



Chillum Elementary School Case Study

By

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Executive Summary

Chillum Elementary School is an example of the second category of schools – an improving school with high growth.

The case was developed through interviews with the principal and key teachers, a review of informal documents provided by the principal, and information about the school's curriculum and instructional program on the school's website. In fall 2014, Chillum Elementary School in Prince George's County Public Schools enrolled 274 students in prekindergarten through grade five. The school is 97 percent minority (59 percent Hispanic and 38 percent African American) and 85 percent free and reduce-priced meals (FRPM). In 2012 and 2013, 81 percent of its students performed at or above proficiency in reading, math and science, compared to only 60 percent in 2010. The school's performance did experience a decline to 73 percent proficient or advanced in 2014.

Nevertheless, the school has exhibited significant academic growth over time. Chillum Elementary places a strong focus on high expectations for all students, building and retaining a strong instructional staff, focusing on early interventions, and emphasizing literacy instruction. It is a data-driven school that administers a number of both formative and summative assessments.

Some key factors behind the school's results are:

1. The school has a common vision and a culture of high expectations. New teachers who are hired are chosen because they fit into the culture.
2. The school emphasizes professional development. A lead teacher serves in the role of instructional facilitator, and time for professional development is embedded into the school schedule and after-school.
3. There is a focus on frequent data-driven focused interventions for students at risk of academic failure.

The overall strategies used by Chillum to produce its high level of growth are aligned with the improvement system embedded within the EB model, and do not require any changes in the EB model to reflect specific strategies this school used to produced its high level of performance.

Introduction

Chillum Elementary School is nestled in a working class community in Hyattsville, Maryland, approximately 35 miles southwest of Baltimore. The school is in a “walking community,” meaning that most of its 274 students walk to school from their homes in the neighborhood. The school utilizes one bus to transport the few students who live too far away to walk to school. The student body is 59 percent Hispanic and 38 percent African American students.

Chillum Elementary is a School-wide Title I school, with more than 85 percent of the students participating in the FRPM program and all of them participating in the Maryland Meals Breakfast Program. Nearly one-third (32 percent) of students are limited English proficient (LEP). Yet, despite these demographics, only six percent of students require special education services.

At one time the school was one of the most overcrowded in Prince George’s County Public Schools, but a decline in enrollment and new attendance boundaries have reduced the school’s size to the point where it no longer needs portable classrooms to house all of its students. In recent years, demographics have also shifted the school from majority African American to majority Hispanic students. In addition, in the 2014-2015 school year, Chillum gained kindergarten students who were not able to enroll through a lottery process into the dual language immersion program in a neighboring school. These newly enrolled students required the establishment of an additional kindergarten classroom at Chillum. Reorganization within Prince George’s County Public Schools also led to the loss of grade six in 2014-2015.

Chillum is a K-5 five school with both Head Start and prekindergarten programs on-site. Table 4.1 shows grade-level enrollment and average class sizes for the school. With the exception of grades three and four, all grades have at least two classrooms. Kindergarten is the only grade-level with three classrooms.

The school provides two half-day sessions of prekindergarten for 32 students total. Two years ago, the school was able to offer a full-day prekindergarten program. In addition, the school provides full-day Head Start for 13 three- and four-year-old students. Parents have to apply for Head Start and there is a waiting list for enrollment.

Table 1 shows that average kindergarten to grade five class sizes range from 18 to 33 students. According to the principal and staff, grades three and four are unusually large this year. The grade three classroom is the only post-kindergarten classroom with an instructional aide.

Table 1
Chillum Elementary School Class Sizes

Grade-Level	Class Size
Head Start	13
Prekindergarten (2 classes)	16
Kindergarten (3 classes)	19
One (2 classes)	19
Two (2 classes)	20
Three (1 class)	33
Four (1 class)	27
Five (2 classes)	18

School Performance

Table 2 shows the composite performance data (combined reading, math, and science scores) for Chillum Elementary for 2007 through 2014. Overall student performance, measured as the composite percent of student achieving proficient or advanced on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), improved from 66 percent in 2007 to 81 percent in 2012, a 15-point gain over six years.

