

Innovative Staffing to Personalize Learning: BROOKLYN LABORATORY CHARTER SCHOOLS

BROOKLYN, NY

This case study is part of a series about schools that use non-traditional staffing arrangements to personalize learning. All schools profiled have demonstrated noteworthy student achievement results.

Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools (which refers to itself as LAB) provides personalized instruction using a combination of four teaching roles: **lead teachers, learning specialists, resident teachers, and fellows.** This staffing also creates a pathway for recruiting and developing LAB teachers, and allows students to form relationships with multiple adults in the core academic subjects. LAB pays its staff within its state-allocated funding, and used grants to fund the creation of its teacher development programs.

Educator roles and responsibilities

- **Lead Teachers:** Lead whole-class instruction in specialized content areas (math, ELA, writing, social studies/science); provide small-group instruction; adjust instruction based on student learning data; build relationships with students; provide tutoring after school
- **Learning Specialists:** Lead in-class and small-group differentiated interventions to help struggling and advanced students
- **Resident Teachers:** Co-teach whole-class instruction with lead teachers; plan lessons with lead teachers; provide small-group instruction
- **LAB Corps Fellows:** Provide small-group instruction to supplement a lead teacher's instruction; personalize instruction for small groups based on student data and established relationships; tutor individual students
- **Enrichment Instructors:** Part-time teachers covering a range of enrichment classes, including arts, STEM, sports, and leadership development

Key instructional practices

- Whole-group & small-group instruction; individual tutoring
- Small groups adjusted as needed based on data; grouped by same learning level
- Teachers differentiate work for each student through assignments, adaptive software & online playlists; students advance based on mastery
- Students help set learning goals & have some choice in learning experiences
- Students do some work in peer teams
- Teachers coach students in social & emotional skills

Technology use

- Blended learning: **Station Rotation, Flex**
- Provides students with differentiated content instruction; assesses student mastery
- Provides teachers with digital data system so they can individually & as a team track each student's progress, & adjust instruction & student groupings as needed

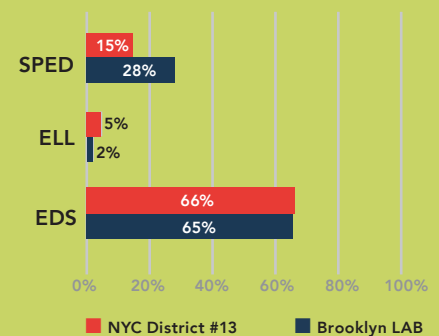
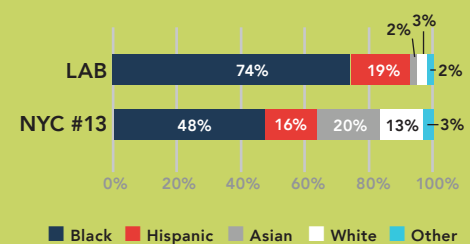
SCHOOL PROFILE, 2017–18

Campuses: 4 (2 middle, 2 high)

Grades: 6–9 (planned 6–12)

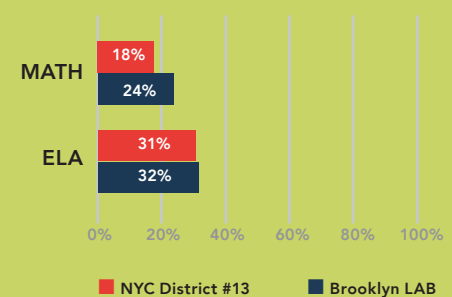
Enrollment: 700 total

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



SPED: Special education students
ELL: English language learners
EDS: Economically disadvantaged students

STUDENT PROFICIENCY



THE LAB TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Following a string of high-profile career opportunities—ranging from the White House to the Federal Reserve Bank to consulting with leading tech companies—Erin Mote and Eric Tucker decided that they wanted to do something with more meaningful impact. At the end of a contemplative stroll through their Brooklyn neighborhood, the couple sketched out on a napkin the basic plan for a school, focused on providing personalized learning to the students least well-served by other educational institutions, and on training and valuing teachers like society trains and values doctors. Building on that vision, they opened Brooklyn Laboratory Charter School (LAB) in 2014.

