Embargoed until:
Tuesday, May 3 at 6am

CONTACT:
Jessica Puller
jpuller@uchicago.edu
773.702.3476

New research: School culture, leadership & colleagues influence teachers' attitudes toward instructional change

A new UChicago Consortium on School Research study released today asks: **How do schools impact teachers' ability to use teacher evaluation data for developmental and improvement-oriented purposes, in contrast to its accountability goals?** Consortium researchers interviewed 44 teachers and 7 administrators in 7 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) at three time points from 2017–18. They looked specifically at whether and how the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in CPS—Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's (REACH) Students—prompted teachers' instructional improvement. This study found three categories of organizational elements that influenced instructional improvement efforts in schools:

1. **Colleagues** were the most cited influential resource supporting instructional improvement efforts.
2. **School leaders** shaped teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward REACH, and impacted teachers' use of REACH data to guide improvement via the expectations, culture, and structural supports they establish in their schools.
3. **School culture and context,** especially related to formal collaboration opportunities and programmatic stability (or programmatic instability), functioned as a support (or hindrance) to instructional improvement efforts.

"Policymakers and school administrators hoping to support teacher development want to 1) understand how teacher evaluation is used to drive improvement in schools, and 2) identify how they can shape school environments to support improvement efforts," said Andria Shyjka, report author and research analyst at the UChicago Consortium. "The details in this qualitative report provide in-depth illustrations of schools' instructional support systems. These case studies can help build a vision and a roadmap for district and school leaders."

These research findings are particularly notable as principals and district leaders nationwide grapple with teacher burnout, turnover, and hiring challenges that have been exacerbated by COVID-19. The findings are also highly relevant to discussions about teacher training programs, mentoring and coaching models, and holistic talent development efforts in districts and schools.

Released during Teacher Appreciation Week and at the end of another challenging school year, the report raises a key question for district, school, and teacher leaders: how can they best support developing the complex organizational conditions captured in the research findings in *all* schools—especially schools with limited instructional support systems—so that all teachers have access to important instructional support and resources?

Additional key findings:
1. Colleagues and Collaboration

- Collegial relationships and trust provided the basis for many teachers' willingness to share and discuss, reflect on, and use REACH data.
- Schools in which teachers felt respected as knowledgeable professionals encouraged collaboration among colleagues and the leveraging of internal expertise to support REACH-related practice changes.

Formal Collaborative Structures/Settings
- Teachers identified several formal collaborative structures and opportunities existing in their school which, when utilized for learning, supported improvement efforts.
- Structures that facilitated personalized, practice-focused opportunities for teacher collaboration around classroom observations were particularly impactful to teachers' practice improvement efforts.
- Coach and mentor teacher relationships were highly supportive for teachers attempting REACH-related instructional changes.
- Departmental, grade, course, and vertical team meetings were by far the most common collaborative structure teachers had access to, however teachers' ability to productively use them to support REACH-related practice changes was limited.
- Teachers' ability to leverage learning from large scale professional development for evaluation-related improvement was generally predicated on individual teachers' ability to connect and transfer professional development learning to those efforts.

2. Leadership
- Principals' attitudes toward REACH shaped teachers' attitudes toward REACH.
- Teachers who trusted their principals were more likely to welcome and use REACH feedback.
- The clarity, communication, and coherence of school-wide professional expectations and instructional priorities provided by school leadership could promote or hinder REACH data use for improvement.
- Teachers who had evaluators they perceived as knowledgeable instructional leaders or as having relevant classroom experience were often more open to evaluation feedback.
- Principals who employed an "open door policy" supported teachers' ongoing instructional improvement through intermittent, informal coaching and collaboration.

3. School Culture and Context
- Consistency and stability of school programs and initiatives facilitated teachers' ability to make individualized practice improvements.
- Schools with improvement or learning-focused professional cultures promoted teachers' confidence to make REACH-related practice improvements and collaborate with colleagues to the same ends.
- The population served by the school or classroom was, at times, perceived as limiting potential REACH-related practice changes teachers considered.

About the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research
With the goal of supporting stronger and more equitable educational outcomes for students, the [UChicago Consortium](#) conducts research of high technical quality that informs and assesses policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, families, and communities as we support the search for solutions to the challenges of school improvement. The UChicago Consortium encourages the use

of research in policy action and practice but does not advocate for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school improvement by identifying what matters most for student success, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

###