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# The Challenges Facing CPS Administrators: Roadblocks to School Improvement

**UCHICAGO Consortium**  
on School Research

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The academic leaders of schools—principals and assistant principals—play a critical role in the success of their students. Both research and experience demonstrate that an administrator’s job requires various skills to handle a broad scope of responsibilities. The latest Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, released in 2015, help illustrate the formidable complexity of this position.<sup>1</sup>

The standards include 10 areas in which school leaders must be proficient. These range broadly from establishing a vision to managing operations, cultivating relationships and a sense of relationships to overseeing fundraising. Research has not simplified, but has documented, the number of roles successful leaders play. One recent review of empirical evidence distinguished 28 practices of effective school leaders; another identified 21—these numbers illustrate the scope and complexity of the principal’s role.<sup>2</sup> Within schools, it seems that principals choose practices that work best for them and move forward, adjusting as necessary. However, navigating these extensive and varied expectations often creates many challenges for principals, and as principals seek to improve their schools, some challenges emerge as bigger roadblocks than others.

This brief provides insights into what administrators in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) see as the greatest roadblocks to school improvement, based on surveys developed and administered by the University of

Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium). Responses from the 2017 survey were analyzed and compared to previous years to determine how such roadblocks have changed over time.<sup>3</sup> While no two administrators’ responses were the same, clear districtwide trends surfaced: the emergence of financial concerns as new top roadblocks for schools; the increased saliency of roadblocks concerning human resources in both charter and non-charter schools; and increased concern over social challenges in the community. In addition, patterns of administrators’ responses to roadblock items indicate that respondents fell into three roughly equally-sized groups that differ distinctly in breadth and depth of concerns, from those facing limited roadblocks to those facing considerable roadblocks. We identify factors that increase a leader’s chances of falling into the “Considerable Roadblocks” group, and conclude by sharing what implications our findings may have for practice and policy.

1 National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015).

2 Hitt & Tucker (2016); Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005).

3 We also analyzed responses by responder position, years in position, school type (elementary/high school, charter/non-charter), and school achievement level. Most differences were not noteworthy; those that were are discussed in this brief.

## The Administrator Survey: An Overview

The UChicago Consortium's Administrator Survey—different from the *5Essentials* Surveys given to teachers and students annually in Chicago—has been administered in the spring semester 14 times since 1992, in order to provide insights into administrators' perceptions on key aspects of their work.<sup>A</sup> These surveys have provided insights for Consortium reports on REACH<sup>B</sup> and the Common Core State Standards,<sup>C</sup> for example, and have helped foster a deeper understanding of administrators' experiences across Chicago.

In the spring of 2017, the UChicago Consortium surveyed 1,363 principals, assistant principals, and other lead administrators in 658 schools. Our response rate for the survey was 51 percent. Slightly fewer administrators responded to the questions specifically about roadblocks (549), giving us a 40 percent response rate for that section. (During analysis, we found no substantial response differences between principals and other administrators, so we will refer to administrators collectively in this report.) Further details and bias analysis can be found in the Appendix.

The 2017 survey included the same questions as previous surveys, with some additions to reflect more current concerns.

For example, although previous surveys included items about financial concerns such as the pressure to obtain external funds, in 2017 we included an item about student-based budgeting—a practice that was introduced in 2014. We also extended and changed the response categories to allow for a greater range of answers, while keeping the ability to compare administrators' perceptions over time. For the purposes of comparing 2017 to the past, we collapsed the “significant” and “complete” roadblock categories (see Figure A)—thus, the “top category” in this report refers to both “significant” and “complete” roadblocks in 2017, and “serious factors” in prior surveys. For a chart of all 2017 roadblocks and responses with categories not collapsed, see Figure A.1 in the Appendix.

This brief provides an update to our last report about administrator surveys, *The Work of Chicago School Principals*, which used data from 1997-2007 and was published in 2008. In this brief, we consider trends from 2001-09, as well as 2017. Because administrators were not asked to respond to questions about roadblocks between 2009 and 2017, we are not able to determine what trends occurred in the interim years. Data prior to 2001 can be found in our 2008 report.

**FIGURE A**  
**Administrator Survey Response Categories: 1992-2009 and 2017**



A The Administrator Survey was administered in 1992, every other year from 1997-2011, annually 2013-15, and in 2017.

B Sporte & Jiang (2016a); Sporte & Jiang (2016b).

C Gwynne & Cowhy (2017).

## Administrators' Greatest Challenge: Financial Concerns

Of all the roadblocks that administrators rated, managing resources under student-based budgeting had the highest proportion of school leaders responding in a top category of any item in all the years of the survey: 66 percent of administrators responded that it was either a significant or complete roadblock. In other words, of all roadblocks ever asked about in the UChicago Consortium's Administrator Survey, managing resources under student-based budgeting has been the single most challenging roadblock reported by CPS administrators since 1992.

Another financial issue, pressure to obtain external funds, was also widely acknowledged as a challenge. More than half of administrators (54 percent) rated it a significant or complete roadblock to their school's improvement.

The upsurge in financial concerns, and their rank as the top two roadblocks, is a notable change. Since it was first asked in 1997 until 2009, pressure to get test scores up quickly was the highest-ranked roadblock for administrators.<sup>4</sup> The proportion responding that it was a top concern has consistently been around 40 percent since 2003, having reached its highest level of concern in 2001 at 56 percent (see Figure 1)—this high point could perhaps be attributed to the No Child Left Behind Act, which became effective in 2002 and emphasized standardized testing compliance.<sup>5</sup>

In 2017, the pressure to raise test scores remained a prevalent and serious concern, with 43 percent of all administrators considering it a significant or complete roadblock.

