



Successful Budgeting Practices of Principals in Chicago Public Schools

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About This Report

In Chicago Public Schools (CPS), principals have the unique responsibility of developing school budgets that reflect the specific needs of their communities. With the approval of their Local School Councils (LSCs), principals can make resource decisions around a variety of strategies related to student learning, including staffing, curriculum and professional development.

Of course, these decisions are harder to make when resources are constrained. According to the state, CPS only has 66% of what it needs to be considered “adequately” funded. This may help explain why no principal feels they have sufficient resources to meet their community’s needs. Since 2017, “my school’s available funding” has been identified as one of the top three issues for Chicago’s principals on The Chicago Public Education Fund’s (The Fund) annual Principal Engagement Survey.

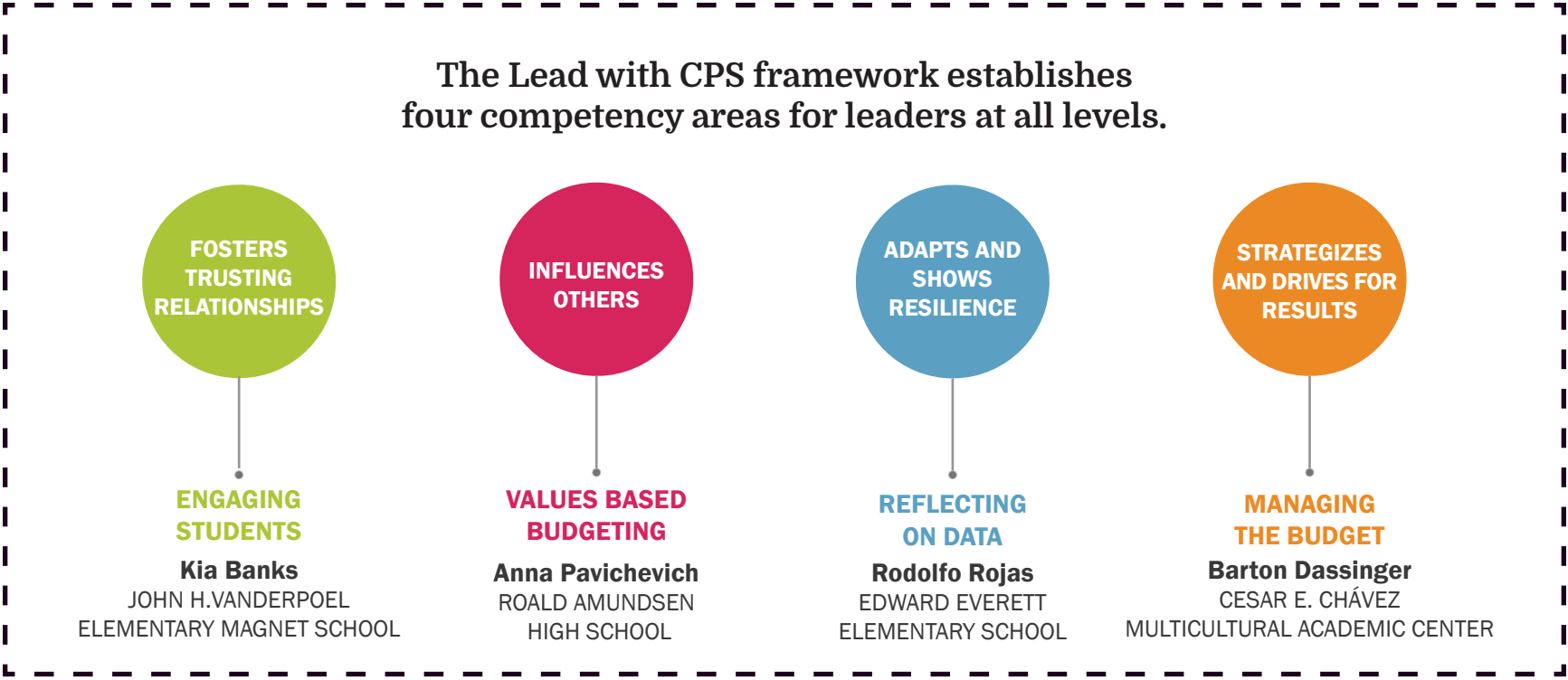
To address that reality, this report highlights successful practices from four experienced principals in Chicago. These leaders use their budget flexibility in creative ways, effectively serving their school communities even when resources are limited. Each case study provides insight into the principal’s approach, as well as a tool or resource that can be modified and adapted to fit individual school contexts. Principals in all types of schools and at all stages of their careers may find innovative practices to incorporate into their own budget processes.

