TEACH +PLUS

Opportunities for Teachers, Results for Urban Students

REACH 2.0:

Incorporating Peer Feedback and Peer Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

The Chicago Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows (TPF) are a diverse group of current Chicago Public School teachers who represent elementary and secondary schools in traditional, selective enrollment, charter, and alternative school settings. The Fellows have been involved in laying the groundwork for Recogizing Educators Advancing CHicago (REACH) with policy briefs written in 2011 and 2012, and two Teach Plus Fellows served on the negotiating team for the first contract that included REACH. Our current research brief builds on this body of work.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launched a new teacher evaluation system, REACH, in 2012. Three years into its implementation, the program holds great potential and we are excited to put forth recommendations to strengthen REACH and make it an integral part of teachers' instructional practice and improvement. Designing and implementing REACH with fidelity is a monumental task and we applaud the steps that CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) have taken towards creating a robust and reliable system for teacher evaluation.

However, we believe that REACH can be improved in two major areas: providing feedback to teachers in order to improve instruction, and consistently implementing REACH ratings for all teachers. Our research suggests that CPS teachers want to take on a more active role in REACH evaluations by using peer feedback and evaluation.

CHALLENGES

Research from Teach Plus and the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR)[1] highlights two specific challenges with the current REACH evaluation system:

- Challenge 1: Teachers do not view REACH as an effective means of providing feedback for improving instructional practice.

- Challenge 2: One-fourth of teachers did not receive their required summative evaluation in the first year of REACH due to missing observation ratings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend two approaches to address these issues.

- Institute **Peer Feedback** systems within each CPS school and network. Peer Feedback is provided by another teacher in a similar subject area to help hone teaching practice and prepare for REACH. It is not part of the formal REACH observations. These systems can be implemented today with no contract changes.

- Institute a **Peer Evaluation** system between schools to provide feedback to teachers and to reduce the administrative burden of the REACH system. Peer Evaluation is a formal evaluation by another teacher in a similar subject area which counts as one of the required REACH observations. This approach would require changes to the contract.

> *I think peer observations would be helpful because I find that other teachers in my department have a better sense of what goes on in my classroom than an administrator does. They are more knowledgeable about the content, but also about the students that we teach.*
>
> *–High School Math Teacher, CPS*

ABOUT REACH

CPS, the first district in Illinois to implement a new teacher evaluation system under the state's 2010 Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), began implementing REACH in all of its schools in the fall of 2012. REACH is based on multiple measures, with no individual measure determining a teacher's overall performance rating. The key measures are:

- Professional Practice
- Student Growth[2]

The REACH evaluation system improves on the former system, first implemented in the 1970s, which entailed a short checklist of items and failed to differentiate teacher quality.[3] The new system incorporates a detailed classroom observation process and student growth measures into teachers' effectiveness scores. The teacher practice component consists of classroom observations completed by a certified administrator utilizing the CPS Framework for Teaching, a modified version of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching.[4] As classroom teachers, we became concerned about several issues in the system that needed to be addressed. We conducted a survey of Chicago teachers to gauge their thinking on peer feedback and evaluation.

WHAT DO CHICAGO TEACHERS SAY ABOUT PEER FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION?

RESEARCH METHODS

How did we collect the data?
In the fall of 2014, Chicago Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows conducted a literature review of Peer Assistant and Review models along with the reports on the effectiveness of REACH Evaluation System.[5] Upon review, we identified peer feedback as an area of concern within the REACH Evaluation System. The primary issues appear to be related to quality and confidence in the observation and feedback cycle created by REACH evaluations. To deepen our understanding of ways to improve REACH evaluations, we created a survey about peer and administrator observations.

Who were the participants?
The survey was sent in January 2015 to teachers in preschool through grade 12 in Chicago. The background of the 376 respondents is highlighted below:

- School type: 71% Traditional CPS, 15% CPS Charter, 11% Other (CPS Magnet, Selective, Alternative or Military), 2% Not currently teaching.
- Experience: 52% 1-10 years, 32% 11-20 years; 16% 20+ years.
- Grade level: 26% PreK-5, 20% 6-8, 41% 9-12, 13% Multiple grade levels.
- Subject: the majority of teachers (52%) taught more than one subject, which is common for elementary teachers. Over 89% of respondents identified either Math or English Language Arts (ELA), as one of their content areas. 44% also indicated teaching at least one non-core subject course.

What were our findings?

Our findings show that teachers strongly want feedback from content-area peers and that many are open to evaluation by their peers.

