UCHICAGO Consortium
on School Research

Reaching for Improvement
Teacher Evaluation and its Role in Instructional Improvement

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Introduction

Improving the quality of instruction is one of the most significant and enduring quests in educational practice. Efforts to improve instruction are guided by years of educational research that identify teachers as the most influential *in-school* factor for improving student learning.[1] In recent years, policies and initiatives have been designed at all levels: schools, districts, and states have targeted supporting instructional improvement through teacher development. Often, these policies and initiatives exist alongside each other in context of the school, offering multiple paths into instructional improvement. In practice, most teachers experience some school-level messaging and support related to improvement, as well as system-wide policies, including teacher evaluation. This report provides an examination of how school-level conditions can effectively support teacher development and instructional improvement.

Understanding effective systems of support for instructional improvement is one essential part of developing a teaching workforce that is focused on continuously improving practice in an effort to increase equitable learning opportunities. The aim to increase the value and impact of teacher evaluation on instructional improvement efforts requires evaluation to work in concert with other improvement supports. Districts and schools are constantly revising ways of thinking about and supporting teacher improvement, including their approaches to and hopes for teacher evaluation. Many states (31, as of 2015) and districts have been working toward using evaluation data to directly inform teachers' professional learning opportunities by offering guidelines or instituting related policies.[2] In Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the shift to making evaluation part of a more wholistic approach to educator effectiveness is evident in the push from "compliance to coaching."[3] This shift implied that the mandated teacher evaluation system—Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's (REACH) Students—would be situated among regular, persistent support for instructional improvement. While the details of this shift are not yet operationalized, comprehensive support for teacher development will rely heavily on schools' internal capacities.

As efforts are made to increase the relevance and value of teacher evaluation as a developmental tool, district and school leaders must endeavor to increase coherence among instructional improvement supports. To that end, we examine how schools' and teachers' instructional improvement efforts were influenced by a districtwide teacher evaluation system situated in the individual, decentralized, Instructional Improvement Support System (IISS) of their schools. District-driven evaluation and school-level systems support instructional improvement are tightly interwoven. And the success of instructional improvement is dependent on the organizational conditions and capacities of schools.

Historically, schools have implemented reform policies unevenly in ways that are shaped by context[4] and we would expect teacher evaluation to be no different. Teachers' ability and willingness to engage, interpret, and construct implications for practice from teacher evaluation data happens in the context of schools with varied characteristics, resources, capacities,

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[1] Hanushek & Rivkin (2010); Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges (2004); Wright, Horn, & Sanders (1997).
[2] Connally & Tooley (2016).
[3] https://www.cps.edu/about/departments/talent/
[4] Louis (2007); Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer (2002).

demands, and improvement goals. Similarly, school leadership and the relationships they have with staff may also shape implementation in meaningful ways. Further, teacher evaluation is only one source of data and improvement messaging provided to teachers. Other external sources include messages from district, school, and instructional leaders, professional development providers, coaches, and even the news and social media. These sources and messages may vary or conflict, leaving teachers to decide which have more value or should be prioritized.

While one of the goals of evaluation is to provide feedback that improves teacher instruction, it is not the only way teachers and leaders collaborate around improvement in a school. Many of the systems and supports for teacher improvement work are left as responsibilities of individual schools. This decentralization may result in significant variation in the types of support teachers have access to for instructional improvement across schools. Schools have their own improvement agendas and unique IISSs. The IISS of a school and the developmental use of the evaluation system share a common aim to support teacher improvement. They are connected and mutually influenced by organizational conditions and capacities, including leadership, school culture, and collaborative structures. Though these conditions and capacities are intricately enmeshed, we create the distinctions as a heuristic to reflect how teachers described practical facilitators and barriers to their improvement efforts.

Instructional Improvement Support Systems

An Instructional Improvement Support System (IISS) includes aspects of the school that are intended to contribute to teacher development and instructional improvement. This includes the presence, clarity, and consistency of a shared vision of instructional excellence and related improvement expectations, formal structures for collaboration, and professional development opportunities and resources. Formal structures for collaboration may include various configurations of team meetings (grade-level, department, course, and vertical—one representative from every grade—teams), personalized learning opportunities like observations and walkthroughs as well as coaching and mentorship programs. Professional development sessions offered through the school or department are also a common component of the IISS of a school.

District-level teacher evaluation policy endeavors to support development of individual teachers by aiding their improvement through focused, practice-based feedback intended to guide improvement efforts. At the heart of teacher evaluation reform is the generation of more detailed data and feedback to teachers about their instructional practices, with goal of that data being used to guide improvement. By providing teachers a concrete picture of what high-quality instruction should look like in the district—and information about their own practice in comparison—it is presumed that teachers will use this information to inform their improvement efforts. These systems include multiple sources of data, providing different lenses on teacher practice through classroom observations of professional practice, test-based measures of student growth, and student surveys. Classroom observations are often structured around a

rubric of professional practice, identifying key elements of effective teaching against which teachers will be assessed. Definition of practice expectations establishes a shared language around and understanding of what proficient teaching requires in their state, district, or school.

In order to expand the amount and variety of data available to teachers and leaders, evaluation reform places increased demands on school capacities generally and leadership specifically.[5] Evaluation places significant time demands on leaders,[6] as does building personal and school capacities around data use.[7] This data-use approach to supporting teacher development is predicated on the assumed logic that observation, feedback, and data about student performance can and will be used to inform and guide the practice improvement efforts of teachers.[8] These improvements in instruction will, in turn, lead to improved student learning and achievement. However, the context in which evaluation reform is being implemented shapes whether this goal is achieved.

Despite the considerable resources dedicated to teacher evaluation reform, there is currently little evidence on the mechanisms by which evaluation translates into improvements in teachers' instructional practice. Similarly, the organizational conditions and capacities of schools shape if and how data generated by the teacher evaluation system is used to inform instructional development, yet this influence remains understudied. Understanding how evaluation data-use for improvement occurs in schools and identifying the organizational conditions and capacities which may be leveraged to support improvement efforts is essential if schools and districts hope to support teacher development.

This Study

To address this need, we designed a two-pronged approach to examine the use of evaluation data for improvement. The first is an *evaluation-specific approach* that looked explicitly at teachers' instructional improvement efforts across the district that were prompted by REACH. The second is a *comprehensive approach* that looked more broadly at how teachers' instructional improvement efforts were prompted by both 1) their school's unique IISS and 2) their school's implementation of REACH—and the dynamics between IISS and REACH-driven efforts. Together, this two-pronged approach allowed us to identify common organizational conditions and sources of support for evaluation data use across school contexts while also surfacing the variability in how schools support teacher learning generally.

For this report we use data from interviews with teachers and principals in CPS focused on instructional improvement, as well as evaluation ratings, personnel data, and survey responses on school quality (*5Essentials* Survey) and teacher evaluation for sampling purposes. (See the box titled **Interview Data Used in this Brief** on p.7, **Appendix B**, and **Appendix C** for a detailed description of data sources). We explored the ways in which teacher evaluation—both the process and the performance data it generates—helped (or hindered) teacher development. In an effort to understand how evaluation fit alongside school-level instructional improvement

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[5] Donaldson & Cobb (2015); Sartain et al. (2011).
[6] Lavigne & Chamberlain (2014).
[7] Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park (2008).
[8] Marsh & Farrell (2015); Firestone & Donaldson (2019).

support systems, we examined teachers' experiences with instructional improvement in seven case schools.

Specifically, the following research questions guided our inquiry:

- How and to what extent are teachers using teacher evaluation data, particularly classroom observation data, to guide practice improvement?
- How and to what extent does school context influence teacher use of evaluation data?
- How does the interaction between the teacher evaluation system and school-level instructional improvement support systems shape teacher instructional improvement?

We found that almost all the organizational characteristics and capacities which meaningfully supported teacher learning and improvement were *universal*—meaning they supported teacher improvement efforts no matter where the effort derived—from evaluation data or somewhere else. However, the degree to which REACH mattered as a data-source to guide improvement heavily depended on the strength of a school's IISS. Schools with stronger IISSs supported teacher learning and instructional improvement no matter where a change effort originated, while teachers in schools with less-developed IISSs often faced challenges, especially when attempting personalized, non-programmatic improvement efforts. Ultimately, this suggests that district (or school) efforts to cultivate the organizational conditions identified as supportive for evaluation data use could not only help improve the efficacy of teacher evaluations, but it could also enhance support for teacher improvement overall.

In Chapter Two, we outline our study and present the analytic framework which structured our case studies. In Chapter Three, we summarize our findings across schools on which organizational conditions and capacities facilitated teacher use of evaluation data. In Chapter Four, we look at the implications of these findings for school leaders and policymakers trying to support teacher improvement. Following that, we offer a set of framing questions for the case studies which serve as points of reflection to help readers connect to and reflect on the opportunities and challenges in their own school and district. Last, in Chapter Five, we take a deep dive into the complexities of teacher instructional improvement in schools presenting case studies of four schools, each of which highlight how organizational conditions shaped the developmental use of evaluation data specifically and the instructional improvement process more generally.

REACH Components and Ratings

The CPS REACH teacher evaluation system includes two main components:[A]

1. **Professional Practice,** the most heavily weighted element of REACH, is measured by multiple classroom observations using an evidence-based observation rubric.
   - Evaluators (principals and assistant principals) conduct observations, collect evidence, and assign ratings on the CPS Framework for Teaching (FFT), a modified version of the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching, and hold both a pre- and post-observation conference with teachers.[B]
   - In this rubric, teachers are rated on four domains of teaching practice listed below. Each of the domains is further broken down into 4-5 components in which expectations for each level of performance are described in detail.
     - Preparation and Planning
     - Classroom Environment
     - Instruction
     - Professional Responsibility
   - Teachers must be observed three times to receive REACH ratings. Non-tenured teachers and tenured teachers with previous low ratings are observed three times each year. Tenured teachers with previous high ratings are observed three times over the course of two years.

2. **Student Growth** is another key element of REACH. CPS uses two different types of student assessments as part of REACH:
   - **Value-added measure (VAM)**: Teachers in grades 3-8 reading and/or math receive an individual value-added score based on their student's NWEA MAP—an adaptive, computer-based test.
   - **Performance tasks:** Developed by teams of CPS teachers and central office staff, performance tasks are written or hands-on assessments designed to measure students' mastery—or progress toward mastery—of a particular skill or standard. Performance Tasks are typically administered and scored by teachers.

REACH Scores and Ratings

Teacher professional practice scores are combined with student growth scores for an overall REACH score, which then translates into possible ratings of "Unsatisfactory," "Developing," "Proficient," and "Excellent."

For more details on the percentages of each measure, see Appendix A.

[A] Chicago Public Schools (2019–20).

[B] Danielson (2009).

Chapter 1. Study Details and Analytic Framework

This report describes instructional improvement efforts in seven Chicago schools. The data used in this report is a subset from a larger mixed-methods study that draws on districtwide surveys of teachers in the 2017–18 school year and teacher and principal interviews conducted across three time points from spring 2017 through spring 2018. These interviews provide rich descriptions of how teachers and principals engaged with REACH—specifically the classroom observation and summary report—and offer insights into other, school-initiated instructional improvement efforts.

The seven case study schools were purposefully sampled from schools where teachers said 1) that the principal was a strong instructional leader and 2) that there were high levels of trust between the principal and teachers. These reports of leadership quality came from the spring 2015 administration of the *5Essentials* Survey. The *5Essentials* Survey is a comprehensive, evidence-based system designed to drive improvement in schools through the identification of strengths and needs associated with five critical domains of school performance. (See Appendix C for specific items.) We also sought schools where there was some stability in leadership. We sampled this way with the assumption that the presence of strong, stable instructional leadership would shape the implementation of REACH and subsequent teacher practice changes. Similarly, we would expect these schools might not only productively implement REACH, but also have strong systems for supporting the instructional development of teachers more generally. We hoped to identify organizational conditions and capacities within these schools that supported teachers' learning and improvements in their practice. To ensure inclusion of schools that serve students with different needs, we also explicitly considered the socioeconomic status of the students in the schools, as well as geographic and racial/ethnic group makeup for the students. Schools also had teachers with a range of evaluation ratings, so that we could interview teachers with high REACH ratings and low REACH ratings. These criteria provided a set of schools where principals had the opportunity to use evaluation data to improve instruction, across a variety of contexts.

This study highlights organizational conditions that support teacher improvement using a two-pronged approach, an evaluation-specific approach, and a comprehensive approach. The former looked at teachers' instructional improvement prompted by REACH while the latter took a broader view, including instructional improvements that were prompted by both 1) their school's unique IISSs and 2) their school's implementation of REACH—and any cohesion of IISS and REACH efforts. These complementary perspectives allow us to first offer insights into how districts may effectively leverage teacher evaluation for its developmental purpose across school settings, while also acknowledging and providing insight into the complexity and nuance of teacher improvement within schools, which often have their own instructional improvement agendas and initiatives. These two perspectives necessitated two approaches to analysis and framing.

Interview Data Used in this Brief

The findings in this report are based on teacher and principal interviews conducted over the course of two school years. We interviewed seven principals in four elementary schools and three high schools during the spring and summer of 2017. This design allowed us to discuss instructional improvement efforts over time, including two evaluation cycles. Our principal interview protocol included topics such as perceptions of REACH and instruction in school, including how administrators and instructional leaders supported struggling teachers. In total, interviews with 44 unique teachers were included in this analysis. Most participants were interviewed at multiple timepoints (see Table A for interview timeline). The teacher protocol focused on perceptions of REACH, instruction in school decisions, and whether REACH factored into these areas. Because we wanted to understand the experiences of teachers with a variety of positions, backgrounds, and experiences with evaluation, we purposefully selected our teacher sample to reflect the range of teachers across the district. Sixty-six percent of our participants were tenured teachers, as compared to the 72 percent across the district in the 2014–15 school year.

Table A. Interview Timeline

Timeline	Spring/Summer 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018
Schools	5	7	7
Administrators	7	n/a	n/a
Teachers	25	38	34

Evaluation-Specific Approach to Instructional Improvement: Key Findings

The evaluation-specific approach focused on how organizational conditions could facilitate teacher development through use of data produced through REACH. As we examined teachers' use of REACH data, we identified three interwoven but distinct categories of organizational conditions and capacities that teachers identified as influential in shaping their use of evaluation data for improvement: colleagues and collaboration; leadership; and school culture. These key findings are described in detail in Chapter 3. These findings may help districts support schools to identify existing conditions and capacities that could be leveraged to support evaluation-based teacher learning and development. They also complement our March 2020 brief that identified ways to make evaluation feedback useful to teacher improvement.[9] Together these research findings illustrate the ways in which teacher evaluation may be effectively leveraged as a developmental tool.

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[9] Shyjka, Gutiérrez, & Hinton (2020).

Comprehensive Approach to Instructional Improvement: Case Studies

This comprehensive approach provides case studies of four schools to understand the complexities of teachers' instructional improvement in the school context—where the REACH teacher evaluation system is conceptualized as one data source (including observations and summary reports) and mechanism operating within a school that may have its own broader and/or distinct IISS for teachers. Accordingly, our analytic framework (see Figure 1) is built on existing research, current policy, and shifting perspectives on teacher effectiveness at the district level and draws attention to the quality and characteristics of each system for teacher development. From our interview data, we classified the robustness of both the REACH teacher evaluation system and the school's own IISS, then examined the *relationship between* REACH and the school's IISS, with a particular focus on any integration or cohesion that existed between the systems. By evaluating both systems independently and together, we were able to gain a deep understanding of the complex nature of teacher improvement efforts in context.