It is important to note that this report does not feature any of the 142 schools, including charter schools, that are funded outside of the Student Based Budgeting model. The principals in those schools also have successful practices to highlight. Given the differences in their individual budgeting processes and the way they are funded from CPS, a future Fund memo will explore the differences between district and charter funding methods and provide an additional case study in the charter sector.

Each case study in this report provides insight into the principal’s approach as well as a tool or resource that can be modified and adapted to fit individual school contexts. The compiled tools can be found at this link: bit.ly/3bbgDST

Chicago’s principals exemplify strength in the Lead with CPS Competencies¹ in their budgeting practices.

In 2019, CPS established Lead with CPS, a framework designed to provide common language around leadership for all employees across the district. The framework includes four competency areas: fostering trusting relationships, influencing others, adapting and showing resilience, and strategizing and driving results. The case studies in this report aim to show how principals exemplify strength in each of these competency areas through their budgeting practices. These strengths allow principals to effectively work with their LSC members to implement innovative budgeting practices that are ultimately designed to improve outcomes for students and communities.



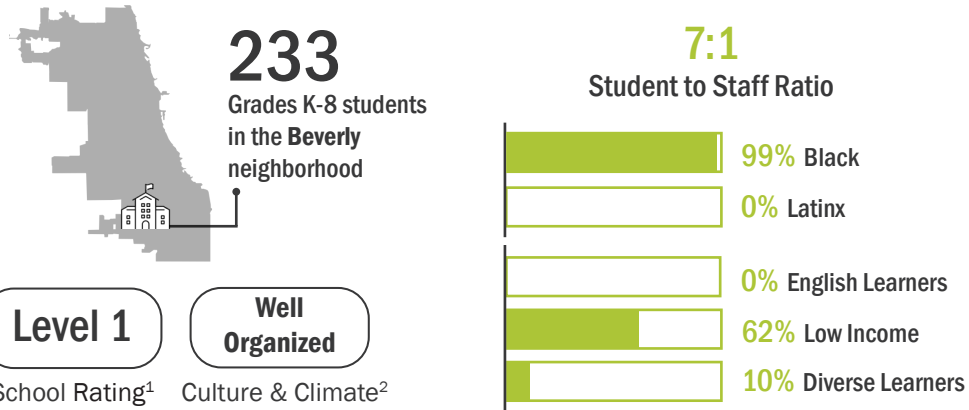
1. The Lead With CPS framework and other related resources are available at lead.cps.edu.

Engaging Students to Set Priorities



Kia Banks, principal since the 2015-16 school year.

John H. Vanderpoel Elementary Magnet School



During her first year as principal at John H. Vanderpoel Elementary Magnet School, Kia Banks faced a challenge: Student morale was low, and too few of the students she served were excited to come to school. She knew her budget would have to stretch in new directions to shift her school culture. Kia decided to do something to help students see that their teachers and principal cared about their interests: She asked students about what opportunities they wanted, and then she modified her budget and built stronger community partnerships to better meet their needs.

Kia’s Approach

After her first year at Vanderpoel, Kia developed a student survey. She asked students what would make coming to school more exciting for them, and she received plenty of answers. Students wanted the opportunity to explore new things — everything from fashion design to chess — and to see new investments — like a fully stocked library — in their school. To make those opportunities a reality within Vanderpoel’s budget, Kia worked with her teachers to develop clubs during indoor recess that aligned to students’ interests. She also shared the data with community organizations such as Play in a Book to expand arts and music programs. Student engagement skyrocketed, and it showed on Vanderpoel’s 5Essentials Supportive Environment score, which improved from 64 in the 2015-16 school year to 98 in the 2018-19 school year.