Finding 1: Teachers do not view REACH as an effective means of providing feedback for improving instructional practice.

Only 37% of teachers rated their current evaluation system as very effective or effective in providing meaningful feedback to help improve their practice.[6]
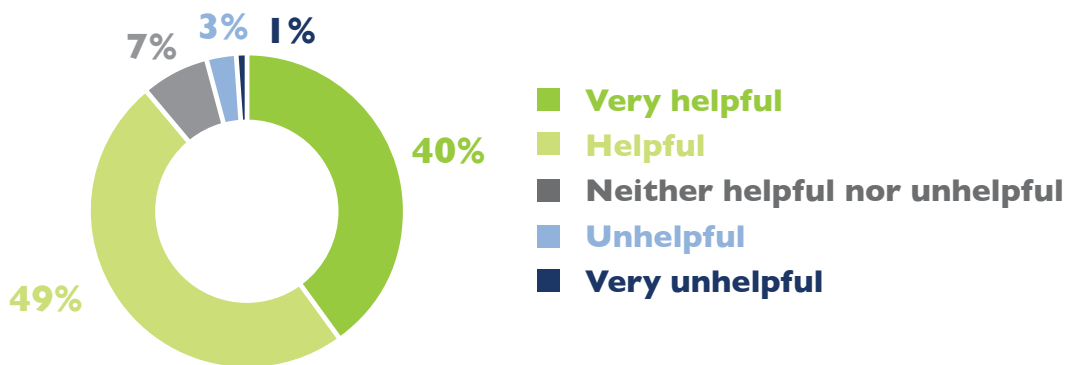
Question: "How effective is the current evaluation system in providing meaningful feedback to help improve your practice?" (n=372)

- **Very effective**
- **Effective**
- **Neither effective nor ineffective**
- **Ineffective**
- **Very ineffective**
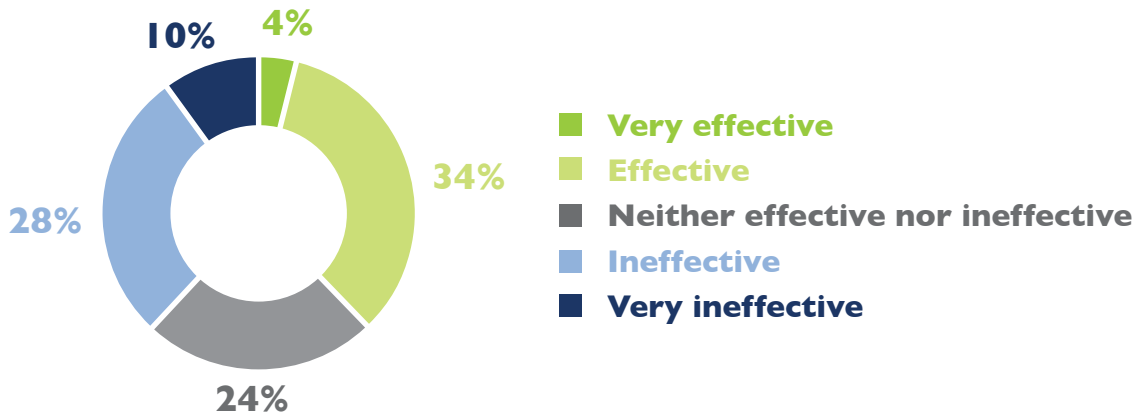
If REACH is not effective in providing meaningful feedback, then it will not serve to improve instruction and student outcomes. The perception that REACH does not provide meaningful feedback may help explain why the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that over 45% of teachers and 55% of evaluators agreed that the evaluation process takes more effort than the results are worth.[7]

Finding 2: Teachers value feedback and evaluations from other teachers with content-area expertise.

Question: "How helpful would a teaching peer with knowledge of your subject be as your evaluator? (evaluation by someone in the same/similar subject)" (n=374)

- **Very helpful**
- **Helpful**
- **Neither helpful nor unhelpful**
- **Unhelpful**
- **Very unhelpful**

An overwhelming 89% of teachers thought evaluation by a peer with similar content experience would be very helpful or helpful. Clearly, teachers welcome feedback from their peers and find it helpful. A teacher with

content expertise can provide feedback on both content and pedagogical content knowledge that a principal may not be able to provide.[8]

Finding 3: Teachers in Chicago are open to the idea of having other teachers observe, provide feedback, and contribute to their evaluation.