Figure 1. Analytic Framework
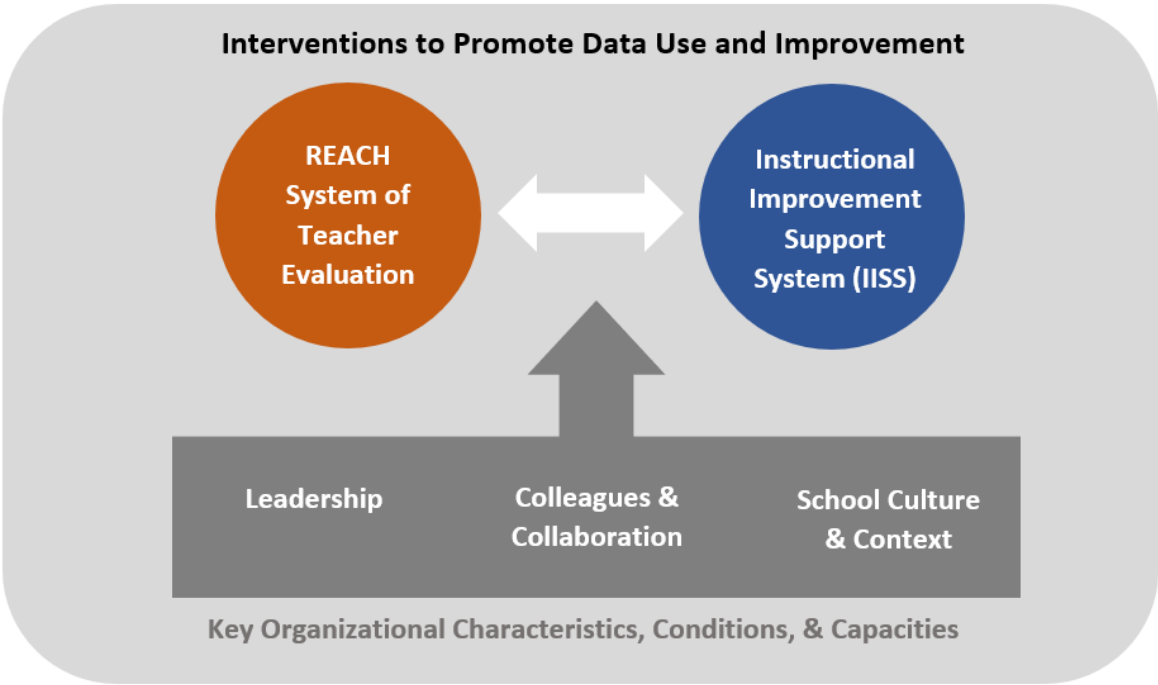
Classifying REACH Teacher Evaluation System

We categorized schools' implementation and use of the REACH teacher evaluation system for instructional improvement purposes and considered similar parallel elements. First, we examined teachers' perceptions of their school leaders' opinions about district policy for teacher evaluation. Then we examined the degree of fidelity with which REACH was implemented as intended. Finally, we assessed the presence and use of REACH elements, like the Danielson Framework for Teaching—which outlines expectations for distinguished instructional practice in the domains of planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities—for developmental purposes within the schools (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Spectrum of Support: Classifying REACH Teacher Evaluation System

REACH implemented with fidelity for evaluation & elements regularly used by school for non-evaluative purposes

REACH implemented with fidelity for evaluation & elements may be used by school for non-evaluative purposes

Inconsistent REACH implementation for evaluation & little school use outside of evaluation

REACH implementation lacking & little to no school use outside of evaluation
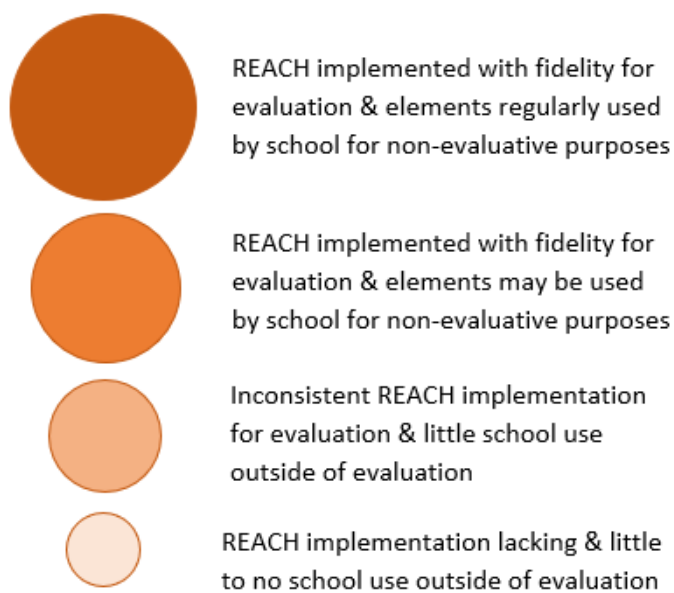
Classifying Instructional Improvement Support Systems (IISS)

To categorize the quality of the instructional improvement support system for each school along our proposed spectrum of support (see Figure 3), we examined evidence from interviews and surveys related to three dimensions: professional culture and norms; teacher knowledge of a school's instructional vision, goals, and expectations; and collaborative structures and routines.

Figure 3. Spectrum of Support: Classifying Instructional Improvement Support System

Robust system of instructional improvement support & culture of adult learning

Robust system of instructional improvement support

Inconsistent instructional improvement support

Instructional improvement support lacking
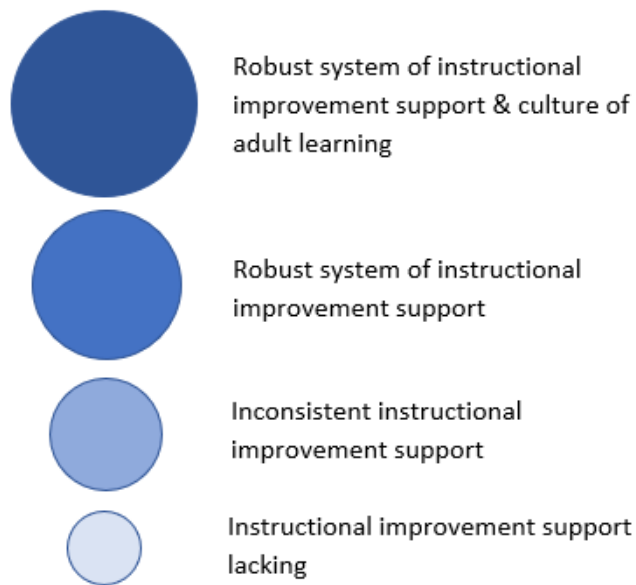
Norms of interaction and professional culture can shape social interactions, the data-use process, and teacher learning in meaningful ways.[10] Therefore, we reviewed teacher accounts of the school culture and improvement process for illustrations of school norms, particularly those related to privacy, inquiry, collaboration, and risk taking. The presence of a shared vision of high-quality instruction and related improvement goal and expectations has been found to be beneficial in developing coherence and facilitating teacher improvement efforts.[11] As such, attention was paid to the ways in which teachers characterized the instructional vision and improvement agenda of their school and the communication and expectations surrounding them. Lastly, the presence and variety of collaborative structures and routines were captured as well as the availability, frequency, consistency, and duration of these opportunities. These structures played an important role in shaping who teachers interacted with and for what purposes. These interactions directly and indirectly influenced both what data and topics received attention and the potential for generative teacher learning.

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[10] Coburn & Turner (2011).

[11] Cobb, Jackson, Henrick, & Smith (2018).

Classifying REACH-IISS Integration

Since the collection of data for this project, CPS has shifted from "compliance to coaching" in their thinking about educator effectiveness. Compliance is understood to be the implementation of just the required REACH evaluation system components. Conversely, coaching toward improvement would involve sustained attention to and coaching around the details and conversations raised by REACH, especially classroom observations, and may therefore place additional demands on schools' already strained capacities, if coaching systems are not already present. If REACH-related coaching is to be feasible for schools, it would likely be both most efficient and effective to integrate relevant elements of the REACH evaluation system into the IISS of a school. We therefore examined the current degree of integration between the REACH evaluation system and a school's IISS and how that integration shaped changes in teacher practice. This degree of integration is described in each case study in Chapter 5.

Case Studies

The four case studies presented in Chapter 5 offer district officials and school leaders opportunities to understand how school capacities and support systems are leveraged to support teacher development in a variety of school settings. We offer guiding questions to promote reflection around key organizational conditions illustrated within, and through comparisons among, the four schools.

For each school, we provide:

- A high-level overview of the *organizational characteristics, conditions, and capacities* which were salient to instructional improvement efforts
- A *classification of REACH and IISS*, including aspects of each which teachers identified as meaningful to their improvement efforts
- A *classification of REACH and IISS integration*, including how they cohere and diverge in ways which facilitated or hindered teachers' improvement efforts
- A *visual representation of the robustness of the school's REACH, IISS, and REACH-IISS integration*

One case study school, Ibelin Elementary School, offers an example of a school with limited IISS, limited REACH implementation, and a lack of integration between the two teacher learning and improvement systems (see Figure 4). The IISS for this school is the smallest (lightest blue) indicating that instructional improvement support for teachers is lacking. Teachers at this school undertaking instructional improvement efforts typically had to find their own support as opportunities for collegial collaboration and learning were infrequent, and therefore described the IISS as inconsistent and fragmented. In terms of REACH implementation, Ibelin Elementary School did not adhere to implementation expectations and there was little evidence of use of REACH or any of its elements outside district requirements. This is reflected in the smallest (lightest orange) circle for REACH. Finally, the distant separation of the circles for Ibelin Elementary School show that there was no evidence of integration of the Framework for Teaching (FFT) or any other aspect of REACH into the school's IISS.

Figure 4. Integrations of REACH into Ibelin Elementary School's Instructional Improvement Support System

In contrast, Docherty High School had a robust IISS and implemented REACH with fidelity for evaluation while also using REACH elements for non-evaluative purposes—and integrated elements of REACH and the FFT into the IISS in multiple ways (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Integrations of REACH into Docherty High School's Instructional Improvement Support System

Teachers described Docherty as having an improvement-oriented professional culture, cultivated by an instruction-focused administration. The robust IISS included regular opportunities for collegial collaboration, individualized feedback opportunities through observations, and optional afterschool adult learning opportunities. The IISS of Docherty is therefore represented by the largest (darkest blue) circle. REACH observations were implemented as expected and often resulted in productive, practice-focused conversations. Elements of the FFT regularly appeared in communications from leadership to staff. The fidelity with which REACH was implemented in Docherty and its use for non-evaluative purposes is represented by the largest (darkest orange) circle. Finally, the FFT was regularly referenced as the source of a shared vision of instructional quality at Docherty. Improvement initiatives were explicitly connected to practice change goals drawn, from the FFT. Additionally, optional weekly REACH domain-focused professional development opportunities were offered for teachers. Docherty was heavily focused on developing the instructional practices of its teachers through integrating the FFT in a developmental way. The extensive integration of the two systems of teacher learning and improvement Docherty is demonstrated by the high degree of overlap of the blue and orange circles.

Chapter 2. Supportive Organizational Conditions and Capacities for Instructional Improvement

In this chapter, we illustrate how school conditions and capacities impacted teachers' ability to leverage evaluation data for its developmental purpose, improving individual educator effectiveness and instructional quality. We will primarily focus on the last element, how school conditions shaped REACH-driven instructional improvement. When fulfilling its developmental purpose, the data produced through the teacher evaluation generally, and observations particularly, are intended to be used to guide teachers' instructional improvement efforts. However, evaluation data and feedback are rarely, if ever, the only evidence—formal or informal—which teachers receive about their practice. Teachers work with children who produce work and assessment data which can act as valuable data to inform instructional improvement efforts. They also work in schools with their own improvement agendas, expectations, and capacities. Accordingly, we spent over two years talking to teachers in seven schools to deeply understand REACH-driven instructional improvement in the multi-layered, dynamic, and complex realities in these schools.

Through speaking to teachers in these schools, we recognized three broad categories of interwoven but distinct organizational conditions and capacities which supported or could be leveraged for evaluation-driven instructional improvement. First, teachers identified *colleagues and opportunities for collaboration* as essential as sources of support for instructional improvement, which were utilized for that purpose regularly. Second, *school leaders*, who frequently also served as evaluators, played an important role in making evaluation work. Leaders' identity and relationship with teachers shaped the attitudes, expectations, and abilities of teachers to engage and use data for improvement. Third, teachers qualified some elements of the *school context and climate* as supportive of individualized improvement efforts, like having a learning-focused professional culture, and some as challenges like programmatic churn. Though the schools included in our study varied in many ways, teachers often articulated similar perspectives about what really mattered to their motivation and ability to make REACH-related practice changes, specifically, and instructional improvements more generally.

This chapter illuminates the organizational conditions and capacities that supported teacher learning and development across the schools we studied. While an overview of these supportive elements is presented here, many are also reflected in rich detail in one of more of the four the case studies provided at the end of this report. Connections with case studies are explicitly identified when present.

1. Colleagues and Collaboration

Across the seven schools we studied, colleagues were the most cited influential resource supporting instructional improvement efforts. A strong sense of support and collaboration within the teacher community was a key support for teacher improvement and use of REACH. Positive, supportive relationships encouraged informal connections with other teachers, who were important facilitators of teacher sense-making and use of REACH data and other improvement efforts. Relatedly, teachers managed to make the most of informal moments of learning and collaboration when they had access to regular collaborative structures and experience with learning routines which encouraged practice change efforts and instructional improvement for most.

Collegial relationships and trust provided the basis for many teachers' willingness to share and discuss, reflect on, and use REACH data.

Most teachers reported sharing REACH results or feedback with teachers at their grade level/subject, area/position, or with those whom they shared a personal relationship. Teachers discussed REACH results with others to understand calculation of scores, assess fairness, prepare for an observation, or reflect and consider instructional changes. Many teachers found discussions related to REACH results or related practice change attempts happened organically and sporadically, normalizing continuous instructional improvement efforts in impactful ways. Though positive collegial relationships and trust facilitated this normalization, without regular access to formal collaborative structures and opportunities, these relationships were limited in the degree to which they were engaged in support of systematic instructional improvement efforts.

> *Connect:* To see an example of how strong, trusting collegial relationships supported teachers' sense-making and use of REACH data for improvement, refer to the **case study of Alpert Elementary School**.

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.

When the culture of the school situated teachers as knowledgeable professionals, it encouraged teachers to view their colleagues as beneficial resources for practice change. Teachers repeatedly described strategically utilizing the instructional experience and expertise of their colleagues to inform REACH-related instructional improvements. In each school we studied, teachers identified specific colleagues as experts or "go-to" support sources for particular skills or techniques. In schools where collegial collaboration was positioned as a norm, many teachers could more readily leverage formal and informal collaboration toward adult learning and practice change. Expectations of collegial cooperation inspired teachers to use informal opportunities to exchange and reflect on instruction and improvement. Such expectations also indirectly facilitated teacher's collaboration across departments and grades.

> *Connect:* See our **Reyes High School case study** for an example of how collegial trust and accumulated expertise in one school helped support teachers making both REACH-related and general instructional improvement efforts.

Formal Collaborative Structures/Settings

Teachers identified several formal collaborative structures and opportunities existing in their school which, when utilized for learning, supported improvement efforts.

Teachers repeatedly described meaningful instances of instructional improvement, focused collaboration, and learning that occurred in formal settings like grade-level, course, department, and vertical team meetings, peer observations, coaching and mentor partnerships, and professional development sessions. These spaces provided teachers with opportunities for collective sense-making about REACH ratings and feedback. It is important to note that while many teachers depicted collaborative structures as helpful to their instructional improvement efforts, not all teachers had regular access to formal collaborative opportunities, and some depicted this limited access as a barrier to instructional change. Similarly, many teachers who did have consistent access to collaborative opportunities did not experience them as being used to support adult learning and development. While regular access to formal opportunities for collaboration was important, successfully leveraging them in support of instructional improvement was more difficult because of logistical concerns, professional culture, and programmatic churn. For many teachers, settings that allowed for one-on-one or small group, practice-focused collaboration were more helpful in supporting evaluation-related improvement efforts.

Structures that facilitated personalized, practice-focused opportunities for teacher collaboration around classroom observations were particularly impactful to teachers' practice improvement efforts.

Across schools, teachers repeatedly reported the value of or desire for opportunities to observe teachers who excelled in an area of practice they were trying to improve. Teachers characterized opportunities to observe other instructors or to be observed themselves as providing a space for meaningful and practical individualized learning and reflection. These spaces were also ideal for supporting teachers who were attempting REACH-related improvements, because they could request feedback on target areas. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to observe other teachers because it gave them a chance to see familiar strategies enacted in new ways or be exposed to new instructional approaches or classroom management techniques. On the occasions when observations were paired with opportunities to debrief the experience, ask questions, and generate actionable ideas about how to improve moving forward, the perceived benefit was even greater. These sessions allowed teachers to directly engage with each other over a shared, concrete experience, increasing the relevance and applicability of the learning.

> *Connect:* See the **Alpert Elementary School case study** for an example of teachers using REACH observations as a source of personalized, practice-focused feedback which informed their improvement efforts.
>
> *Connect:* Refer to the **Reyes High School case study** to see how one school included regular opportunities for practice-focused learning in their instructional improvement support system.

Coach and mentor teacher relationships were highly supportive for teachers attempting REACH-related instructional changes.

While access to these types of partnerships was limited, those who participated benefited from the individualized, improvement-focused support and feedback provided. These partnerships were most often reported by new teachers and were designed to assist them in their induction into the profession, as well as to further develop their instructional and classroom management skills. Teachers often characterized the duration, typically at least a year, as providing multiple opportunities for relationship building that was trusting and collegial. For most teachers in these partnerships, the personal relationship—coupled with regular, learning-focused interactions—made for a particularly potent form of instructional change support. Teachers not only reported discussing REACH ratings and related instructional changes with their partners, but also reflected on their enactment of these changes in ways that helped them hone specific instructional skills. At times, the growth teachers attributed to these relationships was attributed to the alignment of grade or subject taught between the partners. Teachers with mentors or coaches who worked in the same grade level or subject area said the specificity of their practice discussions augmented their usefulness. While coaching and mentor partnerships were quite fruitful in their ability to support REACH data use and instructional improvement, the scope of this impact was frequently limited to new or struggling teachers.

> *Connect:* To better understand how a new teacher mentorship program provided some teachers a source of consistent, individualized support within a school with a fragmented IISS where REACH was a meaningful and key source of instructional feedback, look to the **Alpert Elementary School case study**.

> *Connect:* To learn more about using the expectations in the FFT to structure a REACH-based teacher fellowship program to support new and struggling teachers make evaluation-driven improvements, see the **Reyes High School case study**.

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.