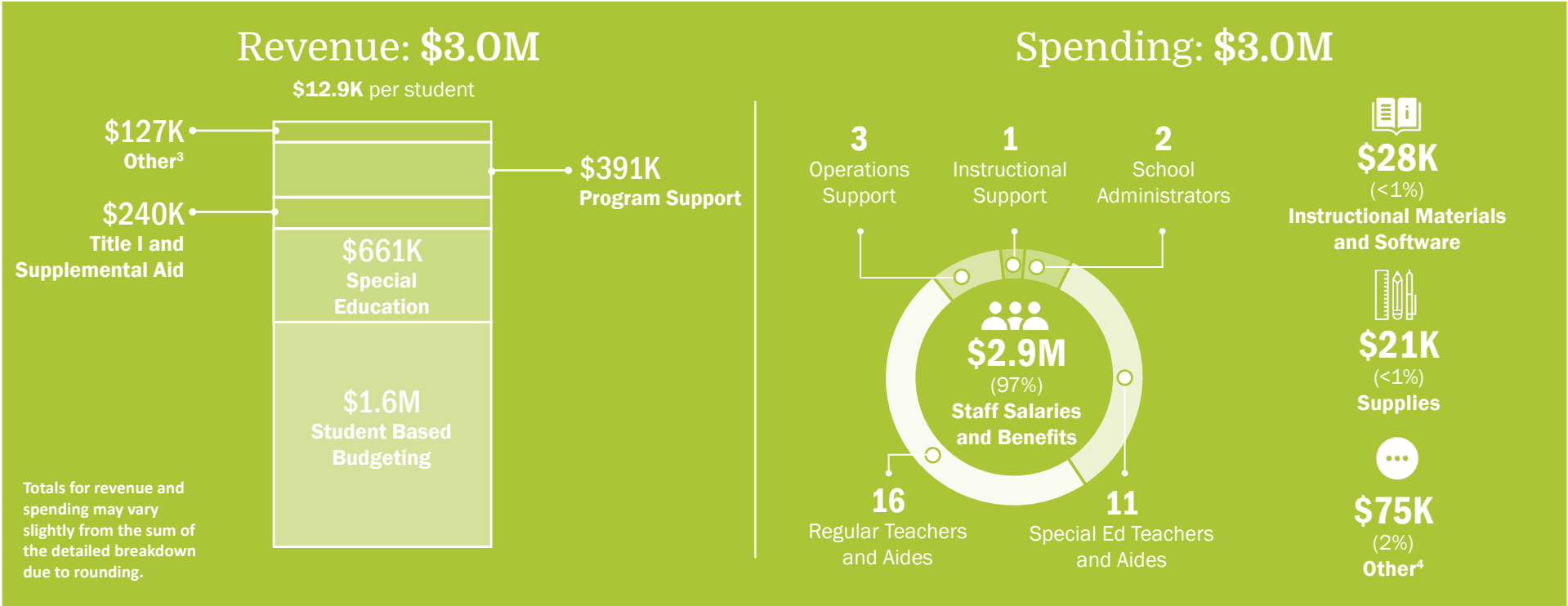
The way that Kia engages students in the budgeting process has evolved and deepened over time. While she still surveys students, Kia has also added another opportunity for students to express their desires for Vanderpoel. In the 2018-19 school year, Vanderpoel held its inaugural “Hackathon.” In a schoolwide assembly, students presented their ideas to improve the school, such as adding yoga classes, updating the girl’s bathroom and purchasing additional technology for the humanities program. Five winners were granted \$500 to implement their projects, and the ideas helped Kia better understand how students wanted to see themselves reflected in their school.

Beyond improving the school’s internal culture, the student survey and the Hackathon have helped Kia build a number of relationships with organizations in Beverly. After the Beverly Review published an article about the Hackathon, several organizations in the neighborhood, including Third Baptist Church and Black and Well, came forward to support students’ ideas. Some made financial donations by funding the individual projects that students proposed in the Hackathon, which enabled the school to bring in a yoga teacher once a week. Others pitched in where they could: After hearing that students wanted to create a school library, community members began dropping off books. The school’s library has now grown to over 5,000 books, and Kia hopes to budget for a librarian in the upcoming year.

For Kia, listening to students’ needs and wants is the best place to start the budget process: “Hearing directly from the students – through student survey results, the Hackathon, or otherwise - is the most powerful way for the broader community, including LSC members and community partners, to understand what the school needs in order to be a place where all children have access to the opportunities they want.” Using information about what opportunities students want has been critical in communicating her school needs and budget decisions to the LSC and developing community partnerships. Without these partners and the support of her LSC, Kia does not believe she would have seen the growth in student engagement and academic performance that she has experienced during her time as principal at Vanderpoel.

“Hearing directly from the students is the most powerful way for the broader community, including LSC members and community partners, to understand what the school needs.”

