



To: CPS: Chief Officer of Talent, Alicia Winkler, Chief of Staff, Matt Lyons, Educator Effectiveness Manager, Meghan Zefran, CTU President, Karen Lewis, and Quest Center Coordinator, Carol Caref

From: Teach Plus Chicago Teaching Policy Fellows

RE: Recommendations from classroom teachers to support year 1 implementation of REACH Students

Date: October 24, 2012

At our October Teaching Policy Fellows session, we were able to bring together Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) to discuss priorities for implementation of the new REACH Students evaluation system. Our goal was to listen and engage the CPS and CTU representatives around your priorities, and in return we submit this memo as our reflection from the classroom, on key areas that need attention.

As current classroom teachers in Chicago Public Schools, we believe that teacher recommendations for successful implementation of evaluation are critically important. We believe that implementation of a comprehensive teacher evaluation system will improve outcomes for students in public schools across our state, and especially in our city. The teacher evaluation system should be an investment in us as professionals, a means to improve the quality and effectiveness of our instruction and professional responsibilities. We hope you will work with us in an ongoing capacity to build strong feedback loops for teachers in the implementation process.

ISSUE: Differentiation of professional development based on teacher need.

WHY: Too often, teachers sit through professional development that is not focused on improving content knowledge, geared toward a different grade-level than that which they teach, or does not contain any new information. Through differentiated professional development, teacher needs would be met to improve individual practice. Teachers would be allowed to work to improve identified areas of growth that will result in increased learning gains for their students.

IDEAS: Leverage technology and teacher leaders to provide better access to differentiated PD for teachers.

- Professional development should allow for a general overview of the *Framework for Teaching*, technology assistance for teachers new to using CIM, and evaluation data analysis.
- Teachers should be able to search for and enroll in their PD of choice, or as discussed with the evaluator during post-conferencing, through CPS University. PD sessions offered by the district should be targeted toward understanding and exemplars of excellence in the designated component of the *Framework for Teaching*.
- Identify effective teachers to lead more PD and build new training modules to meet newly identified needs based on data from the new evaluation system.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES: Expectations will be clearly understood and teachers will have accessed examples of proficient and distinguished teachers during professional development. Improvements in practice will lead to increased student learning.

“REACH has the potential to identify and develop all CPS teachers into effective educators by setting clear expectations which will in turn highlight teacher strengths and areas for growth. However, the amount of misinformation and lack of knowledge about the system - what it entails, clear examples of proficient and distinguished teaching as well as how summative ratings will be calculated - leaves teachers feeling confused and discouraged instead of confident and empowered”.

– Shelli Shadday, 8th Grade Teacher at Jungman Elementary School

ISSUE: Provide teachers with comprehensive communication and opportunities for feedback on REACH Students implementation.

WHY: As we rollout the new REACH Students evaluation system, there is not enough information being provided for teachers. Teachers need to fully understand the components of the system (Framework for Teaching, Value-Added data, and Performance Tasks). In addition, as teachers are being evaluated on their practice using the Framework for Teaching, evaluators should identify different areas of growth for individual teachers in order to improve their practice, which requires the expansion of available resources.

IDEAS: Use communication strategies that provide clear, consistent, and transparent messaging.

- Teachers should participate in a mock evaluation by watching similar videos to their administration and using the framework themselves. This will give the teachers a voice and help them build trust in the process.
- Teachers should have access to watch videos of teaching that span the four ratings in order to see what teaching at each rating level looks like. Accompanying each video should be a place for conversation about the teaching and its rating.
- Develop an online forum to serve as a space where teachers can post questions that would be answered by other teachers or CPS facilitators.
- We also recommend “fact checkers” for the online forum. This should be well-trained experts in REACH, who are able to jump into the conversation to clarify the facts regarding the evaluation system.

Expected Outcomes: Currently, there is a system-wide disconnect on the implementation of the new teacher evaluation process. Due to differences in conveying messages, many teachers are unclear on the exact details of the process and have a lack of trust in their evaluators. There needs to be transparent messaging about principal training and accountability in the sense that teachers know the processes their administrators went through to evaluate them, and they also know how principals are being held accountable for their jobs. We believe that these low cost steps can be taken to reach clarity and gain trust between teachers and evaluators.

"REACH is a multi-faceted system that will improve education IF it is correctly implemented in Chicago Public Schools. This means clear expectations, a fair evaluation for all subjects and grade levels, challenging professional development with up-to-date information, and resources to support teachers. Currently, these necessities are not available. This should be the highest priority of the district."

-Susan Volbrecht, 2nd Grade Teacher at Cook Elementary School

ISSUE: Training principals to be effective evaluators that promote teacher growth and improve student learning.

WHY: The REACH evaluation system requires principals to receive adequate training necessary to conduct proper evaluations to monitor teacher practice and student progress. In order to effectively evaluate classroom teachers according to the four domains, principals have to pass a series of modules and organize their daily schedules in order to meet the demand for pre-conference meetings, classroom observations and post conferences with each teacher. This concerns teachers due to the varying levels of principal experience from building to building. Although the REACH evaluation system is a much-needed improvement in the assessment of teacher effectiveness, many teachers find the system to be threatening and have little confidence in their administration's ability to conduct an effective and objective observation due to their limited training and the bias they may carry with them as they evaluate teachers.

IDEAS: Build capacity of Principals to provide effective feedback through ongoing professional development.

- In an effort to stay current, principals should be required to pursue professional development at least two times within their four-year contract that focuses on instructional coaching and implementation of the CPS Framework for Teaching.

