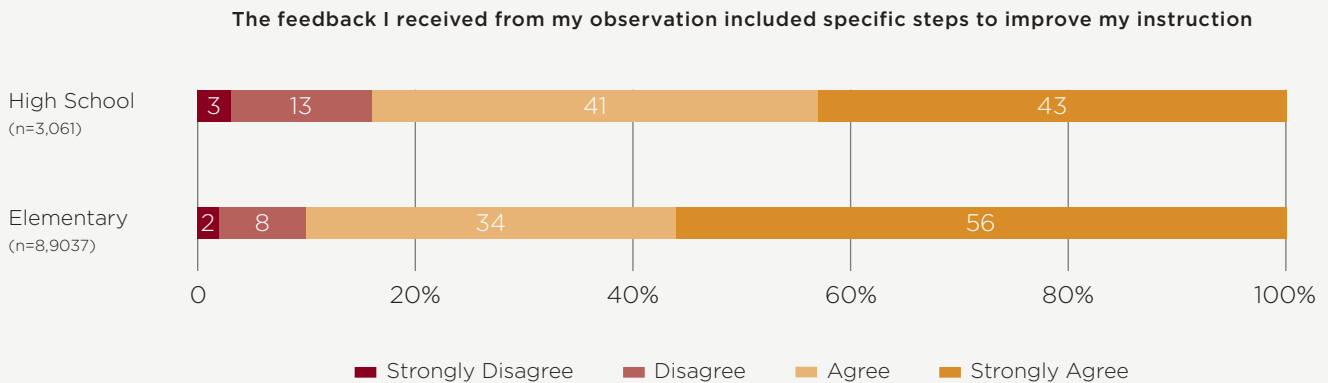
FIGURE 4

A Majority of Teachers Reported that Post-Observation Conferences Were Improvement-Focused

My conversations with my evaluator after the observation were focused on improving my performance

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
High School (n=3,076)	3	6	42	49
Elementary (n=8,931)	2	5	32	61

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,076 high school educator respondents and 8,931 elementary educator respondents about observations.

FIGURE 5

Most Teachers Reported Receiving Specific Steps to Improve Instruction in Their Post-Observation Conferences

The feedback I received from my observation included specific steps to improve my instruction

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
High School (n=3,061)	3	13	41	43
Elementary (n=8,9037)	2	8	34	56

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,061 high school educator respondents and 8,903 elementary educator respondents about observations.

2. Connected to an area of improvement or transferable instructional concept.

Under REACH, it is considered best practice for evaluators to identify an area of improvement for teachers during their post-observation conferences. Teachers reported that this was indeed addressed, and that their evaluators often used language that reflected components of the Framework for Teaching (e.g., assessments, questioning, student engagement) when discussing areas of improvement. Furthermore, when evaluators purposefully paired areas of improvement with related, specific practice change suggestions, teachers felt that they had obtained important clarity about how to improve in the identified area.

Two teachers reported that they received this combination of feedback, and that they found it useful and influential to their improvement efforts:

> *"You know, her saying that I could **pace** my... maybe sometimes I talk too fast or I go over something too quickly, **making sure students have enough time to answer themselves,** not always answering for the students..."*

> *"So one thing that I think is hard to do is the using **assessment**... So she gave me some **ideas for quicker feedback** and we kind of talked about **what could that actually look like** in person."*

Evaluator feedback that took this even further—that connected an area of improvement with a specific practice change suggestion and an instructional concept that teachers could transfer across areas of practice—was particularly impactful. One teacher recalled this type feedback and its sweeping effect on their practice:

> *"I had a cup of sand and a cup of pebbles, and they had to pour the water in each one. And the kids were obviously really wild. So [my evaluator] just said **let them play around with the materials first, like let them explore, discover, before going into the lesson....**So I always...I remember that. That's ingrained in me. So now, every time, I give 'em some type of manipulatives. I don't know; it always stayed in my mind. So I let 'em...I give 'em, "Okay, two minutes of free time." So I give 'em a geo-board—two minutes of discovery time, you know....Yeah, **let 'em play with it, get their curiosity going.**"*

In contrast, when specific changes and areas of improvement were *discussed, but not connected,* teachers did not report the feedback as useful. For example, when an evaluator identified assessments as an area of improvement for a teacher, but provided specific practice change suggestions related to use of the Smartboard, without explicit connection to assessments, the evaluator feedback was typically viewed as less useful. Suggestions which explicitly connected to an area of improvement provided a concrete step towards change and improvement in the identified area.

