



**2020**  
ANNUAL REPORT



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# LETTER FROM THE CEO

Early in my career as a math teacher, I made the decision to spend significant time on remediation. In the months following the COVID-19 pandemic, when I was deeply immersed in learning and research, I reflected on [the opportunity cost of my decision](#). While my intentions may have been good, my students paid the price for my misunderstanding of what mattered most for student learning.

I've heard many conversations about the double threat we face: inequity already existed, and COVID makes it worse. Reflecting on my earlier missteps has made me wonder if we are on track for a triple threat: inequity already existed, COVID makes it worse, and the way we as educators respond could compound the negative effects. We need to be sure the treatment for the problem of expanded inequity does not slow the learning trajectory for the very students who need acceleration.

We've entered a critical period for education in our country and an unbelievable time for our schools. Never before has it been more important to anchor to what we know works and what really matters when it comes to student learning. Conversely, never before has it been more urgent to understand and unpack what does not work—what we should deconstruct rather than recreate.

This has also been a year of substantial change within Instruction Partners. To help schools and systems respond to an unimaginable crisis, we pivoted our services, learned quickly about what works in this complex context, and shared more of what we are learning in real time.

I hope this end of year report gives our greatest supporters a view into that journey, and demonstrates our commitment to do all we can to work alongside educators and ensure every child experiences an excellent and equitable education. As I have ended [my weekly emails](#) since this spring—one step at a time, together.

Emily Freitag  
Co-founder and CEO



# OUR APPROACH AND MISSION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

## Our mission

We work shoulder to shoulder and screen to screen with educators to support great teaching and accelerate student learning. We focus on small systems, both districts and charters, and we work to ensure equitable access to great instruction for students in poverty, students of color, students learning English, and students with disabilities.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has upended traditional ways of thinking about school, our mission feels more important than ever. We know that how schools and systems respond in this time will dramatically shape educational experiences for years to come, with the potential to significantly exacerbate existing inequities in critical learning and preparation. To prevent that outcome, schools and systems need to develop new models for instruction and intervention, and leaders need help understanding how to apply these models in their context.

Instruction Partners can play an important role for schools during the COVID-19 crisis and its unfolding chapters. Our team is experienced at supporting schools to imagine new possibilities to serve students better and helping leaders make hard changes and think about how to lead through change.

We are here to help leaders implement instruction and learning supports to meet the moment, while simultaneously staying focused on long-term recovery goals. We look through a content-specific and equity-centered lens at the quality and current state of instruction, develop goals and practical action plans for improvement, and support the implementation and fine-tuning of those plans as needs evolve. If we respond to the current crisis by focusing on high-quality content and just-in-time supports for students to engage with grade-level materials, **we can accelerate learning for all students.**

**...our mission  
feels more  
important than  
ever.**



# WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

## Partnership Data Insights

For the past few years, we have examined our partners' instructional data and student assessments to understand the impact of our services on the quality of instruction and student learning. Through that examination, we identified a few promising practices, which our partnership team implemented this school year as part of our [train-plan-coach cycle](#):

1. Unit internalization
2. Lesson preparation
3. Student work analysis
4. Follow-up observations and feedback

In particular, schools with clear internalization routines at the unit or lesson level were more likely to deliver stronger, more impactful instruction at the beginning of the year compared to schools that did not have clear routines. Additionally, the “plan” piece of the train-plan-coach cycle required intentionality; without our support, planning often got worse or became nonexistent, but with our support, it was kept as a focus and led to stronger instruction.

Across our partners last year, we observed a correlation between regular (i.e., at least monthly) beginning-of-year classroom walkthroughs and stronger baseline instruction. While it is not clear whether principal walkthroughs accelerate improvement in instruction, this practice may be a proxy for coherent leadership that is engaged in instruction and has routines in place to monitor progress.

Pandemic-related school disruptions inhibited our ability to complete our full cycle of instructional observations during the year; as a result, we did not collect final classroom data on instructional improvement, nor did we collect final data on the state of structures and routines we seek to influence as part of our planning and on-site support. Given 1) the opportunity to increase our frequency with partners while we are virtual, 2) the knowledge that less than 15% of our partners last year entered the school year with robust stepback routines, and 3) the realities of a rapidly changing environment due to COVID, we are focusing our efforts on continuous improvement routines as a means to support partners in achieving their goals this year.



