

**Public School Teachers' Perspectives of Student-Based Budgeting:**

**A Qualitative Case Study**

by

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## Abstract

School funding is one strategy to ensure K–12 public education in the United States is equitable. Access to equitable education is paramount to addressing the achievement gap between White affluent Americans and low-income students of color. The perception of inequity in the public school system was apparent before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case when segregation in public schools became unconstitutional. School funding models emerged. Under most models, resources are distributed to schools by providing staff and designating money for specific purposes. Student-based budgeting is a phenomenon because K–12 public schools are funded based on the number of students enrolled in a specific school. A set amount of money is earmarked per student. Under the model, additional funds may be given to low-income students, students who have special needs, or students who are English language learners. The principal has authority to allocate dollars for programming which best fits the school's needs. Literature addressing student-based budgeting from a quantitative context has highlighted educational and financial advantages and disadvantages from a political or administrative perspective. A gap exists regarding the perspectives of Illinois K–12 teachers. The equity theory, developed by John Stacey Adams, framed the course of the qualitative case study. From the literature review, themes emerged including education reform, school leadership, and student achievement. A purposeful random sample of 27 teachers participated in the study. Data collection entailed preliminary surveys, four online focus groups with transcription and member checking, and a questionnaire given after the focus group. Using the survey may benefit the credibility of the study because teachers who were unfamiliar with the budgeting formula were not sought to participate in the focus group. Findings show inequity in low-income schools and schools with low enrollment. The study may benefit educators, students, and lawmakers.

## Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As a woman of sound faith, I know I can do nothing without the grace of God--my doctorate included. I remember when I was younger and I would peruse through dissertations, and I would think that I could never write a paper with the magnitude a dissertation requires. However, I know God said He has not given us a spirit of fear, but love, peace and a sound mind. God has never forsaken me. He has always given me the leverage, wisdom, stamina, and excitement I needed to complete every goal. Sometimes I forget so fast the obstacles I overcame such as the fear of buying my first home. Christ has been with me during the doctoral journey. When I got sleepy, he rejuvenated me. When I got discouraged, he sent someone in my path who just earned their doctorate and they provided solid advice.

I am additionally dedicating this dissertation to all the black women who have obtained their doctorate before me. You look like me and your perseverance has bought me to this place. I knew if you could achieve this level of expertise to bring more awareness in your field, then I could follow suit. When times were challenging, and the illusion of moving backwards instead of moving forward in this journey took hold, I thought of you. I said I cannot let my fellow black queens down. We are a team. Completing my doctoral journey will remind and encourage another black woman that earning her doctorate is not impossible.

I dedicate this dissertation to my fellow teachers who not only teach our students each day, but advocate on their behalf. Teaching is a privilege, and I ultimately wrote this dissertation on behalf of all the K-12 students who deserve a quality education regardless of geography, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Our students deserve quality teachers, and educators, who are probably the smartest and the most talented people in the world.

## Acknowledgements

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I want to acknowledge my mother who is my biggest supporter. One of my goals in life is to always make you proud. This will not be the last thing I do either to make you happy either. My accomplishment is your accomplishment. Thank you, mom, for always believing in me even when I was unaware of what believing meant.

Next, I want to acknowledge my son who sacrificed along this journey with me. There have been many days and weekends where our communication was minimal. I had to go back on promises of going out to dinner, bowling, and weekend vacations. However, you understood my goals and why I was doing this. Thank you for not judging me and not thinking I was a bad mother. You are truly a joy and I hope this journey has made our bond stronger than ever before.

Last but never least, I want to acknowledge The American College of Education. You have provided a space and opportunity for me to excel in the field of leadership. When looking for credible institutions to earn my doctorate, I initially felt discouraged due to the prices and how the hours of instruction conflicted with my full-time teaching position. After earning my Masters in Educational Leadership from ACE, I prayed for the college to expand its course offerings to include a doctoral program, and you did. The doctoral journey has been longer than anticipated, but it was worth it. Failure has never been an option in this institution.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Utilizing an equitable K–12 public school funding model in the United States has been debatable since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 (B. D. Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2018). On average, state and local governments account for more than 90% of K–12 funding. States provide 47%, while local funding accounts for 45%. The federal government spends about 8% of the budget on K–12 public school education (Partelow, Shapiro, McDaniels, & Brown, 2018). Student-based budgeting is a unique K–12 public school funding formula. Some lawmakers, school district officials, and administrators say the funding formula eliminates the inequity in public education, especially when it comes to the nation’s most vulnerable populations, including low-income, English language learners (ELLs) and those with disabilities (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Overall, federal funding of K–12 public education has decreased since 2008 (Partelow et al., 2018). Twenty-nine states provided less funding per student in 2015 than in 2008, a year before the Great Recession (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017).