**Table 2
Chillum Elementary School Performance, Maryland School Assessment (MSA), 2007-2014**

School-Wide Percent Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Reading, Math and Science								
Performance Level	MSA 2007	MSA 2008	MSA 2009	MSA 2010	MSA 2011	MSA 2012	MSA* 2013	MSA* 2014
All Students	66	65	60	76	76	81	81	73
FRPM Students	66	62	60	75	74	81	NA	NA
LEP Students	60	62	58	69	68	75	NA	NA
Non-White/ Non-Asian Students	66	64	60	76	75	82	NA	NA

*Assessment data by student subgroup for 2013 and 2014 were not available at the time this report was written.

When data are disaggregated for particular subgroups of students, the results are consistent with the overall performance of the school. Students who qualify for FRPM show the same 15-point improvement from 66 percent to 81 percent proficient or advanced, as do non-white and non-Asian students. The latter group’s performance increased one additional point, from 66 percent to 82 percent proficient or advanced. The only subgroup with noticeably different scores is LEP students. This group’s performance also increased 15 percentage points over the six-year period, but because the starting point in 2007 was six percentage points lower than the school average, the same six-point difference remains in 2012.

School Staffing

Table 3 shows the school’s staff, consisting of 24.1 full-time equivalent (FTE) certified and 12.0 FTE classified staff. Classroom teachers make up the majority of the certified staff, with 14 classroom teachers, including prekindergarten and Head Start. The school employs 1.7 FTE teachers for art, music, physical education (PE), and a media specialist. Another 4.9 FTE certified teachers provide instruction in special education to LEP students, and to students who require extra help in reading and math. School leadership is provided by a principal and an instructional coach, and pupil support is provided by one guidance counselor and one school nurse position (vacant at the time of the visit). The 12.0 FTE classified staff includes 4.0 FTE instructional aides, 2.0 FTE clerical staff, 3.0 FTE custodians, and 3.0 FTE cafeteria staff.

**Table 3
Staffing at Chillum Elementary School**

Category	FTE
<u>Administration</u>	
Principal	1.0
Assistant Principal	0
Clerical	2.0
<u>Prekindergarten Program</u>	
Licensed Teachers	1.0: prekindergarten 2.0: Head Start
Instructional Aide	1.0
Prekindergarten Parent Helper	0
<u>Main Program</u>	
Core Teachers	11.0
Elective Teachers	0.2: Art 0.5: Music 0.5: PE
Instructional Coaches	1.0
Special Education Self-Contained (Severe and Profound)	0
Special Education (Mild and Moderate)	2.0
LEP Teachers	1.5
Tutors/Tier 2 Interventionists	1.0 Math Resource Teacher 0.2 RTI Reading 0.2 RTI Math
Librarian	0.5 Media Specialist
<u>Aides</u>	
Instructional: Title I	1.0 Grade three
Special Education Self-Contained (Personal Assistant for Child with Visual and Physical Disabilities)	1.0
Special Education, Inclusion	1.0
<u>Pupil Support</u>	
<u>Licensed</u>	
Guidance Counselor	1.0
Nurse	1.0 (vacant)
Psychologist	0
Occupational Therapist	0
Physical Therapist	0
<u>Non-licensed</u>	
Behavioral Specialist	0
Lunchroom Staff: 1 Manager and 3 Assistants	3.0

Prince George’s County Public Schools utilizes student-based budgeting, which allows the school to “purchase” staff within its allocated budget. In addition to the budget allocation, the district will provide

additional staffing resources. In the 2014-2015 school year, the district allocated a 1.0 FTE Community Outreach Liaison to work with the school. This allocation may change from year to year.

The principal can hire teachers and other staff within the school's budget allocation when vacancies arise. The district will perform an initial screening of applicants to ensure their eligibility (e.g. fingerprint checks), but the ultimate hiring decision is in the hands of the principal. This allows the principal to hire the candidate she sees as the most qualified to further the school goals and best fit into the existing school culture.

School Goals

Chillum Elementary does not have a set of unique school goals, but instead aligns its activities with the goals and performance objectives (i.e. Adequate Yearly Progress) set by the district.

The school staff determines how to meet the following expectations:

Goal 1: High Student Achievement. Students will receive education that is rigorous, engaging, and relevant to the future.