# SCIENCE

Our two-year science pilot with 14 middle schools and three high schools in Tennessee spanned the 2018–19 and 2019–20 school years. We developed and used a draft rubric for diagnosing science instruction to assess the current state of instruction in the pilot schools, set action steps to support improved instruction, and created final reports to identify and track trends across the pilot.

We saw positive increases in each rubric indicator, with 6 of the 15 indicators showing an improvement of 15% or greater. Significant learnings include:

**Start by building a shared vision:** In order to improve instruction, leaders and teachers need support understanding the instructional shifts in science (three-dimensional instruction, phenomena-driven instruction, etc.)

**High-quality materials make a difference:** Leaders often see a need to adopt new, higher-quality materials to support shifts in teacher practice. Pilot partners who adopted high-quality materials such as OpenSciEd and Amplify Science saw a more substantial improvement in instruction, even as they continued to build their own understanding of the instructional shifts exemplified in the materials.

**Science faces structural barriers:** A critical component of working with partners to improve science instruction is ensuring that there is time dedicated to and protected for science. This includes time for leaders to internalize instructional shifts and support teachers as well as time for teachers to plan for and facilitate consistent, high-quality instruction.

**Deeper support is more effective:** Partners returning for a second year in 2019–20 began to see more substantial and accelerated improvement in instruction. These partners had access to additional on-site and virtual support to build capacity with dedicated leaders in the building who could then work with teachers on a consistent basis.



## Rethinking Intervention

In March 2020 we began an interview series with a wide-ranging group of educators, researchers, medical professionals, and organizational leaders to help answer this question: What do we know about what works and what does not work to intervene effectively and accelerate student learning? We dug into the research, the debates, and the evidence in search of common ground. You can watch video recordings of these interviews and read the complete interview transcripts [on our website](#).

However, what started as a project to better understand what drives and challenges intervention practices quickly became a survey and meta-analysis of research and practice to better understand and rethink schooling and to re-examine what we know about how students learn. The series prompted the Instruction Partners team to broaden our organizational consciousness beyond our content and instructional lens, reinforcing the importance of content pedagogy in new ways.

Each participant lent their own perspective, which was steeped in research, practice, expertise, lived experience, and, most often, a combination of these factors. While topics of conversation ran the gamut from content-specific best practices to systemic shifts in how we relate to students and families, when it came to discussing what works, our interviewees often pointed toward common themes, which we have grouped into five categories:

1. Cultivating affirming relationships
2. Tapping students' individual genius
3. Pushing forward into new learning
4. Growing teacher practice
5. Leading with an interconnected vision



*“The academics will come, kids will learn—they are like sponges. But if we don’t attend to these really important emotional and mental needs, I don’t think we have a fighting chance.”*

-Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, formerly UW-Madison

*“As opposed to dropping down the rigor level as soon as you see someone is struggling, what we should be doing is providing challenging work with support. . . . The core of education in my mind is the relationship between the teacher and the students and the work in which they’re engaged.”*

-John King, The Education Trust

*“What we’re trying to get at is deeper student learning. If we don’t have teachers who can teach at a high level of instruction, we won’t get to that deeper student learning.”*

-Candice Bocala, Harvard Graduate School of Education

*“We will not close equity gaps, we will not meet kids across the range of how they are reentering school and bring them back to a path to close gaps, unless our core approach is one that is integrating all of those bodies of knowledge of what good education is.”*

-Scott Hartl, *EL Education*

*“Family engagement cannot be done without thinking about racial equity.”*

-Robert Crosby, III, *Flamboyant Foundation*

## Continuous Improvement

Educators have passed the first hurdle of reopening during an unprecedented time, but continue to face many interconnected and complex problems. In our work with schools and systems across the country, we’ve identified three major challenges leadership teams are working hard to address:

How do we better orient our planning around priority groups of students?

How do we devote extra attention to all students’ emotional needs and unfinished learning?

How do we plan to advance and preserve student learning across multiple instructional scenarios?