These meetings were most often described as spaces dedicated to addressing pressing logistical and behavioral concerns, which occasionally provided an opportunity for collaborative planning or review of student data. While it was often difficult for these opportunities to guide learning and support around practice change, they helped build the professional community generally while increasing trust between individuals. Teachers who described these meetings as regular sites for reflection and learning were frequently working in schools or departments with strong data use capacities and/or shared goals around instructional improvement or student learning. The norms and routines of these schools and departments smoothed the way for productive review of student and teacher data for the purpose of adult learning and improvement.

> *Connect:* Two of our case schools, **Nadler Elementary School and Reyes High School** provide distinct examples of organizational conditions which facilitated teachers' ability to successfully leverage team meetings as collaborative opportunities for reflection and improvement.

> *Connect:* To better understand the challenges that teachers faced to using formal

collaborative opportunities to support learning and instructional see the Khan High School case study.

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.

Several teachers identified these larger scale professional development sessions as providing regular opportunities for learning and thinking about their work. However, these professional development sessions typically focused on a curriculum or program, which often offered narrow learning opportunities specific to the topic. As a result, some teachers felt professional development sessions were a temporary support to their work, but rarely of long-term value in terms of facilitating substantive pedagogical improvements. Larger scale professional development opportunities had the limitation that they did not provide for the individualized or granular feedback possible through other collaborative structures more highly valued by teachers. Despite the noted constraints to teacher learning, professional development sessions remained a stalwart structure in schools' instructional improvement support systems, though one that was rarely cited as a source of REACH-related improvement support.

2. Leadership

School leaders shaped teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward REACH. Leadership also impacted teachers' use of evaluation data to guide improvement. Observation for teacher evaluation in the district is typically conducted by a school's administrators. As a result, teachers and leaders have preexisting knowledge, perceptions, and expectations of one another that can influence the evaluation process and its potential to improve teacher practice. The way teachers perceive school leaders and the tenor of the relationships between administration and teachers can explicitly and implicitly influence teachers' engagement in the evaluation process. School leaders can also enable and constrain teachers' abilities to make REACH-related practice improvements through how they design and provide structural supports, the culture they cultivate, and the expectations they set in their school. Simply put, school leaders have a significant and multi-faceted influence on teachers' use of evaluation data for improvement.

Principals' attitudes toward REACH shaped teachers' attitudes toward REACH.

Principals' attitudes toward and framing of REACH teacher evaluation mattered for teacher engagement in the evaluation process. The principal's perspective on and approach to REACH affected teachers' expectations that evaluation could provide helpful and usable data to guide their improvement efforts. Consequently, the importance of making and pursuing the specific practice changes suggested was similarly influenced. As would be expected, teachers reported less engagement with evaluations in schools led by principals who were either explicit in their dislike for or took a compliance approach to REACH. Often teachers in these schools expressed a *"if they don't care why should I?"* perspective toward REACH observations. If a principal was not invested in the evaluation process and its potential as a source of data, teachers were less likely to be as well.

> *Connect:* The **Reyes High School and Nadler Elementary School case studies** provide

insight into the ways a principal's value of and investment in the REACH system influenced the likelihood with which teachers will engage in the process to support their professional development and instructional improvement.

Teachers who trusted their principals were more likely to welcome and use REACH feedback.

Positive, trusting relationships between teachers and evaluators lessened anxiety around teacher evaluation and encouraged engagement in the process. Anxiety and fear associated with the evaluation experience was reported far less by teachers who identified relationships with their evaluator as trusting or supportive. These attributes encouraged teachers to take a "benefit of the doubt" view of REACH. They were more open to feedback and less defensive. Several teachers described having fewer accountability and misuse concerns about teacher evaluation because they had positive and trusting relationships with their evaluator. Relatedly, teachers regarded feedback data as having potential for use more often. Some of these teachers expressed a willingness to attempt suggested practice changes because they trusted that their principal would have reasonable expectations.

> *Connect:* To learn more about how the trusting teacher-principal relationships in one school successfully reduced teachers' anxiety about the accountability aspects of evaluation, see the **Nadler Elementary School case study.**

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.

School leaders who clearly identified and communicated expectations about professionalism and instructional practice primed teachers for the expectations of the FFT. Alignment of leader expectations with the definition of distinguished practice in the FFT promoted use of REACH-related feedback for teachers. For some teachers, this was because making REACH-related improvements furthered two complementary aims. Changes addressed an area identified for improvement at the personal level, while also representing progress toward a school-level instructional vision. For other teachers, the presence of clear leader-communicated practice change goals established expectations around the practice improvement process. In contrast, in schools where teachers reported their leaders held inconsistent or conflicting goals and expectations, some teachers felt unmotivated to undertake REACH-related improvement efforts.

Teachers who had evaluators they perceived as knowledgeable instructional leaders or as having relevant classroom experience were often more open to evaluation feedback.

Teachers shared multiple explanations as to why this evaluator characteristic was so meaningful. They believed that the feedback provided could be practical and applicable in the classroom and that it would align with other on-going improvement work. This alignment could be related to school improvement initiatives or individualized, REACH-related improvements. Some teachers who perceived administrators' instructional knowledge as weak or misaligned to their specific instructional position—this was especially common for teachers who did not teach core academic subjects—reported frustration over the quality of the feedback and the potential for

later administrative support for improvement. Occasionally teachers found that REACH feedback encouraged them to attempt a specific instructional improvement, prompting them to reach out to their administrators to secure direct, internal support for this improvement work. Several teachers noted that in these instances their administrators were not helpful because they did not possess adequate instructional knowledge. Often, teachers who taught non-core subjects or worked in co-teaching environments found that their administrators also lacked the skills to connect them with the content specific learning resources to meet their needs to support instructional improvement. As a result, these teachers were often left to locate resources and professional development opportunities to support REACH-related instructional improvement on their own.

> *Connect:* For an example of a school in which core instructional teachers described very different levels of support and access to improvement resources than non-core and specialist teachers, see the **Alpert Elementary School case study**.

Principals who employed an "open door policy" supported teachers' ongoing instructional improvement through intermittent, informal coaching and collaboration.

Leaders who employed an "open door policy" toward staff provided informal support opportunities which some teachers reported using when attempting practice changes. Teachers who attempted REACH-related practice changes often did so in an ad hoc way, making efforts whenever the opportunity presented. As such, some attempted a practice change without access to another person to sense-make and reflect on the experience with. In some of these cases, teachers made use of a person in school leadership to reflect on their efforts, as well as being introduced to new and potentially helpful ideas.

3. School Culture and Context

Teachers across schools described the ways in which the school culture and context could function as a support or a hindrance to their REACH-related instructional improvement efforts. Both the programmatic stability and the professional culture of a school heavily shaped teachers' willingness and ability to attend to the type of individualized instructional improvement efforts stimulated by evaluation feedback. When teachers experienced less programmatic churn, it opened opportunities to use professional development and formal collaborative opportunities to engage with data for reflection, learning, and improvement. Similarly, formal collaborative opportunities in all forms were more likely to be leveraged in support of adult learning and improvement when schools had professional cultures that held those as fundamental expectations. Consequently, the quality of these two organizational conditions could constrain or enable the individualized instructional improvement efforts of teachers on multiple levels. Some teachers also highlighted how context-specific considerations, particularly the students they served, shaped their motivation and capacity to attempt the specific instructional changes identified in REACH feedback. Teachers almost always discussed REACH feedback and improvement efforts in the context of the particular students they served. As such, it was relatively unsurprising to find that teachers' beliefs about their students and the nature of the connection of the school to the community it served were pertinent factors in shaping teachers' engagement with evaluation data.

Consistency and stability of school programs and initiatives facilitated teachers' ability to make individualized practice improvements.

Teachers repeatedly lamented that they had neither the time nor focus to systematically pursue personalized or REACH-related practice improvements because their learning and change efforts needed to be focused elsewhere. Teachers at several schools raised frustrations over what they framed as a constant turnover of curriculums, programs, and initiatives. These new initiatives were typically paired with professional development designed to support teacher implementation. Though teachers often appreciated this support, the scope of impact was viewed as limited as it was often program-specific. As such, when a new curriculum or program was employed, much of that previous learning was now perceived as somewhat inapplicable. Teachers whose instructional course-load changed frequently faced similar challenges to their personal instructional improvement trajectory, as they were often focused on learning new content and curricula. Teachers also highlighted how the need to constantly focus their learning and development energy on programs and curriculums reduced their bandwidth to take on and attend to personalized practice change efforts. It follows that teachers in schools with relatively more programmatic stability faced fewer challenges in personalized improvement efforts, like those intended to stem from evaluation feedback. For some, stability also allowed teachers to feel more comfortable trying new instructional techniques when the content and curricula were familiar.

> *Connect:* To understand how the program and policy churn of one school challenged teachers' evaluation-driven improvement efforts, as well as inhibited substantive teacher learning generally, see the **Alpert Elementary School case study**.

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.

Teachers typically described schools with improvement or learning-focused professional cultures as having had a defined instructional improvement agenda which was connected to the work occurring in formal collaborative settings and coupled with expectations for professional growth. These types of professional cultures were particularly supportive for instructional improvement if they occurred when high performance expectations were explicitly paired with supports associated with them. Teachers working in these cultures often described feeling confident in their ability to access support for improvement efforts, whether they were REACH-related or not. This access, combined with their positioning as a learner, helped some teachers attempt instructional improvement efforts which seemed difficult or out of their comfort zone, because they felt that it was a safe environment to experiment and try new things. Teachers who engaged in this supported experimentation often reported making progress toward their practice change goals. Across schools, teachers identified aspects of the professional culture of schools which supported individualized improvement efforts, including positioning them as professionals, holding collaboration as a norm, and being improvement or learning focused.

> *Connect:* To see how having a learning-focused professional cultures had a positive impact on teacher improvement in a school with rich integration of REACH into their IISS, refer to the **Reyes High School case study**.

Connect: For an example of how a learning-focused professional culture helped teachers make the most of REACH feedback in a school with a relatively weak IISS, see the Nadler Elementary School case study.

The population served by the school or classroom was, at times, perceived as limiting potential REACH-related practice changes teachers considered.

When reflecting on the usefulness of REACH feedback for guiding instructional change, some teachers described the suggested changes or expectations in the FFT as not appropriate or would not work for the students they served. Teachers cited a variety of ways in which students' skill level, background, or identity made it difficult to meet the instructional expectations as defined in the FFT or by student growth measures. The extent to which teachers felt secure in their framing of students as a challenge to instructional improvement sometimes reflected the relationship between the school and community. Teachers working in schools that had close connections to the community acknowledged the challenge of making achievement gains, but also often held an asset-based perception of students that encouraged their own improvement efforts.

Chapter 3. Interpretive Summary

As states, districts, and schools rethink how to leverage their existing teacher evaluation systems as a tool to support instructional improvement more holistically, this study offers several specific observations that could inform their efforts. The findings from this study have important implications for districts' and schools' instructional improvement systems (IISSs), as they highlight organizational conditions that facilitated teacher learning and contributed to instructional improvement.

Key Takeaways

First, the impact of teacher evaluation was limited when it was isolated and separated from any broader school-wide IISS. Therefore, identifying and leveraging opportunities to build coherence between the FFT (the district's vision of instructional excellence) and school-level instructional goals could connect evaluation feedback and a teacher's ongoing improvement efforts. Policy and program churn at the district and school levels was also disruptive to teacher improvement efforts because the lack of stability reduced teacher buy-in for related professional learning and redirected energy from other instructional improvement. Coherence of instructional vision and programmatic stability within a school protected against disruptions to teachers' instructional improvement process. **Therefore, district and school leaders who endeavor to support instructional improvement might benefit from coordinating systems of support for teacher learning and instructional goals.**

Second, our case studies highlighted how variation within schools' IISSs impacted teacher learning and instructional improvement. Though all the schools in our study offered some supports for professional development and teacher learning, the elements and quality of support provided varied significantly. Variation in schools' IISSs reflected their nature as a largely undefined expectation of the district, other than the FFT. Schools were expected to support teacher learning and professional development; the district provided some resources for this purpose. But ultimately the design of the IISS was primarily determined by school leaders and, to a lesser degree, instructional leadership teams and teacher leaders and school capacity. This resulted in teachers in some schools having access to more resources and learning opportunities.

Third, no matter where teacher learning and improvement efforts stemmed from—the districtwide REACH evaluation process or the school's own IISS—the organizational conditions and capacities that meaningfully supported those efforts were largely similar across all schools. This is positive news for policymakers and district leaders who seek to have teacher evaluation leveraged more effectively as a developmental tool. Any related organizational capacity-building efforts should serve instructional improvement comprehensively. Unfortunately, many of the conditions and capacities that were most influential and supportive of teacher learning and improvement are not simple to achieve. Instructional improvement remains a complex and multifaceted challenge for educators, schools, and districts. For key organizational considerations and capacities which were essential in supporting adult learning and instructional

improvement, see the next section, *Essential Organizational Conditions and Capacities for Consideration for Supporting Instructional Improvement*.

Given the district's intent to move REACH implementation "from compliance to coaching"[12]—shifting from simply evaluating teachers to helping them develop or deepen their practice—**district leaders, network chiefs, school leaders, and teacher leaders will need to ask themselves how they can best support development of these complex organizational conditions and capacities.** Schools will require additional district assistance and resources to make this shift initially and to aid development of internal capacities to continue the substantive work of supporting teacher learning and improvement over time. And some schools will require more assistance than others. Our findings illustrate that schools with weak IISSs will face the biggest challenges in this shift to provide more instructional support for teachers as part of REACH implementation; they will need to build the conditions and capacities that already exist at other schools. **District leaders must be prepared to provide increased levels of assistance in these schools to avoid exacerbating existing cross-school inequalities in support for teacher learning and instructional improvement.**

Essential Organizational Conditions and Capacities for Consideration for Supporting Instructional Improvement

Staff relationships and collegial trust in schools are key organizational conditions which school and district leaders may want to consider as they seek to support teacher learning. The internal expertise of staff at a school and the relationships among staff played an important role in shaping instructional improvement.

- Across almost all schools, teachers identified colleagues as their first and most influential source of support for improvement. They described the instructional experience and expertise of colleagues as a valuable and often-utilized improvement resource. Teachers routinely identified specific individuals in their schools as the "go-to" person when seeking support for a particular issue. Sometimes this was a recognized teacher leader, but that was not always the case. Consequently, the existing human capital within a school was remarkably impactful not only for student learning but for adult learning as well. These findings highlight an existing resource in schools that could be developed and leveraged to support instructional improvement more broadly.
- The presence of trusting relationships influenced the set of collegial resources that teachers accessed during their improvement process. Collegial trust not only shaped teachers' willingness to be vulnerable and engage in informal and formal learning opportunities, but it also influenced the set of colleagues' teachers typically accessed as learning resources.

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[12] See https://www.cps.edu/about/departments/talent/

Both personalized learning opportunities and collaborative structures provided natural opportunities to align the IISS of schools and the evaluation system to benefit teacher learning and instructional improvement. Regularly-scheduled, clearly-defined collaboration opportunities explicitly connected to a shared vision of instructional excellence to bolster teachers' improvement efforts, as did personalized learning opportunities like observations.

- Most teachers described personalized learning opportunities as highly impactful in guiding and informing their instructional improvement process. The type of feedback provided during observation opportunities was typically viewed as more usable than other data sources, because it was grounded in the realities of the classroom. As this type of learning opportunity is particularly impactful for its specificity and ability to transfer feedback and enable discussion directly to practice changes, it may be beneficial to consider how to include these opportunities as a regular part of schools' IISSs.

- For many teachers, the characteristics of the collaborative structures (including frequency, duration, and purpose) determined their potential to support learning and development. Several teachers found that increased frequency of meeting opportunities allowed them to resolve administrative issues (such as meeting and scheduling issues), without overtaking time for collaboration around instruction. Meetings with overly general or ill-defined agendas often resulted in unproductive use of teachers' time. Similarly, teachers frequently dismissed the impact of whole school professional development opportunities to their practices because the techniques were not easily transferable to other areas of practice or that they were not relevant to their current area of improvement work. Each of these issues was somewhat ameliorated when professional development learning was explicitly connected to a shared vision of instructional excellence be that the FFT or something else.

A strong professional learning culture and shared vision of instructional excellence supported teacher improvement and data use. In fact, the ability of these collaborative opportunities to be leveraged for teacher learning and improvement was largely dependent on the professional culture of the school.

- Teachers who identified their school as having a culture that centered learning and improvement were more willing and able to utilize teacher evaluation data for improvement purposes. Teachers in schools with a culture of adult learning or strong culture of data use leveraged formal collaborative settings for adult learning and development more often than those in other schools. Teachers in schools or on teams that regularly employed facilitated collaboration and data routines felt more comfortable and had more tools when engaging in individualized improvement efforts. Leaders may want to consider how best to integrate data protocols and routines to facilitate teacher learning.