Goal 2: Highly-Effective Teaching. Teachers who are effective will have students who are engaged and excited about learning, able to communicate what they have learned, and can demonstrate high performance on standardized tests and other academic measures.

Goal 3: Safe and Supportive Schools. Schools will be a safe environment in which students and teachers are able to focus on instruction without distractions, and the staff will provide the highest level of customer service in both schools and offices.

Goal 4: Strong Community Partnerships. The school system will strengthen existing public and private partnerships and aggressively seek opportunities to establish new partnerships with parents, businesses, government representatives, and community leaders who are willing to assist in meeting student achievement goals.

Goal 5: Efficient and Effective Operations. The school system will perform non-instructional operations as efficiently and effectively as possible, and will continue to streamline processes and become efficient in all areas.

While Chillum does not have unique school goals, the school does have a set of commonly held values around which practice is structured. Current and newly hired staff members are expected to share these values and contribute to these common goals.

The following is taken from the school's Title I School Improvement Plan:

Vision Statement: Chillum Elementary School strives to create a safe environment, which fosters the development of responsible and caring students who are critical thinkers. It is the vision of the school to prepare students academically for college and careers by striving for excellence in education.

Mission Statement: Chillum Elementary School will provide a challenging and comprehensive academic program that meets the educational, physical, social and emotional needs of every child. Staff, parents and community members will work collaboratively to ensure students receive a high-

quality education. The learning environment will promote high expectations for every student through professional development, collaborative leadership, integration of technology, and reflective teaching practices of educators. In order to achieve the vision of the school, students will take pride in a job well done and do their best.

School Motto: Doing Our Best on the Road to Success!

School Schedule and Collaborative Teams

A committee of Chillum teachers creates the class schedule, making sure that they meet the district's requirements for instructional minutes in each subject while trying to create uninterrupted blocks of time for instruction. To the extent possible, they also build in time for collaborative planning and professional development, though this part of the schedule changes from year to year depending on the allocation of specialist teachers.

The school day at Chillum Elementary begins with breakfast for all students from 8 to 8:15 a.m. All students have a 30-minute lunch and a 15-minute recess during the day, leaving five-and-one-quarter hours of instructional time, or 315 instructional minutes. Most of the instructional hours are spent on teaching core subjects (reading/English language arts, math, science, and social studies) in all grades. The times for each subject vary by grade-level, with more time spent on reading/English language arts in the earlier grades and increasingly more minutes on math, science and social studies for the later grades.

Reading/English language arts (R/ELA) blocks of 150 minutes are used in kindergarten and grade one. The block is 135 minutes in grade two. In grades three through five, R/ELA time is split into multiple shorter sections totaling 105 minutes.

Math instructional time begins at 60 minutes for four days a week and 30 minutes for one day a week in kindergarten, 60 minutes for five days a week for grade one, 75 minutes for five days a week for grade two, and 90 minutes for five days a week for grades three through five.

Science instructional time is 45 minutes for four days a week and 30 minutes for one day a week in kindergarten, 45 minutes for five days a week for grades one and two, and 60 minutes for five days a week for grades three through five. Social studies instruction is 30 minutes for five days a week for grades kindergarten through five.

The two grade three and four teachers and the two grade five teachers have opted to teach in teams rather than as self-contained classrooms. In each case one teacher teaches R/ELA and social studies while the second teacher teaches math and science.

All grades have a specials period for art, music, media, guidance and PE for 30 minutes for three days a week and 45 minutes for two days a week. Staff indicated that scheduling the special subjects can be challenging, depending on how many specialist staff are allocated to the school and whether they are full- or part-time staff. This also has an impact on their ability to schedule collaborative time for teachers. For the 2014-2015 school year, grade-level teachers have common planning and preparation times during specials, allowing for collaboration in grade-level teams; the two grades three and four teachers have common planning and preparation times. In previous years, the school has approached collaboration differently. Last year, for example, they scheduled the time after-school. This year the staff has chosen to build in into the daily schedule.

