

THE CHICAGO
PUBLIC
EDUCATION
FUND

PROFILES IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:

Implementing Personalized Learning

INTRODUCTION

Across Chicago, educators are designing and implementing solutions to help students reach their fullest potential and are leveraging new tools beyond traditional academic models.¹

This includes hundreds of educators now implementing elements of **personalized learning**—tailored and rigorous instruction, often supported by technology, that meets students' individual learning needs, strengths and interests.

In 2013, The Fund launched the [Summer Design Program \(SDP\)](#) to foster the adoption of **school-based innovations**, including elements of personalized learning, in more Chicago public schools. As school-based innovations require educators to use learning time, teacher talent, curricular resources and classroom space in new ways, SDP gives principals and their teacher teams the time and support required to implement this kind of innovative change.

Inspired by the successful launch of SDP, The Fund and [LEAP Innovations](#), a Chicago-based nonprofit organization, applied to [Breakthrough Schools: Chicago](#) — a national competition for school leaders to develop and launch personalized learning innovations in Chicago. Seven teams from traditional, charter, elementary and high schools, five of whom were prior SDP participants, participated in the first cohort of Breakthrough Schools: Chicago. Through

this opportunity, the seven school teams worked with LEAP Innovations to develop blueprints for their school models, used planning grants to test and pilot new innovations, and won additional grant funds to implement their models school-wide.²

Since its launch in 2014, Breakthrough Schools: Chicago has accelerated the implementation of innovative practices and personalized learning models in 22 Chicago public schools and for 13,000 students. The Fund's \$1.06 million in direct-to-school grants for the first cohort of participants, as well as our \$750,000 grant to LEAP Innovations to support and provide programming to the second cohort, reinforced our belief that educators are best-positioned to drive instructional innovation.

This report includes three case studies of Breakthrough Schools: Chicago Cohort One principals and their teams as they transform their schools' instructional models.

We chose to ground this report in the principal perspective because they are the instructional leaders of their schools, responsible for developing and managing

The personalized learning components outlined in this report are aligned to the [LEAP Learning Framework for Personalized Learning](#): a resource that is used by educators nationwide and provides observable student and teacher actions around personalized learning. In addition, the change management practices in this report that support personalized learning are aligned to [Kotter's Change Model](#).



pedagogical practice. As other school leaders look to pursue personalized learning or school-based innovation more broadly, we are confident that they will learn from these pioneering school leaders. Beyond sharing these stories, The Fund is committed to creating and supporting the conditions that will allow continued innovation in Chicago's public schools. ■

¹ Traditional academic models use teacher-led lectures and textbooks to teach course concepts and materials.

² A year later, in 2015, 15 new Chicago schools received planning grants, of which seven were later awarded launch grants.

Student Agency

Wildwood IB students entrusted to take ownership of their learning experiences



PRINCIPAL: MARY BETH CUNAT

- Breakthrough School:
Wildwood International Baccalaureate World Magnet
- Prominent Component of Personalized Learning Model:
Student Agency
- Necessitates Strong Leadership In:
Community Engagement

Mary Beth Cunat of Wildwood International Baccalaureate World Magnet (Wildwood IB), a traditionally high-performing K-8 school, wanted more for her students than strong test scores. She began this journey with the vision that all students should be “confident thinkers, leaders and advocates for positive change, and feel inspired to apply their passions and talents in a global society.”⁴ To accomplish this, Mary Beth believed Wildwood IB should provide students with opportunities to make informed decisions about their own instruction and advocate for their needs, interests and aspirations. She took part in both SDP and Breakthrough Schools: Chicago to help accelerate the implementation of personalized learning at Wildwood IB.