It is, however, not surprising that financial issues rose to the top of administrators' lists of concerns. Student-based budgeting, a method for school funding that allocates funding on a per-student basis for up to 50 percent of a school's overall budget, was first adopted by CPS in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Budgets created with this method for the 2013-14 through 2017-18 school years were based on a school's projected enrollment for the following year. However, if 20th day enrollment numbers differed from the projections, then budgets were adjusted accordingly<sup>7</sup>—and schools that enrolled fewer students than projected saw their budgets decline, with administrators grappling with how to cover their school's deficit (e.g., cutting programs, reducing staff, limiting supplies and resources, etc.).<sup>8</sup> On top of student-based budgeting challenges, a lack of state budget from 2015 to 2017 was acutely felt by public schools in Chicago.<sup>9</sup> Unprecedented mid-year budget cuts in 2016 also proved to be a challenge for school administrators, with the average of \$60,000 cut per school.<sup>10</sup> Although a direct comparison to student-based budgeting concerns is not available for 2009 or earlier, taken together, these findings do indicate an increasing salience of funding concerns among school leaders.

4 Roadblock items were included in surveys from 1997-2009 then again in 2017.

5 WTTW (n.d.).

6 Chicago Public Schools (n.d.).

7 Berlin & Perez (2016, September 27).

8 Perez & Richards (2015, October 5).

9 McCoppin, Mahr, Perez, Rhodes, & Wisniewski (2017, June 30).

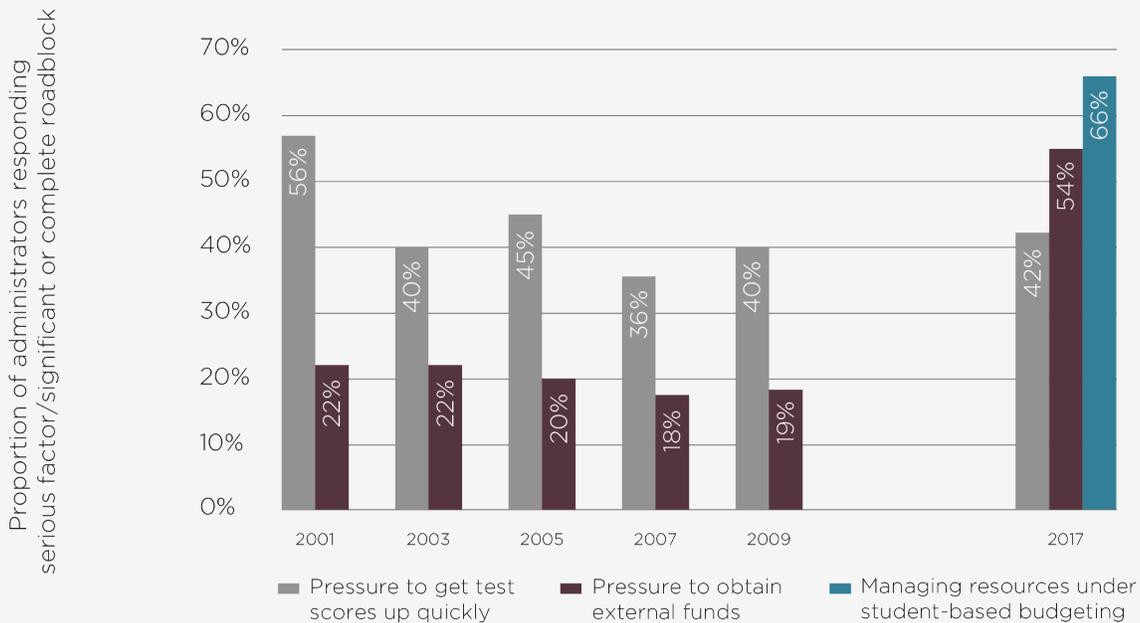
10 Vevea (2016, February 10).

In 2018, the district’s new CEO, Dr. Janice Jackson, made significant changes to the student-based budgeting process. Principals received their 2018-19 budgets in April 2018, rather than July 2018.<sup>11</sup> That budget was based on actual enrollment for the 2017-18 school year, rather than a projection for the 2018-19 school year—and no funds were cut if student enrollment decreased, but additional funds were provided if enrollment increased.<sup>12</sup> This may lessen financial concerns in coming years. However, as of spring of 2018 when the Chicago Public Education

Fund conducted their latest CPS principal survey, funding concerns remained at the forefront of principals’ minds. A question regarding what would need to be improved for a principal to stay in their role longer showed that “my school’s available funding” was mentioned most frequently, followed closely by “time and effort needed for compliance requirements.”<sup>13</sup> Future surveys will continue to provide insight on administrators’ perceptions of financial concerns.

**FIGURE 1**

**In 2017, Financial Concerns Surpassed Pressure to Increase Test Scores as the Highest-Rated Roadblock**



<sup>11</sup> Karp (2018, April 17).

<sup>12</sup> Perez (2018, March 7); FitzPatrick (2018, March 7).

<sup>13</sup> The Chicago Public Education Fund (n.d.).