Based on 2016 national data, the amount spent per pupil on public K–12 education averages \$11,762, with Illinois spending an average of \$14,180 per student (Maciag, 2020). Student-based budgeting, also known as weighted student funding and backpack funding, is a school funding formula whereby each school principal in the district is provided a set amount of money to fund staff and programs based on the number of students enrolled in each school (Rosenberg, Gordon, & Hsu, 2019). Extra money, or weight, is given to a particular school if the school services students from low-income families, students who are ELLs, or students who have special needs such as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP; Chingos & Blagg, 2017). In some districts, having a fixed amount of staff and programming paid for by the central office is more common or a more traditional method of school funding (Travers & Catallo, 2015). A traditional

or common education budget formula is known as school-based budgeting or site-based budgeting (Doyle, Boast, Rosch, & Hassel, 2012). In the traditional site-based budgeting model, the central or district office provides staffing resources to individual schools rather than a set budget to each school in the district (Barnard, 2019).

Illinois K–12 teachers in a district implementing student-based budgeting were the focus of the study. The introduction of the study provides relevant information about student-based budgeting and the qualitative research instrument in the study. The following major sections include the background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and chapter summary.

### **Background of the Problem**

An increasing number of school districts and states have instituted student-based budgeting models to address inequity in K–12 public school systems (Fogarty, Harris, Morrow, & Scott, 2015). Nearly 30 U.S. school districts began practicing student-based budgeting since implementation in the late 1990s (Kelleher, 2015). Of the nearly 30 urban school districts utilizing the student-based budgeting formula, one urban district in Illinois allocates 30% of its total budget to schools based on the student-based budgeting formula, compared to about 40% to 45% of Houston, Hartford, and Boston school districts spending of their budgets through student-based budgeting (Kelleher, 2015). One Illinois school district began implementing the student-based funding model in 2014 to diminish the achievement gap and programming and staffing inequities in the school district (Fogarty et al., 2015). To demonstrate educational equity, policymakers tried to ensure districts across the state had the same access to resources, which included the same amount of funding per student (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Also, to help ensure

equity among the school systems, lawmakers stated taxpayers would pay the same property tax rate regardless of residence location (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Supporters and critics of the budgeting formula are acknowledged in research (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Advocates of student-based budgeting say it is the most equitable way to fund schools because districts can eliminate spending money on low-performing schools. Critics of student-based budgeting say parents transfer children from low performing schools and place the students in high-enrolled schools, which are more likely to be high achievement schools because the schools receive more money. In student-based budgeting, more students equal more money, and more money can equate to more teachers and resources. Low-performing schools are schools with students whose standardized test scores indicate a lack of grade-level attainment and growth over time and high schools with high dropout rates (Balnaz, 2019). Additionally, supporters of student-based budgeting indicate students benefit from the funding model because principals have the autonomy to fund specific programs to prioritize the specific needs and demographics of the school's population (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019).

Critics of the student-based budgeting formula say the model provides the same amount of resources to all students regardless of income level. The argument is low-income students have greater needs and need more funding than students from affluent families (Barnard, 2018). Also, opposers of student-based budgeting are concerned the formula forces low-enrollment public schools to cut programs, enrichment courses, teachers, and support staff to compensate for lower budgets (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Based on research, supporters and critics of student-based budgeting are officials, lawmakers, school administrators, and organizational leaders. A lack of research has explored student-based budgeting's impact from a teacher's point of view.

The majority of teachers, 53%, believe teachers' opinions are taken into account most of the time when school-level decisions are made (Rentner, Kober, Frizzel, & Ferguson, 2016). Outside of the school level, the majority of teachers believe the opinions of teachers do not matter; 76% believe teachers' opinions do not matter at the district level, 94% believe teachers' opinions do not matter at the state level, and 94% believe teachers' opinions do not matter on a national level (Rentner et al., 2016). Educators for Excellence, launched in 2010, is a nonprofit organization seeking to ensure teachers have an influential voice in policies impacting students and the profession (Fregni, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem is the lack of teacher input in student-based budgeting implementation in the school district studied. The lack includes opinions, perceptions, and experiences of K–12 public school teachers with student-based budgeting. Much of the enthusiasm for student-based budgeting comes from lawmakers and school district officials (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Teaching positions are affected by the funding process. Principals and school administrators have discretion on how many teachers to utilize in the building (Barnard, 2019). In the Illinois school district where this study was conducted, the district or central office provides the principal with only one school clerk, one school counselor, and one assistant principal. The positions are paid for by the district and do not come from the school budget, which is managed by the principal. Other district employees are funded by the school's budget, which is based on the number of students enrolled (Kelleher, 2015). Some custodians in the schools are outsourced and are not paid from the school's budget.



### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of K–12 public school teachers in an Illinois school district utilizing student-based budgeting. Exploring the views of teachers in Illinois can reveal the impact the funding formula has on teachers and the level of equity it provides in education. Teachers are in the classroom and can see how student-based budgeting affects the school's staff and students. The Illinois K–12 teacher participants teach in an urban school district and have experienced the budgeting formula since 2014.

### **Significance of the Study**

The qualitative case study is significant because it affords decision makers the opportunity to view student-based budgeting's impact from another perspective: Illinois K–12 public school teachers. In one Illinois school district, the central office gives the principal a set budget based on the number of students enrolled in the school (Poiner, 2018). Teachers do not make decisions on how the funds are utilized. Teachers' opinions are rarely represented when it comes to policymaking on school funding on a district, state, or federal level (Shannon & Saatcioglu, 2018).

The literature suggests teachers have little influence on policy reform (Shannon & Saatcioglu, 2018). The study could allow for more inclusive dialogue among lawmakers, school district officials, school administration, and teachers. The outcome of the study can advance the field of education by allowing more input on school budgeting implementation from a variety of educational professionals. As a result, future research could present how teacher attitudes on student-based budgeting or educational policy can impact the teaching profession and student achievement. The results from the qualitative case study can assist education stakeholders in

decision making to help all students succeed by administering equitable funding standards. The partnership between teachers and policymakers can improve teacher satisfaction, resulting in more teachers staying in the profession and lessening teacher turnover (Daily, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions supported the qualitative case study. The questions are fundamental to analyzing a specific perspective of a group of Illinois teachers in a large urban school district on student-based budgeting's impact on education. A total of 128,000 Illinois K–12 public schools serve 1,935,195 students (L. Baker, 2017). The school stakeholders may provide insight into the funding formula's effectiveness.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' experiences with student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' views on equity in education in a large Illinois urban school district?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Equity theory, which originated with American behavioral psychologist John Stacey Adams (1963), states individuals have a tendency to seek consistency among others' beliefs or opinions. Furthermore, Adams explained if inconsistency exists among attitudes and behaviors, something needs to change to eliminate the dissonance. Originally, the concept appeared in a business-related article, which focused on the employer–employee relationship. The equity theory explains why the relationship should not be viewed merely as an economic transaction; the relationship should involve elements of relative justice which supersede business and provide

perceptions of equity and inequity. The theory also enables one to determine whether the allocation of resources is fair to both relational parties.

Equity theory is the theoretical framework guiding the qualitative case study. The framework narrows the focus when researching teacher perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding student-based budgeting's impact to be framed around student equity. In relationship to the study, *educational equity* is defined as providing the necessary resources for all students to ensure achievement.

Teachers who are working under student-based budgeting are working under a system which premiered in the late 1990s established primarily in urban school districts. Some teachers worked under a previous system and had to adapt to the new system. Because student-based budgeting was a part of school reform, theories guiding the qualitative case study research surrounded equity. School reformers, lawmakers, and district officials have made claims to provide fairness to ensure students make academic gains. One overlying theory emerged impacting the perspectives of teachers. The theory is equity theory and affects education, gender, racial, and social equity.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The key terms utilized in the study are necessary and provide relevant connections to the qualitative case study method. The following definitions are crucial to understand the background and necessity of the study. The terms are defined as they relate to the qualitative case study.

***Achievement Gap.*** The ongoing disparity in achievement based on standardized test scores between minority/low-income students and White students (Ratcliff et al., 2017).

***Active Classroom Teacher.*** A teacher who is actively working in a classroom with students and provides academic instruction (Cox, 2020).

***Budgeting.*** The process of a school district educational plan to utilize resources to allocate a finite amount of financial resources which prioritize educational and organizational needs (Pouncey, Ennis, Woolley, & Connell, 2013).