We asked teachers about their openness to including peers in observation, feedback, or evaluation. We found that 88% of teachers were open to receiving feedback from their peers, and nearly half (47%) of teachers were open to peers contributing to their evaluations.[9] Answers to an open response question indicated that teachers were hesitant, however, to evaluate peers in their own building.

We also asked all teachers to comment on an ideal balance between peer and administrator evaluations. There was a wide mix of the ideal weighting between administrator and peer observation, although we found that 87% percent of teachers included peer evaluation in their ideal weighting. The ideal average weight of a peer evaluation was 31% of the total observation rating.[10]

Question: "If another teacher's observations or feedback were introduced as part of your evaluation, what approximate balance would you want between a fellow teacher's observation and your principal's observation?" (n=368)

- **0% Peer Observation**
- **10-30% Peer Observation**
- **40-60% Peer Observation**
- **70-100% Observation**
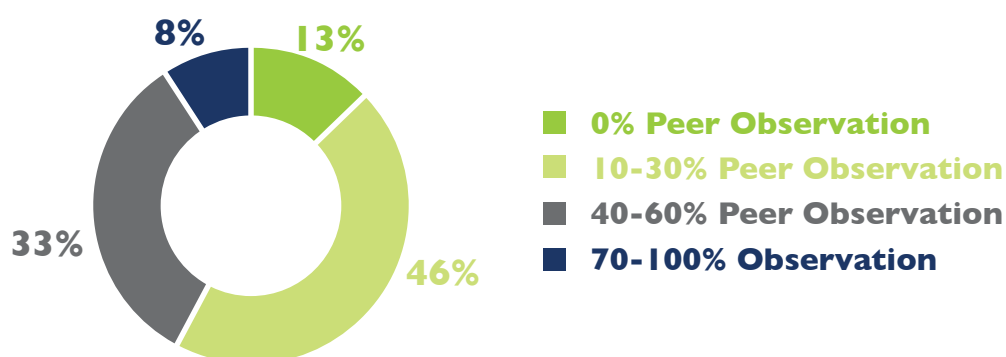
Based on these survey results, teachers in Chicago are clearly open to observations, feedback, and evaluations from their peers. The current implementation of REACH Evaluation System does not yet reflect the perspectives of the respondents in this survey.

Finding 4: One-fourth of teachers did not receive their required summative evaluation in the first year of implementation.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research's 2014 Analytic Memo noted that the missing data for both observation ratings and performance tasks was a major challenge in the first year of REACH. Specifically, the Consortium noted that:

- 24% of non-tenured teachers did not receive a REACH score in 2013-14.
- Over 400 schools had at least one teacher who did not receive the required number of observations.

In many cases, administrators have no experience in the special education classroom and they come to evaluate with a wrong view. Having a teacher in the field evaluate would be more fair and meaningful.

-High School Special Education Teacher, CPS

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- At 47 schools, 100% of their non-tenured teachers did not receive the minimum number of observations, and thus were assigned an "Inability to Rate."[11]

The time requirements to complete REACH may account for this problem. Elementary school administrators average over 120 hours/year administering REACH evaluations, and high school administrators average nearly 168 hours/year administrating REACH observations.[12]

We believe that Peer Feedback, particularly from a colleague with content-area expertise, can address the need for feedback that improves instructional practice. Peer Evaluation, in addition to providing the feedback that can improve instruction, can also reduce the administrative burden of REACH and ensure that more teachers receive their ratings. To institute Peer Feedback or Peer Evaluation, CPS can draw on several systems that have already been developed.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION IN CPS FOR PEER TO PEER FEEDBACK ON TEACHER QUALITY?

CPS offers a variety of feedback and evaluation systems for teachers. The existing systems, however, are disconnected and only affect those teachers who are new, at risk of being fired, or who opt in. Existing systems for feedback in CPS include:

- Chicago New Teacher Center (CNTC): CNTC offers mentors to coach teachers who are new to the profession and to CPS. CNTC coaches are all high-performing teachers on leave from their classrooms who conduct classroom observations and meet with teachers in a coaching setting.

- CPS Consultant Teachers: Mentor teachers from neighboring schools are assigned to teachers who are deemed ineffective and are going through an instructional remediation process required after receiving unsatisfactory performance reviews. They meet weekly during a 90-day period to assist and coach unsatisfactory teachers to help them improve their practice.

- Framework Specialists: Framework Specialists are a select cohort of teachers who create resources, facilitate professional development, and/or create videos aligned to the CPS framework for teaching. These teachers are some to the most important contributors of the CPS Knowledge Center.