- Teachers in schools that had a shared vision of instructional excellence or clearly held high instructional expectations were more likely to engage with data for developmental purposes. Shared vision and expectations not only provided teachers a common language to discuss practice change—they also engendered a feeling of collective responsibility

and support. In schools with distinctly separate IISSs and evaluation systems, the shared vision encouraged general engagement in instructional improvement but did not typically serve the same purpose for REACH-related improvement. In contrast, teachers in schools who utilized the FFT as a guide for instructional excellence were often able to connect improvement efforts to elements of the FFT, whether the effort was directly connected to evaluation feedback or not. For schools trying to develop a shared vision for instructional excellence, the FFT offered several benefits as a model, especially as it established consistent expectations across the two systems aimed at teacher development.

Chapter 4. Case Studies: Instructional Improvement in the School

The four case studies presented in Chapter 5 offer school and district leaders opportunities to understand how school capacities and support systems are leveraged to support teacher development in a variety of school settings. Pseudonyms are used for all schools and participants. We offer guiding questions in the ***Case Study Reflection Questions*** box on p.28 to promote reflection around key organizational conditions illustrated within, and through comparisons among, the four schools.

For each school, we provide:
- A high-level overview of the *organizational characteristics, conditions, and capacities* which were salient to instructional improvement efforts
- A *classification of REACH and IISSs*, including aspects of each that teachers identified as meaningful to their improvement efforts
- A *classification of REACH and IISS integration*, including how they cohere and diverge in ways which facilitated or hindered teachers' improvement efforts
- A *visual representation of the robustness of the school's REACH, IISS, and REACH-IISS integration* (**see Figure 6**)

Figure 6. Integrations of REACH into Schools' Instructional Improvement Support Systems for Case Study Schools

Reyes High School

Khan High School

Docherty High School

Alpert Elementary School

Nadler Elementary School

Ibelin Elementary School

Akins Elementary School
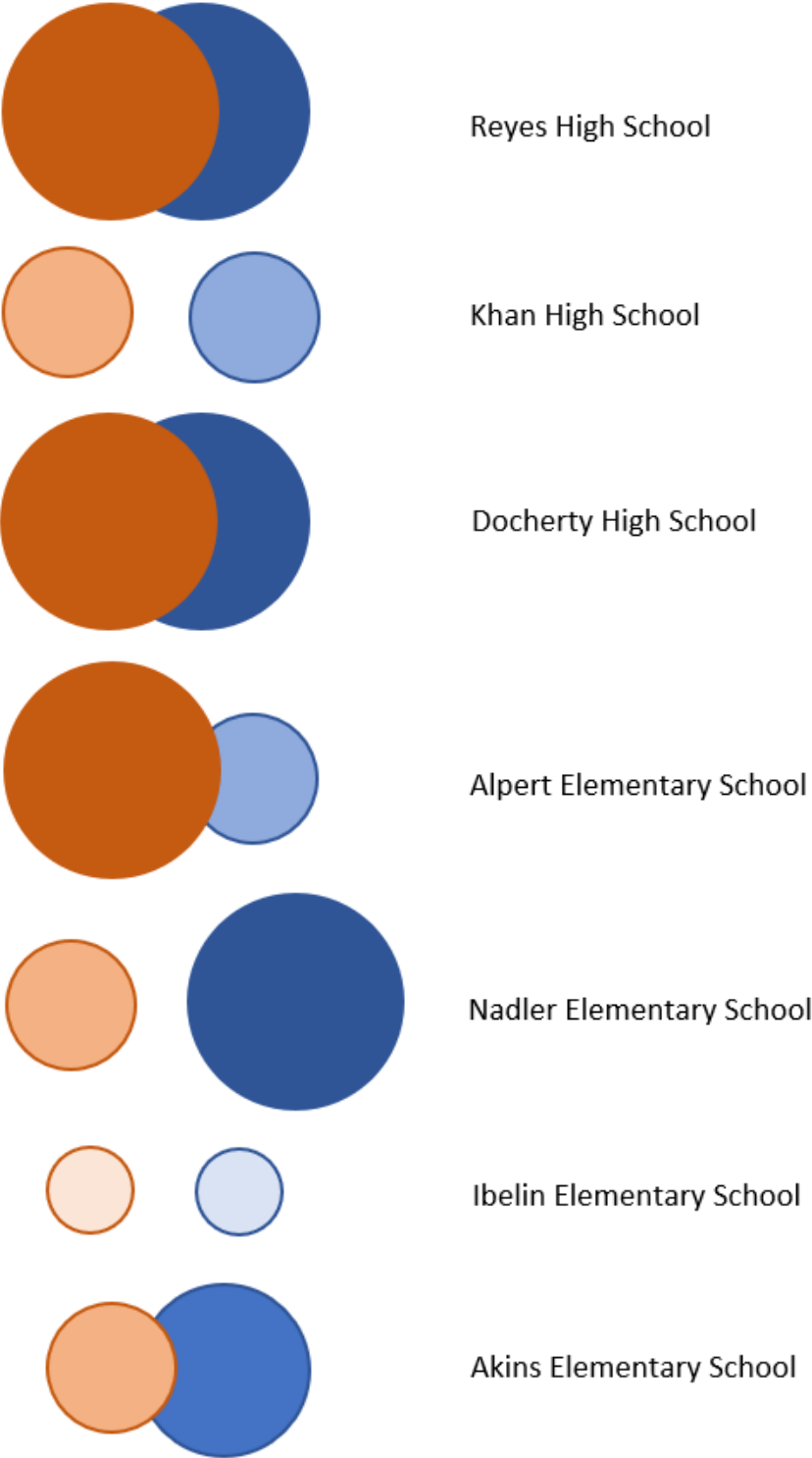
Case Study Reflection Questions

School and district leaders can use the following questions to reflect upon the organizational conditions illustrated within, and through comparisons among, the four case study schools:

- What similarities and differences exist between your school and the case study schools?
  - What meaningful influence do you believe the differences would have on teacher learning?
- What types of relationships exist in your school between administrators and teachers?
  - How can they be further developed?
  - How can they be leveraged to encourage and support teacher learning and improvement efforts?
- How would you define your approach to leadership? How would your teachers? How might your approach to leadership shape teachers' instructional improvement work?
- How would you characterize staff relationships in your school?
  - How can teacher-teacher relationship building be better supported?
  - How can positive, collegial relationships be more effectively leveraged to support teacher learning and development?
- How would you describe the professional culture at your school?
  - After reading how professional culture shaped teacher learning in the case schools, do you see any new ways you can leverage existing cultural capacities in your school?
  - Who are the existing, teacher-identified improvement resources in your school?
  - How can teachers be encouraged to buy in to programmatic-focused professional development as a generative learning source for their practice over time?
  - How does your school promote a professional culture that supports adult learning and improvement?
  - How do schools develop a shared vision of instructional excellence?
  - How is a shared vision of instructional excellence connected to expectations around teacher learning and improvement?
- What are the core elements of your school's IISS?
  - Do you see any similarities between any of the case schools' IISS and your own?
  - How might noticing these similarities help you think about teacher experience with the IISS?
  - How is existing instructional expertise operationalized toward improvement?
  - Do teachers have regular access to personalized learning opportunities?
  - What type of collaborative structures do teachers have regular access to as part of the IISS, and what is their value for supporting practice change?
  - How could teacher meetings be more intentional in supporting teacher development?
  - How can large-scale professional development feel relevant to teachers' personalized improvement efforts?

Reyes High School – A Case Study

Overview

The case of Reyes High School provides the opportunity to examine a school with strong integration of REACH—specifically the FFT—into a robust, largely departmentalized IISS guided by a clear, coherent school-wide improvement agenda. Expectations regarding teacher learning and public practice combined with a variety of collaborative structures to create a professional culture of facilitated collaboration. The IISS at Reyes provided teachers regular opportunities for personalized learning through observations and walkthroughs, which were highly valuable to teachers' developmental efforts. Inclusion of elements from the FFT into these learning opportunities, departmental meetings, and professional development furthered a shared vision of instructional quality and distinguished practice. Possibly due to this continuous exposure to the FFT, REACH observations were typically depicted as a requirement, not something to be fearful of or to expect too much from. While most teachers did not report directly using REACH feedback, those who attempted practice changes benefited from a wide variety of resources to support their efforts. The culture of adult learning and facilitated collaboration created a constant push for teachers to learn and try new things. This, combined with the robust IISS at Reyes, facilitated teacher success in their change efforts, but teachers did not necessarily connect these efforts to the specific feedback from infrequent REACH observations.

Details

Reyes High School is a highly-rated, selective enrollment high school on the West Side of the city. The student population is split almost evenly between Black and Latinx students with almost 70 percent qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. During the period of study, Assistant Principal Harper was promoted upon Principal Emerson's departure after four years. Emerson and Harper worked closely together, resulting in a relatively smooth transition. Principal Emerson was in his fourth year as a principal and was pursuing a doctorate in education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This pursuit afforded him direct leadership coaching, as well as regular development-focused, collaborative opportunities with other principals. These interactions were a highly valuable and utilized source of guidance and support for Principal Emerson, who frequently referenced his learnings and related evidence as support or influence on his leadership of the school.

Teachers and administrators described Reyes as having a clear and coherent improvement agenda that was well communicated to staff and instructional leaders.
This facilitated a streamlining of improvement efforts at the school, department, course, and personal levels. Principal Emerson described strategically undertaking complementary improvement initiatives which aligned with the school's instructional vision and priorities:

"We have a couple priorities this year that we are focusing on. One is our transition to proficiency-based learning, which is a little ahead of schedule for the state, every school had to have a competency-based pathway by 2023, I believe. And so we're making that shift a little bit early but it's really in alignment with all of our priorities so it makes sense strategically increasing complexity and doing like the vertical and horizontal alignment across curricular alignment."

Most teachers we spoke with described the same improvement goals and initiatives as school priorities, which indicates the clarity and coherence of administrative messaging. Teachers also recounted how these priorities and goals manifested in department, course, and grade-level teams. This was likely because a distributed leadership model was employed for much of the instructional oversight and support for teachers at Reyes. Some teachers described how departments set specific yearly improvement goals and relevant supports aimed at addressing the "*targeted instructional area*" for the school. Staff and instructional leaders recognized that administrators' priorities were first and foremost instructional, even if they were not directly actualizing these efforts. "*Overall, it's super clear that all of them [Reyes administrators] care about instruction first.*" The well-articulated school-level improvement agenda and the shared nature of the instructional vision at Reyes facilitated departmentalization that was typically regarded as effective, supportive, and coherent with school goals. Relatedly, this coherence of vision, and effort promoted a shared culture of collaboration and support for improvement among teachers that reinforced the shared vision.

Teachers described the professional culture of Reyes as one of facilitated collaboration and learning.

Several teachers acknowledged Principal Emerson's efforts to develop a trusting, supportive environment for teachers which fostered collaboration and improvement. Though this effort was evident, teachers described variable levels of comfort and trust with administrators and staff. Typically, teachers reported a high level of trust within departments, which helped create and facilitate collaborative discussions about teaching practice. A foreign language teacher portrayed this trust and collegial respect as partially stemming from working with "*a lot of reflective people,*" which naturally led to generative, improvement-oriented discussions. Another described how, as a new teacher, he appreciated that he felt comfortable and had the opportunity to regularly "*take advantage of my colleagues' experience*" with the aim of learning and improvement. Relatedly, when describing the staff dynamics, several teachers identified how trust and collaboration were related to a shared vision. One teacher describing their experience with the professional culture of Reyes summarized this relationship saying, "*We have a really cooperative staff. They work together. I feel like a lot of people here have the same kind of vision for quality instruction. So when we give each other feedback, in terms of like, teachers, it's helpful.*" Another teacher, relating the culture to the high expectations for development and growth as a culture which is essentially a "*youthful pursuit of excellence*" that is *"invigorating"* for personal growth. When asked about the professional culture, teachers explicitly and repeatedly connected it improvement, with several noting that the strong culture of adult learning and improvement eased fears of trying new instructional approaches and promoted productive developmental discussions between colleagues.

Instructional Improvement Support System

Teachers and administrators agreed that Reyes had a robust IISS, guided by clear school and departmental goals about instructional improvement. Accounts of the IISS often noted the effective use of school capacities and collaborative structures to support improvement efforts. Teachers benefited from an IISS which included multiple opportunities for personalized feedback, peer observation, and learning walkthroughs which proved valuable in guiding and supporting practice change. Relatedly, most teachers described how collaborative structures—like staff, department, and course team meetings—provided a space typically focused on planning, data review, and practice improvement, as opposed to being focused on logistical concerns. These opportunities were generally effective due, in part, to a professional culture that valued and supported adult learning and practice change.

Teachers as Reyes spoke of formal opportunities to engage with others in reflection and conversation about their own or others personal instructional practice through observations. These opportunities helped teachers identify areas in need of improvement, reflect on progress toward a specific goal, and source ideas to guide future improvement efforts. The consistency of these opportunities for teachers also served to normalize pedagogical and data-based discussions between staff. One teacher described the frequency of personalized feedback opportunities and variety of sources:

> "Our department chairs come and watch us, especially at the beginning of year, pretty frequently. And then we're in each other's rooms, and admin does do pop-ins. We had a resident principal this year, or principal intern, and she came in a few times for various reasons. But it was always a chance to get some feedback."

While department-organized observations were an important and regular part of the IISS for teachers, strong cross-school coordination provided additional opportunities. These cross-departmental observational opportunities were often facilitated by administrators or leadership teams. For one new teacher, the opportunity to observe a strong veteran teacher in a different department was a valuable learning experience, made possible through communication and prioritization of support for these opportunities. She described this opportunity and impact:

> "We've had a couple of moments throughout the year where our IST or our curriculum director will send out an e-mail and say, like, 'Hey, so and so is interested in letting people come enter their room. If you're interested in this, come check it out.' And that's been helpful. So, someone who works with freshmen, is super, hyper organized and has their procedures down and has them down for years and years and years, I got to go watch even though they're in a different department, which was nice."

These feedback opportunities, combined with the high level of coherence and communication with regards to improvement goals, facilitated clarity and openness for many teachers. In describing how these elements coalesce one teacher said:

> *"Here if you have a question about where you stand in the eyes of admin [with regard to instructional quality], you've missed the meetings and the conversations. Admin does walks, IST does walks. And I know some people are less comfortable with it, but I always tell anyone, 'If you want to, come on in my class. Feel free. If you want to give me a heads up, cool. If not, that's fine too. I'll see you there.'"*

These personalized opportunities to observe other teachers or to be observed were characterized as highly valuable to teachers' learning and practice improvement, particularly when these opportunities and related discussion served as sources of further engagement in larger team meetings.

Collaborative structures were in place at the school, department, and course levels which facilitated developmental interactions between colleagues.

These structures, in combination with strong teacher-teacher trust and a climate supportive of adult learning, provided teachers with opportunities and resources that supported instructional improvement efforts. Most teachers noted or implied that guidance for their current instructional improvement efforts primarily came from their departmental or course team and their progress was aided by related collaborative structures including meetings and professional development. They often described the focus of departmental goals and improvement opportunities as connected to the larger school improvement agenda. Meetings at Reyes often included meaningful collaborative opportunities focused on instructional improvement and practice change. One ninth-grade teacher described how her current improvement efforts were shaped by the school and department, and progress was aided through organizational structures:

> *"You know, my school, one of the focuses they've been doing is on academic perseverance. So that's been a focus also for our department. So just kind of talking with colleagues and thinking of strategies that they use. Kind of modifying them for my class. And really that's kind of, like, the topic of conversation a lot of times at all school meetings and department meetings."*

Some teachers cited inter-departmental trust and accumulation of expertise as a key source of learning and support which aided their improvement efforts. "*In general if not every, almost every teacher in every department I think is, you know, a very good person whose opinion I trust. I mean we have content experts in pretty much every area of content which is nice.*" These experts were well known to the teacher community and frequently acted as resources for teachers pursuing specific instructional improvements. Department and course teams were also a key source of guidance and support for teachers as they attempted improvements which reflect school-level initiatives, even when they were difficult. For one physics teacher, the "*targeted instructional area*" and goal for Reyes of consistent and substantive inclusion of "*reading and writing across the curriculum*" posed a challenge. While initially resistant, the buy-in from other course-team members to the initiative helped him so he was "*no longer trying to find a compliance solution.*" This goal was still challenging, but he shared how multiple sources of support within the department, course-team, and interdepartmentally aided his efforts. While he has yet to reach the goal of consistent inclusion of reading and writing in his classes, it helped that "*the two people I teach with [on the same course-team] are both very good at it*" and shared

activities and discussed different various methods during collaborative opportunities allowed by shared-prep periods and regular course and department meetings. In addition, he described how his course team benefited from inter-departmental, same-grade collaboration opportunities saying, "*We've talked to English [department] quite a lot this year. Two of the junior English teachers we've gone over and said like 'hey, we think we want to do this. How would you do that?' Kind of give us some good feedback. So that's definitely helped.*" In this instance, strong collaboration and shared responsibility facilitated instructional changes aimed at content and pedagogy as opposed to compliance. These improvement oriented collegial interactions, both formal and informal, were identified as essential resources supporting teachers as they tried to make practice changes. These interactions were often facilitated by organizational structures of the school's IISS but the underlying culture of learning and improvement also proved a vital element to teacher development.