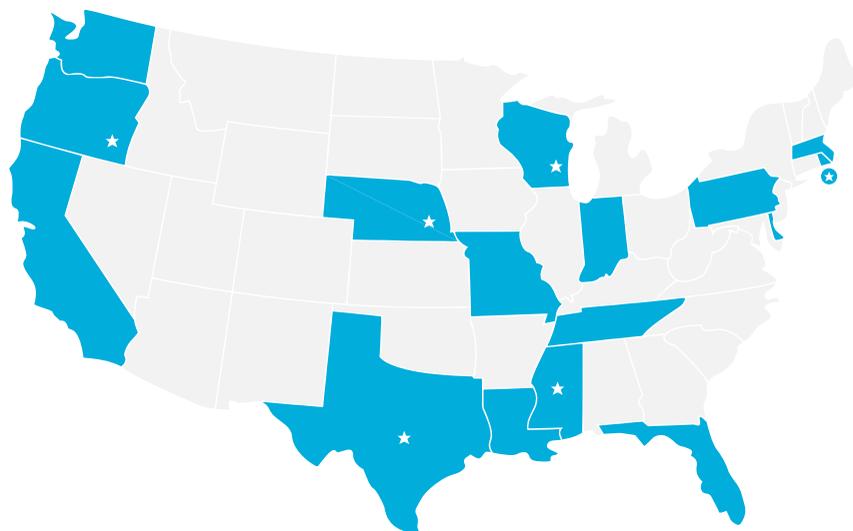
We worked with our partners to design and test tools, resources, and guidance that supports leaders in answering these questions. The [Continuous Improvement Toolkit](#) represents the result of that research and development endeavor.

The toolkit offers school and system leaders scenario-specific guidance for planning in-person, remote, and hybrid learning; useful tips for minimizing disruption despite constant changes; content-specific guidance for ELA, math, and science; content-agnostic guidance on how to adjust plans and pedagogy to deliver high-quality distance learning experiences; resources for teaching the same content in a changing environment; and considerations for antiracist instruction that affect how we teach, what we teach, and who we teach.

# PARTNERSHIP RECAP

In the 2019–20 school year, we worked with 104 system partners and more than 200 schools, primarily in Tennessee, Louisiana, Indiana, Florida, and Texas, with emerging work in California.

PARTNER TYPE	SY19-20 COUNT	SY20-21 EXPECTED
<b>Total System Partners</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Direct System Partners</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>87</b>
Deep Partners	27	25
Medium Partners	23	32
Light Partners	24	30
<b>Indirect System Partners</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Direct Schools Served</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>Students Served</b>	<b>363,860</b>	<b>366,885</b>



- State with system/school partnerships
- ★ State Department of Education partnerships

Through our annual net promoter survey, we found that 84% of school and system leaders who received our COVID-19 support services found them to be valuable.



**We achieved an overall net promoter score of 56, our highest ever.**

Our team was not able to complete all of our spring classroom walkthroughs and collect follow-up instructional data due to school shutdowns from COVID-19. However, there were 152 school-subject observations we did collect in both the fall and the spring before the shutdowns, and for those, we saw a 12.7% increase in percent positive indicators on the IPG from fall to spring (which was encouraging given that our goal was a 13% increase).



Building on our commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we issued a new set of commitments to antiracist action, both adding dedicated work and infusing this work into our personal learning, our organizational interactions, and our partnerships (read the full commitment statement in the appendix).

## **EXPANDING OUR REACH**

This year we deepened our commitment to sharing our tools and learnings with the field. Our COVID-19 [School Resource Hub](#) drew 25,000+ regular visitors, highlighting school leaders’ need for support during the pandemic. Our website traffic also tripled, with viewers from all 50 states.

Instruction Partners received significant earned media coverage this year, as major national and education-focused publications featured our efforts to support educators and students in response to the severe disruptions in schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, CEO Emily Freitag penned two original articles, one for the [Fordham Institute’s Flypaper](#) and the other for the national edition of [Chalkbeat](#). See the appendix for the complete list of major coverage.

## TENNESSEE TUTORING CORPS Summer Tutoring Program for K-6 Students

To counteract the threat of devastating learning loss for K-6 students across Tennessee, former Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam and his wife Crissy launched the Tennessee Tutoring Corps, which recruited 1,000 college students to offer in-person tutoring to as many as 5,000 elementary school students. The Haslams selected Instruction Partners to develop tutoring materials based on state learning standards as a way to supplement lessons from the last quarter of the school year, when students may have had inconsistent internet access, time, and opportunity to learn new material. We designed materials and training for the tutors on how to use them, and end-of-summer results showed substantial student learning gains in K-2 literacy in particular, alongside gains in ELA and math across the spectrum.