## Challenges Removing and Hiring Teachers

The most challenging issue reported by administrators in 2017, after the two financial concerns discussed in the prior section, was *difficulty removing poor teachers*. As shown in Figure 2, the proportion of administrators who rated this in the top category increased 9 percentage points from 2009 (39 percent) to 2017 (48 percent). Breaking responses down, more than one-quarter of administrators considered this a “complete roadblock” to school improvement—and only *managing resources under student-based budgeting* received more responses in the “complete roadblock” category in 2017.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, *difficulty recruiting and hiring the right teachers* was rated almost as challenging as *difficulty removing poor teachers*. In fact, the proportion of administrators indicating a high degree of concern over recruiting and hiring teachers nearly quadrupled from 12 percent to 44 percent from 2009 to 2017.

In the past decade, teacher evaluation in Chicago has undergone numerous reforms with the aim of improving administrators’ ability to differentiate stronger and weaker teachers, provide more focused supports, and recruit and hire teachers. Prior to 2012, teacher evaluations were based on a checklist of teacher performance indicators that could either be a “strength” or a “weakness.” This approach, however, produced an overwhelming number of teachers who were rated in the top categories. A new teacher evaluation system (REACH) was introduced

in 2012, and fully implemented by 2015.<sup>15</sup> Using the Danielson framework, this new system was designed to provide assessment of teachers’ performance in specific areas, using evidence from classroom observations. However, based on results from this survey, it appears school leaders still found personnel changes difficult.

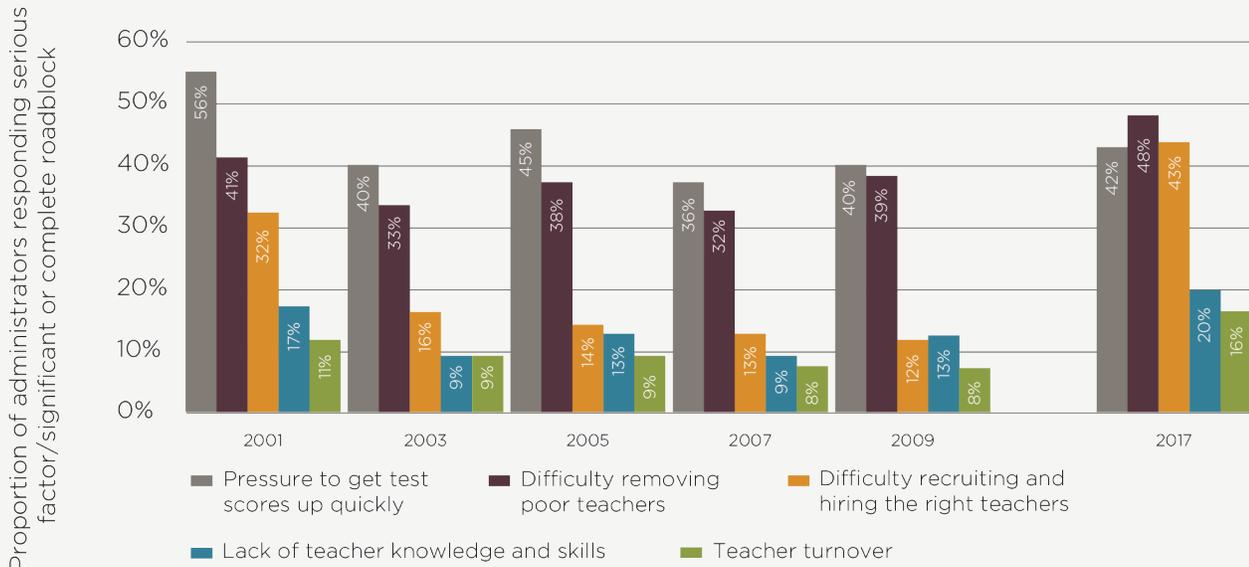
Also related to staffing, 20 percent of administrators reported *lack of teacher knowledge and skills* as a significant or complete roadblock to their school improvement in 2017. Although it remained one of the least-endorsed roadblocks, 2017 ratings were up 7 percentage points since 2009. At first glance, this may seem to be at odds with the fact that *difficulty removing poor teachers* was ranked as the third-highest roadblock by administrators—why would so many administrators report difficulty removing poor teachers as a major roadblock, while few report lack of teacher skills as a challenge? One possible explanation may be that fewer administrators found a lack of skill among their teachers to be a school-wide problem, yet they still had concerns regarding specific teachers, and then faced difficulty in removing them. This would explain the upsurge of concern that we see over *difficulty removing poor teachers*, despite the relatively stable concerns over a *lack of teacher knowledge and skills*.

<sup>14</sup> For bar chart showing percent of 2017 responses in each of the four response categories, see Figure A.1 in the Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> Sporte & Jiang (2016a); Sporte & Jiang (2016b).

**FIGURE 2**

**In 2017, Removing and Hiring Teachers Surpassed Pressure to Increase Test Scores**



**Note:** Pressure to increase test scores is included in this graph as a reference. It used to be the highest ranked roadblock from 1997-2009.

**FIGURE 3**

**Proportion of Charter and Non-Charter Administrators Who Reported Challenges with Recruiting/Hiring Teachers and Teacher Turnover**



**Note:** The number of charter schools in Chicago has grown dramatically over time: 2007: 21/46 charters responded to survey item; 46 percent response rate. 2009: 28/66 charters responded to survey item; 42 percent response rate. 2017: 50/98 charters responded to survey item; 51 percent response rate.