KIA BANKS
PRINCIPAL OF VANDERPOEL

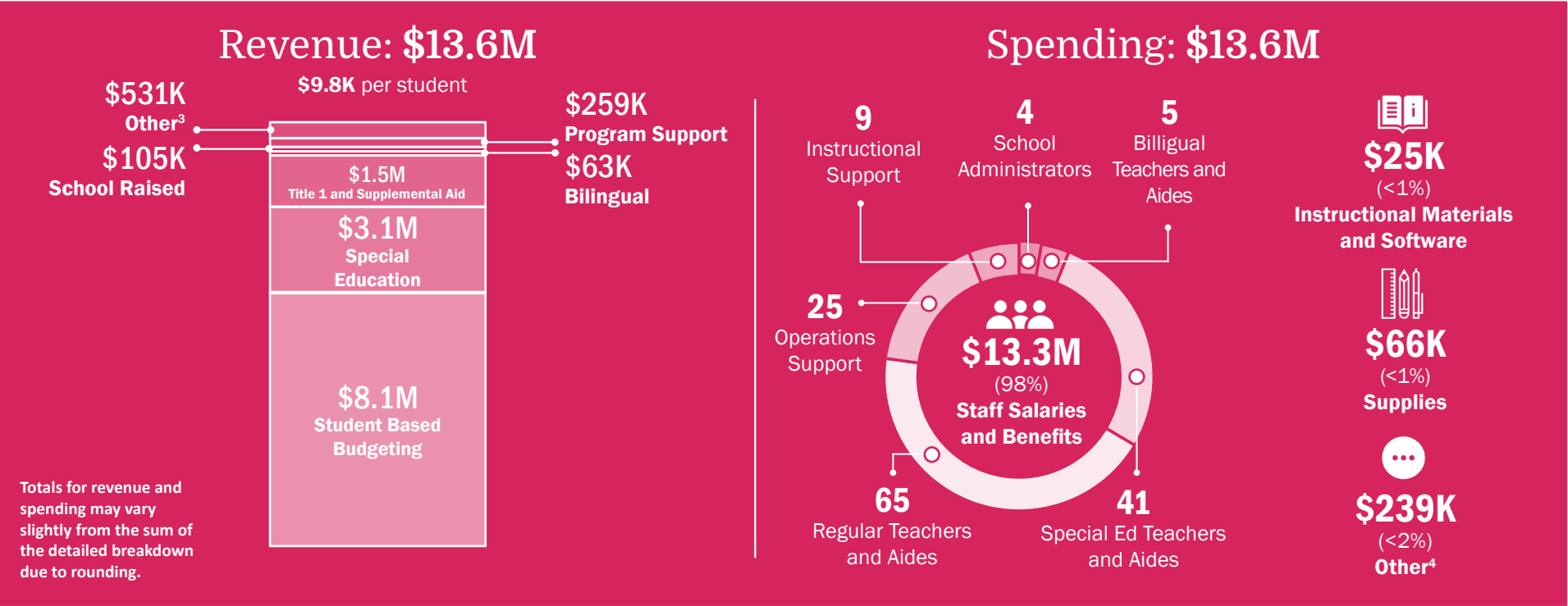
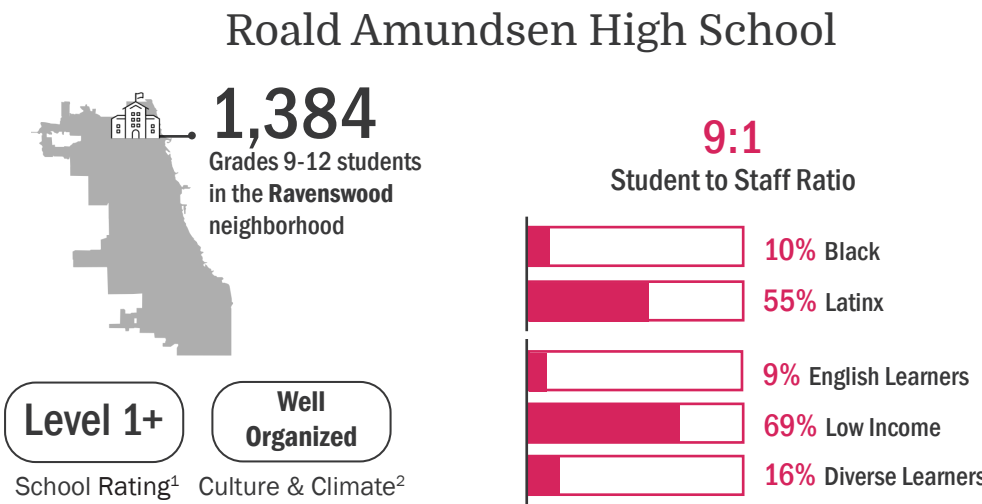


1. The School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) is the CPS policy for measuring school performance.
2. School culture and climate is measured using the “My School, My Voice” Survey administered by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.
3. Other revenue includes Lunchroom funds (Fund 312), Tort Funds/Workers Comp (Fund 210) and the IL Empowerment Grant (Fund 367).
4. Other spending includes items such as extended day teacher salaries and equipment.

Influencing Others through Values Based Budgeting



Anna Pavichevich, principal since the 2012-13 school year.



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3. Other revenue includes Lunchroom funds (Fund 312) and Tort Funds/Workers Comp (Fund 210).

4. Other spending includes items such as extended day teacher salaries and security, summer school, after school programs, and science and math equipment.

In the 2012-13 school year, Anna Pavichevich became principal of Roald Amundsen High School, one of the largest and most diverse schools in CPS. In 2019-20, Amundsen has 1,384 students and 149 staff members. Given the size of her school and the complexity of her staffing structure, Anna found it difficult to ensure all staff had a voice in establishing budget priorities through a fair and transparent decision-making process. She saw the budget process as an opportunity to align her staff with her broader vision for the school and engage them in a discussion around how Amundsen’s \$13.6 million budget can be used to support schoolwide values. To do this, she turned to a process called Values Based Budgeting.

