

# Innovative Staffing to Personalize Learning: INTRINSIC SCHOOLS

CHICAGO, IL

*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.*

Intrinsic Schools provides personalized instruction using a combination of online learning and team teaching in math and English. The Chicago charter school's staffing arrangement gives students personalized instruction and supportive relationships from multiple adults, while fostering teacher development through co-teaching. Intrinsic teachers also receive formal and informal coaching and mentorship from other teachers or administrators. Intrinsic pays its staff within its state-allocated budget, and uses grants to fund new building construction, extra professional development, and student field trips.

## Educator roles and responsibilities

- **Pod teachers:** Provide small-group instruction as part of a three-teacher English or math team; adjust instruction based on student learning data; oversee independent student work; build relationships with students; support other pod teachers
- **Teacher mentors:** Observe other teachers during the mentor's prep periods and down time in addition to teaching full-time; meet informally with teachers to discuss observations

## Key instructional practices

- Whole-group & small-group instruction
- Small groups adjusted weekly based on data; grouped by same learning level
- Teachers differentiate work for each student through assignments & adaptive software
- 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

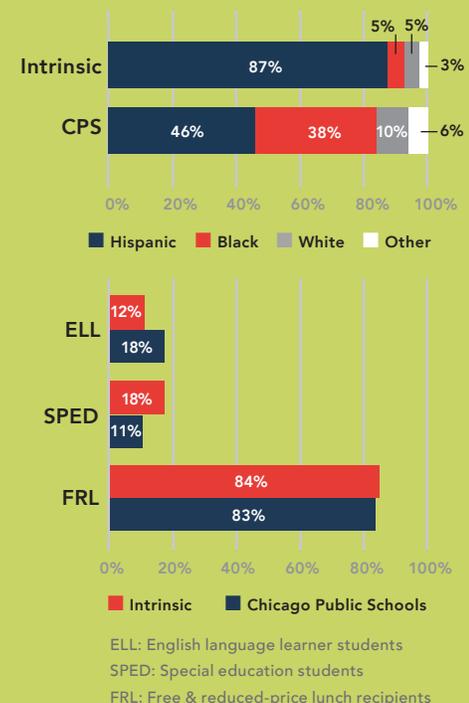
## Technology use

- 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, and adjust instruction & student groupings as needed

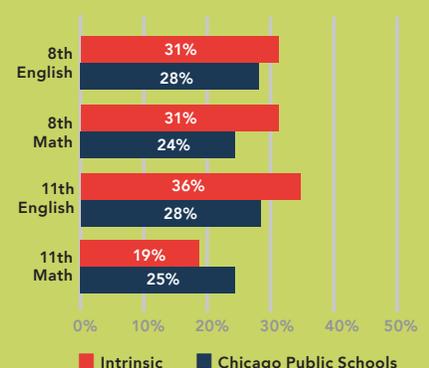
## SCHOOL PROFILE, 2016–17

**Campuses:** 1  
**Grades:** 7–12  
**Enrollment:** 986

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



## STUDENT PROFICIENCY



## THE INTRINSIC TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

When Melissa Zaikos founded Intrinsic Schools, she had two goals: Give students life-changing opportunities that would prepare them for postsecondary success, and show other educators how to replicate this, sustainably. Previously, Zaikos worked as Chicago Public Schools' chief area officer for about 100 high-performing schools developing innovative practices and felt frustrated that hard work led only to some schools making incremental gains, while many stagnated. So she and a few colleagues spent two months traveling the country to learn from innovating schools, then took the best pieces from the models they observed and opened Intrinsic in fall 2013. The school opened with just ninth grade, and added seventh and tenth grades the following year. The school added grade levels each year, so that it has served seventh through twelfth grades since 2016–17.

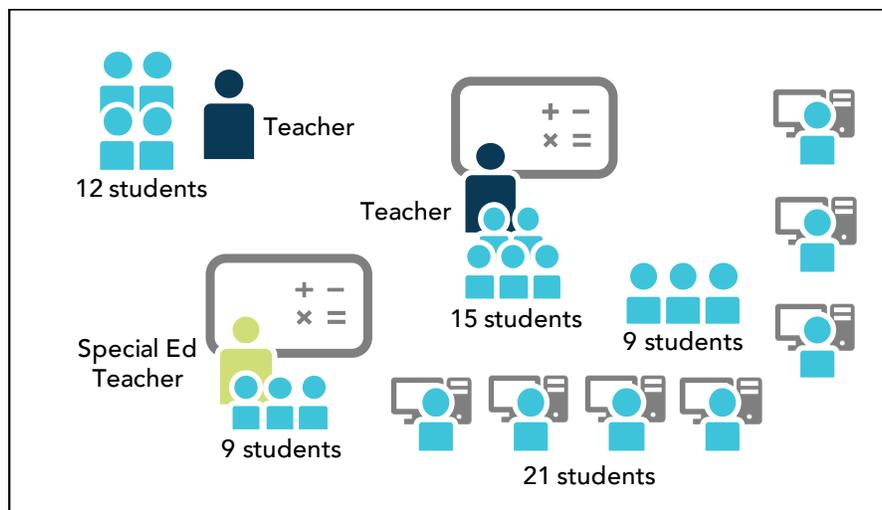
### Staffing model

Intrinsic's core instructional model for English and math centers on pods: large, open rooms with flexible furniture that teachers can rearrange to fit their lesson plans. Three **pod teachers**—usually one veteran teacher with three or more years of experience and strong teaching skills and prior student outcomes, one teacher who is often a novice teacher, and one special education teacher—share responsibility for teaching 60 students during each 90-minute block.