## Staffing Concerns in Charters vs. Non-Charters

Overall, administrators in CPS reported facing significant human resource challenges, as shown in Figure 2. Looking more closely at charter and non-charter administrators' 2017 survey responses revealed differences between the two groups (see Figure 3).

Charter administrators reported greater difficulties in recruiting and hiring teachers. Although the challenge of recruiting and hiring teachers has increased for both charter and non-charter administrators, historically more charter administrators have reported it as a top roadblock. On average, since 2007, the proportion of charter school administrators responding in the top category for *difficulty recruiting and hiring the right teachers* has been 9 percentage points higher than their non-charter counterparts (see Figure 3). In 2017, more than one-half of all charter school administrators (55 percent) said that recruiting and hiring the right teachers was a top roadblock in their schools, compared to 42 percent of non-charter administrators.

Charter school administrators also found teacher turnover to be a much larger issue than administrators in non-charter schools (Figure 3). In 2017, more than one-third of charter school administrators (34 percent) said teacher turnover was a significant or complete roadblock, while only 14 percent of non-charter administrators had similar levels of concern.

This is part of a larger trend over time—starting in 2007, as the number of charters increased in the district, the gap between charter and non-charter administrators' reports on the challenges of teacher turnover grew larger as well. By 2017, the number of charter school administrators who viewed teacher turnover as a significant or complete roadblock was 20 percentage points higher than non-charter administrators.

Despite reporting challenges with both recruiting and hiring teachers and teacher turnover, charter school administrators reported that removing poor teachers was much less difficult. In fact, from 2007-09, not a single charter school administrator reported *difficulty removing teachers* as a serious factor to their school's improvement. In 2017, *difficulty removing poor teachers* did become a top roadblock to 18 percent of charter school administrators. This proportion is three times higher (54 percent) among non-charter administrators. Research does not point to any conclusive evidence that would explain these differences, and determining the reasons for these differences is beyond the scope of this report.

## Community Issues and Parent Connections

Since 2009, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of administrators reporting that social problems in the *school's community* (*poverty, gangs, drugs, etc.*) are a top roadblock to school improvement. Whereas slightly less than one-third (31 percent) of administrators viewed social problems as a top roadblock in 2009, by 2017 this number had grown to include 43 percent of administrators.

Although the same proportion of administrators (43 percent) rated *pressure to get test scores up quickly* in the top category in 2017, slightly more respondents rated social problems a “complete” roadblock (17 percent) compared to test scores (13 percent).

Unfortunately, because the wording of this survey item is very general, it is not possible to know which aspect of *social problems in the school's community* administrators were referring to specifically. We also lack respondent data for the years between 2009 and 2017. However, increased concerns about this roadblock mirror a rise in crime rates during this period, so the two may be correlated.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of the ties between parents and schools, administrators reported that although *mistrust between teachers and parents* remained a fairly low

level roadblock, a *lack of parent support* had grown as a top roadblock for many. In 2017, 87 percent of administrators said that *mistrust between teachers and parents* was only a “partial roadblock” or “not a roadblock” at all (a slight decrease from 2009, when 93 percent of administrators responded that teacher-parent trust was “not a factor” or only “somewhat a factor” to school improvement).<sup>17</sup>

However, a *lack of parental support* was a top roadblock to almost one-third of administrators in 2017. It is unclear, from this survey item alone, in which areas administrators want parents to be more supportive. For some, extra support may mean additional funds brought to the school through fundraisers and school events. For others, this may mean parents supporting students at home with homework and class projects. Still for others, the parental support they may be seeking could be social-emotional, in terms of supporting the school mission and community. In the future, we intend to include survey items that could better distinguish among the support school administrators seek from parents.

<sup>16</sup> Bentle, Berlin, Marx, & Rumore (2018, January 9).

<sup>17</sup> Response categories changed between 2009 and 2017—“Not a factor/Somewhat a factor/Serious factor” changed to “Not a roadblock/Partial roadblock/Significant roadblock/Complete roadblock.”

## Three Categories of Roadblock Severity

In an effort to understand whether there were districtwide trends that influenced how administrators perceived roadblocks, we considered characteristics such as administrators' years of experience and the type of school they served. To do this, we used latent class analysis to examine all administrator responses across all schools at once to see if any underlying patterns emerged that were related to individual or school context (see box titled *What is Latent Class Analysis?*).

When we looked across administrators' responses for the degree to which they considered proposed issues to be roadblocks, we found respondents fell into three similarly sized groups: Limited, Moderate, and Considerable Roadblocks groups (see Table 1). Figure 4 illustrates the differences in the level of concern reported by each of these three groups.

### What is Latent Class Analysis?

We considered a number of comparisons: principals and assistant principals, new and experienced leaders, elementary and high schools, and charter and non-charter schools. We then used a statistical method called latent class analysis, which is a statistical process which simultaneously examines responses from all administrators across all items at once to see if patterns in these responses were related to the individual and school characteristics we were investigating. This allowed us to “zoom out” and see a bigger story across many pieces of information. Using the latent class analysis, we found that there were three distinct groups of responses amongst administrators (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
**Three Groups of Administrators Perceive Different Levels of on-the-job Challenges**

<b>Limited Roadblocks</b>	Most items on the list are <i>not concerning</i> .
<b>Moderate Roadblocks</b>	Most items on the list are <i>moderately concerning</i> .
<b>Considerable Roadblocks</b>	Most items on the list are <i>extremely concerning</i> .