Staffing model

LAB designed its staffing model to provide its students with more interaction with supportive adults and to create a pipeline for recruiting and developing excellent teachers through on-the-job training. “When we personalize learning for students, it’s not necessarily just with technology,” Mote says. “It’s with understanding that they learn better with a certain teacher or fellow, or in a particular small-group setting.”

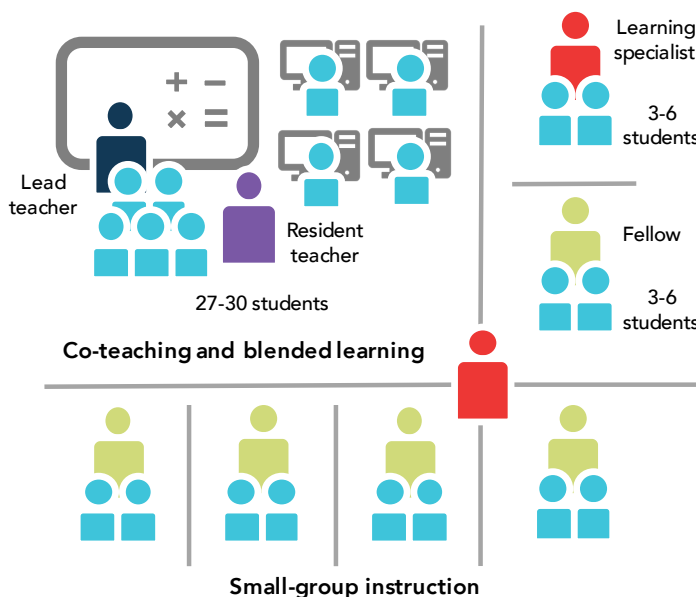
LAB begins its teacher pipeline with **LAB Corps Fellows**. The school recruits recent college graduates and career-switching professionals to become fellows, and focuses on recruiting people who mirror the demographic backgrounds of the student population. During the 11-month fellowship, fellows lead small-group instruction in either English language arts or math. LAB hires deans to work with fellows on instruction, setting their own goals, and professional development, at a ratio of eight to 10 fellows per dean. At the end of the year, fellows who demonstrated excellence are given the opportunity to return as resident teachers the next year.

Resident teachers spend two years at LAB developing their expertise through co-teaching classes with lead teachers and instructing small groups. Residents also work with lead teachers during their planning time to observe (first year) or co-plan lessons (second year). As part of their program, residents attend the Relay Graduate School of Education to earn their master's degrees and teaching certificates. Residents who successfully complete the residency are eligible to be hired as lead teachers.

Strong **lead teachers** are one of LAB’s core strategies for driving student success. LAB hires teachers who are alumni of the residency program or strong external candidates. Lead teachers orchestrate whole-class instruction and take primary responsibility for students’ outcomes. Those who co-teach with a resident teacher also coach the resident. LAB strives to have all its teachers cross-certified in both special education and their subject area so that all teachers are equipped to support all students’ learning needs. LAB partners with the **CHIME Institute** to provide its teachers with training in neuro-developmental and strengths-based approaches to serving students with learning differences.

LAB also uses **learning specialists** in class and small-group settings for interventions with struggling and advanced students. Specialists are certified in special education and often have additional certifications in speech or other related services. They provide individualized education program (IEP) services to LAB’s special education students. Specialists collaborate daily with teachers, and some specialists co-teach classes.

FIGURE 1. STAFFING ARRANGEMENT



On Wednesdays, students leave at 1:15 p.m. to give co-teachers time to review student data and plan instruction. Teachers also use this time to consult with colleagues and share practices. Fellows spend Wednesday afternoons receiving intensive professional development and coaching on classroom management, pedagogy, lesson planning and delivery, and content instruction from lead teachers, deans, LAB leadership, and outside providers.

The student learning experience

Each student’s day begins with an advisory block, in which teachers help students plan their day, and coach them on good study habits and mindsets that will support learning.

Then, in a typical core-instruction class, students rotate through stations, alternating between **class time** with their teachers and **small-group instruction** with fellows. During **class time**, lead and resident teachers co-teach groups of 27 to 30 students. They adapt their lessons and instructional strategies using student learning data from LAB’s online learning platform. Students also spend some class time learning through online playlists.

