

RESEARCH RETROSPECTIVE JANUARY 2016

Teacher Evaluation in Chicago

Key Findings from Consortium Research

Teacher evaluation systems have been a pillar of recent efforts to improve instruction and ensure that all students have access to effective educators. Through state law changes, Race to the Top, and federal flexibility incentives, more than 40 states are designing and implementing new systems of educator evaluation based on multiple measures, including classroom observations and student growth. This represents wide-scale movement after many years of relative inattention to educator effectiveness within federal and state policy agendas.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) began revising its approach to teacher evaluation in 2006. An initial pilot, the Excellence in Teaching Project (EITP), launched in 2008. The current system, called REACH Students (Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's Students), represents a dramatic departure from the checklist system used prior to 2008. In the 2014-2015 school year, for the first time under the new system, almost all CPS teachers received an evaluation score.

In Chicago and nationwide, these implementation efforts have prompted ongoing conversations about the implications of the new system for teachers, administrators, and students. The critical information these systems generate has the potential to drive better teaching and learning, better resource allocation, and better policy by providing an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on what has been learned from the early phases of implementation and what those findings imply for the future of teacher evaluation in CPS and nationwide.

The UChicago Consortium on School Research has been studying teacher evaluation in CPS from the initial EITP pilot to district-wide implementation of REACH. Studies have included annual surveys of teachers and principals, quantitative analysis of all available ratings, and qualitative interviews with educators and administrators. This retrospective highlights key findings and lessons learned in Chicago from 2008 to 2014.

Teacher Evaluation in Chicago: Key Findings from Consortium Research

The classroom observation and feedback process has potential to spur improvement in instructional practice.

- Reading scores improved on average in schools that were early adopters of the EITP pilot. Among schools in the pilot, those that saw the largest gains tended to be those that were higher achieving and lower poverty.
- In schools participating in EITP, nontenured teachers with unsatisfactory ratings were more likely to leave the district and tended to be replaced by teachers with higher ratings.
- In both EITP and REACH, administrators say that all or most of the observed teachers have incorporated feedback and made improvements in their practice. Most administrators report that the observation process is useful in identifying effective teachers and targeting support.

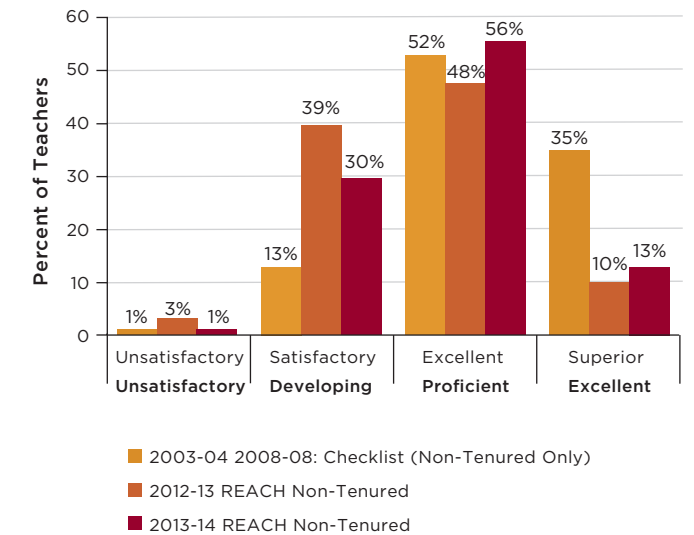
REACH imposes an administrative burden on school leaders, and teachers report increased levels of stress and anxiety.

- Administrators reported that the observation process is burdensome and time-consuming.
- While most administrators feel comfortable with the observation rubric and with assigning ratings, they vary greatly in their skill and comfort at giving constructive feedback and having productive post-observation conferences.
- Most teachers reported that the evaluation process had increased their levels of stress and anxiety.
- Most teachers believe their evaluation relies too heavily on student growth, and only half of teachers said the assessments used to measure student growth are fair assessments of their students' learning.

Most teachers and administrators are positive about the new evaluation system.

- Teachers and administrators report the observation process supports teacher growth, identifies areas of strength and weakness, and has improved communication between leadership and staff within their schools.
- A majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with the evaluation process at their school.
- Teachers welcome the opportunity for feedback and reflection, and most believe their own evaluators are fair and unbiased.
- Three-quarters of teachers and nearly all administrators report the observation framework provides a common definition of effective teaching.
- Two-thirds of teachers and nearly all of administrators say they believe the new system will lead to better instruction and improved student outcomes.