3. Framed with the Danielson-based CPS Framework for Teaching.

A majority of CPS teachers agreed, when surveyed, that the Framework for Teaching did a good job of defining distinguished practice (see Figure 6). In interviews, teachers shared that they appreciated when evaluators framed improvement efforts using the instructional goals and rating scale of the Framework. Many teachers noted that when practice change suggestions were presented in the context of the Framework rating scale, there was more clarity about what the instructional goals of a component looked like in practice. Additionally, teachers valued knowing how implementation of a suggested change could push them to the next rating level. For example, in recounting their post-observation conference, one elementary teacher said:

*"Those conversations about this is where you are. This is what I see. This is...**if you want to make it to distinguished in this category, this is what that looks like.** These are teachers that are doing it well. These are ideas of the things that are happening in classrooms that I would rate as distinguished. So, to me those conversations are actually **really helpful."***

Teachers who did not receive feedback framed by the instructional goals of the Framework noted its absence as a limitation to the usefulness of the feedback. For example, one high school teacher said:

*"But, then again, where there's room for improvement, **it's not like she tells us 'if you want to get distinguished...' or 'this is what distinguished looks like.'** We don't know that."*

FIGURE 6
Most Teachers Agreed that the Framework for Teaching Provided a Useful Definition of Distinguished Practice
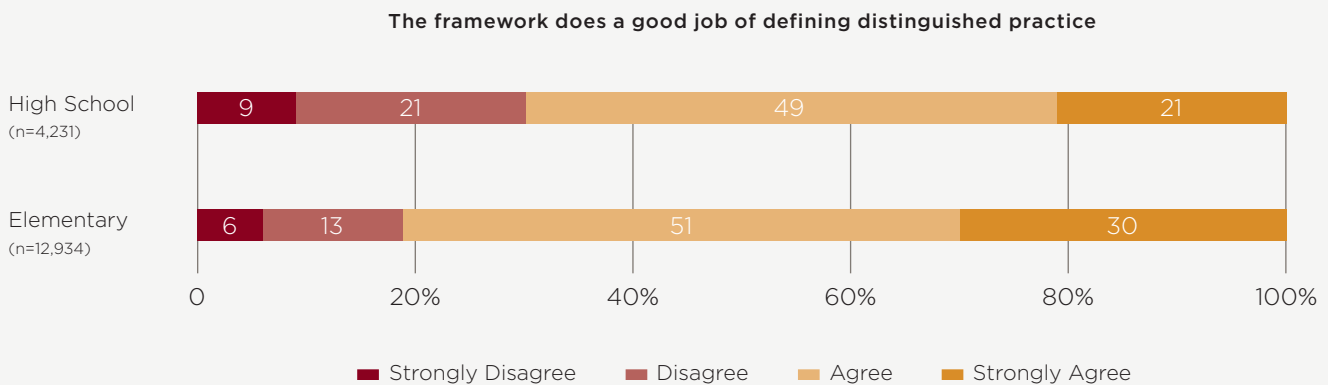
The framework does a good job of defining distinguished practice

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 4,231 high school educator respondents and 12,934 elementary educator respondents.

4. Related evaluation conversations to teachers' own professional goals.

Teachers valued the opportunity to discuss their professional goals during the observation process, and often viewed the process as useful for reflection and improving their practice. In interviews, teachers noted that most goals-focused discussions occurred during the pre-observation conference. Notably, only elementary teachers reported the pre-observation conference as a site for this discussion. Several expressed that this discussion helped set a tone of shared, mutual engagement in the observation process. For example, one teacher described how their evaluator provided them the opportunity to share their professional goals as a way to steer and focus the evaluator during the observation process:
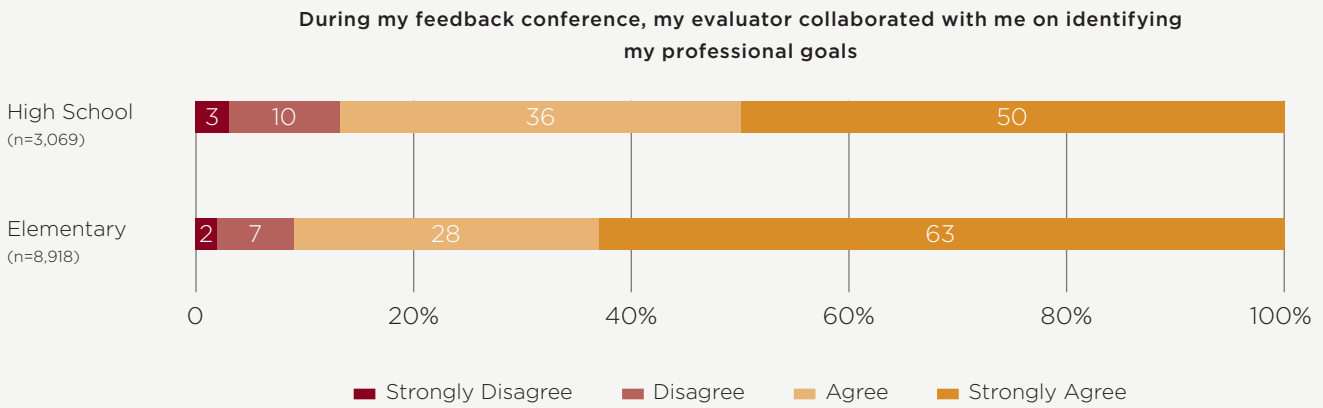
> *"One thing that she [the evaluator] always does, and I **like** that she does, she always says, **"Is there something that you want me to look for?"** Like any questions that I kind of have going into this."*