MODEL IN ACTION

1. Inquiry Projects

Wildwood IB’s personalized learning model prioritizes student agency through inquiry projects and student progress reports.⁵ The

TERMS TO KNOW

Student Agency

Also known as “Learner Led” in the LEAP Learning Framework, student agency is present when students are entrusted to take ownership of their learning – co-designing their learning experiences, articulating their strengths and needs, and monitoring their own progress.³ Student agency at Wildwood IB is evident by:

- **Inquiry projects** and student-selected learning topics that empower students to have greater influence over their learning experiences.
- **Student goal-setting** and self-monitoring over their learning progress that creates greater transparency and purpose.

structures and expectations for the inquiry projects vary from classroom to classroom, and range in topics from prototypes for seizure alerts to piping for communities with lead problems. Teachers train students to explore areas of interest in the lower grade levels, using the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program (MYP) Inquiry Question framework to identify key

³ For the complete definition of “Learner Led”, please view the LEAP Learning Framework here: <http://leaplearningframework.org/>.

⁴ Wildwood IB’s complete school vision is available here: http://www.wildwoodworldmagnet.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=278427&type=d.

⁵ Inquiry projects enable students to pursue real-world topics of interest. They are driven by students’ questions about the world, integrating their interests with unit content across multiple subject areas.

PRINCIPAL: MARY BETH CUNAT

differences between factual, conceptual and debatable questions.⁶ By the upper grade levels, students are skilled at asking debatable questions that promote discussion, test assumptions and encourage evaluation.

At inquiry fairs throughout the year, students across all grade levels showcase their projects and model the inquiry process to parents and community members. For example, at the kindergarten inquiry fair, students describe characteristics of different fabrics – pulling them apart, discussing similarities and differences in texture, and examining them under a microscope. These fairs set clear expectations that teachers provide students with the time, space and support to develop these projects during the school day, and that parents continue to support this work at home.

2. Student Goal-Setting

Mary Beth emphasizes the importance of students monitoring their own progress toward learning goals. As such, she implements procedures and processes that promote student awareness and agency. For example, every student has a “WIN folder” that holds his or her classwork, interim assessments and performance on Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Additionally, students use journals to set goals, write reflections, track progress on their inquiry projects, and get sign-offs from parents on their progress.

Wildwood IB students also lead report card conferences. In preparation for these conferences, students select work samples, develop an agenda and rehearse with other students. During conferences, students share examples of success, areas for improvement and how their parents can help them feel supported at home.⁷ Between these semester conferences, teachers send five-week progress reports home with students, measuring their self-agency, self-management and mastery of Common Core State Standards in math and reading.

CHANGE-MANAGEMENT

Student agency necessitates strong leadership in community engagement.⁸

Wildwood IB parents are some of Mary Beth’s strongest allies in her commitment to this approach, in large part because of her exceptional work involving the community in the change-management process.⁹ In the 2014-15 school year – the Breakthrough Schools: Chicago planning year – Mary Beth hosted a number of meetings to discuss the need for change and a recommitment to fostering student agency and ownership. Grounding parents in her vision for Wildwood IB, Mary Beth hosted three parent workshops and leveraged existing Parent Teacher Association and Local School Council (LSC) meetings.

Mary Beth’s community engagement efforts did not stop there. Today, Mary Beth and her teachers update parents on students’ academic and social-emotional progress through weekly school eNewsletters and five-week progress reports on student agency and choice. During LSC meetings, Mary Beth communicates the intersection of personalized learning and IB inquiry units with the school’s Continuous Improvement Work Plan – a streamlined strategic planning process that spans two school years.

Robust partnerships between Mary Beth and Wildwood IB’s parents and teachers make the school community one that supports the testing of innovative practices and advances the learning and development of its students. ■



⁶ The complete IB MYP Inquiry Framework is available here: http://www.ibo.org/globalassets/digital-toolkit/brochures/myp-brief_mathematics_2015.pdf.

⁷ You can view a sample worksheet that students complete prior to report card conferences here: <https://www.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/resources/edutopia-wildwood-world-magnet-student-led-conference-worksheet.pdf>.

⁸ This aligns to Kotter’s second step for effective change-management.

⁹ Change management encompasses a number of approaches to supporting teams in making organizational change.

