

For EMBARGOED release:
Wednesday, Sept. 18

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UChicago CCSR report: Early promising results for Chicago's ambitious new teacher evaluation system

A new report from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR) finds that the overwhelming majority of teachers and principals in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) believe the overhaul of the district's teacher evaluation system has promoted teacher growth and instructional improvement; however, teachers also voiced concerns about some elements of the evaluation system, particularly the use of student test scores as a factor in teacher ratings.

"Challenges clearly remain for CPS, which must improve communication and training around teacher evaluation and also grapple with teachers' concerns around the fairness of their ratings," said Sue Spote, the lead author of the report. "Nevertheless, it is promising that teachers and administrators believe the system has the potential to improve instruction, particularly considering that the 2012-2013 school year began with the first teacher strike in CPS in over 25 years, and teacher evaluation was a major point of contention."

The report released Wednesday is part of a study by UChicago CCSR, in collaboration with CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union, of REACH (**R**ecognizing **E**ducators **A**dvancing **C**hicago Students) – CPS's teacher evaluation system implemented during the 2012-2013 school year. Chicago, as the largest district in the nation to put in place a rigorous new system for measuring teacher effectiveness, has become a national test case for revamping teacher evaluation. More than 40 states, including Illinois, have passed legislation in the last few years mandating the evaluation of teachers based on a combination of student performance and the close examination of teacher practice. States and districts have adopted these new systems in response to a number of factors, including a growing body of research on the importance of teacher quality and incentives from the U.S. Department of Education.

This report, the first in a series of reports about REACH, uses survey data and interviews to focus on the perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators during the first year of REACH

implementation. These experiences can be helpful to CPS and to other districts across the country as they work to restructure teacher evaluation. Major findings include:

Teachers and administrators found the observation process useful for improving instruction.

- The overwhelming majority of teachers and administrators surveyed believed the observation process supports teacher growth, identifies areas of strength and weakness, and has improved the quality of professional conversations between them.
- A large majority of teachers believed their evaluator is fair and unbiased and able to assess their instruction accurately.

Teachers were hesitant about the use of student growth on assessments to evaluate their classroom performance.

- More than half of teachers surveyed believed REACH relies too heavily on student test scores to measure teacher effectiveness.
- Nearly one-third of teachers who responded to an open-ended question about what they found most problematic about REACH identified the student growth component and the assessments used to measure student growth.

District communication with teachers and administrators was noted as an area for improvement.

- Many teachers interviewed were confused about how student growth would factor into their ratings. While student growth did not account for more than 25 percent of any teacher's evaluation this year, some thought that the majority of their evaluation hinged on test scores.
- Teachers primarily relied on their school's administrators for information about REACH; yet, more than 60 percent of administrators expressed a weak or moderate understanding of how the different components of REACH were combined into a final summative rating for teachers.

REACH places considerable demands on administrators' time and capacity.

- Based on the amount of time administrators reported spending on each observation, and the average number of observations performed by each administrator, the typical elementary administrator spent 120 hours (the equivalent of two full weeks) solely on teacher evaluation while the average high school administrator spent 168 hours (or roughly three full weeks).
- Some administrators reported having to sacrifice other duties, including working directly with students and parents and participating in departmental meetings, in order to fulfill duties around teacher evaluation.

The study of REACH was generously funded by the Joyce Foundation, which supports the development of policies that both improve the quality of life for people in the Great Lakes region and serve as models for the rest of the country.

Please visit ccsr.uchicago.edu for a copy of the report.