Teachers also found it useful when evaluators used the pre-observation conference to outline any areas of focus for the upcoming observation. This provided teachers with additional clarity about instructional expectations.

Opportunities to discuss teachers' professional goals in the context of observations were not limited to the pre-conference, though several teachers reported that they appreciated its inclusion during this step. Districtwide surveys found that a majority of teachers reported having the opportunity to collaborate with their evaluator on their professional goals and to discuss their instructional goals following their observation (see Figures 7 and 8).
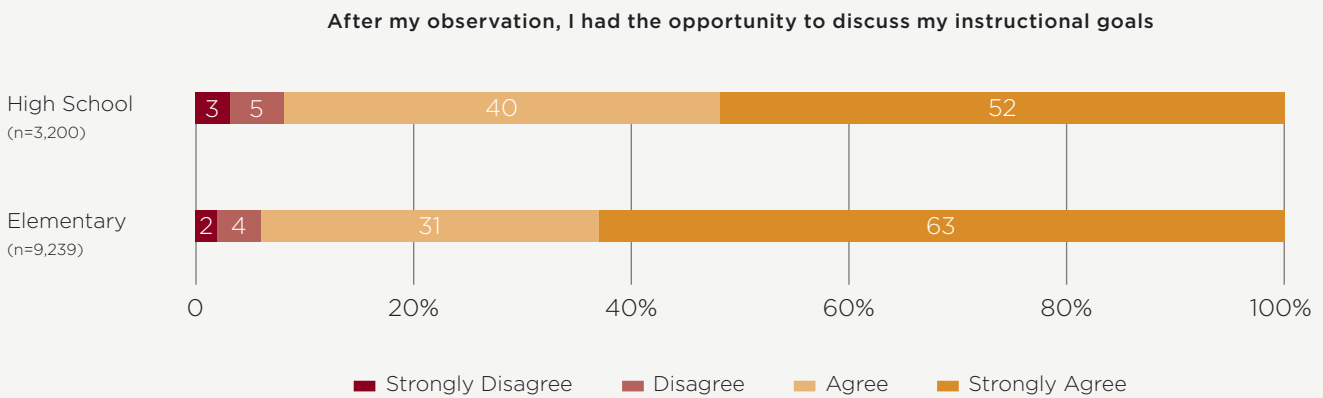
FIGURE 7

Most Teachers Collaborated with their Evaluator on Identifying Professional Goals During Their Post-Observation Conference

During my feedback conference, my evaluator collaborated with me on identifying my professional goals

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
High School (n=3,069)	3	10	36	50
Elementary (n=8,918)	2	7	28	63

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,069 high school educator respondents and 8,918 elementary educator respondents.

FIGURE 8

A Majority of Teachers had the Opportunity to Discuss their Instructional Goals Following Their Observation

After my observation, I had the opportunity to discuss my instructional goals

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
High School (n=3,200)	3	5	40	52
Elementary (n=9,239)	2	4	31	63

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,200 high school educator respondents and 9,239 elementary educator respondents.

HOW Evaluators Gave Feedback Mattered

Teachers valued balanced and collaborative discussions with knowledgeable evaluators

In interviews, teachers discussed three aspects of teacher-evaluator relationship dynamics that affected how they perceived the usefulness of REACH observations feedback:

1. Relevant evaluator background and expertise;

2. Balanced feedback facilitation;

3. Collaborative relationship between evaluator and teacher.

1. Relevant evaluator background and expertise

Some teachers described their post-conference feedback as helpful, or more helpful, when their evaluator's expertise and background aligned with their same grade level (e.g., elementary school), content area (e.g., math), or both. Others noted that feedback was not as helpful when there was no alignment.