# INTERNAL GROWTH

## Team

[Our team](#) continues to grow. We internally reorganized, adjusting roles to reflect the shifted distribution of work for this more dynamic context, which adds capacity to our program and state teams and emphasizes leadership support on our school and district partnerships team. 100% of staff accepted new positions, and we are hiring for up to 13 additional roles, bringing the team to 86 FTEs by June 2020.



## Leadership updates:



Jabari Sims joined the team as our Executive Director of District Partnerships.



Malika Anderson, formerly our Chief of Organizational Development, shifted into our Chief Program Officer role.



Donique Muhammad stepped into a new role as our Managing Director of Antiracism and Equity.



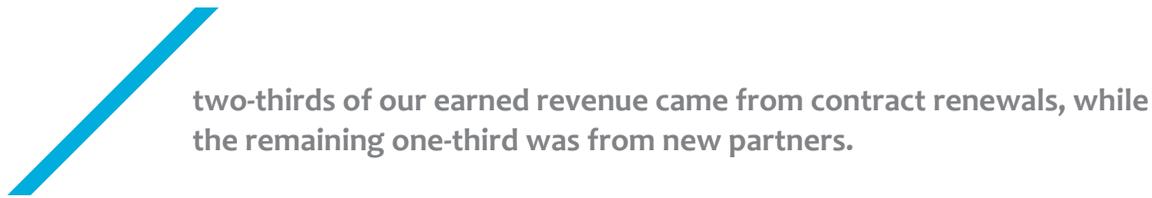
Erika Cook joined this fall as our Managing Director of State Partnerships.



Lovette Curry will be coming on board in early 2021 as our Senior Managing Director of People.

## Financials

The past year involved significant growth in our revenue. Many former partners renewed their contracts with us. In fact,



We also grew our custom revenue service line significantly.

FY20 MARKET	NEW REVENUE %	RENEWAL REVENUE %
Autonomous	38%	62%
District Partnerships	21%	79%
Custom Projects	60%	40%
Total	33%	67%

When COVID-19 emerged as a crisis in March, we had just completed a five-year strategic plan (not one that contemplated a pandemic) and were completely on track to meet our FY20 budget. On March 14, we completely ceased all travel and “business as normal.” At this point, we had \$1.6M in contracted services left to deliver in the final quarter of FY20, and we quickly pivoted our services to respond to our partners’ needs. By doing so, we delivered \$1.2M of outstanding contracted service by year-end. Additionally, we added \$172,000 in new COVID-specific services and rolled over another \$100,000 of services into FY21. Because we adapted quickly, by year-end, we had delivered 96% of services related to earned revenue, which is the same percentage as FY19 (without a pandemic).

In addition to our focus on meeting our earned revenue targets, we also immediately ramped up our pursuit of philanthropic dollars to place us in a strong position for the coming years that were expected to bring complete uncertainty. Without knowing how the pandemic would affect schools and systems, but anticipating constricted budgets and purchasing in the next few years, we knew philanthropy would be crucial to helping us stabilize and prepare for the new future created by the COVID-19 crisis.

To ensure we could support our existing staff and partners, we immediately sought out additional general operating philanthropy and philanthropy for new COVID-specific projects, such as developing a new School Resource Hub website, Grab and Go Instructional Materials for the spring shutdowns, and a Leadership Toolkit for the summer. This funding also ensured we could invest in the research and development that would be needed to identify strategies that would help our partners as they transitioned to virtual school and dealt with the inevitable learning loss caused by the unpredictable shifts in instructional practice. From the start of the pandemic through

the end of FY20, we were able to raise \$3.5M in philanthropy. We are immensely grateful for all of our supporters who were quick and nimble as COVID-19 emerged as a crisis and funded our work to provide fast solutions for schools. We also know that philanthropy will continue to be critical to our work as we partner with schools entering the “recovery” phase of the pandemic.

