

December 11, 2015

Dear REACH Joint Committee and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Members,

Since the initial development of REACH, CPS has made it a priority to explore opportunities to improve its effectiveness and ensure it is a valuable tool for all teachers and principals. In order to make certain that our teachers are assessed properly and everyone has valuable, actionable data on teacher performance, REACH must provide a fair reflection of classroom performance.

While REACH has been an important step forward in the area of professional evaluation and instructional improvement, it is clear there are tactical challenges and opportunities that should be addressed to improve its effectiveness. Based on feedback we have received from teachers and principals, I am asking the Joint Committee and TAC to review the following areas for potential improvement:

1. Context Variables:

REACH was designed to be implemented in a variety of school models and environments, but we believe it is necessary to carefully consider how context variables influence REACH. Based on concerns that have been raised in recent months, we believe it is essential to consider two important issues:

- I. We need a better understanding of how variables including poverty levels, special education needs, and administrative changes influence teacher observation results.
- II. We also need a better understanding of how teacher race, gender and age are associated with REACH observations. For example, some evidence suggests male African American teachers may be receiving lower observation scores than their peers, but often male African American teachers are working with some of the most challenging students. It is crucial for us to develop a better understanding of this while also exploring the possibility of providing certain groups of teachers with tailored professional development to help address unique needs.

2. Data Collection, Calculation and Reporting:

In order to provide coaching and supports to teachers who are struggling, school leaders and teachers need to have timely access to prior performance data. As REACH summaries incorporate several different streams of data into a final report, we need to be more timely in collecting observation and performance task data and in calculating student growth metrics and value-added results from student test scores. Reporting

systems must also produce efficient records of results shared in part and in whole with teachers and leaders as close to the time of collection as possible.

We request the Joint Committee and TAC evaluate the District's REACH data collection, calculation, and reporting systems to determine where improvements can be made so that we are able to provide teachers and principals with actionable information more rapidly than in the past.

3. Performance Tasks:

Performance tasks are an important component of REACH, and as we move forward with the tool it is important to ensure performance tasks provide a reliable, consistent measure of performance. In order to ensure that performance tasks are a useful measure of student growth, we must ensure teachers and school leaders are provided with the tools and knowledge they need to effectively and consistently evaluate performance tasks. Please review the current performance task system to determine if there is consistency among teacher evaluations while also determining if the District is doing enough to provide teachers with the resources they need to evaluate performance tasks in a fair and consistent manner.

4. Written Evidence Training:

REACH was designed to serve as a consistent evaluation metric, but it is clear there is variance in administrative capacity, particularly in the area of written evidence provided by principals. It is our responsibility to ensure school leaders have the tools they need to make REACH an effective tool, and we must consider whether we, as a district, can do more to support our principals. We request that the Joint Committee and TAC consider potential opportunities to improve training that will ensure principals and assistant principals have the tools they need to provide high-quality written REACH evidence. By improving the quality of written REACH evidence, we will be able to provide teachers with better, more-actionable feedback during post-conferences, while hopefully reducing the time principals spend on written evidence. REACH relies on quality principal-generated feedback, and it is essential for the District to evaluate potential opportunities to improve the quality of this feedback.

5. Evaluation of Non-Classroom Teachers:

School-based employees who are evaluated under REACH fall into a number of different roles, and it is important that each employee who participates in REACH receives an evaluation that fairly grades them against criteria relevant to their position. Employees including nurses, psychologists, speech language pathologists and social workers are evaluated under REACH, but their job duties vary significantly from those of classroom teachers. In order to ensure these valuable employees are being graded in a fair and appropriate matter, we request that the Joint Committee and TAC determines if principals could benefit from additional resources and training regarding the evaluation of these employees.



JANICE K. JACKSON, Ed.D
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

We are at a crucial junction where an opportunity exists to build on the gains we have made with REACH in recent years by improving the professional development process. It's crucial that we get the evaluation process right so we can all focus on how to tackle the complex realities that affect our classrooms and teaching abilities such as poverty and school resources.

It is clear there is room for improvement, and we appreciate your assistance as we work to bolster the effectiveness of this valuable and essential tool.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Janice K. Jackson".

Janice K. Jackson, Ed.D
CEdO, Chicago Public Schools