Reyes' culture of learning and expectations of public practice were tightly coupled to the organizational structures that facilitated staff collaboration, observation, and feedback. This consistency facilitated the relative normalization and benefit of teachers making their practice public. Making practice public was positioned by Principal Emerson as an important step to receiving regular, individualized feedback. One teacher personified how this environment established an expectation of, and comfort with, public practice saying "...*we have observers from various programs coming in like our department chairs come in all the time. And like you know we watch each other so it's not weird for there to be another adult in the room.*" Learning walks and walkthroughs, held at least once a quarter, were another structure which necessitated teachers making their practice public. Teachers understood the value and need to make their practice public in the aim of instructional improvement, even if it was innately uncomfortable for some. This expectation, coupled with the collaborative opportunities focused on generating and supporting practice improvement, set Reyes apart from some teachers' experiences at other schools. A 22-year veteran CPS teacher who transferred to Reyes in 2015 contrasted the expectations of excellence, the IISS, and culture to their previous schools, noting that Reyes was "*more geared towards making me a better teacher*" because that was the path to improved student learning.

REACH System for Teacher Evaluation

REACH teacher evaluations were conducted as expected at Reyes, with most teachers characterizing it as a requirement that demanded little to moderate special attention.

Most teachers positioned REACH observations as the most valuable element of REACH to their instructional improvement, but the scope of use remained limited. These limitations were partially attributed to the infrequency of these observations, as well as their existence in a school which provided prevalent and regular sources of feedback through the IISS. It may also be somewhat a reflection of Principal Emerson's characterization of REACH, not as a policy to be implemented, but as the source of a tool, the FFT, which should be used to guide improvement and establish a shared vision of distinguished teaching. This perspective was evident in the ways in which the FFT was situated

within the school context as a definition of instructional quality. It also speaks to the power of coherence in facilitating improvement efforts, both of which will be further explored in the following section. Teachers identified two aspects of REACH observations that were particularly beneficial to their improvement trajectory. First, administrators clarified expectations during the pre-conference, which eased anxiety about the evaluative nature of the exercise. Second, teachers felt the conversations during the post-observation conference were productive.

Many teachers at Reyes depicted pre-observation conferences as a valuable opportunity to share their perspectives and learn about evaluator expectations, both of which could promote meaningful feedback and learning through the process. Principal Emerson largely shared teachers' perspectives about the value of the pre-observation element especially with regards to making the most of it as a leverage point for supporting teacher development. He described this potential as follows:

> *"So for formal observations, teachers have the opportunity to pre-conference, they plan; they review their plans they know what's happening right? So you see what teachers believe is their highest quality instruction and you see them where they are doing what they believe is best. So it's a window into what they [the teacher being observed] think is quality instruction, which allows the observer to insert themselves into strategic areas to increase the capacity of that teacher in the post-conference."*

While some teachers focused on the value of pre-observation conferences as a source of context-setting for evaluators, others perceived the primary benefit as learning about the specific expectations of their evaluator, as situated within school-level instructional goals. For example, one teacher described how their evaluator did a "*very good job of communicating, here's what we're expecting...this is what we're looking for to get a four,*" related to the school's transition to performance-based grading and use of rubrics. Teachers appreciated this information largely because they were aware that interpretation of the FFT and the ratings they received would be, at least to some degree, influenced by school-level improvement initiatives and related expectations. As such, pre-observation conferences were an important opportunity for teachers to clarify these connections and how they may impact their evaluation.

Teachers generally felt that they had productive conversations following their observation and there were resources available to support instructional change related to REACH feedback. While many teachers highly valued the colleague-based feedback facilitated by the IISS, the opportunity to have feedback from administrators provided a different, yet still beneficial, opportunity. In reflecting on the benefit of REACH observations specifically, one teacher said, "*I think what's nice about REACH is having an opportunity to have conversation around instruction about what's happening in your classroom with an administrator, with an expert. That's what's nice about it...just sitting down and having a conversation with someone about some actionable things you can do to make your classroom stronger.*" Most teachers at Reyes found feedback and "*any sort of conversation around instruction to be productive.*" From this perspective, REACH observations and conferences were simply another opportunity for those conversations. This may also help explain why many teachers had difficulty identifying specific instructional changes

that stemmed from REACH observations because they were occurring alongside an IISS which provided those opportunities frequently.

Teachers' responses to low observation scores and negative feedback were influenced, in part, by teacher tenure, staff-evaluator relationships, and the inherent power dynamics of evaluation. Though some teachers appreciated the opportunity to receive direct feedback from administrators, the high stakes of evaluation and power differential negatively impacted the potential for it to be a productive learning experience for some. These concerns arose most frequently with teachers who had a negative observation experience or received what they perceived as unfair or low ratings. One newer teacher we spoke with felt frustrated with an evaluator's behavior during the observation and the subsequent ratings he received. He described this experience and its potential impact:

> *"You're [the evaluator] determining my future right now, man, and if I was in a classroom that you were in, and my job was to watch you do something and I pulled my phone out 10 separate times, you would chew my ass into oblivion, and I would deserve it. But I can't say any of that, because at the end of the day...he's still my boss, determining my future right now."*

He went on to describe how he did not feel comfortable pushing back on the evaluation, but also worried for future encounters noting that "*what sucks is that I'm scared to bring this up in meetings, because one thing I found is you don't wanna piss off your evaluator.*" This accounting demonstrated that despite the culture of learning at Reyes and the prevalence of observational opportunities the power dynamic inherent in an evaluative observation may, for some, reduce the potential for collaborative discussion about instructional improvement. This may also reflect experiences more common for teachers who are new or new to a specific school. In contrast, a veteran teacher with a positive relationship with their evaluator described their response to low ratings this way:

> "*I earned a couple of basics and I'm a little frustrated about that, but I think I got really good advice as to how to overcome that in future observations so I think I got real clarity as to how I should be working. So I felt very good coming out of that and I understood what their vision for my role was*."

In general, teachers' experiences with REACH observations at Reyes were relatively unremarkable and limited with the extent to which they informed teachers' instructional improvement efforts.

Integration and Influence

Reyes demonstrated a strong integration of REACH, particularly the FFT, into the school IISS and improvement initiatives.
Principal Emerson successfully employed REACH as a developmental tool and mitigated its evaluative purpose by fully integrating it into the school's professional development efforts. Most notably, the FFT was infused into

school identity and culture by mapping it onto the key aspects of the school—values, norms, and priorities. Evidence of the infusion of the FFT manifested as concrete programs, policies, and organization of staff improvement support. Principal Emerson felt that the vagueness of Domain 4 "*allows us [administrators] to say, this is what this means here [at Reyes] and gives us the liberty to do that which I actually like*." For example, Principal Emerson portrayed Reyes as a school which held strong relationships with families as a core value which necessitated setting out specific expectations related to parent communication, a Domain 4 component. The vagueness of the FFT and the liberty it afforded for interpretation at the school level was an opportunity to adapt it to Reyes specially by revising the staff handbook. Specific expectations for teachers related to each component of Domain 4 were outlined in the handbook. This allowed increased clarity of expectations, which reflected the norms of the school by including definitions of what it meant "*to be distinguished in this area here at Reyes, in alignment with our values.*"

Teacher leadership was a core value of Reyes's organizational identity, which shaped professional expectations and evaluation ratings.

Principal Emerson described how this manifested in terms of REACH ratings when he said, "*We value teacher leadership, so you're not going to get Distinguished, unless you are a member of a teacher leadership team and in some things professionally.*" While not all teachers felt that expectations of leadership should influence REACH evaluations, almost all confirmed the degree of importance administrators placed on teacher leadership and highlighted numerous related opportunities. One teacher described the expectations and opportunities for teacher leadership and potential impact of administrator perceptions:

> "*There are so many opportunities here to become a teacher leader...there are lots of different positions and things that people could take more of a leadership role. IST [Instructional Support Team] is one of them, grade-level teams are another...there's lots of different ways to get involved. But the expectations for everyone in this building are high.*"

Teachers also acknowledged supporting each other in attaining and documenting evidence of the various expectations, with regard to Domain 4. While this support was largely informal— "*just kind of reminding them here's all the part of Domain 4, Here's what you're looking for. Here's how you put that in*"—teachers acknowledged it as shaping how they attended to this domain throughout the year.

While the FFT was, in many ways, infused into school-level expectations for teachers, Reyes also offered a formal, stand-alone REACH-based teacher fellowship program.

According to Principal Emerson, this program was designed for "*new [teachers] and new-to-Reyes teachers where we go into more detail about what the REACH does looks like here and what to expect with administrators.*" Teachers also described this program as a mentorship program required for teachers who "*don't get Proficient or Distinguished.*" Teachers we spoke with had mixed feelings about this program, but acknowledged that it highlighted the importance of the expectations laid out in the FFT, which could be beneficial for new teachers.

While REACH data was not the central driver of instructional change for most teachers at Reyes, those who attempted REACH-related changes were often able to master and internalize new practices. Teachers attempting REACH-related practice changes were able to draw support for these changes from the existing IISS and related collaborative structures and resources aligned with the FFT. Teachers we spoke with described how various collaborative groupings facilitated developmental efforts related to specific Domains and their components. Course-team meetings were described as an ideal place for collaborative planning aligned with Domain 1, while department meetings and experts supported instructional and professional improvements related to Domains 3 and 4. Just as teachers reported the presence of content experts in departments, some also reported that "*within every department there's at least a couple of people who know it relatively well, if not very well*" who could act as resources for improvement both within and outside the evaluative process. One teacher described the FFT expert in their department as "*a good person to talk to about teaching. She's used to making people a very good teacher. And in addition, then she's also therefore very good at not only making you a better teacher but also helping you get a better score.*" This natural coupling of instructional expertise and guidance with the FFT expectations used for evaluations served as a source of alignment and coherence for teachers' improvement efforts. This interwoven relationship often aided teachers who committed to a specific REACH-related practice change, because they felt supported in their effort both personally and through the climate of the school. The ability to draw on collaborative structure and improvement resources integral to the IISS enabled teachers the ability not only to make progress toward their instructional goals but to internalize their practice changes. Simply put, for many teachers at Reyes, high expectations, the consistent presence of IISS, and the culture of adult learning meant that they frequently did not connect their improvement efforts to the REACH specific feedback, instead attributing their effort to the shared school-level instructional vision and related initiatives.

Alpert Elementary School – A Case Study

Overview
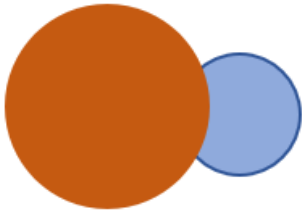
The case of Alpert Elementary School provides the opportunity to examine how, in a school with a relatively weak IISS, a robust and feedback-focused implementation of REACH can be influential in teacher improvement. Teachers generally held mixed-positive views of administrators, describing them as supportive, but management-focused, due to increasing district demands. Alpert was characterized by a high degree of programmatic and policy churn, which negatively impacted teacher improvement efforts. High levels of teacher-teacher trust, teacher retention, and accumulated expertise facilitated creation of a professional culture of collaboration and collegial support which teachers heavily relied on when attempting instructional improvement. The IISS at Alpert was fragmented, providing a two-tier system of support which heavily prioritized core-subject teachers and large-scale program-focused professional development. REACH teacher evaluation observations were generally useful for teachers, as they received robust, usable feedback often connected to their personal goals and paired with resources. Alpert offered teachers few opportunities for feedback on their practice through the school's IISS. Consequently, the individualized feedback provided through REACH observations proved to be an important source of guidance for many teachers practice change efforts.

Details

Alpert is a highly rated school on the Near Southwest Side of the city. This magnet school serves an almost exclusively Latinx population, of which just under one-half are English Learners (ELs). Over 95 percent of the student population qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and are considered low income. Enrollment at Alpert has dipped significantly since the 2013–14 school year, dropping almost one-quarter of their total student population. Alpert teachers highlighted the school's rich historical connection to the community and persistent good reputation, despite recent fluctuations in its school quality ratings. *5Essentials* Survey data for family involvement further confirms this positive school-community relationship. Despite this, most teachers cited how student achievement, student behavior, or some aspect of student's family background or communities created challenges for the staff. Several of these related to difficulties of achieving academic growth expectations, given the number of ELs. Teachers did not denigrate students or blame them. Instead, they noted the challenges that ELs faced in reaching academic standards set for native English-speaking students.

Principal Cortez has been leading Alpert for less than five years, but has extensive leadership experience in other educational settings. Principal Cortez was typically described as a supportive, management-focused leader by teachers. Most also described positive relationships between administrators and staff, though some viewed Principal Cortez as still adjusting to the school and

the community. Perceptions of the administrator's leadership style ranged from mixed to positive. Interestingly, all the teachers who offered mixed accounts were also non-core subject teachers. (Understanding the experiences of non-core teachers at Alpert is an important factor in this story.) Core subject teachers described positive supports from their administration by providing additional resources, raising the level of expectations teachers had for students, and leveraging teacher expertise to address students' needs. In outlining the strengths of the principal, one teacher said:

> "Our principal works really hard to make sure that we have the resources that we need. She's really good with the budget, so making sure that we have the books that we need and the resources we need for our kids, so that's a big strong area for her and something that I think the staff respects a lot about her is that time where budget is a huge issue for CPS. She makes the most of what we have and does that really well."

Teachers appreciated that administrators treated teachers as professionals and were receptive to their improvement suggestions:

> "They're always very open to any ideas that we might have. I mean, maybe not all may be approved, but they're always open to listening, 'Well, what do you suggest? How do you think we can support these kids?' So we have tried different suggestions when it's possible to do it, we do it. They're very open about helping us because they know that we know the students. So they usually rely on us, 'Okay, well what do you think will work?' Then if it's something plausible we can do, we try it."

Principal Cortez was generally viewed as management-focused rather than instructionally focused. Some teachers framed this approach as necessary, due to the high-degree of policy churn and related demands at the district level and programmatic churn and cohesion issues at the school level. Teachers described with generally positive relationships with both Principal Cortez and Assistant Principal Jarrah. But they characterized AP Jarrah as a greater source of instructional leadership. This was partially attributed to Jarrah's previous position as a teacher at Alpert, when she developed salient insights into practical challenges encountered by teachers and potential strategies to ameliorate them.

Teachers largely felt supported by administrators, but they also identified two concerns. While all the teachers we spoke with generally reported mixed-positive, supportive relationships with administrators, they also observed variability in responsiveness and support toward staff members. Essentially, teachers recognized that administrators did not treat all staff members equally. For some, this planted a seed of concern and distrust, especially toward the principal. Others, particularly non-core teachers, recognized this as one example of a two-tiered system of support that characterized Alpert.

The second concern was more universal. Several teachers felt that all staff would benefit from more administrative support when handling student discipline, while recognizing the changing context of district policy. One teacher summarized this concern:

"I know in other classes behavior ends up being a concern that kind of is an impediment to teaching. And sometimes it feels like we don't get a lot of support from admin in that area. There's a huge emphasis in CPS in lowering office-managed behavior, which I support, but I think at times you have a student who's being continually disruptive and kind of stopping and learning of other students then there has to be some kind of avenue for that."

Many Alpert teachers felt that the school suffered from policy and program churn at the district and school level, which hindered individual efforts at practice improvement.
Teachers also highlighted how the ever-changing nature of programs and curricula can make it difficult to improve their instruction. In describing the instructional challenges that program churn causes, one science teacher said, "*Either we don't try things long enough for them to work or we just get something to work and then it's, no we're not doing that anymore. We're doing something else. So at times it's just frustrating.*" This programmatic instability and turbulence impacted the coherence and effectiveness of the IISS and hindered teacher learning. Teachers at Alpert reported that the long tenure of many staff members helped mediate the impact of programmatic fluctuations on the quality of instruction.

High staff retention and teacher-teacher trust helped establish a culture of collaboration and collegial support at Alpert.
In general, collaboration between teachers was normative at Alpert. However, formal opportunities for collaboration differed for core subject teachers and non-core subject teachers. Core subject teachers described strong collaboration, facilitated by concurrent prep periods that provided "plenty of time" with grade-band colleagues and vertical-subject teams (same subject matter but across different grades). Teachers' consensus on the strong and supportive working relationships at Alpert suggests that they functioned as a "protective factor" for some. For example, despite the perceived lack of program coherence in CPS, teachers generally got on board with implementing new initiatives at Alpert. Perhaps this "*can-do*" attitude described by staff was fostered by strong collaboration among most teachers at Alpert. Several teachers pointed out that high teacher retention at Alpert led to an accumulation of experience and expertise and long-term trusting relationships between staff, both of which furthered collaboration and collegial support.

Instructional Improvement Support System

Teacher accounts characterized the IISS of Alpert school as fragmented and of limited impact in supporting instructional change for all teachers.
Additionally, several teachers discussed how they had more opportunities aimed at supporting reflection and change efforts around instruction in the past than currently. This was even though some teachers reported increased expectations for quality instruction from administrators. Though teachers acknowledged rising expectations, most were not able to identify shared school-level goals related to improvement, with the exception of new curricula in some subjects. It must be noted that principal and teacher accounts of the IISS and instructional goals varied greatly. Also, within teacher accounts there was often variability

between core and non-core subject teachers. As was the pattern at Alpert, non-core teachers typically received less support for improvement.