Anna’s Approach

Values Based Budgeting, which Anna adopted in 2017, ensures every dollar supports what the school community cares about most. At Amundsen, the process includes three main components: 1) determining priorities that align to school values, 2) building department budgets that are tied to those values, and 3) collectively deciding how to prioritize additional spending. Each year, Anna and her senior leadership team establish priority areas that are aligned to the school values and Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP). Then, they engage with the full staff in a two-part process to build department budgets and prioritize how to spend additional funding.

“Staff members do not make excessive requests in their department budgets because they don’t need to scramble to grab resources. They know that every dollar we spend is aligned to our values, and we make sure they have what they need to support students.”

ANNA PAVICHEVICH
PRINCIPAL OF AMUNDSEN

In the spring, departments reflect on their current resources and complete a formal worksheet outlining additional items they want to request for the upcoming year. There must be a clear rationale for each request, which Anna reviews to ensure it aligns with the school values. These requests include obvious items like textbooks and technology. This also includes nontraditional things, such as additional professional development or collaboration time for teachers during the summer. Anna has found that engaging staff upfront in a transparent process has a lot of advantages: “Staff members do not make excessive requests in their department budgets because they don’t need to scramble to grab resources,” Anna explains. “They know that every dollar we spend is aligned to our values, and we make sure they have what they need to support students.”

Starting with staffing costs, Anna begins building Amundsen’s budget. Then, she goes through the department worksheets to approve requests that are essential to the classroom and additional items with strong ties to instruction and school values. By using this process, she builds each department budget from the ground up every year. This could mean that there are major fluctuations between a department’s budget from year to year, but Anna finds that staff members feel supported — even when their budget is lower than the previous year — because it meets their needs or they understand the tradeoffs that were made.

After creating the initial budget, Anna has an understanding of how much money is leftover. She then holds an optional staff meeting and facilitates a discussion about how to prioritize spending. During that meeting, the staff ranks 10 different areas that could be prioritized, such as additional social-emotional learning support, technology and field trips. To do this, Anna and her team reflect on how the areas they want to prioritize connect to the school values and impact students’ lives: “It can be eye-opening for the staff to go through the process and learn about the full scope of what goes into the budget,” Anna says. “These productive discussions ultimately lead us to budgeting decisions that the staff feels good about.” Through this transparent process, Anna has seen improvements in her staff culture. She and her senior leadership team are able to work with her LSC to approve a budget that her staff understands and supports.

LEARN FROM AMUNDSEN

See two tools that Anna uses to include her staff in the Values Based Budgeting process here: bit.ly/2XHG5eV

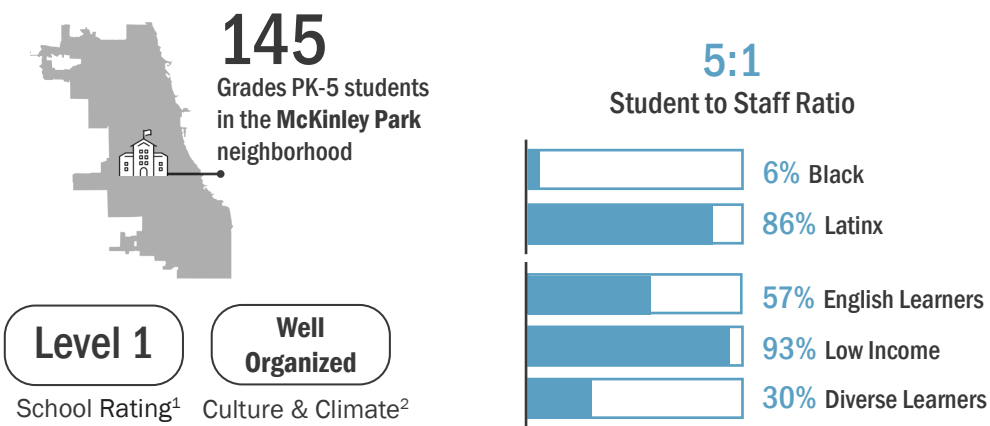
INFLUENCES OTHERS

Reflecting on Data to Adapt



Rodolfo Rojas, principal since the 2012-13 school year.

Edward Everett Elementary School



Being a principal requires a lot of flexibility. That’s something Rodolfo Rojas learned quickly when he took the helm at Edward Everett Elementary School in the 2012-13 school year. Everett is a small school with 145 students enrolled during the 2019-20 school year. These students have very diverse needs: 57% qualify as English Language Learners, 93% come from low income families, and 30% are considered Diverse Learners. To ensure that each student has what they need to be successful, Rodolfo has to be creative with his \$2.7 million budget. By working closely with classroom teachers, Rodolfo has created a system that leverages data to identify when students aren’t meeting their goals and then marshals resources to help close the gap.