- The evaluation system should also require school leaders to pursue professional development in order to use research-based interventions to coach struggling teachers. Most teachers believe that Principals need additional training to develop the skills in having strong, professional conversations about instruction.
- To properly implement the observation rubric with fidelity, principal accountability needs to be raised. This can be achieved without cost by mandating that all observations are recorded (using iPads or other technology already in schools). This will be a useful tool for post-observation conferencing, teacher and principal reflection, and as an additional safeguard to be sure rubric indicators are aligned to evidence. Videos should be given only to the teacher after the post-observation conference for their professional use, unless otherwise agreed upon by both parties.

"The REACH system has great potential to foster conversation about teaching and learning but must be implemented with transparency".

-Vonzele Reed, History Teacher and Instructional Coach at Lakeview High School

Expected Outcomes: Unlike the previous evaluation model, struggling teachers should have the opportunity to reflect and set goals to make improvements, provided that they are supported by an administration that is fully equipped with high quality strategies to improve instruction. But more importantly we can use the REACH evaluation system to properly foster a professional dialogue to identify and share concrete evidence in areas (according to the 4 domains) where teachers need to improve. The pre-and-post conferences should be an opportunity to set short and long term goals by both stakeholders. Principals who know how to use the REACH evaluation system effectively will foster conversations with their faculty rooted in teaching and learning. The REACH evaluation system requires teachers to strengthen their teaching in order to improve student outcomes.

ISSUE: Utilization of teacher leaders to enhance the implementation of the new evaluation system.

WHY: Using the evaluation system to identify effective teachers should be celebrated and rewarded. We believe teacher leaders such as department chairs at the high school level or grade level leads at the elementary school level can take on some of the tasks of evaluation as they do in numerous districts across our state and nation.

IDEAS: Identify effective teaching and elevate teacher leaders across schools.

- Teachers who have consistently demonstrated quality instruction should be encouraged by principals to assume instructional leadership positions in order to assist in school improvement and work with colleagues in a non-evaluative manner.
- Continuous practice and professional development will allow administrators to identify effective teachers but will also foster conversation to help teachers who appear to have challenges in their classroom instruction.
- Elevate effective teacher leaders, as evaluators, providers of differentiated professional development, and opportunities to be at the decision-making table to improve implementation.

Expected Outcomes: In many successful suburban districts, teacher leaders fully lead their departments and are entrusted to evaluate their peers. Many teachers respect these teacher leaders because of the fact that they are experts in their content areas and are still in the classroom unlike administrators who may be far removed from the classroom and not experts in specific content areas or grade levels. This would also ease administrative time for evaluation in large schools.

"Chicago Public Schools is far behind neighboring suburban districts in the area of teacher leadership within schools. It is my hope that the REACH evaluation system can aide in elevating highly effective teachers. With extensive professional development support from school administrators, the district and the union, CPS can plan and implement specific school-level leadership roles and responsibilities for teachers based on their effectiveness".

Gina Caneva – English Teacher at Lindblom High School

ISSUE: Increase capacity for the district and union to improve implementation by training more evaluators.

WHY: Currently, there are only 19 Instructional Effectiveness Specialists employed by the CPS Office of Talent. Why not more? In order to build a bridge with the Chicago Teachers Union and promote cohesion and buy-in, there lies an opportunity to train Union representatives to serve in the capacity as Instructional Effectiveness Specialists.

IDEAS: Allow the union and the district to work collaboratively to identify strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation process and problem-solve together.

- The team, set forth by the union and district, could bring increased reliability of the evaluation process.
- Both district and union Instructional Effectiveness Specialists should be assigned to calibrate and participate in classroom observations.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES: With union support, teachers will begin to understand evaluation as a tool to improve teacher practice and efficacy of overall instruction for students. As a result, this strategy has the potential to elevate the profession of teaching and position Chicago as a model for other large, urban districts.

ISSUE: Improve academic outcomes for students by using measures of student growth for K-2 and special education students that are directly linked to teacher impact.

WHY: Many teachers of K-2 and special education students are concerned that 10% of their evaluation is based on data not related to the students they actually serve. The short-term effects of this policy are that many teachers may not be rated accurately, especially if they choose to teach in a challenging environment. The long-term effect of this problem is that inaccuracies could drive some of the most effective teachers from their subject area, the schools where they are most needed, or out of the district entirely.

IDEAS: Use available assessments and student work to generate measures of growth for K-2 and special education students.

- For K-2 teachers use existing data from the multiple measures that are already in place (Dibels, TRC, Step, MAPs, and Mclass Math). These will require no extra training, no additional money to be spent, and give an authentic picture of performance.
- For special education students, teachers should have the opportunity to compile IEP portfolios with evidence of students' progress toward each goal. These goals are developed by a panel of experts, and we believe that this qualifies as integral data. We propose that Teach Plus Fellows work with current special education teachers to generate portfolio and rubric templates for use across the district.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES: Teachers want the opportunity to be held directly accountable for their impact on student learning, therefore we should use the student growth measurement tools already available to us. By investing teachers in these assessments and using them for professional growth, we will be able to realize the true intention of REACH Students: to increase teacher effectiveness.

"All teachers want to REACH to improve and grow as professionals and to help our students reach their full potential. We want to make a difference in the communities we serve. However, in order to see this progress in action, we as educators need access to more comprehensive professional development and leadership opportunities".

-Rick Coppola, Middle Grades Teacher at Drake Elementary School

SUMMARY:

We can fill the gaps between policy and practice by leveraging teacher leadership. We need to work to build collaboration and shared resources among all stakeholders in the new teacher evaluation system. As classroom teachers and experts in our craft, we want the new system to be implemented successfully. But we must elevate the teaching profession by allowing accomplished teachers to inform decision-makers about best practices moving forward. As Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellows, we are ready to lead the district and the union in these efforts, so together we can achieve success and implement REACH Students with the utmost integrity.