As Principal Cortez was not typically viewed as an instructional leader, teacher instructional and professional development generally fell to teacher committees. These committees scheduled walkthroughs and communicated with administrators about instructional improvement efforts. Professional development related to curricular and programmatic changes was prevalent, though not perceived to have long-term applicability. Teachers wished for more opportunities to engage in personalized and practice-focused collaboration and professional development. With formal opportunities for those limited and often team dependent, teachers at Alpert largely turned to their colleagues. They took advantage of collaborative structures, like team meetings, to facilitate and support their personal instructional improvement when possible. Though these structures, like grade-level team and professional learning committee meetings, facilitated collaboration, there was little evidence that they were intended or resulted in direct learning and improvement-centered opportunities. This may be attributed to the lack of coherent instructional priorities at Alpert. While most teachers had many opportunities to collaborate with peers in a trusting environment, there were no driving instructional improvement imperatives present at Alpert.

Alpert's IISS primarily consisted of professional development aimed at large/broad program areas. Teacher instructional development, which targets more individualized or granular aspects of teacher practice, generally fell to the teacher committees.

Teachers at Alpert reported regular opportunities to participate in quality professional development focused on curricula and specialized programs. While most teachers appreciated these opportunities, some noted that the professional development benefits were short-lived and not easily transferable. A few teachers associated this limitation with the constant turnover in program and materials that stemmed from shifting district requirements. They found that this turnover made it difficult to build up the experience required to substantively improve teaching. This churn also constrained the long-term applicability of learning teachers garnered from professional development:

> "I think a lot of times we're given new curriculum or new programs and we're given [professional development], and a lot of training, but it almost feels like the following year there's something new, and I wouldn't say that's my school. I think a lot of it comes from above—from the district or our network or whatever. There's always new things to implement and so sometimes I just feel like teachers aren't as comfortable with the curriculum because it's always changing, and there's new things we have to add in. There's a lot of what-ifs every year, things that change."

The potential benefits of curriculum and program focused professional development was also constrained in its impact, as non-core teachers rarely had access to these or similar position-applicable professional development opportunities. Teachers in these roles who wanted development support needed to personally advocate for it to the administration, which only some felt comfortable doing.

New teachers at Alpert did benefit from individualized instructional improvement attention.
Administration and teachers agreed that the new teacher mentorship program for the school was the most robust source of consistent, individualized support for instructional improvement at Alpert. This program paired new teachers with experienced mentors, facilitating collaborative learning opportunities, including regular peer observations and one-on-one meetings, both of which were considered highly valuable. More experienced teachers did not receive such supports.

REACH System for Teacher Evaluation

While teachers at Alpert held mixed perceptions of REACH as an evaluation system, many teachers found REACH observations a usable source of individualized feedback which could inform their instructional improvement efforts.
This was, in part, attributed to the relative lack of opportunities for individualized practice feedback in the IISS and that the majority of professional development provided was curriculum- or program-focused. Within that context, teachers identified three aspects of REACH implementation at Alpert as more likely to produce usable data for them about their practice. First, pre-observation conferences typically gave teachers the opportunity to personalize the REACH process to some extent. Second, step-by-step use of the framework, paired with observational evidence, guided post-observation conversations. Third, though some teachers received a lot of feedback and others much less, the feedback provided was generally high-quality and included strategies that facilitated use.

Execution of REACH pre-observation conferences at Alpert was notably successful as opportunities to frame the evaluation process in ways specifically beneficial to individual teachers.
The observation pre-conference increased evaluators' understanding of the class which they would be observing, laying out the context of the situation in terms of students, instructional goals, the strategies expected to be used to reach those goals, and how achievement of those goals will be assessed. The process of completing the pre-observation protocol itself, prior to any discussion, was helpful for some teachers for several reasons. One teacher noted that it helped her organize her lesson plans; another noted how it facilitated reflection on their class and instruction; and a third noted that the process reinforced the expectations laid out in the FFT.

Productive discussions during the pre-observation conference were informed by the protocol and lesson plans submitted, because they reflected personal areas of focus connected to or generated by the teacher or evaluator. Many teachers saw the opportunity to provide context setting and *"background information"* for their evaluator as essential. This was because having the evaluator *"know what was going on"* was key to a true and fair appraisal of the teacher. Teachers with the opportunity to share their instructional goals generally expressed increased buy-in to the evaluation process and its ability to meaningfully inform their instruction. Teachers appreciated when evaluators also identified specific areas of focus for the upcoming observation. These areas were informed by past improvement efforts or reflected an

improvement area that a team was working on or was explicitly connected to the FFT. In identifying this intentional focus, one teacher recalled her evaluators this way: "*'I'm going to be coming in to see you discourse with the kids' because that's one thing we were trying to focus on.'*" This information was helpful in that it helped prime their expectations for the observation and for feedback which could be used strategically within the evaluation system.

An effective pre-observation conference gave teachers an opportunity to provide context setting for the evaluator, share their instructional goals, and gain clarity about evaluator expectations, increasing the potential for the observation to produce relevant, useful feedback while also smoothing the negative feelings about teacher evaluation generally.

In general, teachers at Alpert used at least some of the feedback provided to them during their post-observation conference to inform their instructional improvement efforts.
This use was often attributed to the structure, quality, and granularity of the feedback and the resources provided to support practice change. Alpert teachers reported the same useful elements of evaluators' feedback that the UChicago Consortium previously reported.[13] Therefore, the description here will be brief, since it is so like findings already reported.

Most teachers at Alpert agreed that the FFT did a good job of identifying distinguished practice. Teachers generally found feedback and discussion, which were explicitly guided by the FFT, as useful because it was directly connected to clear, known instructional expectations with specific evidence of their practice recorded during the observation. Teachers found this framing especially beneficial when it was used as a strategic facilitator for concrete, learning-focused discussions. Teacher perceptions of the quality of feedback largely mirrored their perceptions of leadership. That is, when teachers trusted their evaluator's expertise and fairness, they were more inclined to take feedback to heart. Most teachers reported that AP Jarrah provided specific, actionable feedback following REACH observations:

> "We talk through the ratings that she gave. She gives feedback on why, shows me all the different evidence, which is helpful. And then we kind of talked about what are the ongoing goals that I have, and then she gives some suggestions for how she thinks that could work."

A positive, trusting relationship between the teacher and evaluator-facilitated improvement-oriented discussion that allowed for teachers to probe for further clarification and support were particularly meaningful. One teacher described a picture of one of these helpful interactions which began with her pushing for clarity:

> "Can we talk about that one? So, she gave me some ideas for quicker feedback and we kind of talked about what that could actually look like in person. Would these things count—these are the things I am doing. Would those qualify and using assessment and instruction? So even having that conversation and hearing her feedback and her opinion was helpful."

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[13] Shyjka et al. (2020).

Some teachers reported receiving resources to support instructional change during or after their post-conference from AP Jarrah. Resources provided to teachers during post-observation conferences included a REACH-specific domain booklet, instructional books, question stems, and sample lessons plans and handouts. One bilingual teacher received an example lesson plan as a resource to inform REACH-related improvements noting, "*So it's nice when you get more…like a hands-on example of what you need to do. Sometimes it can be like this is what it says on the rubric but what does it actually look like in practice?*" The lesson plan provided a concrete translation to practice. Almost all teachers who received specific resources found that they were helpful in guiding practice change in an area identified in their REACH feedback. On the other hand, teachers found feedback from Principal Cortez to be more general and less helpful.

Organizational structures in place which support collaboration of instructional core subject teachers proved valuable in facilitating use of REACH feedback.

Teachers at Alpert who worked in the instructional core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies) reported having more time for collaboration because of purposeful scheduling of shared prep periods. These teachers noted that the high degree of teacher collaboration and collegial support was a strength of their school. For example, one teacher received REACH feedback which identified assessments as an area in need of improvement. The teacher then went to their grade-level team, lead teacher, and bilingual teacher for additional ideas and suggestions about how to improve this area of their practice.

Not all teachers were offered these same structural supports that facilitate collaboration. Special education, special subjects, and early childhood teachers had very few collaborative opportunities, as well as limited collaborative partners. This hindered both general instructional improvement and those specifically related to REACH feedback. Both the special subject and early childhood teachers in our sample lamented having no colleagues with whom to discuss their work. While both also used their REACH feedback to make some degree of instructional change efforts, the degree and depth of these changes appeared to be less than that of teachers who benefited from collaborative structures. Interestingly, while special education teachers reported a lack of collaborative time with other teachers as a salient issue in their work, they demonstrated a high degree of use of REACH feedback. This may be because one of the REACH evaluators had special education expertise and provided robust and specific feedback which was clearly applicable to their practice. They were able make use of the feedback even without ongoing support from colleagues. In this way, the expertise alignment acted as a protective factor that allowed teachers who lacked collaborative support to still benefit and employ the REACH feedback. In trying to understand the extent to which use of REACH data is influenced by school culture and climate, this evidence points to the important role of a strong culture of collaboration and structures which facilitate it. Also, if this area is not well-developed in a school, other factors—such as evaluator expertise alignment—can support use in a similar way.

Teachers took advantage of the culture of collegial support when sense-making about REACH ratings and feedback.

The high level of teacher-teacher trust, especially among grade and subject-matter teams, facilitated collaborative engagement focused on using feedback with the aim of shared improvement in performance. "...*Everyone is pretty open with sharing about their ratings and*

feedback they got to help each other out." Teacher sense-making included shared discussion and interpretation of component and domain level scores and verbal feedback. Some teachers highlighted the importance of this shared engagement in helping them identify and think through possible strategies to address areas in need of improvement:

> *"It's something that I definitely talk to my colleagues about because we all kind of struggle with the assessment piece...But I have asked other teachers as well, because we do have a lead teacher. We have a bilingual teacher as well. So, whenever I feel like something is not working or I can't seem to find a way to really evaluate a particular student because you know the type of assignment he gets, then I do try to go to them vs. my administrators."*

Formal and informal sources of collaborative sense-making and idea sourcing were meaningful to teachers' ability to successfully make REACH-related instructional changes. Though structures that facilitated this collaboration were present for many, it was rare that they were focused on supporting instructional improvement. As such, teachers often described taking strategic advantage when a personal improvement effort aligned with the logistical concerns that often dominated meetings. Similarly, teachers leveraged personal and professional relationships as resources to support REACH-related improvements.

Integration and Influence
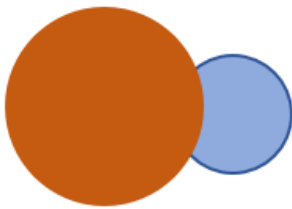
The fragmentation of Alpert's IISS meant that the limited integration of REACH and the FFT occurred sporadically and in pockets. While there was some evidence of use of the FFT to aid instructional improvement, it was typically light and inconsistent. Some teachers reported the FFT being used as a tool during Instructional Leadership Team walkthroughs. The results of these walkthroughs were shared with staff and teachers, further clarifying evidence of the practical expectations of the FFT. Occasional meetings about domains were also offered by a teacher who was receiving direct training and support related to the FFT. One teacher described how REACH, and specifically the FFT, informed what topics and strategies administrators covered in meetings and selected for professional development. They said:

> *"I know now more of our PD gets tied into how it's weighted within REACH or what components of the teaching framework it would affect. So, I think now there seems to be more of a push towards typing our PD at to REACH or tying expectations for teachers to REACH...They'll say, 'Oh, we're going to do this PD on having student discussions.' Then it's like this could impact your REACH 2B and 2A components for your observation. And it could help you move up to distinguished."*
> *So, it seems like they're making it more tied into a purpose, setting up a purpose for PD, kind of tying it back to REACH."*

Accounts of this explicit connecting of professional development with the FFT were relatively rare, but its occurrence served as a reminder to teachers of the instructional vision and

expectations of the district. Though there was no consistent use of the FFT at the school level, its occasional presence, combined with its evaluative use, solidified and reaffirmed it in teachers' consciousness. So, while teachers might not "*think about it on a day-to-day basis*" its inclusion in the evaluation system established skills as those which teachers "*needed to practice.*" In the absence of a school-level, shared, instructional vision and goals, the definition of distinguished practice by the FFT served that purpose for some teachers. While integration of REACH and the IISS was limited, erosion of individualized attention for instructional support and practice improvement systems at the school level resulted in REACH observations being a key source for instructional feedback to teachers. Teachers' ability to make progress toward improvement goals stemming from REACH feedback heavily depended on their opportunities to collaborate and sense-make with supportive, experienced, high-quality colleagues.

Khan High School – A Case Study

Overview

The case of Khan High School provides the opportunity to examine what resources and capacities teachers leveraged toward instructional improvement in a school with a professional culture of autonomy and little coherent messaging and support for improvement. Teachers and administrators at Khan generally had positive, trusting relationships which established an environment where teachers' expertise felt valued. While teachers, especially veteran ones, appreciated this freedom, they desired additional support and opportunities for collaboration aimed at improvement. REACH teacher evaluations were typically perceived as an exercise in compliance at by both teachers and administrators at Khan. There was little evidence of integration of REACH or the FFT into the sparse IISS at Khan. In sum, for many teachers at Khan instructional improvement was individually-driven and heavily relied on informal collegial support.

Details

Khan High School is a large, mid-rated school located on the South Side of the city. This neighborhood school serves a population which is over 90 percent Latinx and more than 80 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and are considered low income. Enrollment at Khan has been relatively stable for the past five years. Khan is led by Principal Santoro, who grew up in the community which the school serves. Despite being a relatively new principal, Principal Santoro has worked in the school in various positions for her entire career and described herself as *"deeply invested"* in Khan and the community. Principal Santoro characterized her leadership style as team-oriented and focused on relationships and school culture. This focus was predicated on Principal Santoro's belief that a positive culture encourages students to want to attend school. Once there, they will then become fully engaged in all aspects of school activities and show greater interests in academic learning.

Almost all the Khan teachers we spoke with described school administrators in a positive light, noting that they were "supportive of their staff." This perceived support promoted positive staff morale.

One teacher characterized the strong relationships between staff and administration as being based on trust and integrity saying:

> *"Main strength [of Khan] is, I think, trust between the administrators and the teachers. Trust, yes, that—I think we teachers basically trust that our principal and our assistant principals are people of integrity and that they are not out there to call us out or anything; rather, they cooperate with us. They applaud our effort; they applaud our accomplishment."*

Some teachers went further and noted that administrators provided personal support, creating a feeling of "*family*" at Khan. These teachers felt that the sense of family encouraged them to remain at Khan.

Teachers and administrators both described an *"open door policy"* where teachers had easy access to administrators, though not all teachers found this access translated to helpful support for practice change. Teachers felt that Principal Santoro cared about and wished to support their development, but that her capacity to do that was somewhat limited.

Though teachers found their administrators supportive and trustworthy, overall, they did not portray them as instructional leaders. Instead, teachers most commonly relied on their colleagues for instructional support. Teachers confirmed the principal's focus on relationship building and creating a positive professional and school climate to enable peer learning. Teachers depicted practical aspects of administrator support as coming primarily in the form of ensuring teachers had any necessary resources for their instruction.

Staff at Khan described a professional culture of autonomy.
Principal Santoro's preference for distributed leadership, combined with her self-appraisal as "*not a micromanager,*" was interpreted by teachers as facilitating their independence. The strong relationships and teacher-administrator trust described by participants furthered the perception that administrators trusted teachers' judgement and professionalism. Many of the teachers we spoke with enjoyed this freedom appreciating that "*administrators aren't necessarily down on our necks, and they're not poking and prodding us, but you know, for some of us who are together and do our jobs, it's great, because we have that autonomy that we like*."

Though most teachers described this autonomy as desirable, they also identified potential challenges it created for the school and especially for new teachers and those seeking greater instructional guidance. At Khan, there was very little clear communication between administration and the full school staff. Some teachers interpreted this lack information flow as reinforcing their individualism and autonomy. Yet sometimes the lack of communication between administrators and teachers undermined opportunities to create a shared instructional vision and goals for the school. Although almost all teachers agreed that school-wide communication was infrequent at Khan, the autonomy it provided was particularly favored by veteran teachers. Despite these teachers' preference for autonomy, they recognized that it could pose a challenge for new teachers. For new teachers still developing their practices and professional networks, this high level of autonomy may be detrimental to their improvement trajectory. The culture of teacher autonomy at Khan had meaningful implications for the instructional improvement work of both new and veteran teachers.

Instructional Improvement Support System

Khan administrators were effective at creating a culture in which teachers felt generally supported. Even so, when asked specifically about improvement expectations and support systems, they did not describe clear structures and processes, and the lack of coherence was evident. Teachers and administrators perceived the approach and system of instructional improvement support quite differently, particularly with regards to the availability and frequency of meaningful improvement opportunities. Principal Santoro was not viewed as an instructional leader by the staff and she confirmed that she does not position herself in that way, instead primarily focusing on culture and climate. Though improvement support was happening, particularly in small pockets of the staff, there was little notion of a shared vision of instructional quality or improvement goals.