Personalized Progression

CICS West Belden students progress at their own pace based on demonstrated competencies



PRINCIPAL: SCOTT FRAUENHEIM (FORMER) AND COLLEEN COLLINS (CURRENT)

- Breakthrough School:
Chicago International Charter School (CICS) West Belden
- Prominent Component of Personalized Learning Model:
Personalized Progression
- Necessitates Strong Leadership In:
A Strong Vision for Change

As a first-year principal in the 2012-13 school year, Scott Frauenheim knew it was time to shake things up at Chicago International Charter School (CICS) West Belden, a K-8 school serving a predominantly Latino and low-income student population. Although CICS West Belden students historically scored well on the NWEA MAP exam overall, Scott observed that students were beginning to stall on NWEA MAP growth measures. He attributed the trend to student disengagement with the learning process and designed a plan to address it. As such, Scott and Colleen Collins, then assistant principal of CICS West Belden and now its current principal, implemented a model known as personalized progression. This model uses small groups – rather than whole-class instruction – to allow students to progress through content based on their levels of demonstrated mastery and readiness. This shift required Scott's team to think more creatively about time, talent and physical space.

TERMS TO KNOW

Personalized Progression

Also known as “Learner Demonstrated” in the LEAP Learning Framework, personalized progression is present if students progress at their own pace based on demonstrated competencies.¹⁰ Personalized progression at CICS West Belden is made possible through:

- **Flexible learning environments**, including creative use of space and staffing, that is driven by student needs; this ultimately allows students to be grouped and regrouped by skill level.
- **Frequent formative assessments** that empower students to demonstrate mastery when ready.

MODEL IN ACTION

1. Flexible Learning Environments

During the 2014-15 Breakthrough Schools: Chicago planning year, CICS West Belden scrapped its traditional classroom layouts and piloted two multi-age and flexible learning configurations: first-second-third grade and fourth-fifth grade. Scott opened connecting doors between classrooms to encourage students to move freely between

¹⁰ For the complete definition of “Learner Demonstrated”, please view the LEAP Learning Framework here: <http://leaplearningframework.org/>.

PRINCIPAL: SCOTT FRAUENHEIM (FORMER) AND COLLEEN COLLINS (CURRENT)

them. He then used a portion of the Breakthrough Schools: Chicago planning and implementation grants to purchase modular furniture designed for small-group instruction and independent student work. As a result, teachers can easily group students by demonstrated skill level, and students can transition between teacher-led seminars, partner work and independent work on their personal devices.

Even when Scott transitioned from his role as principal of CICS West Belden to Chief Operating Officer of Distinctive Schools, CICS West Belden's charter management organization, Colleen continued to experiment with flexible learning environments as CICS West Belden's new principal. For example, Colleen recognized that her first grade students required extra bilingual support and resources, which led her to modify the structure of the lower grade levels. For the 2017-18 school year, she aims to hire a bilingual teacher to serve as a fourth instructor in a K-2 classroom – to maximize the student-to-teacher ratio for personalized progression and provide the necessary supports to English Language Learners.

2. Formative Assessments

Scott and Colleen encouraged teachers to provide students with short and frequent assessments – every two to three days – to keep student data current and relevant.¹¹ To fully leverage this data and maximize the potential of personalized progression, Scott knew that teachers would need specialized development and cross-curricular planning

time. Consequently, he and Colleen built a master schedule that allowed for grade-level meetings of 90-120 minutes each day, as well as three hours after school each Wednesday.

Today, teachers bring their assessment data to their planning meetings, using that time to flag skills where students need more practice before advancing to new content, and to reconfigure the students into dynamic and ever-changing groups. This ensures that students who need extra support receive it, and students who demonstrate readiness are able to move on to new material at a pace suited to them.