In the “Limited Roadblocks” group, administrators considered most items to be partial roadblocks, if they were roadblocks at all. For the most part, the issues more likely to be higher rated were financial, with both student-based budgeting and pressure to obtain external funds appearing as the most

highly-rated. Administrators in the Limited Roadblocks group generally rated financial issues as either partial or significant, but not complete, roadblocks. This group did not often report other areas (e.g. test scores, parents and community, or human resources) as roadblocks.

**FIGURE 4**

**Administrators Were Grouped by Number and Degree of Roadblocks**



Administrators in the “Moderate Roadblocks” group displayed a moderate level of concern across a number of items on the list. Similar to members of the Limited Roadblocks group, financial issues topped the list of concerns for administrators in this group. However, unlike the Limited Roadblocks group, Moderate Roadblocks administrators also found other items to be more challenging across the board, albeit predominantly at the partial roadblock level.

Administrators in the “Considerable Roadblocks” group found many different areas challenging, and at a much higher level than the Moderate Roadblocks group. In fact, the majority of administrators in this

group rated at least one-half of the items either significant or complete roadblocks to their schools. To administrators in this group, the roadblocks they identified were considerable impediments to school improvement. Financial items were again rated most highly among the roadblocks, but administrators in this group were more likely to rate them as significant or complete roadblocks than administrators in the other two groups. This group was least likely to rate teacher turnover, mistrust between teachers and parents, and lack of teacher knowledge and skills as significant roadblocks. The rest of the potential challenges, however, were acutely felt.

## Roadblocks and School Characteristics

In an effort to understand whether administrators' level of concern with roadblocks was greater in schools with particular characteristics, we analyzed the data by looking at structural factors first.

Neither the type of school (charter vs. non-charter) nor the overall number of students differed significantly between groups. However, high school administrators were more likely to fall in the Moderate Roadblocks group, while elementary administrators were fairly equally distributed across the three groups (see Table 2).<sup>18</sup>

In addition to structural factors, we were curious to see if administrator experience would affect how administrators perceived roadblocks. Notably, both the newest and most veteran administrators had an equal chance of being in the any of the groups.

We found that administrators who fell in the Considerable Roadblocks group were not the least experienced, and they did not plan to leave their position earlier than other respondents in the other two groups. Furthermore, the number of additional years principals planned to continue in their position did not differ significantly by group. While it might be expected that administrators in the Considerable Roadblocks group may have wanted to leave their positions earlier, this was not the case. Principals responded that they would likely remain in their job, on average, for six more years, regardless of being in the Limited, Moderate, or Considerable Roadblocks group. While there was a slight difference for assistant principals, it was not statistically significant.

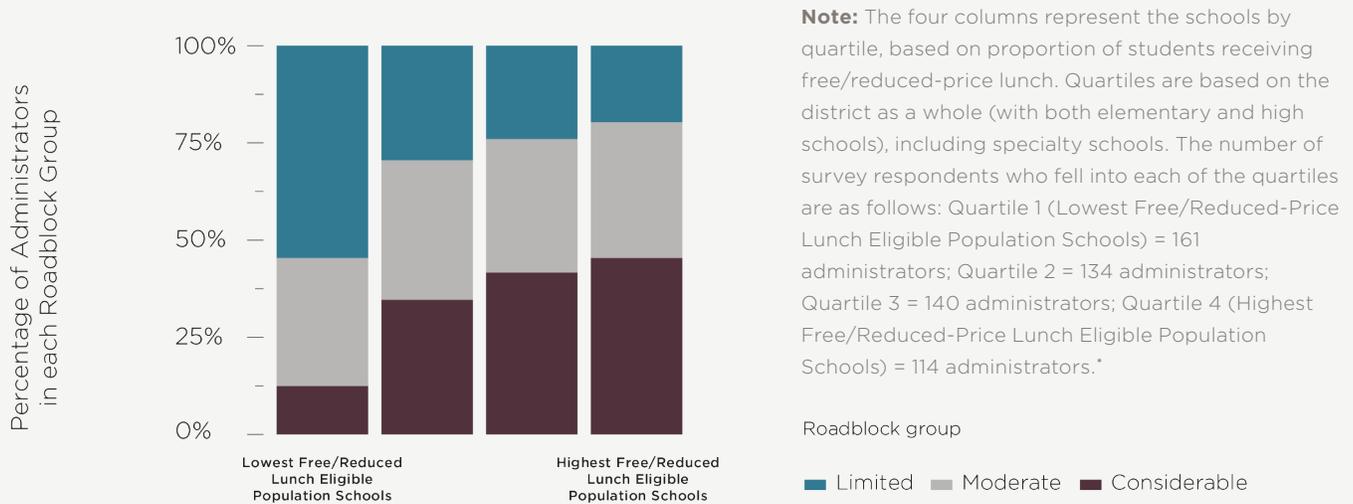
**TABLE 2**  
**Counts of Administrators in Each Roadblock Group**

Roadblock Group	Elementary Administrators	High School Administrators
Limited	151	36
Moderate	125	74
Considerable	128	35

<sup>18</sup> Our bias analysis indicated that high school administrators responding to our survey tended to come from somewhat higher-achieving schools (see the Appendix.) This should be considered in interpreting results since the concerns of lower-achieving high school administrators may not be adequately represented.