For **small-group instruction**, LAB divides classes into five to seven groups that each work with a fellow. During small-group instruction, struggling students receive rapid remediation, while advanced students work on extension activities. The lessons and activities that fellows cover during small-group instruction reinforce what students learn during class time. Small-group instruction also provides time for students with IEPs to receive services from learning specialists, such as speech therapy or reading interventions.

Following core instruction, students attend PE and electives, such as robotics, computer programming, arts, and sports.

Most teachers also provide their students with tutoring outside of scheduled classes, but within the extended school day, which generally goes from 8:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. (except for Wednesdays, as noted above).

Technology use

LAB uses technology both to allow students to learn at their own pace and to gather the student learning data that teachers use to personalize instruction. On **Cortex**, a platform created by LAB’s sister organization, InnovateEDU, students learn from online materials, complete learning activities, and take assessments to demonstrate their content mastery. Online work allows students to set personal learning goals, track their progress against those goals, and focus on content tailored to their needs. Cortex also provides teachers with a dashboard for tracking students’ learning progress so that they can easily identify where students need extra support and pull students out for targeted instruction. Overall, students spend no more than 30 percent of their class time using technology.

FIGURE 2. SAMPLE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Min.	Content	Led By
30	Advisory	Teacher
60	English language arts	Lead/Resident co-teachers
60	Small-group literacy	Fellow
60	Science and social studies	Lead/Resident co-teachers
Lunch		
60	Small-group science and social studies	Fellow
60	Math	Lead/Resident co-teachers
60	Small-group math	Fellow
120	PE, electives, or writing augmentation (6th grade)	Various Adults

Compensation and funding model

LAB pays its teaching staff and covers its core operating expenses using the recurring public funds that all charter schools receive, based on enrollment. Fellows, who work 39 hours per week, receive a \$15,500 stipend and are eligible for a loan-forgiveness program for debt incurred during their undergraduate studies through the Corporation for National and Community Service. Residents make \$50,000 in their first year and \$52,500 in their second year, and LAB uses a portion of its public funding to pay for them to earn a master's degree through Relay in addition to their teacher certification work. Lead teachers earn between \$60,000 and \$80,000, depending on their experience and credentials. In comparison, the average teacher salary in 2016 in New York state was \$79,152; median public school teacher pay in Brooklyn in 2017 was \$65,705.¹ LAB also gives its teachers allowances for professional development that some use for additional graduate studies. LAB is able to afford enough co-teachers and fellows to support each class by relying on a small administrative staff, operating in low-cost facilities, and avoiding other nonessential costs.

Philanthropic grants cover LAB's costs to develop its innovative approaches, open new campuses, and create its professional development programs. LAB also considers its partnerships with organizations such as InnovateEDU and Relay to be critical for sustainably supporting its fellows and residents. For example, all resident teachers receive scholarships from Relay for a portion of their tuition costs, which in turn help LAB keep costs down.

Endnotes

¹For state salary, see table C-5 in: National Education Association. (2017, May). Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the states 2016 and estimates of school statistics 2017. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/2017_Rankings_and_Estimates_Report-FINAL-SECURED.pdf; local salary estimate from Salary.com, which notes: "The median annual Public School Teacher salary in Brooklyn, NY is \$65,705, as of September 27, 2017, with a range usually between \$57,358-\$75,854 not including bonus and benefit information and other factors that impact base pay." Retrieved from <http://www1.salary.com/NY/Brooklyn/Public-School-Teacher-salary.html>

This series is a collaboration between Public Impact and the Clayton Christensen Institute. Research, writing, and editing was done by Thomas Arnett and Luis Flores from Christensen and Nita Losoponkul and Sharon Keschull Barrett of Public Impact; video and print production by Beverley Tyndall of Public Impact. Thank you also to Emily Ayscue Hassel, Bryan C. Hassel, and Grayson Cooper of Public Impact.

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Please cite this report as: Public Impact and Clayton Christensen Institute. (2018). *Innovative staffing to personalize learning: Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact; and Lexington, MA: Christensen Institute. Retrieved from <http://publicimpact.com/innovative-staffing-to-personalize-learning/>