CHANGE-MANAGEMENT

Personalized Progression necessitates strong leadership in creating and communicating a strong vision for change.¹²

Even when Scott transitioned to his new role in 2016, the CICS West Belden model continued to thrive. This is not a happy accident; it is a result of Scott's careful attention to creating, communicating and engaging staff in a strong vision for change. Committed to a cohesive plan for change and engaging teachers in the process, the administrative team built out a very deliberate, four-step approach that resulted in a personalized learning framework unique to CICS West Belden.¹³

The personalized learning framework and sub-descriptors outlined each of the four components of CICS West Belden's model

– beginning with flexible learning environments and concluding with personalized progression.¹⁴ Scott and Colleen hand-picked a group of teachers for each new aspect of the school design; eventually, they brought the rest of the teachers along by providing school-wide professional development on the personalized learning framework, as well as offering substitute-teacher coverage so staff could observe personalized learning in action within the pilot classrooms. By frequently revisiting the working framework and having an opportunity to provide their input, staff remained rooted in the school's vision and personalized learning model.

Although the vision and its pillars remain fixed, Colleen reminds staff that the teacher actions described under each pillar of the framework are subject to change; it's important that teachers and administrators challenge their working definition of personalized learning and continue to build on lessons learned. As long as teachers are flexible in their approach, they can remain committed to meeting the needs of their students. ■



11 For an example of how CICS West Belden teachers use quick assessments to maximize personalized progression, view this resource posted by LEAP Innovations: http://leaplearningframework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/LEF_Educator_Resource_Scalzetti.pdf

12 This definition aligns to Kotter's third step for effective change-management.

13 Scott and Colleen borrowed components of their framework from the Personalized Learning Working Definition (PLWD) first used in Breakthrough Schools: Chicago planning workshops with LEAP Innovations.

14 CICS West Belden's personalized learning framework involved four parts: flexible learning environments, learner profiles, personal learning paths and competency-based progression. For additional details, view the framework here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DIOzmQHjGc2buclmZE3Cxe-LGbsDfH-bb3FEpB3xS5Js/edit?usp=sharing>.

Targeted Instruction

Chávez students experience learning that is relevant, contextualized and designed for their individual needs



PRINCIPAL: BARTON DASSINGER

- Breakthrough School:
Cesar E. Chávez Multicultural Academic Center
- Prominent Component of Personalized Learning Model:
Targeted Instruction
- Necessitates Strong Leadership In:
Continuous Improvement

When Barton Dassinger became principal of Cesar E. Chávez Multicultural Academic Center (Chávez), a predominantly bilingual and low-income school, he had clear goals: meet students' varying academic needs and improve student outcomes. Leveraging his classroom experience, Barton put data-informed instruction at the core of his school improvement strategy. In 2013, Barton participated in The Fund's SDP and [LEAP's Pilot Network](#), creating a plan for using technology to access data and track student growth. Breakthrough Schools: Chicago presented Barton with an opportunity to build on the successes of SDP, through both continued funding and LEAP Innovations' program support.

MODEL IN ACTION

1. Technology

Through Breakthrough Schools: Chicago, Barton strengthened technology integration practices in the classroom, using edtech data to track individual student mastery and

TERMS TO KNOW

Targeted Instruction

Also known as "Learner Focused" in the LEAP Learning Framework, targeted instruction is present if the learning is relevant, contextualized and designed for students' individual needs.¹⁵ Targeted instruction at Chávez is made stronger by:

- **Technology** and edtech products that supply students, teachers and administrators with relevant data.
- **Strategic use of data** that empowers administrators, teachers and students to make timely interventions.

progress. The data generated from edtech programs allow teachers to know when and with whom to intervene or set new, ambitious goals; they also provide teachers with the information to assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies and make refinements to an approach when necessary.

Five years into this process, teachers use weekly grade-level and departmental meetings to review student data, discuss high-risk students and students in need of a challenge, and create plans to support them

¹⁵ For the complete definition of "Learner Focused", please view the LEAP Learning Framework here: <http://leaplearningframework.org/>.

PRINCIPAL: BARTON DASSINGER

– many times leveraging edtech and online resources to both feed new content and monitor progress.