Though administrator and teacher perceptions of the instructional support system at Khan varied, the evidence points out the absence of a coherent system of support and expectations.
According to teachers, Khan's primary approach IISS came in the forms of whole-school professional development seminars and sessions. Many teachers we spoke with reported that the whole-school approach limited the utility of the session because the content was often broad and not easily applicable to their subject or setting. Similarly, the topics were often disparate even from each other so that they reinforced the lack of messaging and clarity regarding school-level improvement efforts. Teachers were generally unable to identify a general improvement goal and related supports at the school level. One teacher, characterized their impression of the school improvement focus and support "*'Reading and writing' seems to kind of be the focus but vague and often mentioned in a 'how am I supposed to do that in my subject/with my students?' kinda way.*" This characterization highlights how the minimal amount and frequency of communication between administration and staff generally manifested as unfocused and vague understanding of school improvement goals.

Some teachers connected this lack of coherence to low collective responsibility among teachers, as they all had different ideas about the expectations and priorities of the administration. As such, teachers' efforts to engage in and support school-level improvement were diffused and often ineffectual as a result. Despite these perceptions of low collective responsibility among teachers across the whole school, they did regard departments and teams as building collective efficacy and supporting instructional improvement.

Departments and teacher teams were seen as valuable sources of instructional improvement support, but were constrained by organizational structures.
According to Principal Santoro, instructional leadership at Khan was largely distributed to teacher leaders and department chairs. Most teachers viewed their department and course teams as resources for practice change and took advantage of them when attempting shared or individual changes. In fact, all the teachers we spoke with at Khan emphasized that their colleagues were their first and main resource for their instructional improvement efforts–especially among teachers who shared similar roles or content. Collaborative opportunities with departments and teams were useful for diagnosing and seeking new ideas and insights about instructional and related curricular issues. For example, one team worked together to first identify a general weakness to their courses finding that "*the writing was really lacking*" and

identify potential solutions. As teachers on the course team worked to infuse more writing into their courses, they also found that they had to make changes to their practice around supporting student writing. The scope of these changes was varied, but team members relied on each other for new ideas and suggestions. They also shared reflections about the results of their enacted changes. The value of team support in instructional improvement efforts was also key for grade-level teams and for some, teams facilitated coherence in the instructional approaches and vocabulary used with students. Ms. Pace, a history teacher, described the value of working with the ninth-grade teacher team as an opportunity for alignment that would facilitate student learning. Ms. Pace recalled one discussion with ninth-grade English teachers that began with a few simple questions but was very informative for their instructional practice. Ms. Pace began by asking:

> *"What are you doing? Have you taught them this skill? How did you teach it? Because however you taught it, I'll do it the same way in my classroom and I'll defer to you because if I'm doing something reading or if I'm doing something about tone or expression or others purpose, if you did that first I don't wanna confuse them. So however you taught it, I'll use the same vocabulary, I'll use the same verbiage. Whatever you did let me follow because then it's nice and coherent for the students."*

While these formal cross-departmental collaborative opportunities were described as highly beneficial by teachers, the potential to engage in them was often hindered by logistical challenges. For example, some departments had different schedules for prep periods. Several teachers noted using alternative and informal opportunities to ensure that some degree of collaboration was occurring. These teachers spoke of working on weekends and during lunch-breaks. They also used text and email to communicate when the school schedule made in-person meetings impossible. Mr. James, a special education teacher, co-teaching math, was not able to meet with his co-teacher on a regular schedule due to cross-departmental scheduling challenges. "*I wish, with me teaching algebra I had more opportunity to collaborate with the actual math department, but schedules make it very hard to do that, so I don't get to do that often.*" As a result, he described most of his math collaboration as taking place outside of the classroom. "*We text. I'll wait and we have the same lunch, so we'll work on that together.*" Mr. James found that sharing some classes with a math teacher allowed him to observe another teacher regularly. These observations encouraged practice change improvements in his other classes as he was able to try "*some of the things that he [the math teacher] has done.*" Similarly, Mr. James had the opportunity to model some instructional strategies for his co-teacher. While the co-teaching structure did facilitate cross-department teacher collaboration for Mr. James, most teachers did not benefit from this instructional arrangement Those teachers were left to their own initiative to arrange cross-departmental collaboration and the conversations and reflections that others found had supported and encouraged their instructional improvement efforts.

Every teacher we spoke with at Khan reported actively working to improve some aspect of their practice, but the area of focus was typically self-determined and not a result of broader improvement initiatives or specific feedback.

Similarly, while teachers attempted to take advantage of formal collaborative structures, such as department and team meetings, they were limited in their impact because of the lack of frequency, duration, and focus. One science teacher described their frustration about collaborative structures and the lack of time for instructionally-focused discussion:

> "We meet regularly, like, twice a month for, like, 45-minute, 50-minute period for business issues, like a funding issue, order this thing before we do this, there's new grading system, there is new assessment style, those things. Business. While within my department, chemistry teachers get together, 'Let's plan this or talk about this.' [Claps hands] But, we don't have a common time to meet together."

She identified turning to her course team members for support when she faced instructional challenges. But typically, this was self-initiated, informal collaboration. Most of the teachers with whom we spoke shared this perspective and used their own initiative to find support. They described self-identifying areas for improvement through self-reflection on their students' behavior, their test performance, and the quality of their assignments. One teacher described knowing when he needed to make practice changes "*by the confused look on my students' faces and by their assignments when they hand it in.*" Teachers' attempts at improvement typically began with them trying alternate, but familiar, instructional approaches. If these efforts were not sufficient, they then sought alternative ideas and resources from colleagues. One teacher described strategically utilizing colleagues as a resource to support her own improvement:

> "I think that every teacher has a different strength. I've tried to put myself with teachers and see what they're doing. 'How do you teach this thing? How did you do this?' Then that's pretty much how I feel like I made myself a better teacher. Tried to stick to people that at least I've heard, 'Oh, they're doing pretty well. They do a good job.' Then try to pick their brain."

Other teachers found the insight from teachers of the same course or subject as the most useful in facilitating their practice change efforts. Typically, once teachers attempted new instructional practices, they reported discussing the experience–both the positive and negative aspects–with colleagues. At Khan, individual teachers identified personal areas of weakness, collected improvement ideas from colleagues, attempted changes in practice, and then they followed with reflection and collaborative sense-making with colleagues. This individually driven process was the primary path utilized to guide instructional improvement at Khan.

In the absence of a clear, cohesive school improvement agenda, departmental and teacher team collaboration served as a source of formal and informal improvement initiatives and support. When teams did have collaborative opportunities and were able to focus on planning and instruction, they found them highly generative. This was in part credited to the strong relationships within teams. These relationships were particularly influential to teachers' instructional improvement efforts as these colleagues were who they turned to support and guide their practice changes. Yet, according to teacher reports, the positive impact of these collaborative opportunities on teacher practice change was limited by their infrequency, short duration, and competing priorities.

REACH System for Teacher Evaluation

At Khan, teachers and administrators alike described REACH evaluations primarily as a district mandate that required compliance.

Positive relationships between staff and administration reduced teacher anxiety about evaluative observations and potential repercussions. Principal Santoro described this approach as stemming from limited time and competing demands that constrained administrators' engagement in the observation-feedback process. REACH was viewed as beneficial in that it demanded Principal Santoro be in classrooms more frequently, an event that would be hard to make time for if not mandatory. Despite the time demand classroom observations require, Santoro found them enjoyable as they allowed her to see "*all the positive things happening in the building.*" Santoro described her approach to the observation process as framing it "*not as a critical evaluation,*" but an opportunity to further develop relationships with teachers to encourage buy-in and retention. This cursory instructional, relationship-focused approach to observations partially stemmed from intense time demands required to implement the process for a large staff. Principal Santoro said that conducting so many observations is so time consuming that they do not have time to be appropriately reflective and thoughtful with their feedback.

Several teachers confirmed Principal Santoro's accounting of observations. They found the feedback from administrators to be basic in nature, lacking specificity and support to make related practice changes.

Though teachers generally viewed the opportunity for feedback as beneficial, the actual feedback content provided combined with personal and organizational challenges limited use for practice change. Several of the teachers we spoke with described observation feedback as affirming of their practice generally while including little specific information about areas in need of improvement. For example, when one teacher was asked if their evaluator identified any areas of improvement they responded, "*Not specific areas. She just said, 'You seem to be more passionate and you did a better job this year than last year.' That's all she said.*" Another teacher said the principal, "*just gives me a lotta words about affirmation about the way I taught and la, la, la, and I can see that the principal is not against teachers.*"

While post-observation conferences may have encouraged continued positive relationships between administration and staff, some teachers felt frustrated at the lack of substantive feedback and guidance about how to improve their instruction. The two special education teachers we spoke with had external evaluators coming from the district Office of Diverse Learner Supports and Services. The specificity of suggestions and feedback from these evaluators stood in stark contrast to what came from Khan administrators. To illustrate the difference, one special education teacher recalled their evaluator identifying the need for increased student engagement suggesting the teacher may try to:

> "*...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, and then maybe have a student come up instead of myself or the content teacher teaching the bell ringer, having the students come up and do*

that, and also having maybe the students come up more to the board and solve problems."

The specificity and clarity of this feedback helped this teacher feel confident in their ability to take the first step toward improved student engagement, but this ability to productively use REACH feedback to guide improvement efforts was not common at Khan.

Teachers we spoke with at Khan reported little to no use of REACH feedback and data to guide their instructional improvement efforts.
Several teachers cited the lack of feedback as the reason they had not attempted any instructional changes. With one teacher summarized this rationale when they said, "*To be 100 percent honest, not really, because I mean she didn't give me anything that was so important to work on.*" Some teachers did not attempt specific practice changes, but did attempt to increase the frequency with which they used instructional techniques which evaluators had identified as effective or desirable. The few teachers that wanted to use REACH feedback to make instructional changes were left to search for new techniques and support for themselves. Though some of these teachers successfully found and attempted instructional improvements, they often reported facing challenges to the process due competing priorities and limited time for planning and reflection.

Integration and Influence

Khan's limited IISS left little room for integration of REACH or the FFT. In this context, it was not surprising that there was little evidence that either was utilized in the school, outside of the required REACH process. In the absence of a defined, school-wide instructional support system and substantive, actionable REACH feedback, teachers were the primary drivers of instructional change efforts and their colleagues were the most valuable and utilized resource for change efforts. While Khan's principal described utilizing a distributed model of leadership, teacher perceptions of the system varied greatly. Though it is not uncommon to use this leadership model in schools, to be effective, distributed leadership must be situated within a broader, school-level improvement agenda. This was not the case in Khan, which lacked coherent school-level aims and did not communicate instructional plans. Coupled with the culture of teacher autonomy and divergent expectations for improvement across departments, Khan leadership appeared to facilitate teacher individualism and at the same time hindered school-wide collective responsibility. Even teachers who felt considerable support for instructional improvement from their department or team were often unable to leverage joint resources because of limited collaborative time and competing priorities for that time. Although Khan teachers faced considerable roadblocks in participating in collective instructional improvement efforts, they persisted in their individual efforts toward growth. The teachers we spoke with, even the veteran experts, all acknowledged working to improve some aspect of their instruction, yet the process to successfully achieving this aim was hindered by a piecemeal support system.

Nadler Elementary School – A Case Study

Overview
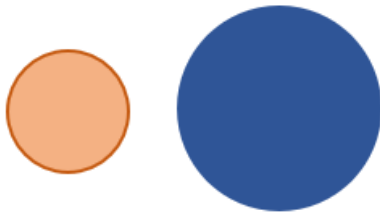
Nadler has a strong IISS which was largely principal-directed. The extended tenure of the principal, community-focused selective hiring approach, and low teacher turnover facilitated a consistent relationship- and expertise-rich environment. Teachers described administrators as strong instructional leaders who were integral to Nadler's IISS, as they regularly worked directly with teachers on student data. Additionally, the principal's clearly communicated and high expectations for improved student learning encouraged teachers to leverage collaborative structures as learning and improvement opportunities. In the context of Nadler's robust, administrator-driven IISS, REACH teacher evaluation and observations were typically positioned as required but unimportant. For many teachers, REACH observation feedback was a formalized moment of conversations that were already happening. REACH did not prove a meaningful data source for teacher improvement and was not integrated into Nadler's strong, principal-directed IISS.

Details

Nadler Elementary School is a highly-rated neighborhood school on the Near South Side. Over 90 percent of its population is composed of Latinx students. More than 90 percent of the student population qualifies for free and reduced-price lunch and just under 90 percent are ELs. While the school has seen a small decline in enrollment over the last five years, it was considered normal fluctuation. Principal Martin has been the principal of Nadler for more than a quarter century. Through that time, he has built a strong reputation for the school in the community and beyond. As a new principal, Principal Martin leaned on his skills as a classroom instructor, as he learned to develop leadership skills. That focus persisted through his tenure and helped to cultivate a professional culture focused on instructional improvement and an IISS which provided comprehensive support to teachers. This culture and support system reflected Principal Martin's mission to improve student achievement by emphasizing teacher development as the core mechanism to improve student performance. Principal Martin's tenure—and hands-on leadership style—manifest such that he is now a defining, fundamental characteristic of the school.

Teachers typically described Principal Martin and their relationship with him in positive terms. Several noted that his "*approachable*" and trusting style helped position him as a mentor and someone teachers could ask for support. Teachers also described Martin as a leader who directly involved himself in their challenges with parents, students, and instruction. He did this in a way that made teachers feel supported and not micromanaged or picked on, and ultimately teachers felt like he had their backs, while trusting their professional judgement. The "*very positive*"

relationship between staff and leadership was intentionally cultivated through selective hiring, trust-building, and support working toward expectations for improved student learning.

Selective hiring, low turnover, and a culture focused on student learning and improvement helped build a strong staff with years of accumulated expertise.

The high quality of the staff, both in terms of experience and relationships, facilitated collaboration and colleague support. Principal Martin and teachers agreed that the collaborative, improvement-focused culture of Nadler was constructed and reinforced through thoughtful, purposeful staffing. Principal Martin described assessing potential staff in terms of attitude, ability to relationship build, and team fit. These aspects were essential for facilitating the collaboration he saw as the backbone to improved teacher performance. He said:

> *"You want people who build relationships, people who work well with others, people who have a sense of humor, people who are balanced...who know how to work with different personalities because I think the way people plan with one another, the way they write units together, the way we do vertical planning and horizontal planning is almost more important than, how I evaluate them in the classroom, how they perform structurally."*

Martin went on to say that these are essential aspects, because he and his experienced staff, can *"teach instructional strategies...or how to plan,"* but the teachers must desire to learn, contribute, and be focused on student development. This perspective and culture drew a now veteran teacher to the school initially because they *"could feel that I would be supported in my first few years of teaching."*

This community-focused approach to hiring was also cited by multiple teachers as cultivating a workplace where they were happy and wanted to stay.

As a result, teacher turnover was very low, facilitating a buildup of institutional knowledge and pedagogical and content expertise. Multiple teachers described teacher tenure and experience as a core strength of the school. One highlighted how teacher retention reinforced the strong feeling of community when they said, *"Everybody's been teaching here for so long. We're like a family."* They went on to note that long-term staff relationships promoted the culture of collaboration and improvement expected by Principal Martin, saying:

> *"I think we're collaborative. I think we like each other too, so that helps...So you have to have those relationships with your peers because then you help one another. So like, 'Oh, my God. I don't have this book. Do you have this book?' And so—I feel like I can walk into any classroom and ask for anything that I need. But I feel like the principal has created that climate, that culture within teachers."*

Principal Martin acknowledged his purposeful approach to cultivating the culture he wanted at Nadler through hiring, retention, direct and structural support for development, and by instilling high expectations. As the instructional leader, he clearly and persistently messaged and modeled high expectations and a mission to improve student achievement. Intentional development of a strong and a shared vision of instructional excellence was of central importance to administrators. Many teachers we spoke with described their work and improvement efforts in

terms of expectations for excellence and student growth laid out by administrators. This framing was intentionally cultivated by Principal Martin through the strategic reinforcement of expectations and personal demonstration of commitment as tools for developing collective responsibility and a culture of continuous improvement. For example, Principal Martin described that "*every time you have a meeting*" about anything at all "*I just start talking about these expectations. It has nothing to do with my purpose for meeting, but I think every time you bring 'em together, you talk about those kinds of things...that's how you create a culture*."

Teachers acknowledged the central importance of high expectations to Nadler's school identity and culture but for several the principal's modeling of collective responsibility was even more influential in cultivating their dedication to collective responsibility and the mission of improved achievement. Additionally, while there was little evidence of distributed leadership, Principal Martin's involvement in all aspects of the school encouraged a professional culture of community, rather than one of hierarchical oversight. In characterizing how his modeling encouraged an egalitarian feeling among the staff they said, "*He goes above and beyond in every aspect. He doesn't believe in hierarchies. He will raise up his sleeves, and whatever we have to do, we gotta do it. And because he shows that, like everyone else feels like...no one is more important than someone else.*" Taken together, high expectations for student learning and strong collective responsibility served to further develop trusting professional relationships and increase teacher commitment to Nadler and its mission.