For example, in one elementary school, a teacher described their response to having an evaluator with background and expertise alignment, as well as a different evaluator with background and expertise misalignment.

"So our AP [my evaluator] was a teacher here [in this school] and was a SPED teacher and so I think part of it is myself and probably a lot of the staff feels more comfortable with her as knowing her as a teacher, whereas our principal, I don't even know specifically what her teaching background is. But from my understanding mostly she was a high school teacher, high school administrator before she came here. So sometimes it can feel like wow, how much familiarity do you really have with elementary school and elementary teaching strategies?"

2. Balanced feedback facilitation

How feedback was delivered and discussed during the post-conference was another factor that influenced whether teachers said their feedback data was useful or not. As shown in Figure 9, most teachers reported that their evaluator delivered feedback constructively. However, a few teachers said they did not receive a post-conference observation, and therefore missed opportunities for their evaluator to provide feedback to them. Teachers who did have the post observation conference described the feedback facilitation as useful when they had a two-way conversation with their evaluator. Teachers specifically highlighted useful conversations as ones that included:

- Collaborative reflection and opportunities to bounce ideas on what could be done better;

- A balanced conversation guided by the framework and Reflect and Learn platform;

- An opportunity for teacher input and voice;

- An explanation of expectations and of what constituted distinguished practice.

Conversely, teachers said that the feedback given was not useful when there was a lack of intentional facilitation and when the post-conference was either principal-dominated or exclusively teacher-led. However, the majority of teachers

reported that their evaluator gave them the opportunity to share their thoughts (see Figure 10).

Teachers described the need for useful feedback discussions to be balanced, or, as one teacher said,

> *"A really nice back and forth. [My evaluator] was very, very open and honest and very, like I said, very collegial."*

Another teacher said,

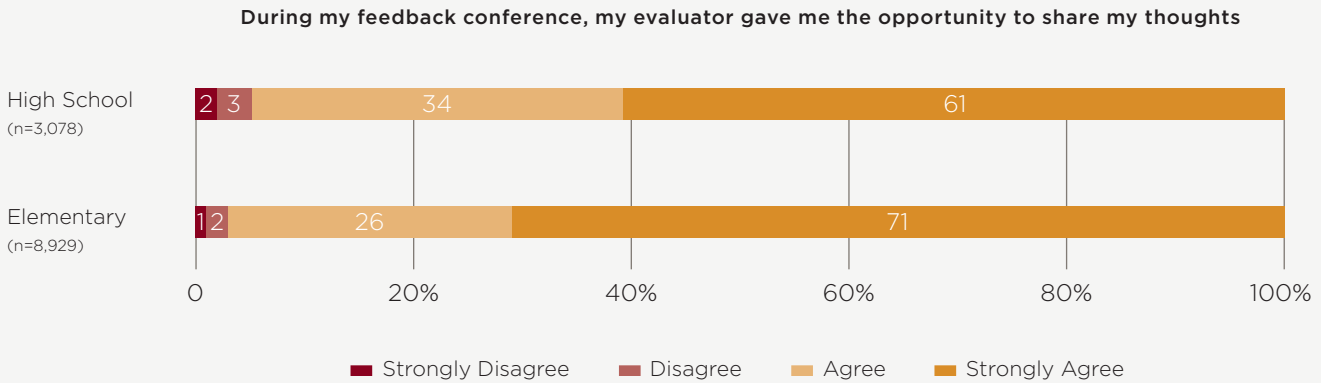> *"It is helpful to kinda [bounce] ideas around [with the evaluator] and see what can be done better."*

FIGURE 9

Most Teachers Reported that Their Evaluator had Delivered Feedback in a Constructive Manner
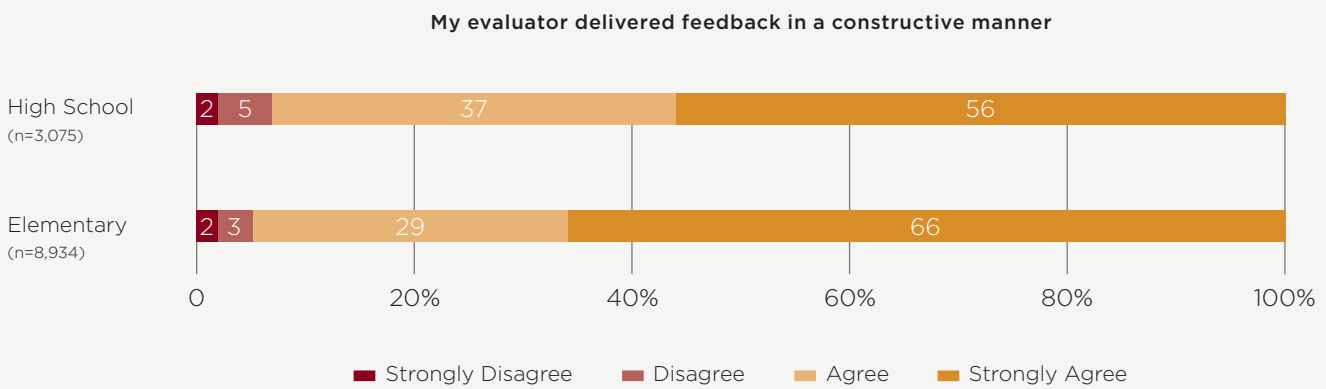
My evaluator delivered feedback in a constructive manner