2. Data Sharing

Barton saw the potential to share data among multiple users. As such, he used his Breakthrough Schools grant to hire a Director of Educational Technology and Data, who worked with Barton to analyze predictive indicators for student learning and assemble weekly reports for teachers. Barton then built a sophisticated teacher and student dashboard, incorporating the UChicago Consortium on School Research's Middle Grade Indicators of Readiness, which are based on a student's attendance, GPA and standardized test scores.¹⁶ From there, readiness ratings match each student to a list of high schools the student can apply to based on individual high school requirements. The dashboard also enables a user to toggle attendance, GPA and test scores to determine where certain gains can increase students' opportunities to meet high school eligibility requirements.¹⁷

To make data equally accessible to students, Barton encouraged teachers to conference with students around the platform each week. Barton and Chávez teachers also set up a student-led demonstration taught by eighth grade students to students in the lower grade levels. With data in the hands of

students, Barton and the Chávez team report an increase in student motivation; many students are now advocating for themselves – asking to revisit certain topics, redo assignments and retake exams.

CHANGE-MANAGEMENT

Targeted instruction necessitates a commitment to embracing continuous improvement with ongoing support from key partners.¹⁸

Despite remarkable gains in reading and math, Barton knows that there is still more work to be done; success is not simply a series of quick wins, but a long-term commitment to continuous improvement.¹⁹ This commitment comes through in his ongoing work with edtech vendors – aiming to identify the right tools, minimize information overload and make data more accessible for staff and students.

To start, Barton negotiates trial-run periods before making costly purchases so that he and his teachers can pilot and test programs. In assessing the impact on student outcomes, he tracks students' test scores linked to each product. Combined with anecdotal feedback from teachers about the products and how students' respond to them, Barton is confident that he and his team evaluate technology in a systematic way.

For products that make it beyond the pilot year, Barton presses the vendors to provide him with key indicators tied to NWEA MAP growth. He also requests school-wide reports with student identification numbers, minutes spent and unit performance, enabling him to slice the data across grade levels, subject areas, topics and student sub-groups. Ultimately, if educator software vendors are able to report student progress in easy-to-decipher formats, then teachers have information on what works, for which students and in what circumstances. ■



¹⁶ To read UChicago Consortium's full report on Middle Grade Indicators of Readiness, view here: <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/looking-forward-high-school-and-college-middle-grade-indicators-readiness-chicago>.

¹⁷ For the underlying spreadsheet to this app, please view here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/mv3l0scowfak5z/Chavez%20artifacts.xls?dl=0>.

¹⁸ This aligns to Kotter's seventh step for effective change-management.

¹⁹ Since 2013, Chicago Public Schools has used the School Quality Rating Policy to measure annual school performance. Cesar E. Chávez achieved Level 1+ status, the highest rating a school can receive.

CONCLUSION

Breakthrough Schools: Chicago catalyzed The Fund's focus on educator-led innovation.

Across neighborhoods and school models, principals and their teams are demonstrating a strong interest in pursuing personalized learning and innovative practices. Responding to this demand, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and partners like LEAP Innovations will continue formalizing and scaling a suite of school-wide personalized learning supports.

Meanwhile, The Fund's investments - like Breakthrough Schools: Chicago, SDP and principal-led [Professional Learning Communities](#) - have emphasized change-management as a critical skillset for school leaders. As such, school leaders engaged in personalized learning opportunities might want to note the change-management practices outlined in this report, which enable innovative models to take off and endure: building a coalition by engaging the community, rallying staff

under a strong vision for change, and continuing to build on that change by leveraging strong partnerships.

Moving forward, we will look for investment and program opportunities that support and enable all Chicago principals to improve student outcomes by transforming teaching and learning in schools. For example, The Fund will continue to help principals strengthen team, time and tool supports by investing, testing and scaling more responsive professional learning opportunities. In advancing this work, we aim to equip schools to pursue other school-based innovations and personalized learning models.

Simultaneously, we are committed to expanding policies that protect principal autonomy and increase principal flexibility to innovate and implement new solutions. During the 2017-18 school year, we will work

with CPS to identify key scheduling improvements and to protect principals' ability to structure and staff their schools. The Fund will also place a particular emphasis on identifying key supports related to procurement, which is relevant to principals who want to incorporate personalized learning practices into their school's instructional model. As with all of our work, we will continue to share lessons learned to inform other efforts in the field. ■

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