Curriculum and Instructional Program

Chillum, along with the rest of the district, uses the following mathematics and reading programs: McGraw-Hill My Math for grades kindergarten through four, Pearson's enVisionMath Common Core in grade five, Houghton-Mifflin's Reading Wonders series in grades kindergarten through two, and Pearson's Reading Street Common Core in grades three through five. According to the principal, the instructional programs are embedded into the textbooks and the district creates a grade-level specific curriculum instructional map that teachers utilize for daily instruction.

The principal and teachers of Chillum Elementary have focused on a strategy heavy with early literacy interventions and the extensive use of flexible small group instruction in both reading/English language arts and math in all grade-levels. This strategy allows them to focus on the quality of instruction, regardless of changes to the curriculum textbooks and other materials chosen by the district.

Chillum Elementary historically has had a strong primary grade focus on literacy. The goal was to have multiple avenues to catch students who were at risk of academic failure, intervene, and allow them to continue to grow at the appropriate grade-level. Classrooms have been small enough in recent years that small reading groups serve as the primary method for delivering reading instruction for Head Start and prekindergarten. They are also used extensively in kindergarten through grade five. Classrooms are set up so that students receive instruction from the teacher, can work in small group centers, or engage in individual work. The teacher moves around the classroom during center and individual work time, as do any support teachers in the classroom (e.g. LEP teacher, RTI interventionists).

Head Start and prekindergarten begin with home visits to determine with parents where children are, what they might need in terms of academic supports, and what expectations parents have for their children. The Dial 4 Assessment is used to create small groups for instruction. Students are given diagnostic assessments as soon as they show any indication of falling behind. These assessments drive interventions and any special education services that may be needed.

Up until the 2010-2011 school year, the school used Reading Recovery, a short-term, focused reading intervention, usually provided one-on-one, for grade one students falling behind. Reading Recovery also came with a reading specialist, but this position was no longer assigned to the school starting in 2012-2013. The lead teacher now serves this role to some extent.

The two RTI interventionists work primarily with grades one and two students and a few grade three students. They work with groups of three students for 30 minutes, three times a week for 12 weeks at a time.

The school library has been "leveled" so that students can find books that are appropriate to their reading level and to help teachers make challenging, yet appropriate reading recommendations to students. The school also makes use of Writing Fundamentals to support writing instruction and recently extended it into kindergarten to smooth the transition from kindergarten to grade one for students.

The State's new College and Career-Ready Standards have brought changes to the mathematics curriculum, in particular, with many district teachers participating in the realignment of math content to appropriate grade-levels. As part of the changes in mathematics, Chillum has begun to make use of small,

flexible grouping in math instruction as well as in reading/English language arts. The school has one math resource teacher who works in concert with the classroom teachers to make this happen.

The school has also begun to incorporate online curriculum materials into the classroom, making use of MyMath's online component as well as the homework module, which students may access at home. IReady also has online components for math and reading, and Chillum has been using these for a few years.

Through the district, the school has a longstanding partnership with the America Reads America Counts program at the University of Maryland. Through this program, university students receive training from district reading specialists in Reading Recovery and general tutoring practices. In turn, they work one-on-one with Chillum students who are struggling with reading or math.

Another partnership, with Junior Terps – University of Maryland student volunteers – offers enrichment activities for two hours a week to students in grades three through five who are “proficient or advanced.” This partnership has been in place for three years.

Partners in Print is yet another partnership with the University of Maryland that brings volunteers to Chillum to work with parents and students. Sessions occur six evenings throughout the school year. The program provides books to families and through the use hands-on activities for parents and students, it develops reading literacy skills that can be practiced in the home.

The principal and staff believe the focus on early literacy, using multiple avenues, has paid off as students make a fairly smooth transition to the intermediate grades. They also attribute the school's remarkably low special education rate to this same focus.