Additional beneficial—and difficult—financial decisions we made included restructuring both our internal staff and our pricing, searching for efficiencies in our expenses, and obtaining a PPP loan in the late spring. The combination of ending the fiscal year just shy of our earned revenue target, exceeding our philanthropic target, obtaining the PPP loan, and shaving down our expenses meant that **we ended the year in the strongest cash position in Instruction Partners’ history**, with over 110 days cash on hand. Additionally, our audit report reflected a completely clean opinion, with no management letter or notes. (See the appendix for our audited FY19–20 financials.)

All of these actions intentionally set us up to be in a strong position for the unpredictable years that lie ahead. One of our board members remarked that few companies or industries are ending 2020 in a stronger position than they started; thanks to the help of our outstanding partners and supporters, we are one of the few.



# LOOKING FORWARD

In so many ways, this will be a very challenging year for our country and for schools. We enter it with dedication to our mission of working with teachers and leaders to support student wellness and advance learning and strengthen our collective capacity to create equitable learning for students.

## **In the coming year, we will be working hard to help our partners by:**

- supporting leaders as they navigate complex dynamics and manage change while maintaining coherent instructional systems;
- building educator capacity to deliver equitable learning at a distance; and
- understanding more deeply how to support unfinished learning in each content area and strengthen classroom and school intervention practices.

## **Partnerships**

- This school year, we are working with 95 partners across 11 states comprising a mix of districts and autonomous schools.
- We are excited to be doing very deep work with 6 school systems and 13 schools as frontrunner pilot partners. Our team will provide extensive support in specific areas to these partners over the next two years, with the goal of total learning recovery and significant increases in equity of learning achievements. We will pattern from this work into lessons that can be scaled to other partners and schools.
- We added a state partnership arm of our work in a “train the trainer” model focused on helping state teams and regional support teams support their districts and schools. Nebraska, Wisconsin, Texas, and Mississippi are our first state partners, and we are in conversation about future partnership with Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island, and California.





# APPENDIX

## EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Malika Anderson, *Chief, Program*

Ben Fenton, *Chief, Growth and Delivery*

Emily Freitag, *Co-founder and CEO*

Erica Garcia, *Chief of Staff*

Donique Nobles Muhammad, *Managing Director, Antiracism and Equity*

Elizabeth Ramsey, *Senior Managing Director, Program*

Jessica Roberts, *Senior Managing Director, Finance, Administration, and Planning*

Jabari Sims, *Executive Director, District Partnerships*

Justin Testerman, *Executive Director, Autonomous Schools Partnerships*

## BOARD

Sandra Alberti, *Senior Fellow, Strategic Partnerships, Student Achievement Partners*

Rick Cruz, *Chief Revenue Officer, Arabella Advisors*

Wil del Pilar, *Vice President of Higher Education Policy and Practice, Education Trust*

Emily Freitag, *CEO, Instruction Partners*

Kira Orange-Jones, *Senior Vice President, Teach for America*

Carrie Previterra, *Partner, New Profit*

Joanne Weiss, *Independent consultant on education programs, technologies, and policy*

Marcus Whitney, *CEO of Health:Further and President and Founding Partner of Jumpstart Foundry*

## SUPPORTERS

Anonymous

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Bill Haslam and Family

Bloomberg Philanthropies

Carnegie Corporation of New York

Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation

Dollar General Literacy Foundation

Houston Endowment, Inc.

Koshland Family Foundation

The Louis Calder Foundation

Overdeck Family Foundation

New Profit

Peter Formanek

Rainwater Charitable Foundation

Roberts Foundation

T.L.L. Temple Foundation

# OUR COMMITMENT TO ANTIRACIST ACTION

Originally shared on June 5, 2020, and updated September 15, 2020, to reflect our actions in partnership for the 2020–21 school year.

BLACK LIVES MATTER.

Instruction Partners stands in solidarity with Black communities and every individual and educator fighting for equity and racial justice.

We see and name the violence racism causes Black people in this country and we grieve the impact it has on the soul of our nation and our children's future. We see and name the harmful role of racism in education and instructional decisions—affecting how we teach, what we teach, and who we teach—and consequently on Black children's outcomes and opportunities. We see and name the racism and bias in ourselves and grieve the pain it has caused and continues to cause and the ways it limits our humanity and our impact.

Creating safety and liberty for Black Americans requires actions of change among all Americans, especially white Americans.