Rodolfo’s Approach

Rodolfo holds quarterly data reviews with his grade-level teams to better understand students’ needs and hear from teachers on how best to address them. These meetings are a critical component of Rodolfo’s budgeting process; he uses what he learns to make informed decisions about how to allocate resources and then tracks whether the investment improved student outcomes.

To prepare for the data reviews, all six grade-level teams complete a worksheet that shows how students are progressing toward their goals. Then, teams present their student data to Rodolfo and discuss how to continue pushing student growth. They identify ways to change teaching practices and strategies and think about additional programs and resources that could better support students.

Once Rodolfo and his teachers have pinpointed areas for improvement, he considers if the gap can be addressed by investing in teacher professional development. This strategy builds up the skill set of his staff and empowers them to address gaps as they emerge. As Rodolfo explains, “Supporting teachers in their development not only is beneficial for students, but teachers also know they are valued and trusted to meet the needs of their students, which helps us retain the incredible teachers we have at Everett.”

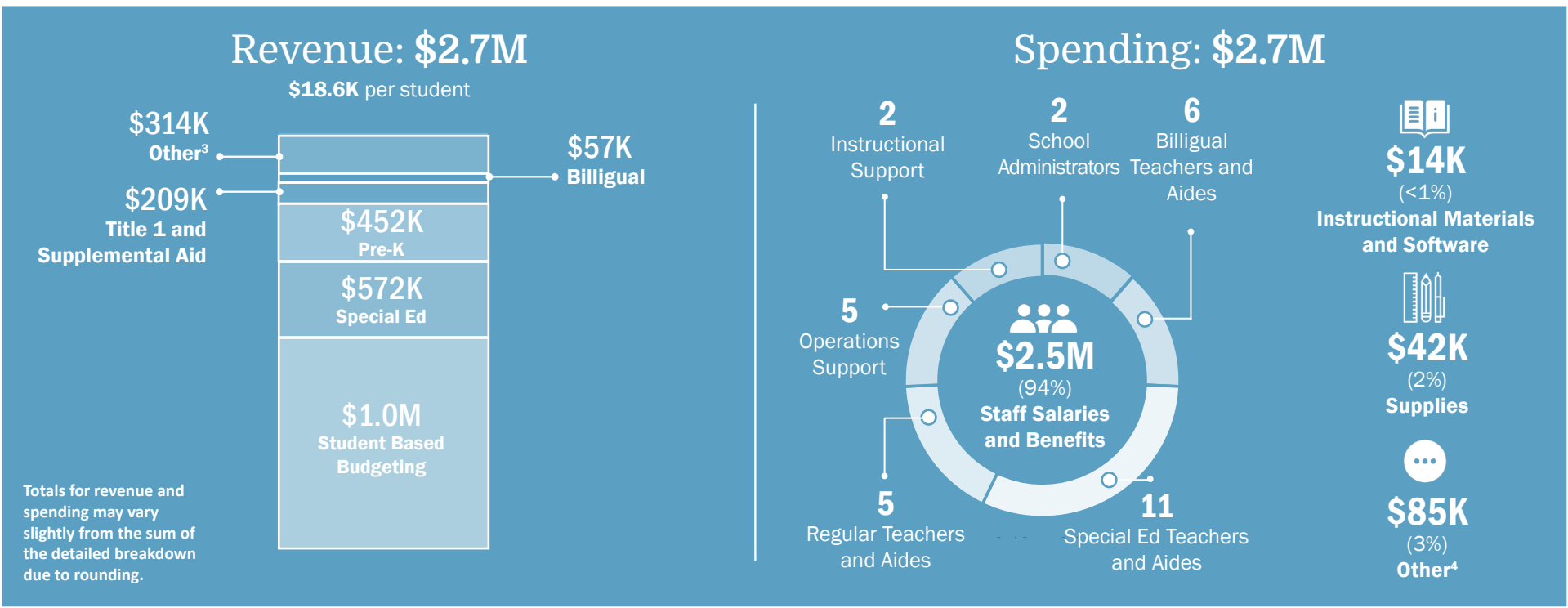
Sometimes, professional development for teachers needs to be supplemented with additional instructional materials or software. For example, in the 2018-19 school year, the data reviews showed that students in all grade levels needed more vocabulary development support, which is especially critical for English Language Learners. While, of course, Rodolfo supported his teachers to build their own skills to help students, Rodolfo also decided to invest in Wordly Wise, a program that teaches vocabulary and broader literacy skills. Rodolfo has been able to use the quarterly data reviews in the 2019-20 school year to see if this investment is helping. Rodolfo has heard from teachers that there are noticeable improvements in class test scores.