**FIGURE 5**

**Proportion of Administrators in Each Roadblock Group, by School's Percentage of Free/Reduced-Price Lunch Recipients**



\* The majority of students in CPS are Free/Reduced-Price Lunch eligible. On average, 86 percent of students within a CPS school are eligible. Because of this, Quartile 1 contains a broad range of proportions since only a small number of schools have very low proportions of low-income students. The ranges for each of the quartiles are: Quartile 1 = 11 -85 percent; Quartile 2 = 85-94 percent; Quartile 3 = 94-97 percent; Quartile 4 = 97- 100 percent.

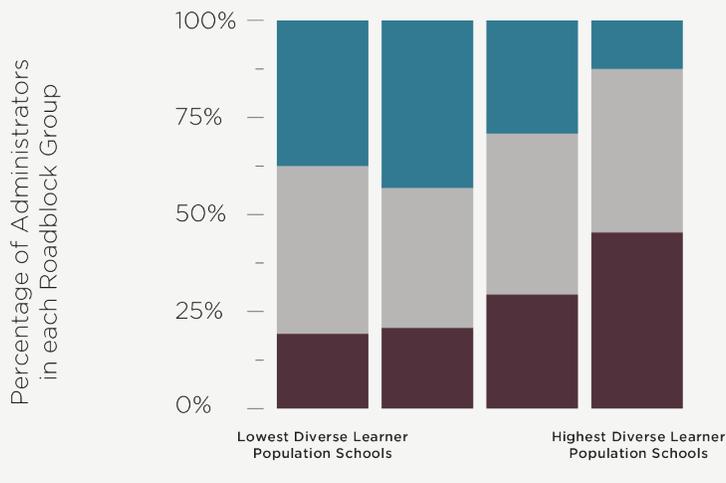
### Administrators Serving Students with Greater Needs Tended to Experience Roadblocks of Greater Number and Intensity.

Next, we wondered whether administrators in the Considerable Roadblocks group worked in schools with the greatest needs for resources. In order to examine this question, we included schools' percentage of diverse learners and percentage of students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch in

the latent class analysis (described in box on page 9). We found that in schools with higher rates of students in these categories, administrators reported experiencing higher levels of roadblocks. For example, for an administrator of a school with 86 percent students receiving free/reduced-price lunch (the CPS average), their chance of falling in the Considerable Roadblocks group was 31 percent. Increasing the proportion of free/reduced-price lunch students to 100 percent increased the

**FIGURE 6**

**Proportion of Administrators in Each Roadblock Group by School's Percentage of Diverse Learners**



**Note:** The four columns represent the schools by quartile, based on proportion of students who are diverse learners. Quartiles are based on the district as a whole (with both elementary and high schools), including specialty schools serving predominantly or entirely special needs students. (Thus the top quartile for diverse learners includes specialty schools that serve entirely diverse learner populations.) The number of survey respondents who fell into each of the quartiles are as follows: Quartile 1 (Lowest Diverse Learner Population Schools) = 146 administrators; Quartile 2 = 149 administrators; Quartile 3 = 137 administrators; Quartile 4 (Highest Diverse Learner Eligible Population Schools) = 117 administrators. \*

Roadblock group

■ Limited ■ Moderate ■ Considerable

\* The majority of students CPS are not diverse learners. On average, 18.5 percent of students within a CPS school are diverse learners. Because of this, Quartile 4 contains a broad range of proportions since only a small number of schools have very high proportions of diverse learners. Specialty schools that serve entirely diverse learner populations are also included in Quartile 4. The ranges for each of the quartiles are: Quartile 1 = 0-11.8 percent diverse learners; Quartile 2 = 11.8-14.5 percent diverse learners; Quartile 3 = 14.5-18.8 percent diverse learners; Quartile 4 = 18.8-100 percent diverse learners.

administrator's chances of being in the Considerable Roadblock group to 45 percent, a difference of 14 percentage points. Similarly, increasing the proportion of diverse learners per school by one standard deviation (from a CPS average of 18.5 percent to 35 percent) increased the chances of being in the Considerable Roadblock group from 31 percent to 41 percent.

In order to illustrate these findings, we categorized all of the schools in CPS into four quartiles, based on the proportion of students they served who were

free/reduced-price lunch eligible (Figure 5) or were diverse learners (Figure 6). We then looked at how many of our responding administrators (549 total) fell into schools in each of the quartiles, and showed the proportion of administrators in each quartile that were classified in each roadblock group (Limited, Moderate, or Considerable). Figures 5 and 6 show that, overall, as the proportion of students with greater needs increases, the proportion of administrators in the Considerable Roadblocks group increases as well.<sup>19, 20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> It can also be noted that despite this clear relationship, having higher proportions of low-income students or diverse learners did not completely determine how challenging administrators perceived roadblocks to be.

As you can see in Figures 5 and 6, there are administrators from each of the Roadblock groups in each quartile.

<sup>20</sup> We also examined the relationship between a school's average achievement level and administrators' roadblock group using NWEA scores for elementary schools and SAT for high schools. Results show elementary administrators from higher-achieving schools were more likely to fall in the Limited Roadblocks group. However, after controlling for proportion of low-income students and diverse learners, the relationship to achievement was no longer significant. At the high school level, smaller numbers of administrators in the Limited and Considerable Roadblocks groups, along with the high correlations among these variables, make it impossible to disentangle one from the other.

## Interpretive Summary

In the eight years since the UChicago Consortium’s last Administrator Survey in 2009, CPS school administrators’ concerns about the pressure to raise test scores have been surpassed by both financial and human resource worries, and is equaled by worries over social and safety issues in their communities.