**We deepen our commitment to dismantle racism in our organization, in our schools, in our country, and in ourselves.**

To further advance the work we've undertaken over the past several years, we pledge to:

- Update our mission, strategic plan, and core values to reflect our deepened commitment to antiracism.
- Deepen our internal work to examine how racism and implicit bias show up in our organization and support our team members, particularly white staff, in becoming more conscious of the ways that racism affects our thought patterns and interactions.
- Bring explicit focus on antiracism into our thought leadership and resource sharing and seek out expert voices to learn more about abolitionist teaching and the ways that racism shows up in schools.
- Design our support for schools, and presently our COVID-19 frameworks and resources, with a more explicit focus on equity driven by understanding, setting goals around and meeting the needs of priority groups.
- In our work with partners, look for and bring consciousness to inequity in instructional choices and impact; in community with our partners, learn how to deconstruct the racism that negatively impacts priority groups.
- Learn more about the research and available curriculum on how students and educators, particularly white educators, can understand and counteract unconscious bias.

We pledge accountability to these actions. We hope you, and our children, will judge us by our follow through. We also commit to create spaciousness for additional conversation and ensuing action. This does not represent the end and these commitments will keep living as we learn more.

As part of our community, we ask you to join us in the work, hold us to these commitments, and call out ways we can do better in our work together.

In peace and with determination,  
The staff of Instruction Partners with full support from all board members



# FINANCIALS

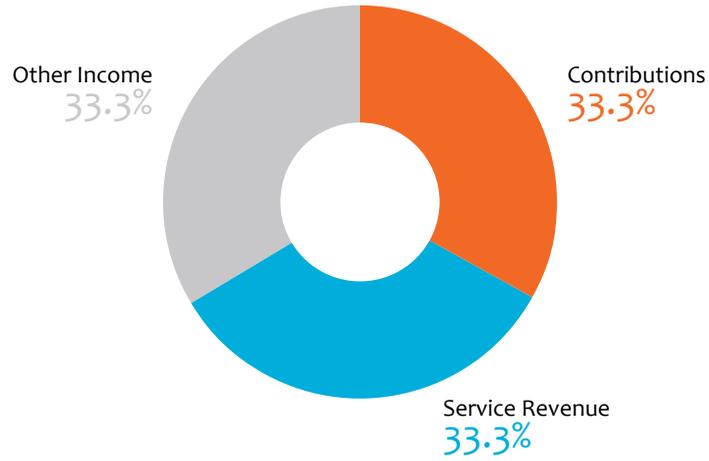
## Statement of Activities

	2020	2019
<b>Support &amp; Revenues:</b>		
Contributions	\$5,427,503	\$2,734,157
Service Revenue	\$7,597,354	\$5,503,668
Other Income	\$432	\$3,555
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenues:</b>	<b>\$13,025,289</b>	<b>\$8,241,380</b>
<b>Expenses:</b>		
Program Services	\$9,758,152	\$7,059,703
Administrative & General	\$1,594,930	\$1,274,085
Fundraising	\$105,282	\$90,142
<b>Total Expenses:</b>	<b>\$11,458,364</b>	<b>\$8,423,930</b>
Change in Net Assets:	\$1,566,925	-\$182,550
Net Assets at the Beginning of the Year:	\$834,365	\$1,016,915
Net Assets at the End of the Year:	\$2,401,290	\$834,365