Assessments

There are many assessments used to inform instruction, instructional groupings, and professional development activities at Chillum Elementary. Assessments vary from end-of-unit tests to state summative assessments, such as the Maryland State Assessment. In between, the school uses district benchmark assessments for progress monitoring and a host of early literacy diagnostic and inventory tools to catch students who are struggling in the early grades. Following is a list of assessments discussed during the school visit:

- Kindergarten-grade one Literacy Assessment. Data are used to group students for instruction and for determining the appropriate level books. Running Records are also used in the early grades;
- Directed Reading Assessments for kindergarten through grade two. It is the most consistent assessment as it has been used the longest at the school. The DRA is also used for determining reading levels as well as providing information about reading fluency;
- Scholastic Reading Inventory. It provides similar information as the Directed Reading Assessment, but it is administered to students in grades three through five. If they score beneath a certain level on the SRI, students are also given the DRA and data are used to provide interventions;
- End-of-unit assessments (textbooks). The data are used by classroom teachers to determine student mastery of the content. MyMath also has pre-assessments, which gauge mastery of the content before unit lessons (i.e. pre and post);

- District quarterly benchmarks aligned to the State’s College and Career-Ready Standards. Data are used to monitor progress on school- and district-wide instructional goals as well as to inform interventions and instructional grouping, and in some cases, classroom placement of students; and
- IReady. It has a diagnostic assessment that gives teachers information about student skills and helps identify appropriate interventions.

The principal and staff make extensive use of the information they obtain from assessments administered to Chillum students. Data are often used to plan for interventions and to drive student groupings for instruction. Data from assessments have also been used to move students from one classroom to another. Results are also used to identify school-wide focus areas (e.g. the increased attention to math in recent years) and to identify professional development needs.

Much of the review of assessment results occurs during staff meetings and the common planning and preparation time built into the weekly calendar.

Extra Help Strategies for Students at Risk of Academic Failure

Chillum Elementary utilizes a combination of in-classroom and pull-out strategies to help students who are struggling to meet the academic content in their classroom. Both LEP and special education teachers partner with the classroom teachers to identify appropriate interventions for English language learners and work through the Individualized Education Plan of students with disabilities.

In the case of LEP students, much of the support happens through the use of small groups within the regular classrooms and some small group pull-out instruction. How students are grouped is determined and evaluated during the common planning time for teachers during the week. Historically, the focus of LEP teachers has been on literacy, but that has recently expanded to include math as well.

The school has relatively few students identified as special education (six percent), something not usually found in a high-poverty school. The school does utilize pull-out strategies to support students with disabilities, taking them out of the classroom for one-on-one and small group instruction. When asked about this low rate of special education, school staff attributed the low rate to their focus on early grade interventions, including the Head Start and prekindergarten programs in the school, and small classrooms in recent years. It is their opinion that the focus on literacy in the early grades pays off and the amount of one-on-one and small group instruction they are able to provide has resulted in fewer special education students.

For students who do require special education services, instruction is provided by a special education teacher and sometimes a paraprofessional who pull students from the classroom for one-on-one or small-group instruction.

In addition to the LEP and special education teachers, the school has additional staff providing Tier 2¹ interventions to students. The school has a math resource teacher who provides pull-out instruction for small groups of students. The district also provides a 0.2 RTI teacher in reading and a 0.2 RTI teacher in math. The RTI staff members are shared with two other schools. And while the school does not have a

reading specialist, the lead teacher serves in this role, often providing one-on-one instruction to students during her classroom visits.

Another significant resource available to students and teachers at the school is the number of volunteers who provide one-on-one support to students at risk of academic failure in reading and math. The number of volunteers in the America Reads America Counts program fluctuates, but during the school visit for this case study, three student volunteers were observed providing one-on-one instruction to students.

The school has also leveraged Title I money to provide extended learning opportunities in the form of an after-school program four-hours per week from October through May.

In the past, resources for summer school were also provided to support a four-week, half-day program focused on reading and math. The school has not had summer school for the last two years.

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is a priority for teachers at Chillum. At both the end of the previous year and the beginning of a new school year, the principal and staff engage in a PD assessment, where they determine their needs and their capacity to meet them. In some instances, the needs may be met through PD available through the district. In other cases, teachers at the school are called upon to develop and provide PD for their fellow teachers. This practice has become more widely used as the district has cut professional development budgets. While PD for individual teachers may be differentiated, there is an expectation that it be focused and aligned to the goals of school and district.

The district calendar provides three pupil-free days and two two-hour early-release days for professional development. A committee of teachers creates the class schedule and builds in the time for collaborative planning for teachers. The school also schedules an hour once a month for school-wide planning.