While teachers at Nadler described a culture highly focused on improving student learning and teacher development, they also felt trusted as experts and professionals which helped them feel confident trying new things in their classrooms.
Several teachers expressed the sentiment that "*admins' belief that teachers know what they're doing*" encouraged them to develop their practice and take advantage of collaborative structures as opportunities for learning. They also characterized the autonomy they enjoyed as predicated on trust, saying, "*So our principal's very—he trusts his teachers, right? So, he's very trusting. So, therefore, he does not have like a micromanagement type of culture in the school.*" Similarly, teachers saw administrative trust as allowing them professional autonomy. One teacher described this autonomy as existing within a system of development and accountability, describing that Martin giving teachers "*a lot of independence and he trusts our judgment. If there is anything, he thinks you need to improve upon, he finds some way of letting you know, but he never really—doesn't nitpick. He values creativity*." The high level of principal-teacher trust and professional respect which provided for teacher autonomy was continuously framed as situated within and in service to improvement in student learning.

Instructional Improvement Support System

Nadler had a robust, administratively-directed, IISS which included structures, routines, and norms directed at improved student achievement through teacher development. Administrators were instrumental in the IISS not only because they established the structures that facilitated collaboration, but because they were directly involved with teacher development and were characterized by many teachers as influential sources of knowledge and support for improvement. Teachers described Nadler's IISS as including multiple structures that facilitated regular collaboration, including specialized committees, grade-level and vertical team meetings, and shared prep periods. Some also described expectations and routines around engaging with student data. The clear mission of improved student achievement and the improvement-focus culture cultivated at Nadler served to cohere and propel improvement efforts.

Teachers at Nadler described how structural supports, like team and committee meetings, were important and generative sources of learning for instructional improvement and practice change.

Many schools have strong collaborative structures, but find themselves using this time to address urgent logistical problems, rather than teaching and learning issues. Nadler teachers were frequently able to move past these issues and engage with student data and shared planning in ways that informed their practice. This focus on achievement, paired with collaborative opportunities, established data routines to support student learning. When describing how Nadler's focus on supporting student growth was operationalized through routines and collaboration, one teacher said:

> "I think our school is great at really just kind of seeing the big picture, student achievement. And we really are good at focusing on individual students and progress monitoring them, every couple weeks if they're very low, every five weeks if they're like Tier 2 RTI. So we get together as a team and we come up with interventions—like why is this kid not growing? So we come up with individualized interventions."

Teachers' opportunities to collaborate with colleagues around student data and instructional practice not only supported personal practice development, but for some it also promoted a feeling of collective responsibility and shared effort. In describing how collaborative time promoted teacher learning and provided improvement support, one teacher said:

> "Yeah, we meet weekly...They're grade level meetings. And sometimes it's pretty nice, especially if we're gonna analyze some student work or look at a task that we're giving the kids. I like those meetings because then we'll talk about kids, and then it's enjoyable to say, 'Oh, you're getting something pretty good out of this _____. I wonder why I'm not getting the same? What can I do to fix that?' or 'Is this a challenging task we're asking the kids to do or is it just a lot of work?' So when we meet and discuss student work and discuss our own assignments, I really enjoy that."

A few teachers described how principal trust and the culture of collaboration and improvement encouraged them to engage with student data and make the most of learning opportunities, *"[Principal Martin] trusts that we make good decisions, that we're unit planning, that we're meeting. And we have like common grade level practices so that we can meet, and he does give us those opportunities to unit plan and look at student work."* The focus on and expectations around improving student achievement encouraged several to take advantage of collaborative opportunities in ways to reflect on student learning connected to their instructional practice. Over time, routines around student data and the responsive instruction that should follow have become largely normative at Nadler. Principal Martin and teachers hold themselves to a high standard and have the motivation and support to consistently work improvement.

Most Nadler teachers characterized administrators as strong instructional leaders who were integral to their improvement process and trajectory.

In fact, when we asked teachers who they went to when they needed support or were trying to improve, Principal Martin was the most common response. While Nadler teachers still depended on their colleagues for collaboration and learning, administrators were positioned as the first line of support. Several teachers recounted instances when they sought and were provided with support for improvement from administration. Some connected the comfort they felt at engaging administrative support to their long-established, trusting relationships. The support provided by administrators came in many forms: direct assistance, engagement with families, attendance at relevant meetings, and providing of resources.

Teachers repeatedly identified Principal Martin as who they sought out when facing a challenge in the classroom. Teachers typically portrayed Principal Martin as being aware of what was happening in classrooms due to frequent, brief, and informal pop-ins. These observational moments often served as a catalyst for informal practice-based discussion between the principal and teachers. These conversations increased administrators' familiarity with the goings on in classrooms further. Yet, if there was an issue that they needed to bring to his attention, a simple email would suffice to get the support required. One teacher described this ease of access to support, *"But every once in a while, I'll email Principal Martin or the social worker…'Hey, this is happening in my classroom,' and I always get support from them."* The assurance with which teachers at Nadler described their access to support for instructional improvement, student management, and all manner of concerns was striking. The depth and breadth of support teachers described from Principal Martin was well summarized by one veteran science teacher, *"You know, if I ask for professional development, I'll get it. If I ask for a resource, I'll get it. If I need help with a particularly challenging student, they'll help."* While another reflected on how this support manifested when he first came to the school, recalling, *"There were concerns I had teaching-wise, instructionally, and I knew who to talk to. I can get information from different teachers, and then I was also given some additional help, support in that field, so anything that I'm looking for I'm given…[within] the financial constraints that the school has."* The relative ease with which improvement supports could be procured through connecting with administration reinforced to teachers that their continuous improvement was paramount as it was vital to improved student achievement. Similarly, administrators' willingness to participate in

collaboration with teachers around student data and support further teacher's perceptions of support as provided as part of Nadler's IISS.

Administrators regularly engaged with teachers during collaborative opportunities in ways that teachers perceived as normative and beneficial.

Some instances of administrative participation in meetings and collaborative learning were seen as part of the normal functioning of the school. Multiple teachers described how the assistant principal regularly supported teachers as they engaged with student data and made planning and instructional decisions based on their examination. The normality of this type of engagement and support at Nadler was evident as one teacher related that "*Teachers do grade-level meetings every week with our assistant principal where she helps with unit plans and looking at student work and those sorts of things*." The expectation that teachers should be reviewing student data to inform their instruction is relatively common in schools, yet the consistent and regular administrative support for this engagement was prioritized at Nadler. A few teachers also reported Principal Martin attending meetings which were particularly relevant to areas of concern identified by a teacher. When the principal took the time to attend meetings in this context, it facilitated the teachers' perspective of a shared community and reinforced the idea that teachers were "*not so far removed from them [administrators]*" and everyone was working toward a shared mission.

The shared goal of improved student learning, as shown by achievement and growth, was the foundation of Nadler's IISS.

This foundational aim, paired with direct developmental support from the principal and access to learning-focused collaborative opportunities, promoted and supported teacher practice change efforts. These efforts commonly stemmed from engagement and reflection based on student data or informal administrative observations.

REACH System for Teacher Evaluation

Nadler's Principal Martin characterized REACH teacher evaluations as an "obligatory exercise" that added little value in terms of supporting teacher development.

Teachers reported Principal Martin as the sole evaluator responsible for all observations, feedback, and ratings; "*He totally does every evaluation and every rating. It's totally his own*." Despite taking on the mantle of responsibility, several teachers depicted the process as compliance based. Some came to this determination because Principal Martin characterized the data produced as "*not for him [the principal]*." While another teacher interpreted the quality of enactment as reflecting its lack of importance, saying "*It's a formality. Absolutely. He does it, boom, that fast. Boom. It's done*." This compliance perspective and personal responsibility, coupled with loose implementation, primed many teachers to dismiss REACH as a tool to support practice improvement. In fact, one teacher simply said of the principal's REACH implementation, "*I don't think he really has time for it*" but goes on to note that this is not concerning because if "*things aren't working out*" with a teacher's practice there are lots of opportunities to be alerted and improvement efforts supported.

Teachers typically described Principal Martin taking a relaxed approach to the observation process, sometimes omitting portions he deemed unnecessary or cumbersome.

This relaxed approach was shared by several teachers who noted that they did little special preparation for planning for the observation period. One resource teacher described REACH pre-observation conference and the principal's review of their submitted protocol as "*not really that formal,*" noting that the principal did "*not put a lot into*" reviewing their submitted protocol. Similarly, post-conference discussions were often brief, though some did contain useful information for teachers' instructional development.

Despite the lackadaisical approach to REACH observations, most teachers' positive relationships and familiarity with the principal increased their confidence in the accuracy of the observations and reduced fear around the accountability aspects of REACH.

While teachers generally found feedback useful, most understood it as a part of a larger, ongoing conversation about instructional improvement happening with the principal. The frequency with which teachers engaged with the principal around instruction allowed them to position REACH observations in a context of familiarity and trust. In describing how Principal Martin's trust and knowledge of them as instructors led to a relative feeling of comfort toward REACH observations, they said:

> "*It's not made into a huge ordeal, you know? And that makes me feel good about me as a teacher because I know that that's [the REACH observation] just one point in time, you know? It's not like—it's not my teaching relies on this one point in time. It's like, I'm a teacher. I make good choices. Maybe I have a tough day. Maybe my kids are having a tough day. But it's not [the] end-all, be-all because he knows me.*"

This teacher acknowledged that Principal Martin held very high standards for teaching excellence and that these expectations were well understood throughout the school. Yet these high standards could lead to lower REACH scores. Teachers' objections to REACH ratings at Nadler most often surfaced about the subjectivity of ratings across schools. Some teachers expressed frustrations that the REACH ratings associated with certain behaviors differed among schools, placing them at a disadvantage due to Nadler's high expectations. To illustrate this point one teacher said "*It's a little frustrating too because 'Distinguished' in this school means a lot different in another school. I know teachers in other schools get 'Distinguished' and we talk about what they do in the classroom and what gets them that 'Distinguished' would get us like a 'Basic' or a 'Proficient.' So I feel like it's very subjective.*"

Though most teachers did not identify REACH evaluations as an important source in guiding instructional improvement efforts, some did receive feedback that was specific and usable.

One third-grade teacher described how his relationship with Martin primed him to attend to the feedback. "'*Cause usually—he's very real. I mean, he's—you know, you can trust him. He doesn't say anything that's outrageous or anything, like yeah, I could probably work on that.*" In describing the practice changes attempted following REACH feedback one teacher said, "*I'm quite diligent about it. I do make changes to try to improve the learning environment and increase student on-task behavior.*" She went on to characterize these attempts as "*ongoing*"

because they are "*hard skills to master*" but highlighted how strong planning and content preparation facilitates her ability to focus on these areas. Collaborative planning time designed to support joint work supported this teacher's individual improvement efforts. While teachers generally found REACH feedback generally useful, most understood it as a part of a larger, ongoing conversation about instructional improvement happening within the school. REACH feedback was simply a formalized moment of improvement conversations that were already happening.

Integration and Influence
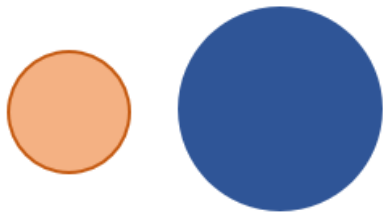
The well-established IISS, which existed in Nadler before implementation of REACH, largely remained, with little intentional integration of REACH or the FFT. This stark separation of the IISS from all things REACH, as well as teachers' regular engagement with student data and access to learning-focused collaborative opportunities, fulfilled the purpose of the role of REACH for many teachers. In describing what she thought the purpose of REACH evaluation was and reflecting on why it was not particularly important or meaningful at Nadler, one teacher said, "*I guess people would think that it's [REACH] for staff development, but it's kind of more addressed on a weekly basis at a grade-level [meeting] if needed.*" Simply put, REACH, as a feedback mechanism was overshadowed at Nadler by the consistent, pressing work of teacher improvement aimed at student achievement. As such, the power of the data produced through REACH observations was just one more instance of feedback, one more learning opportunity in a school full of them. One teacher described REACH in the context of their school IISS and culture, saying:

> "*Yeah, I mean, just from the start, like from the get-go, we talked about it. It's not—this is just one thing that I kinda have to do, you know, to—because somebody's telling him to do it, and it's not for him—I think just having a open conversation with him all the time, not only during REACH. Like, I can go into his office and talk about something, or he'll come and talk to me about something. It's—I don't know, just having—it's not—I don't know, it doesn't seem so nerve-wracking to have the observation. And then to even have the pre- or post-conferences, it's not a big deal. Like, it is nice that I get to—he comes into my classroom, like, I love that he comes into the classroom and does an observation and sees what we're doing, but then in terms of the grading of it…*"

A similar sentiment was shared by another teacher who depicted REACH evaluations as not bringing anything new to the table in terms of development when it is situated in a school where leaders are already aware of your teaching practice; "*I mean they know what you're doing in your classroom, so it's not like anything that you do should be that shocking when they come to evaluate you.*" They went on to describe how feedback about classroom management was the only potentially relevant area on which they could receive feedback because the principal was already familiar with other aspects of their instructional practice and planning. Essentially, the

long tenure of the principal and many teachers at Nadler, combined with a multi-faceted IISS and clear instructional expectations, made REACH low-impact in its ability to guide teacher instructional improvement efforts. However, the culture and supports for improvement could be leveraged by teachers to address REACH-related instructional changes if they wished. Therefore, despite the poor implementation and lack of integration of REACH and the FFT, and that REACH data was not a central driver of instructional change for most teachers, those who attempted REACH related changes were often able to master and internalize new practices.

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Appendix A

REACH teacher evaluations include two main components: professional practice and student growth. The specific positions of teachers determine the weight of each component in their overall score. Observations, the main focus of this study, are the major contributor to all teachers' scores.

Table A.1. Components Making Up a REACH Summative Score

Teachers	2016–17		
	Professional Practice (Observations)	Student Growth	
		Performance Tasks	Value-Added
Elementary Grade 3-8 educators who teach English, Reading, Math, including teachers of diverse learners	70%	10%	20%
Elementary PreK-Grade 2 educators, including teachers of diverse learners who teach only students in Pre-K-grade 2	70%	30% *based on 2 Performance Tasks*	
Elementary Grade 3-8 educators of non-tested subjects such as Science, Social Science, Fine Arts, Physical Education, including teachers of diverse learners and Teacher-Librarians	70%	30% *based on 2 Performance Tasks*	
High school educators	70%	30% *based on 2 Performance Tasks*	
Counselors, Related Service Providers (RSP), and Educational Support Specialists (ESS)	100%		

Appendix B

This appendix includes the data sources used for sample selection. *5Essentials* Survey data identified schools with strong instructional leadership and principal-teacher trust (**see Appendix C** for details). Once schools were identified, administrative data was used to ensure the sample of teachers included represented a range of teaching experience, positions held, evaluation scores, and demographic characteristics. This sampling approach allowed the experiences of a wide variety of teachers with REACH evaluations to be represented, which was essential to understanding what was working and for whom.

Administrative Data

The UChicago Consortium has access to longitudinal datasets describing students and teachers. We use the following data sets to bound our school and teacher participant sample as outlined in the box titled *Interview Data Used in this Brief* on p.7:

- Personnel data: These datasets include information about teacher demographics, certifications, and years of experience in CPS. Importantly they also link teachers to the school where they taught in a given year, and how it relates to their REACH experiences. We used personnel data from the 2012–13 through 2017–18 school years to ensure our teachers in our sample taught a variety of subjects and represented a variety of years of experience.
- Teacher evaluation data: This report utilized REACH evaluation data from the 2014–15 and 2015–16, including teachers' final evaluation ratings and scores, as well as scores for each of the three components—teacher practice, performance tasks, and value-added (when applicable). We used this information to ensure a sample of teachers which represented a variety of REACH ratings.

Survey Data

- *5Essentials* Survey data: We also use teacher survey data on principal instructional leadership and principal-teacher trust from spring 2015, to sample schools for the qualitative work.

Appendix C

5Essentials Survey data identified schools with strong instructional leadership and principal-teacher trust based on responses to the survey items below for our sample selection. These were seen as important attributes for the productive, learning-focused implementation of REACH teachers' evaluations which we wished to examine.

Figure C.1. Questions Asked of Teachers in 2015–16 *5Essentials* Survey to Determine Schools in which to Hold Interviews

	Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with each of the following:
	1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree
2.	The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers.
3.	I trust the principal at his or her word.
4.	It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.
5.	The principal takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.
6.	The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty members.
7.	The principal places the needs of children ahead of personal and political interests.
8.	The principal at this school is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly.

	Principal Instructional Leadership
	Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with each of the following:
	1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree
	A member of the school leadership team:
1.	Makes clear to the staff the leadership's expectations for meeting instructional goals.
2.	Communicated a clear vision for our school.
3.	Presses teachers to implement what they have learned in professional development.
4.	Knows what's going on in my classroom.
5.	Provides me with useful feedback to improve my teaching.
6.	Has provided me with the support I need to improve my teaching.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANDRIA SHYJKA is a Qualitative Researcher and Survey Specialist at the UChicago Consortium. In this position she has worked on a variety of research projects which examine how schools and teachers use data for improvement. Currently, Andria's work focuses on building equitable learning environments through research and strategic partnerships with districts, schools, and support organizations. She believes her decade of teaching experience provides a valuable background to research of teacher improvement via formal evaluation, professional development and student feedback, assessment of school culture and climate, and organizational change. Daughter of a teacher, Andria grew up immersed in learning and still enjoys opportunities to work with aspiring teachers and school leaders as she pursues a doctorate of policy studies in urban education, with a concentration in educational organization and leadership at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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