***Charter School.*** A publicly funded private or independent school free from many district mandates (M. R. Ford & Ihrke, 2019).

***Education Initiative.*** A mandated policy implemented or prescribed either school-wide, district-wide, locally, statewide, or federally to improve education systems and increase student achievement (Francom, 2016).

***Educational Equity.*** Providing the necessary resources to students based on academic, social, and emotional needs to be successful upon graduation from high school (Dean-Coffrey, 2018).

***Educational Opportunity.*** A method of affording students and families the ability to direct tax dollars designated for education to schools and educational programming to best meet the needs of the students. Opportunities can include intra- and interdistrict school choice, charter schooling, school vouchers, tax credit, scholarships, and educational equity (Lueken & Shuls, 2019).

***Efficiency.*** A K–12 public school funding system, supported by taxes, whereby desired outcomes are expected at a minimal cost. Many taxpayers desire improved education funding but do not want to pay more taxes (Lueken & Shuls, 2019).

***Funding Formula.*** A school financing system implemented district- or statewide (Barnett & Kasmin, 2018).

***Principal Autonomy.*** A principal's latitude to manage a school budget to allocate funds to hire staff, including teachers and school personnel, and create programming (Heffernan, 2018).

***Quota System.*** A system in which the school district allocates employees, including teachers, school administrators, and staff personnel, to schools based on school need and not necessarily student enrollment (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019).

***School Choice.*** The freedom of K–12 students and families to select from a variety of schools and educational programming so limitations to choosing only from assigned schools and programming based on geographic location are eliminated (Cowen & Creed, 2017).

***School Reform.*** A transformational plan to move education forward with hopes of systemic change and academic achievement, influenced by educational theory, data, and practice either locally, statewide, or nationally (Dolph, 2016).

***Student-Based Budgeting.*** A K–12 public school budgeting formula whereby a district provides a set budget to an individual school based on student population. The principal has the autonomy to allocate funds for staffing and programming (Travers & Catallo, 2015).

***Vouchers.*** Tuition awarded to students to pay for education in the private sector rather than attending government-run public schools (Laitsch, 2016).

### **Assumptions**

Student-based budgeting can be polarizing. One assumption was teacher participants have a range of views of student-based budgeting's impact. All participants were assumed to be knowledgeable about student-based budgeting and able to articulate the impact on a variety of areas. The reason for the rationale all participants had at least three years of experience working in the school district. The budgeting formula has been fully implemented since 2014. The

budgeting formula is discussed in several formal platforms within the school district such as the monthly school board meeting, local school council meeting, teacher union meetings, which are also monthly. Teacher assumptions emerge from thoughts, beliefs, and actions performed while working (Booke & Willment, 2018).

Another assumption was participants would be relatively easy to locate. More than 15,000 teachers work in the school district studied. All participation in the survey, focus group, and questionnaire was voluntary. Participants were provided a consent form with information about the purpose of the study and indicating participation is voluntary. Participants were ensured nobody will be aware of participation and the potential participant could stop participation at any time. Establishing confidentiality was a priority for the research participants in the Illinois school district where student-based budgeting is practiced.

Confidentiality was practiced during the focus group by addressing the participant by first name and enrollment and grade level code (Example, Brandi EA). When writing the results of the research, only the word *Participant* and a letter were used to transcribe participant comments (e.g., Participant A, Participant B). No genders or school affiliations were identified. All electronic files have been kept on a personal computer accessible only through an encrypted password, and all printed files were placed in a research folder stored in a locked closet for five years (Sutton, 2015). After five years, the printed files will be discarded by shredder, put in a plastic bag, sealed, and put in a receptacle.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The qualitative case study consisted of active classroom teachers in one urban Illinois school district. An active classroom teacher works full-time in the classroom, teaching specific content, and is not retired. The sample involved 15 participants from public schools, comprising

five elementary teachers (Grades K–5), five middle school teachers (Grades 6–8), and five high school teachers (Grades 9–12), with varying levels of experience. A qualitative case study is appropriate when using a single case involving an organization and the case is unique (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). Half of the participants in the study were accustomed to a different funding formula, school-based budgeting, where the central office funded the majority of the school resources. The teachers are the only educators in the state of Illinois whose positions are based on the budgeting formula. Studying the perspectives, experiences, and opinions of a variety of public school teachers has the potential to show a diverse and well-rounded view of the impact student-based budgeting has on teachers. Teachers' views may vary based on grade level, subject taught, years of service, and school of employment. Delimitations must be mentioned in research to explain why certain research actions were taken and the reasons for rejecting particular methods for the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Participants were surveyed online to compile demographic information and to ascertain the level of understanding each potential participant had on student-based budgeting practices in the district. The demographics gathered from the survey also afforded a diverse selection of participants. The diversity included years of service, education level, grade level, content taught, population of students, and demographics of students, including race, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement.