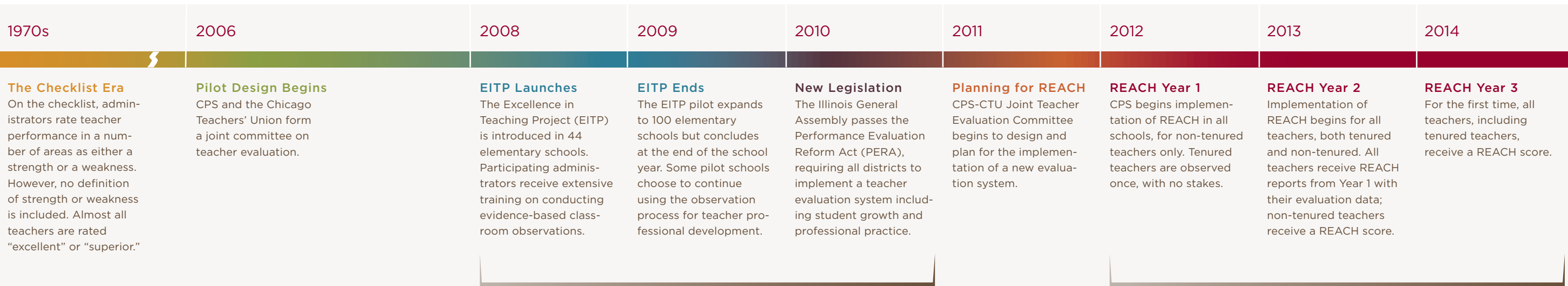
Under REACH, Fewer Teachers Receive Ratings in Top Two Categories



Note: Figure reflects only non-tenured teachers. Top descriptors (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Excellent, and Superior) were initial Excellence in Teaching pilot (EITP) terms. Bottom descriptors (Unsatisfactory, Developing, Proficient, and Excellent) are current REACH terms.

New Evaluation Systems are Substantially Different from Previous Systems

Previous Evaluation Systems	Goals of New Evaluation Systems
Nearly All Teachers Received High Ratings	More Differentiation and Room for Growth
Observations the Only Measure of Performance	Inclusion of Multiple Measures
'Checklist' Tool and Vague Standards	Rubrics Define Effective Instruction
Untrained Evaluators	Certification Requirements for Evaluators
No Formal Feedback Process	Feedback a Requirement



2008-2010: Excellence in Teaching Project utilizes a modified version of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching.

2012-2015: CPS-CTU Joint Teacher Evaluation Committee continues to modify and refine implementation of REACH.

Implementing District-Wide Change Is an Ongoing Process, and Chicago's Approach Continues to Evolve

Chicago was an early adopter of a revamped and expanded teacher evaluation system, and the lessons it has learned offer insights for districts nationwide. One aim of teacher evaluation is continuous improvement, and that applies to the system itself as well as to individual teachers. There is no recipe or formula for structuring a system that will best meet each and every possible need of a district or its workforce. As districts amass more data and see the effects of policy changes, they can and should continue to analyze and revise their approaches.

In addition to findings outlined in research reports, the Consortium's work with CPS has surfaced further implications and considerations for implementing teacher evaluation:

- **Communication to all stakeholders, at all phases, is critically important.** Thorough and frequent communication as decisions are made about the structure of the evaluation system, is a way to meaningfully engage a wider range of stakeholders and make it easier to build teacher and principal buy-in. Articulating the goals of teacher evaluation, the rationale behind each of its components, and the district's vision for supports and accountability can circumvent confusion and make conversations more productive.
- **Implementation details matter.** The timing and frequency of observations, conferences, and reports have important implications for how teachers respond to the feedback generated by their evaluations. For example, CPS teachers currently do not receive their REACH observation reports until late fall of the next school year, which doesn't allow them to act on the feedback in real time, and with the same classes. This timing also doesn't allow principals to make personnel decisions or implement improvement plans.

- **Principals are key to successful implementation.** While many stakeholders will influence how a teacher evaluation system is enacted and perceived, principals play an especially critical role. Not only are they responsible for conducting observations and conferences—both of which they need to do skillfully—but they also establish the school's culture, tone, and expectations around evaluations.

Evaluation is just one piece of the teacher quality and professional development landscape. A primary goal of evaluation is to improve instructional practice across the district. In order to achieve that aim, teacher evaluation systems like REACH need to be linked to individual professional development and school improvement planning processes. If there is a strong improvement plan tied to observations, then leaders can not only target specific areas for coaching and support, they can also begin to evaluate whether or not those supports are successfully improving instructional practice. Policymakers, in turn, can focus on ensuring that each element of the evaluation system is designed to build capacity, support quality instruction, and improve student achievement.

For complete reports and citations visit:
consortium.uchicago.edu/teach-eval