During this period, administrators’ level of concern over test scores remained consistent over time, even though a recent study found that “across racial groups...Chicago students learned significantly

faster from grades 3 to 8 than did students in nearly all other U.S. districts—gaining about six years’ worth of learning in five years.”<sup>21</sup> However, despite showing remarkable improvements around test scores, our results indicate

that challenges in this and other areas still persist for many of Chicago’s administrators.

To ensure all schools are able to thrive, policymakers and district staff may want to consider which supports can best address administrators’ and schools’ needs. Most pressing are the one-third of administrators who reported substantial roadblocks in nearly every category

included on the survey. Yet, regardless of the number and intensity of roadblocks facing them, school leaders demonstrate a willingness to stay engaged and look for solutions—planning to stay an additional six years on average in their leadership roles. In thinking about these roles, it becomes apparent just how much we expect from our schools’ administrators. We see them as educational leaders, as role models for our students, as supporters for teacher success, and as community partners. Each one of these roles is already challenging, and financial, human resource, and community concerns present administrators with additional challenges as well. This brief illuminates some of these areas that may most benefit from additional support. Although solutions may not be easy, this is an opportunity for researchers, policymakers, and the district to work together to provide supports that empower administrators, their schools, and their students to thrive.

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### **CPS school administrators’ concerns about the pressure to raise test scores has been surpassed by both financial and human resource worries**

<sup>21</sup> Sparks (2017, November 9).

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# Appendix

## Survey Administration

From March-April of 2017, the UChicago Consortium surveyed 1,363 principals, assistant principals, and other lead administrators in 658 schools. Overall, 51 percent of administrators completed the survey.

To determine eligible survey participants, we obtained a list of all non-charter principals and assistant principals from CPS. For charter schools, the district provided a list which included one leader per school. In order to include respondents in roles similar to assistant principals for charter schools, we then contacted individual charter school leaders for the necessary information. Since the specific positions that charter school leaders provided us varied, we refer to them here as “other top school administrators.”

This report provides descriptive statistics of 2017 responses without statistical adjustments. However, presented below is a bias analysis of respondents compared to the district overall. On the individual administrator level, the sample of survey respondents is representative of the overall population of CPS in terms of respondent gender, school level (elementary/high school), and charter/non charter school (Table A.2).<sup>22</sup> However, Black and Latino administrators were underrepresented by 6.5 and 3 percentage points respectively, while White administrators were overrepresented by 9.7 percentage points (Table A.1).

At the school level, we found that schools with responding administrators were similar to the district average in terms of proportion of students that receive free/reduced price lunch and students receiving special education services. However, schools in our sample, on average, had slightly fewer Black students and slightly more Latino students than the district average (differences of 6 and 4 percentage points respectively) (Table A.5). In terms of standard test scores, elementary schools with responding administrators did not differ from the district average, but responding high schools were higher-achieving on average (see Table A.2).

Within our respondent sample, we found that the number of respondents also varied by school (ranging from one respondent/school up to nine respondents/school). However, we wanted this brief to focus on the experiences of administrators across the district, and all analyses were performed at the individual and not the school level. We, therefore, did not control for the number of respondents per school in analyses.

<sup>22</sup> In the absence of actual population demographics for administrators at CPS, we created our own districtwide demographics using the information available to us. Of the 1,363 administrators who received invitations to participate in the survey, we obtained demographic information on 1,013 administrators. Of those who do not have demographic data, the majority are from charter schools.

**TABLE A.1**  
**Representativeness of Roadblock Section Respondents, Race/Ethnicity, 2017**

Administrator Race/Ethnicity	Districtwide	Survey Respondents	Difference
Percent Black Administrators	39.5%	33.0%	-6.5%
Percent Latino Administrators	20.0%	17.0%	-3.0%
Percent White Administrators	34.0%	43.7%	9.7%
Percent Asian Administrators	2.0%	2.5%	0.5%
Percent Multi-Racial Administrators	2.3%	2.5%	0.2%
Race Missing/Not Available	2.2%	1.4%	-0.8%
			<b>Chi-square p=0.0009</b>

**TABLE A.2**  
**Representativeness of Roadblock Section Respondents, Gender, 2017**

Administrator Gender	Districtwide	Survey Respondents	Difference
Percent Male Administrators	31%	29%	-2%
Percent Female Administrators	69%	71%	2%
			<b>Chi-square p=0.3076</b>

**TABLE A.3**  
**Representativeness of Roadblock Section Respondents, School Level (Elementary/High School), 2017**

Administrator Gender	Districtwide	Survey Respondents	Difference
Percent Elementary Administrators	71%	75%	4%
Percent High School Administrators	29%	25%	-4%
			<b>Chi-square p=0.0768</b>

**TABLE A.4**  
**Representativeness of Roadblock Section Respondents, School Type (Charter/Non-charter), 2017**

Administrator Gender	Districtwide	Survey Respondents	Difference
Percent Charter Administrators	16%	13%	-3%
Percent Non-Charter Administrators	84%	87%	3%
			<b>Chi-square p=0.0793</b>