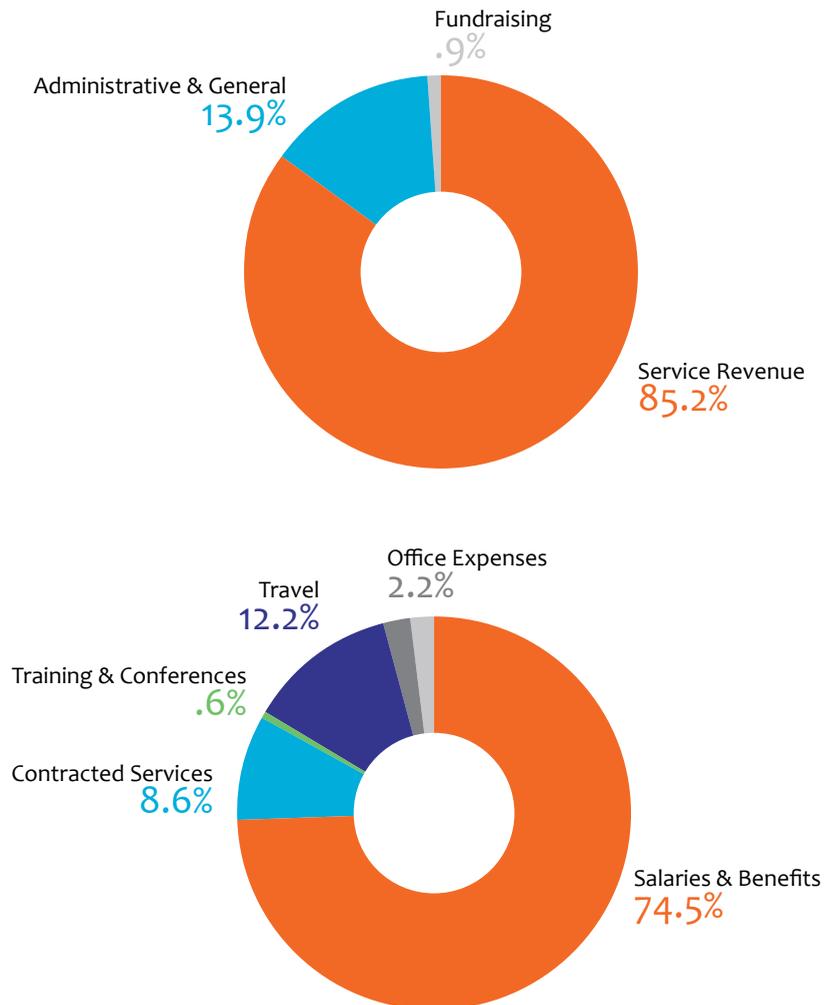


# FINANCIALS CONT.

## Revenue



## Expenses



# SELECT MEDIA COVERAGE

[‘We’re Doing School in a Different Way’: One Nonprofit Took Early Lead in Preparing Districts for Distance Learning During Pandemic](#), The 74

[Reimagining school](#), Fordham Institute’s *Flypaper*

[Moving Beyond Education’s Apollo 13 Moment: What’s Next?](#), Forbes

[Former Governor Recruits Stuck-at-Home College Students to Combat K-12’s ‘COVID Slide’](#), Education Week

[Paths Forward for Public Education](#), Teach For America Magazine

[The Mind Trust awarded \\$1.54 million to support Indianapolis schools during critical transition period](#), The Mind Trust

[Indianapolis charter schools test a \\$1.5 million bet that there’s a better way to teach math](#), Chalkbeat Indiana

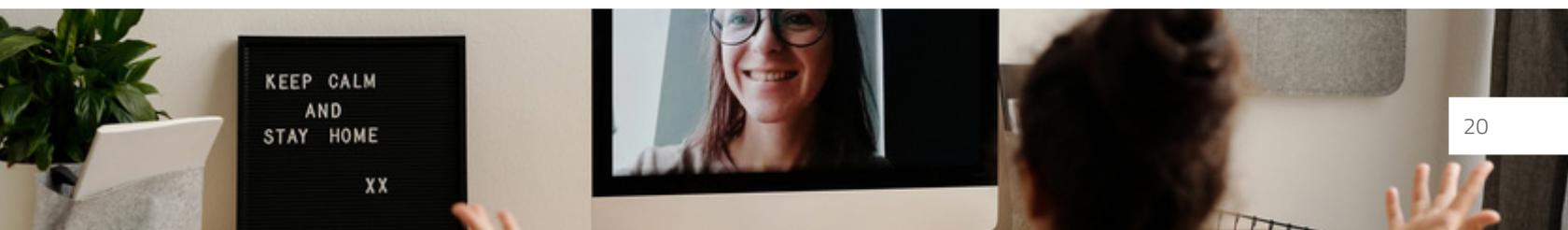
[To Combat the ‘COVID Slide,’ Tutoring Program Pairs Elementary Schoolers with College Students](#), EdSurge

[What Should We Teach? 5 Steps for Keeping Kids on Track This Fall](#), Education Week

[High-Dosage Tutoring Is Effective, But Expensive. Ideas for Making It Work](#), Education Week

[COVID-19’s Harm to Learning Is Inevitable. How Schools Can Start to Address It](#), Education Week

[Let’s fight about the future of public education](#), Chalkbeat





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