The quarterly data reviews also provide an opportunity for teachers to tell Rodolfo when a support is simply not working. In the 2018-19 school year, Rodolfo invested in online software that was intended to provide standards-based, engaging online activities to supplement instruction. However, he heard from teachers that it was not supporting student growth. Rodolfo decided not to purchase the software again the following year, leaving more dollars in the budget to try an alternate solution.

Using data meetings to reflect on how to allocate resources to meet student needs has supported strong student growth at Everett. According to the most recent data released in the 2019-20 school year, 69% of students were meeting or exceeding national averages in math, which is up from 54% in 2016-17. Similarly, in the 2019-20 school year, 67% students were meeting or exceeding national averages in reading, which is up from 52% in 2016-17. Rodolfo’s adaptable and responsive approach, grounded in evidence, ensures that students and teachers have the resources they need to learn and grow.

“Supporting teachers in their development not only is beneficial for students, but teachers also know they are valued and trusted to meet the needs of their students, which helps us retain the incredible teachers we have at Everett.”

RODOLFO ROJAS
PRINCIPAL OF EVERETT



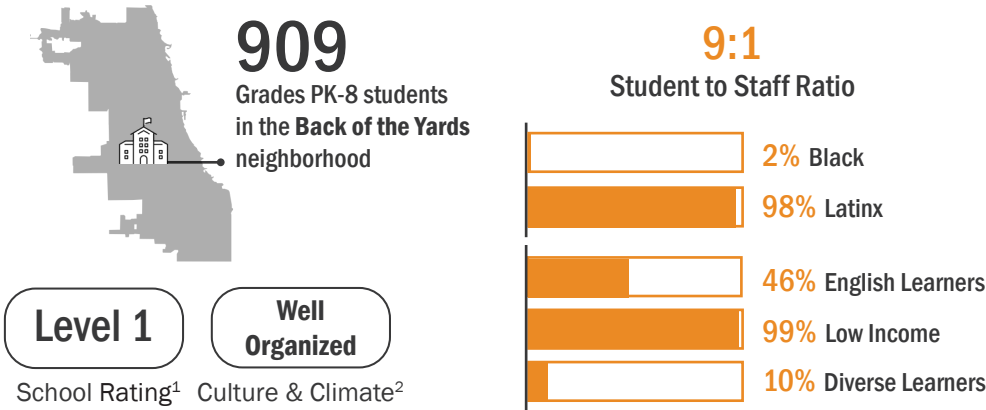
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 2. School culture and climate is measured using the “My School, My Voice” Survey administered by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.
 3. Other revenue includes Lunchroom funds (Fund 312), Tort Funds/Workers Comp (Fund 210) and Title IV Funding (Fund 358).
 4. Other spending includes items such as after-school enrichment, extended day salaries, and math and reading professional services.

Driving Results by Closely Managing the Budget



Barton Dassinger, principal since the 2009-10 school year.

Cesar E. Chávez Multicultural Academic Center



In the 2009-10 school year, Barton Dassinger entered the role of principal at Cesar E. Chávez Multicultural Academic Center with ambitious goals. He wanted to make Chávez one of the top-performing schools in the city, a place where all students — many of whom qualify as English Language Learners or come from low-income families — were supported with what they need. As a teacher, Barton had developed a habit of closely tracking student data to look for ways to drive improvement. As a principal, Barton takes the same approach with his budget. He developed a tool that allows him to continually monitor his budget throughout the year. With this tool, he finds cost-savings that allow him to ensure his teachers have the resources they need from the first day of school to the last.

Barton’s Approach

Careful management of a school budget is hard. In some schools, principals hire a business manager to take on this responsibility. Barton wanted to try it on his own, so he developed a new tool to evaluate actual expenses against the budget every two weeks. That way, Barton can quickly identify opportunities to adjust the budget to better meet the needs of the school in real time. While these types of adjustments are often relatively small in dollar amounts, they are always aligned to the CIWP and make a big impact in ensuring that teachers have the resources they need to help students grow, which is critical to making every school day count.