**TABLE A.5**  
**Representativeness of Roadblock Section Respondents, Other Categories, 2017**

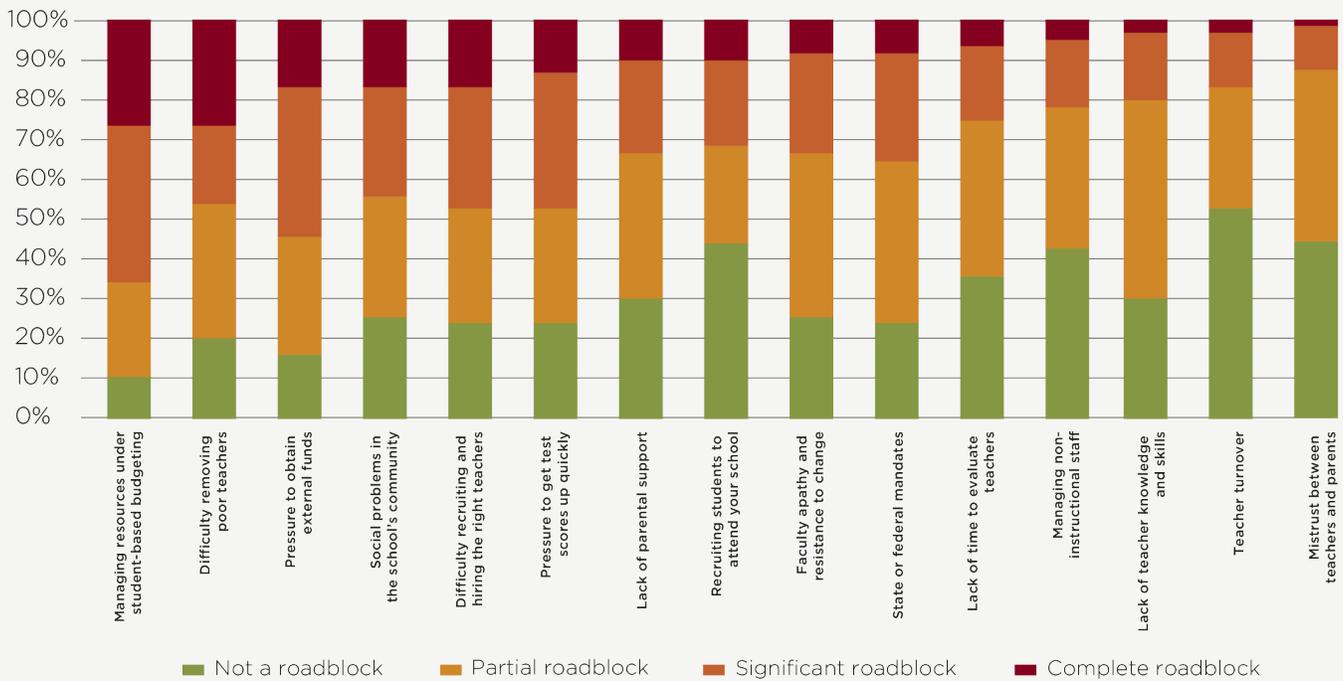
	Districtwide	Survey Respondents	Difference
Average Percent Low Income Students at School	86%	85%	1
Average Percent Special Education Students at School	16%	16%	0
Average Percent Black Students at School	50%	44%	-6***
Average Percent Latino Students at School	38%	42%	4**
Average Percent White or Asian at School	10%	12%	2
<b>Average Scores on NWEA at School (Elementary Only)</b>			
Math	212	212	0 pts
Reading	207	207	0 pts
<b>Average Scores on SAT at School (High School Only)</b>			
Math	437	447	10 pts
Reading	451	460	9 pts*

\*p<.1  
 \*\*p<.05  
 \*\*\*p<.01

## Survey Results

In this survey, we asked administrators to identify the challenges they faced. From a list of 15 potential issues, school administrators indicated whether the challenge was “not a roadblock,” “a partial roadblock,” “a significant roadblock,” or “a complete roadblock” on their path to school improvement. Figure A.1 shows all 15 roadblocks and the percentage of administrators selecting each response. These are listed in the order of most to least challenging, based on how often each item was chosen as a complete roadblock by respondents. Table A.6 shows full text of items.

**FIGURE A.1**  
Roadblock Rankings by Top Response Category, 2017



**TABLE A.6**  
**Original Text of Roadblock Items**

On your school's path to improvement, to what extent do you consider each of the following to be a roadblock?

	Not a roadblock	A partial roadblock	A significant roadblock	A complete roadblock
01 Pressure to obtain external funds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
02 Managing resources under student-based budgeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
03 Faculty apathy and resistance to change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
04 Teacher turnover	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
05 Difficulty recruiting and hiring the right teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
06 Difficulty removing poor teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
07 Lack of time to evaluate teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
08 Managing non-instructional staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
09 Lack of teacher knowledge and skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10 Pressure to get test scores up quickly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11 State or federal mandates (Common Core, special education, bilingual education, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12 Recruiting students to attend your school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13 Lack of parental support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14 Mistrust between teachers and parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15 Social problems in the school's community (poverty, gangs, drugs, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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CHRISTOPHER YOUNG is the UChicago Consortium's Psychometrician. In this role, he helps to create informative survey items and to refine the quantitative feedback provided to practitioners so that it is accurate and useful. Chris also provides support across UEI by advising researchers about applying analysis techniques and providing an accurate interpretation of results for their particular audience. Chris' background is in developmental psychology, a field where he has published on how to identify skills and choose among competing theories of cognition by comparing statistical models. Prior to joining the UChicago Consortium, he helped to develop an assessment system that pre-kindergarten teachers used to measure their students' proficiencies in mathematical and literacy skills through play, and improve them. Chris focuses on using data to understand change over time. He hopes to build tools that measure and promote healthy schools and that help students to grow beyond expectations of past trends.

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