The district provides additional PD for new teachers and the school builds support for them throughout the year, including mentoring by more experienced teachers and the lead teacher. Historically, the faculty at Chillum has been very stable with few, if any, new teachers starting in any given school year. This has allowed prior years' investments in professional development to remain in the school, even after PD funds have been reduced. Chillum's experienced teachers have, in turn, been able to mentor and support new teachers in ways that may not have been possible in a school with a higher teacher turnover rate.

A key instructional strategy at the school is flexible student grouping and a significant portion of the school's allocated PD time, 30 minutes twice a week for collaborative planning, is spent reviewing student data to inform the grouping of students, plan interventions, and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions.

Along with the principal, instructional leadership at Chillum comes from the school's lead teacher, who functions as an instructional coach as well as reading specialist. She models instruction for teachers and provides assistance with classroom strategy. Her day consists largely of classroom visits, where she offers coaching to teachers and one-on-one support to students during lessons. Because she is not an administrator, her observations and feedback are not "evaluations" and are not seen as punitive, but are viewed instead as pure coaching opportunities.

The school also makes use of “learning walks,” a process by which teacher teams visit and observe each other’s classrooms. If needed, the school will hire substitutes for the day. The observations are guided by a structured protocol and they are usually done as a follow-up to a particular PD session to see how the new learning is being translated in the classroom. The data and feedback collected from the learning walks are then used to inform the planning of future PD sessions if, for example, there is a need for reinforcement.

Much of the professional development provided by the district in recent years revolves around transition to the State’s College and Career Ready-Standards and the use of data to inform instruction. The district has adopted a train-the-trainer model in which lead teachers are chosen at each school. They receive the PD training from the district and are then expected to return to their school and provide PD for their colleagues. In addition to new standards alignment, the district invested in the PD on the Data Wise school improvement process as outlined in the Richard Murnane book, *Data Wise: A Step-by-step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning*.

This year the district has begun using Teachscape, a professional learning online system that allows teachers to log in and access PD materials, including videos and online communities, and participate in training sessions and administer the corresponding assessments. Teachers must take the PD modules required by the district, but they are free to choose what they take beyond that.

School Culture and Leadership

“Doing Our Best on the Road to Success!” is Chillum’s motto and the principal and staff members interviewed take this to heart. All staff spoke of the school’s culture as one of high expectations for students, “They know we expect the best from them and they try to do their best,” and for each other, “[students] like to do well and they expect the adults to model for them.”

Leading by example is important at Chillum. Teachers are “modeling champion behavior.” The principal and staff describe each other as members of a “very hard working staff” and are proud that “people don’t watch a clock,” and “we go home and we’re still working.” Staff also spoke of a school culture that is accepting of people, “Everyone is accepted because everyone is a champion,” and of new ideas, “Teachers want to come up with something and there’s room for that,” and there is “always opportunity to try new ideas, if you want to step out and be a leader.” One longtime teacher at the school said she originally chose Chillum because of its location, “then stayed because we have a sense of family.”

The principal and teachers have created an environment where students feel “safe and protected” and where “they feel comfortable enough to come to the office to let me know every little thing.” The principal walks the halls, is present in the lunchroom, and visits classroom frequently, checking in with students by name. “They know who we are and they know we care for them. They try to live up to the expectations we have for them.” Sometimes, when students do not live up to expectations, both staff and students have a say in the consequences, “[students] know that when it comes time that they haven’t met the expectations, sometimes we let them decide the consequences.”

Staff members spoke proudly about their overall lack of behavioral problems in the school. Although the school is part of the district’s Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program for the first time this school year, it had been implementing a number of PBIS strategies previously, including a “Chillum

bucks” reward system for positive behavior. Staff members see this as a direct result of the expectations they have for students and the family environment they have created.

Approximately 10 years ago, the school surveyed parents about uniforms. The parents voted in favor of school uniforms, an important contributor to the sense of family in the school, according to staff. As one interviewee said, “I love the uniforms, it makes us all joined together.”