Within the block, students are assigned to groups with peers who are at similar levels of mastery. Two groups of seven to 15 students work with two of the three teachers on direct instruction or collaborative learning projects. Meanwhile, the third teacher supervises the other students, who either work in small collaborative groups or individually online; this teacher may also provide one-on-one support or small-group instruction as needed. Although they teach separate groups, the three teachers share responsibility for creating the 15 lessons that they will collectively cover each week, and they often meet during daily 90-minute prep periods and sometimes outside of school hours to collaborate on their lessons. At the end of each unit, teachers rotate their student groups, with the special education teacher fulfilling all the same roles as the other two teachers. Pod teachers coordinate their responsibilities to ensure that special education teachers are able to provide required supports to students with special needs.

Intrinsic's staffing model focuses on teacher development. Pod teachers learn daily from one another by observing each other across the pod and conversing informally about common challenges. Additionally, **all teachers** receive regular observations and feedback from either an administrator, a department head, or a teacher mentor. **New teachers** receive feedback about once a week, and their feedback often focuses on lesson planning, creating classroom routines, and basic teacher support. More experienced teachers receive monthly feedback, and the teachers themselves often determine the focus of these conversations.

FIGURE 1. SAMPLE MATH POD CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT



Some of the most experienced teachers serve as **teacher mentors**, observing other teachers during times when the mentor is not teaching, then reviewing student data and creating action plans with those they observed. Students leave early on Wednesday afternoons, giving teachers and administrators two hours to review student learning data and receive professional development.

Intrinsic also has a culture team and a data team to support classroom instruction. The culture team—the assistant dean of culture, the service learning coordinator, and the building supervisor—monitor school climate, escort students who need to leave their classrooms during class time, offer unbiased support for students whom a teacher has disciplined, and serve as an extra set of adults available to support students. Intrinsic’s data team—the school’s data analyst and the director of special projects—looks over all the student data and provides recommendations to teachers, such as adjusting small groups or giving some students extra attention.

## The student learning experience

For students, each day (except early-release Wednesdays) begins and ends with a 10- or 15-minute **advisory period**. Intrinsic created these periods to provide students with additional adult support outside of their classes. High schoolers stay with the same advisory teacher for all four years to help build strong relationships and a sense of community. Each advisory teacher decides, based on student needs, what to focus on in each period, such as goal-setting or team-building activities.

Between their advisory periods, students attend three 90-minute blocks of class time. During their math and English pod blocks, students rotate two or three times among **independent, teacher-led, or cooperative** work. By using pods, Intrinsic keeps special education students in regular classrooms. In addition to the yearlong math and English blocks, students also take semester-long, traditional (not pod) courses in social studies and science (one each semester) and alternate every other day between health and physical education.

Intrinsic emphasizes student responsibility for learning. For example, advisory teachers teach high school students to monitor their grades and seek support as needed, such as by attending office hours. Students also have some parts of their day that are completely student-led. For example, during book clubs that take place in the English pods, students lead their peers in book talks, and teachers are not supposed to intervene to guide the discussion.

## Technology use

Intrinsic uses technology to allow students to progress at their own pace and to gather student learning data to personalize instruction. Depending on each student’s needs, students often work independently for one-third to half of their day. While not all of this time is online, a majority of it is spent on programs such as **Illuminate, eMath, Fishtank, Khan Academy,** and **ThinkCERCA**.

**FIGURE 2. SAMPLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SCHEDULE (EXCEPT WEDNESDAYS)**

Time	Activity
8:30 am – 8:40 am	AM Advisory
8:45 am – 10:15 am	1st Block: Math
10:20 am – 11:50 am	2nd Block: Science OR Social Studies
11:55 am – 12:30 pm	3rd Block I: English
12:33 pm – 12:58 pm	Lunch
1:03 pm – 2:05 pm	3rd Block II: English
2:10 pm – 3:40 pm	4th Block: PE/Art
3:45 pm – 4:00 pm	PM Advisory

## Compensation and funding model

Intrinsic pays its teachers and staff members using the recurring public funds that all charter schools receive, based on enrollment. Teacher mentors receive a stipend proportional to the number of teachers whom they coach. Department chairs, who generally earn more than other teachers due to their experience and expertise, receive \$2,000 stipends. Additionally, veteran teachers in pods earn more than traditional teachers who are not in pods, corresponding to their experience and qualifications. First-year teacher salaries begin at about \$45,500. In comparison, in 2016 the average teacher salary in Illinois was \$61,342, and starting base pay for a teacher in a 208-day position in the Chicago Public Schools salary schedule is \$50,653.<sup>1</sup> Intrinsic uses grants for other professional learning activities, such as bringing in consultants and speakers, and for student activities such as field trips.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For Illinois 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](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/2017_Rankings_and_Estimates_Report-FINAL-SECURED.pdf); for Chicago Public Schools, see the 2016 Agreement between the Board of Education of the City of Chicago and Chicago Teachers Union Local 1, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO (p. 195), retrieved from [https://www.ctunet.com/for-members/text/CTU\\_Contract\\_2015-2019\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ctunet.com/for-members/text/CTU_Contract_2015-2019_FINAL.pdf)

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 Kebschull 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.

See the accompanying videos for this profile at <http://publicimpact.com/innovative-staffing-to-personalize-learning/>

© 2018 Public Impact and Clayton Christensen Institute

We encourage the free use, reproduction, and distribution of our materials for noncommercial use, but *we require attribution for all use.*

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