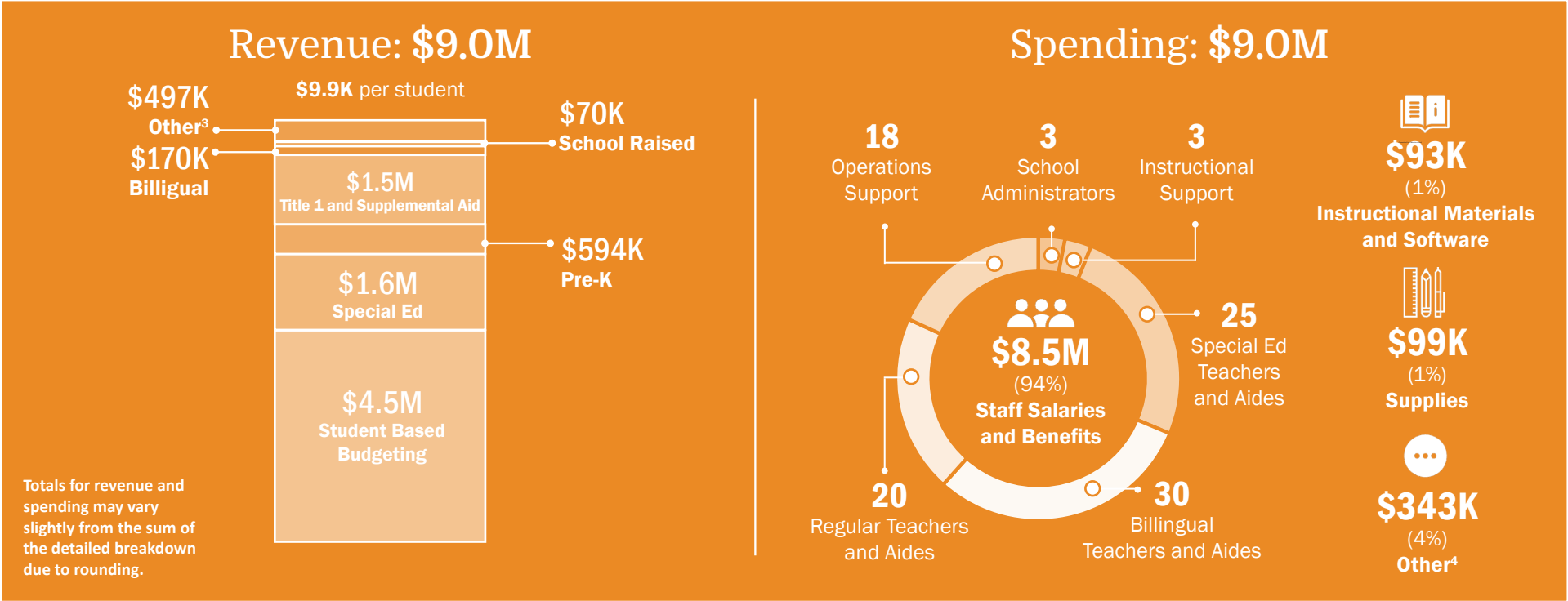
For example, in the 2019-20 school year, one of Barton’s teachers reached out with good news: One of her students had just mastered the content in the Level 6 reading curriculum, the highest level covered in her class. To support this student, she asked Barton if he could purchase the Level 7 curriculum. Barton hadn’t budgeted for the curriculum, so he took a look at his tool, identified a line in the budget for textbooks that were no longer needed, and quickly moved around funds (with the approval of his LSC) to purchase the book the teacher needed.

Closely monitoring the budget, especially the personnel budget, helps Barton identify opportunities to make bigger, more innovative changes. One such change came in the 2012-13 school year, when Barton started budgeting for an extended school day, an investment that costs about \$350,000 annually. He worked with his Local School Council to ensure that an extended school day was the best decision for the school community. He made it clear to his LSC that this program would require sacrifice elsewhere; Barton makes very intentional decisions around the total number of non-classroom teacher positions, and he even went without an assistant principal in some years to maintain the program. This program has paid off: With four additional hours in school each week, his students gain 25 additional days of instruction each year. The outcomes have been impressive. Consistently over the past five years, more than 80% of students have met or exceeded national standards in math, and more than 60% have exceeded national standards in reading. The extended school day also makes Chávez an attractive place to work; teachers who work the extended day earn approximately \$6,000 additional dollars each year. In an often challenging recruiting environment, Barton has found this to be an important strategy for Chávez to attract and retain top teacher talent.

While it takes significant effort to manage his budget so closely, Barton finds it in the best interest of his students. He can provide the resources required to meet unexpected needs that emerge during the school year in addition to driving big, innovative changes that ultimately support student growth. Barton believes that the level of academic excellence shown by students at Chávez would be hard to achieve without strategic decision-making at the line-item level.

LEARN FROM CHÁVEZ

View an example of the Excel workbook that Barton uses to monitor his budget here: bit.ly/34C6s78



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3. Other revenue includes Lunchroom funds (Fund 312), Tort Funds Workers Comp (Fund 210) and the IL Empowerment Grant (Fund 367).
4. Other spending includes personalized learning instruction, extended day salaries and equipment.



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About The Fund

The Chicago Public Education Fund (The Fund) is a nonprofit organization that improves public schools in Chicago by investing in the talented educators who lead them. We are a catalyst for accelerating student learning and a long-standing leader in identifying and scaling what works. For 20 years, we have worked with our partners in the education, nonprofit, civic, corporate and philanthropic communities to redefine what it means to lead in Chicago's public schools.

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