Parents at Chillum are supportive at various levels. The school has an active Parent Teacher Organization, and many parents attend school events. The staff recognizes that some parents can be more involved than others and acknowledge that for some parents, being involved is making sure their children go to school. The district supports the school in reaching out to parents by providing interpreters for meetings and by providing a community outreach liaison to the school.

Summary

The story of Chillum Elementary School’s success at improving student achievement is one of multiple early literacy efforts, frequent and focused interventions for students not quite keeping up, and an emphasis on professional development for teachers. It is also a story of perseverance and consistency. The school principal and many of its teachers have been at Chillum for at least a decade which, they say, has allowed them to set a path and stick to it. They have created a school culture of high expectations for students and for each other, and they have made hiring decisions consistent with their vision of the school.

Relatively small class sizes in recent years have allowed for extensive use of individual and small group instruction at all grade-levels. The availability of RTI interventionists, a math resource teacher, a reading specialist (until recently), the lead teacher, and a number of volunteers through partnerships with the University of Maryland have allowed this to happen. Most of their efforts have focused on literacy, but the transition to the State’s College and Career Ready-Standards and the more challenging content have pushed the school to expand its focus to math.

Chillum has also been able to leverage its partnerships with three University of Maryland groups – America Reads America Counts, Partners in Print, and Junior Terps – to provide additional instructional support to students on a regular basis. Trained America Reads volunteers provide individual and small-group instruction to students who may be struggling; Partners in Print volunteers work with students and parents on improving literacy skills; and Junior Terps provide enrichment opportunities to students who are ready for more advanced work.

The district and the school have made significant investments in professional development over the years. In recent years, resources for professional development have fluctuated, but the staff’s relatively low teacher turnover has allowed investments made in prior years to remain in the school. Furthermore, a significant amount of the school’s PD has centered on the effective use of data to inform their flexible grouping strategy – they identify, group, evaluate, and regroup students regularly based on multiple sources of data. These two things – consistency in teaching staff and a focus on data use – are curriculum neutral, meaning that teachers have a set of skills that apply to any subject or grade-level, regardless of the particular textbooks or assessments used.

A few interviewees mentioned that the school had a few new teachers this year, an unusual situation in their experience. They felt that they had made good hiring choices, pointing out that they had chosen to hire “not new teachers, but teachers that are new to the school.” However, they also indicated the importance of mentoring the new-to-the-school teachers so that they could transition into the school culture and practices. The loss of teachers means a loss of knowledge and skills and, in a climate with diminishing professional development resources, they see teacher turnover as a potential challenge to continued increases to student achievement.

Chillum is experiencing “a lot of new.” There is a new chief executive at the district, new content standards, new textbooks, shifting school boundaries, and new teacher and principal evaluation systems tied to student learning objectives. And yet, regardless of all the new, the elements that have remained consistent up until now – early literacy, data-driven interventions, and professional development – continue to be a priority. The principal and staff can see the fruits of their labor in the culture of the school and in the improvements in student achievement and appear committed to continue to “stick to it.”

Alignment with the EB Model

The approach used in this case study of resource allocation was not to ask the school principal and teachers for how they make resource allocation decisions. Instead, the interviewees are asked, “Tell me how the school accomplished the achievement gains we identified.” From this starting point, it is possible to learn how resources – people and time – are allocated in the school. The Chillum story shows clear and significant alignment to the instructional strategy embedded in the evidence-based model of school finance.

1. The school has a common vision and a culture of high expectations. Any new teachers who are hired are chosen because they fit with the culture.
2. The school has a lead teacher who serves in the role of an instructional facilitator. The lead teacher models instruction and provides non-evaluative feedback to teachers on a regular basis.
3. Class sizes are consistent with the EB model, although grades three and four are unusually large classrooms this school year.
4. The school has enough specialist teachers (e.g. art, music, PE) to allow for common planning and preparation time for grade-level teacher teams.
5. Time for professional development is embedded into the school schedule and after-school.
6. There is a focus on frequent data-driven interventions for students at risk of academic failure. Interventions are provided by a math resource teacher, two part-time RTI interventionists, the lead teacher, and the LEP and special education teachers for more severe needs. and
7. The school administers a number of assessments in addition to the state assessments. These are used to identify learning needs, monitor student progress, evaluate interventions, and to group and re-group students for instruction.