Participants selected for the focus group gathered remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting through the Zoom online platform was a way for participants to feel comfortable and not feel afraid to voice opinions. Based on the consideration of setting, free from the school environment, participants may be more open to sharing experiences honestly.

Conducting a study outside of the school also afforded more convenience as the focus group was not limited to business hours or location.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the qualitative case study exist. Limitations allow for possible problems and bias to be revealed. Additionally, limitations can explain how the problems are addressed in a study (Olufowote, 2017). The limitations included the participants, background, and setting utilized in the qualitative case study. The sample was limited to one school district in Illinois because it is the only school district in the state utilizing the student-based budgeting formula.

The purposeful nonrandom sample encompassed a diverse group of teachers. The participants came from elementary, middle, and high schools. Participants were selected from schools with diverse student populations, including schools with low, medium, and high enrollment. Participants also came from schools with students of varying racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Content areas were diverse and included English, math, science, and extracurricular courses such as library and physical education (P.E.).

Limitations of the study also include bias. Possible bias in the study could be from veteran teachers with more than 10 years of experience in the district. The bias can occur because experienced teachers were employed during a time before student-based budgeting when the district used a quota system. The quota system differs from the student-based budgeting system because the school district's central office, rather than the individual school, paid for positions. Newer teachers with no experience with the previous funding formula could be influenced by the veteran teachers to believe the previous system was either better or worse than student-based budgeting. To preempt potential bias, questions were prewritten and given to participants before the focus group. Additionally, airtime was monitored. Participants were told



to discuss only the questions given. Discussions not following the questions were interrupted and directed back toward the questions.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to use the findings to provide more inclusivity in the decision-making process to help ensure education funding formulas like student-based budgeting are equitable among all students. A comprehensive summary of the issues of student-based budgeting as it relates to the impact of the K–12 public school funding formula on Illinois teachers was included. The problem identified the gap in research with student-based budgeting and how to fill the gap. The rationale for using the educational equity framework in conducting the qualitative case study was explained. The exploration occurred through an in-depth study of Illinois teachers familiar with and working under the studied funding formula. Relevant information provided the research questions guiding the qualitative case study, and the relevant key terms were defined. Also outlined were the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. The following sections present a literature review and the theoretical framework used to guide the qualitative case study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

K–12 public school budgeting models are redefined continuously by states, districts, and schools to improve school reform (Abdi, 2015). The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore the impact of one trending school budgeting model, student-based budgeting, on the attitudes, opinions, and perspectives of teachers in an Illinois school district. The problem is the attitudes and perspectives of Illinois teachers, who are an integral part of the school system, about the impact of student-based budgeting are unknown (Gozali, Claassen Thrush, Soto-Pena, Whang, & Luschei, 2017).

For the study, *budgeting* is defined as the procedural and strategic process of allocating funds and resources to individual school districts (Travis, 2019). According to Schulenburg (2017), the United States is shifting from funding institutions to funding students, to demonstrate and maintain equity in K–12 public school systems. More than 80% of school revenue for K–12 public school education in the United States comes from income, sales, and local property taxes (Chan & Morris, 2018). Despite the central role teachers play in addressing the existing inequality in school systems, little is known about what teachers think of the inequality and how to respond from a school budgeting standpoint (Penner, Rochmes, Liu, Solanki, & Loeb, 2019).

Student-based budgeting is a K–12 public school funding formula whereby the school district allocates money to each school based on the school's enrollment. The school principal has the autonomy to allocate a set amount of money to fund school programming based on priority (Travers & Catallo, 2015). The funding formula differs from the common method of school funding, usually known as school-based budgeting or site-based budgeting (Doyle et al., 2012). In the traditional site-based budgeting model, the central or district office provides staffing resources to individual schools, rather than a set budget to each school in the district

(Barnard, 2019). For example, under the traditional school method, the district may provide 25 content teachers, a librarian, a music teacher, an art teacher, and five teacher assistants. In school-based budgeting, a principal is given a budget and the principal decides what positions are a priority and affordable. Under a student-based budget, a school may have 25 content teachers. However, low-enrollment schools may only be able to afford one extracurricular teacher and three teacher teachers because the principal could have exhausted all the funds in the budget.