> *The most attractive part would be the observer's content expertise. Feedback too often focuses on classroom systems and behavior management, and teachers very rarely get feedback about the best way to teach a particular standard/objective.*
>
> *-High School Math Teacher, CPS*

> *I believe that being evaluated by a fellow teacher who understands the process we go through as teachers. I also believe it would be fairer because some principals can score you low when they don't like you.*
>
> *-Middle School ELA and Social Studies Teacher*

Right now, each of these groups serves only a small section of the CPS teacher population. However, we believe that these human capital resources can be leveraged to implement Peer Feedback and Peer Evaluation more broadly in CPS, as outlined in our recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that Peer Feedback and Peer Evaluation will help generate more teacher buy-in, provide actionable feedback to improve instruction, and solidify the legitimacy of the teacher evaluation process in Chicago. While our two recommendations support each other, each one could also be implemented independently.

- **Peer Feedback:** Institute **Peer Feedback** systems to improve the quality of the feedback that teachers receive to help them improve their instruction. Without changing the contract and with few cost implications, CPS can implement Peer Feedback to teachers from peers in similar content areas.

- **Peer Evaluation:** Institute a **Peer Evaluation** system between similar schools to provide feedback to teachers and to reduce the administrative burden of the REACH system. With a contract change to allow for Peer Evaluation, CPS can provide effective teachers with career growth opportunities, ensure multiple raters to improve REACH reliability, and reduce the administrative burden of REACH on administrators.

Research indicates that peer review is more helpful than reviews solely done by administrators. Even the American Federation of Teachers, the parent union to CTU, has recognized the value of peer review.[13] Our survey demonstrates that many Chicago teachers also think this approach is helpful. The use of Peer Evaluation can reduce administrators' burden of frequent teacher observations, limit top-down approaches to evaluations, and build system capacity of teacher quality and evaluation.

We believe that Peer Feedback and Peer Evaluation will reduce anxiety and increase quality of the on-the-job learning for teachers. There will also be an increase in the credibility of evaluations because peer reviewers will be from similar school backgrounds and content areas. Finally, these systems will help enable successful teachers to expand their positive impact on student learning in ways that do not include administration, thus keeping high-quality and effective teachers connected to the classroom.

I. PEER FEEDBACK

- **Can be adopted without contract changes.**

- **Schools utilize principal-directed preparatory time to provide Peer Feedback to improve practice.**
  At the school level, we believe that Peer Feedback can be implemented at no cost by leveraging principal-directed preparation time within departments or grade-level teams. A Peer Feedback team can be trained in the REACH observation framework and become an extension of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC), Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), or other professional development initiatives at the school. Peer Feedback would be a way for teachers to build capacity and improve collaboration and effectiveness.

- **Networks facilitate content-specific Peer Feedback between schools.**
  Networks facilitate content-specific Peer Feedback by providing training, coordination, and funding for peers to connect with teachers at other schools in the network. (In Chicago, the term "Network" refers to an administrative and regional grouping of schools, usually consisting of 30-40 schools including both elementary and high schools). This inter-school Peer Feedback would be a way for teachers to build capacity and improve collaboration and effectiveness. Networks provide funding for a substitute teacher so teachers can participate in peer observation. Peer reviewers would be trained in the Danielson

framework for observations. A Network could choose to focus its support for teachers of subjects like music, art, or PE, who may not have another colleague in their building who teaches the same content area.

- **The district invests in Peer Feedback, leverages current REACH experts, and provides training to teacher reviewers.**
  The district provides financial and training support to schools that opt to conduct Peer Feedback. Leveraging the expertise of the Framework Specialists and Consulting Teachers, and the certification program for REACH evaluators, CPS can create a simplified toolkit and training, aligned to the REACH framework, to prepare teachers to provide feedback to their peers. Framework Specialists and Consulting Teachers can also provide professional development to peer reviewers. We urge the district to pilot this program by developing this toolkit, providing training, and facilitating a cohort of pilot schools for Peer Feedback. The district can track the effectiveness of the program by tracking changes in REACH ratings for the teachers who receive feedback. District support for Peer Feedback is an important way to leverage teacher talent, and scale up current teacher feedback loops.

II. ADOPTING PEER EVALUATION

- **Contract change required for Peer Evaluation.**

- **Teachers are able to apply and become Peer Evaluators at neighboring schools.**
  Each teacher would be given the opportunity to apply as a Peer Evaluator. Selection criteria would include tenure status, administrator recommendation, and a REACH summative score of 320-400 (upper proficient to excellent).[14] All Peer Evaluators will be reviewing colleagues in similar areas of experience, certification, and endorsements. Evaluators will serve at neighboring schools and not their home school, mimicking the approach used with Consultant Teachers and in response to concerns highlighted in our own research. Peer Evaluators would be trained in accordance with state law and district policy.