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
High School (n=3,075)	2	5	37	56
Elementary (n=8,934)	2	3	29	66

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,075 high school educator respondents and 8,934 elementary educator respondents.

FIGURE 10

Most Teachers Reported that Their Evaluator Gave Them the Opportunity to Share Their Thoughts

During my feedback conference, my evaluator gave me the opportunity to share my thoughts

High School (n=3,078)	2 3 34 61
Elementary (n=8,929)	1 2 26 71

0   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Note: Responses are from the teacher *5Essentials* survey administered in spring 2018. There were 3,078 high school educator respondents and 8,929 elementary educator respondents.

3. Collaborative relationship with evaluator

Teachers said they found feedback useful when they had established a longstanding relationship with their evaluator and described this relationship as trusting, supportive, collegial, respectful, comfortable, and familiar.

For example, one teacher described the positive relationship dynamics with their evaluators:

"With my current administration, I feel very comfortable [sharing my opinions during the post-conference]. That wasn't the case with, you know, every administrator. Some are more intimidating. My current administration's not really, very intimidating. They...have big open-door policies. So they're a little more approachable than the former administration."

Implications

Conducting classroom observations, along with the correlated pre- and post-observation conferences, requires substantial time and effort from teachers and school administrators. Both the teachers and administrators in our study reported finding the value in this element of REACH as a means to provide teachers with meaningful, individualized feedback about their instructional practice.

However, not all feedback was of equal value to teachers. The usefulness of feedback was influenced by multiple conditions. Insights from this study can help evaluators support improvements in classroom practice by considering "the WHAT" and "the HOW" of the feedback they give (see Figure 11).

FIGURE 11
Observation-Feedback Considerations for REACH Evaluators

THE USEFULNESS OF THE OBSERVATION-FEEDBACK PROCESS IS AFFECTED BY

The Teacher's Mindset Toward Evaluations

The Evaluator's Background And Expertise

WHAT feedback evaluators give

- Suggest specific strategies for changing practice
- Connect suggestions to an area of improvement or transferable instructional concept
- Frame improvement efforts with the Danielson-based CPS Framework for Teaching
- Relate evaluation conversations to teachers' own professional goals

HOW evaluators give feedback

- Balanced feedback facilitation
- Collaborative relationship between evaluator and teacher

Administrators may translate these considerations into questions to ask themselves as they plan for school-wide implementation of evaluations, especially observations and conferences. These questions, while prompted by this study on REACH observations in CPS, are relevant in any context that uses classroom observations as a feedback tool:

Making the most of feedback opportunities: Am I…

- Providing teachers with the opportunity to share their professional and instructional goals with me during the pre-conference?

- Making sure that teachers have enough time to review and reflect on ratings and evidence prior to the post-observation conference?

- Encouraging teachers to continue to reflect on their practice during and after the post-observation conference?

Making observation feedback meaningful for teachers: Am I…

- Providing feedback to teachers so that the focus remains on the students?

- Connecting my suggestions to the teacher's goals for students?

- Leveraging my personal experience and skills in ways that are beneficial to teachers in a variety of disciplines?

- Helping teachers apply specific suggestions so that they can translate to broader changes in instructional practice?

- Framing challenges and areas of improvement as actionable opportunities to do things differently, in service of their goals?

Making space for teachers to engage in the observation process: Am I…

- Encouraging open discussion with my teachers—making room for teacher voice, productive disagreement, and ways for teachers to generate their own ideas for how to improve their practice?

- Connecting my feedback with teachers' goals, and engaging in two-way discussions about it?

- Building in opportunities to check in with teachers about their efforts to make changes to their instructional practices and management strategies?

- Giving teachers the opportunity to share and celebrate successes in the classroom?

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