- **Networks provide coordination of Peer Evaluators.**
  Networks would work with the schools to coordinate training and schedules to help Peer Evaluators connect with other teachers as part of the REACH evaluation system.

- **The district and CTU agree to include Peer Evaluators as part of the evaluation process. The district provides funding for training, coordination, and substitute teachers.**
  In the next round of contract negotiations, CPS and CTU agree that Peer Evaluation can count for one of the required observations under the REACH framework. The district office hires one employee to coordinate selection and training, and financial and logistical support for the Networks. The district can leverage teacher talent, by recruiting Peer Evaluators from current teacher leader programs including Framework Specialists, CNTC, and Consultant Teachers who have already been trained as evaluators.

CONCLUSION......................................

CPS' REACH teacher evaluation system is a great step forward compared to the previous system, yet it still has room to improve. In particular, REACH needs to improve feedback to teachers and reduce administrative burdens so that all teachers receive their REACH rating. Peer Feedback, which can be implemented without a contract change and at little cost, can begin to provide instructional feedback from colleagues with expertise in each content area. Peer Evaluation, which would require a contract change, can provide both instructional feedback and reduce the administrative load of the REACH evaluations. Both would further legitimize the teacher evaluation process, increase teacher buy-in, and reduce the administrative burden of evaluations so that the REACH evaluation system can improve teaching and learning in Chicago Public Schools.

ENDNOTES ....

[1] Jiang, J, Sporte, S., and Luppescu, S. (2014). "Analytic Memo: Evaluation Data from the First Year of REACH." The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from: https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/analytic-memo-evaluation-data-first-year-reach, p. 4

[2] Chicago Public Schools: "REACH Students." Retrieved 4/16/2015 from: http://www.cps.edu/ReachStudents.aspx

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[5] These were read as part of the research about peer review:

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[6] Question: "How effective is the current evaluation system in providing meaningful feedback to help improve your practice?" (n=372) Responses: "Very effective" (3.8 percent), "Effective" (33.6 percent), "Neither effective nor ineffective" (24.5 percent), "Ineffective" (28.0 percent), "Very ineffective" (10.2 percent). Results for each summary question may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

[7] Jiang, J. Y., & Sporte, S. E. (2014). Teacher evaluation in practice: year 2 teacher and administrator perceptions of REACH. The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

[8] Question: "How helpful would a teaching peer with knowledge of your subject be as your evaluator? (evaluation by someone in the same/similar subject)" (n=374) Responses: "Very helpful" (39.8 percent), "Helpful" (48.9 percent), "Neither helpful nor unhelpful" (7.2 percent), "Unhelpful" (2.7 percent), "Very unhelpful" (1.3 percent).

[9] Question: "How many of these various situations would you be open to considering? (Please check as many as apply)" Responses: "Having another teacher come into my classroom to informally observe my teaching." (77.6 percent), "Having another teacher come into my classroom to observe my teaching and provide me with feedback." (88.4 percent), "Having another teacher come into my classroom to observe my teaching and contribute to my evaluation." (47.2 percent), "I am not open to any of the above situations." (7.6 percent).

[10] Question: "If another teacher's observations or feedback were introduced as part of your evaluation, what approximate balance would you want between a fellow teacher's observation and your principal's observation?" (n=368) Responses: "0% Peer observation and 100% administrator observation" (12.8 percent), "10% Peer observation and 90% administrator observation" (10.6 percent), "20% Peer observation and 80% administrator observation" (16.9 percent), "30% Peer observation and 70% administrator observation" (18.2 percent), "40% Peer observation and 60% administrator observation" (9.8 percent), "50% Peer observation and 50% administrator observation" (21.2 percent), "60% Peer observation and 40% administrator observation" (3.0 percent), "70% Peer observation and 30% administrator observation" (3.3 percent) "80% Peer observation and 20% administrator observation" (4.1 percent) "90% Peer observation and 100% administrator observation" (0.0 percent), "100% Peer observation and 0% administrator observation" (0.3 percent).

[11] Jiang, J, Sporte, S., and Luppescu, S. (2014). "Analytic Memo: Evaluation Data from the First Year of REACH." The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from: https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/analytic-memo-evaluation-data-first-year-reach

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