Literature shows student-based budgeting has impacted leadership strategies, education policy reform, and student achievement, but little research has included active classroom teachers' perspectives (Barnard, 2019). Illinois has 852 school districts. The state is the third largest, behind Texas and California, but has half the population (Murtaza, 2018). There is no statewide rollout of student-based budgeting in Illinois, but Chicago utilizes the funding model (Banicki & Murphy, 2014). Illinois school district officials have the latitude of choosing a school funding formula best suited for the needs of the district (Haider, 2018).

Illinois has a funding formula which includes a system of dispersing money to address issues of individual districts. The formula is called *evidence-based funding*, which was approved in 2017 to improve educational equity in all Illinois school districts (Rhodes, 2019). The calculation is measured by each district's financial needs by the economic resource saturation in the surrounding community (Rhodes, 2019). A comparison revealed a disparity in school funding in the entire state. The comparison showed some school districts had been working with less than half of the necessary resources, while other districts were supplied with three times more than what was needed (Rhodes, 2019). However, the state funding formula differs from how each school district in Illinois allocates funding to individual schools. Student-based budgeting and

evidence-based budgeting are the outcomes of fair funding initiatives dating back to the start of the 20th century (Banicki & Murphy, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions guided the qualitative case study. The questions were fundamental to discovering perspectives of a group of Illinois teachers on student-based budgeting's impact on education. A total of 128,000 Illinois K–12 public schools serve 1,935,195 students (Illinois State Board of Education, 2017). The voices of the school stakeholders can provide insight into the funding formula's effectiveness.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' experiences with student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' views on equity in education in a large Illinois urban school district?

A significant gap in literature pertains to obtaining Illinois K–12 teacher perspectives of the student-based budgeting funding formula from an equity lens. The qualitative case study explored how the trending funding formula impacts teachers' perceptions of education, including pedagogy, trust in the system, impact on career stability, and student impact.

Nationally, teachers believe the opinions of classroom educators are not considered in the decision-making process, with only 7% claiming to have a meaningful impact on school decisions (T. Hodges, 2018). When focusing on teacher influence on school decisions, only 5.3% reported having moderate influence on the school budget, while just 0.5% reported having meaningful input (Ingersoll, Sirinides, & Dougherty, 2018). Also, 65% of K–12 teachers feel the

state government had too much control over decisions, including school funding (T. Hodges, 2018). Regarding whether teachers' opinions matter in the workplace, K–12 public school teachers in the United States lag behind other professionals. Teachers are stakeholders in the education sector. Teachers' perspectives on the impact of student-based budgeting can provide insight to principals, district officials, and lawmakers on the formula's effectiveness. The perspectives of the teachers can expand overall professional engagement and boost inclusive collaboration.

One reason K–12 public school teachers can be a reliable source is this demographic of educators experiences the impact of the budgeting system firsthand (Knight, Izquierdo, & DeMatthews, 2016). Because teachers are in the building, teachers are aware of how the school allocates funds. Additionally, teachers have an awareness of what students need to increase achievement (Callingham, Carmichael, & Watson, 2016). Teachers are taught how to ascertain student needs by conducting diverse assessments such as student self-assessments, learning style assessments and academic assessments whereby a student can discern one's abilities (Andrade, 2019).

The student-based budgeting formula is based primarily on student enrollment (McAllister, 2018). The funding formula has become an increasing trend in many U.S. school districts, mostly urban, with about 30 school districts using some form of student-based budgeting (Barnard, 2018). Some cities utilizing a form of student-based budgeting include New York City, Houston, Newark, Atlanta, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and New Orleans, and a few states, including New Jersey and California (Barnard, 2019; Travers & Catallo, 2015). Other countries, such as the Netherlands, implement a form of student-based budgeting (Driessen, 2017). The mission of student-based budgeting is to make the funding formula

transparent through increased equity and flexibility by allocating extra money to high-needs students and giving more control to school officials (Travers & Catallo, 2015).

Principals are given a budget at the end of the school year to prepare for staff and programming in the subsequent school year (Fitzpatrick, 2018). The projected budget is based on enrollment from the previous school year. Some students with special needs, including ELLs, students receiving special education services, and low-income students, may receive additional funds (Fitzpatrick, 2018). As school districts transition to student-based budgeting, there is no guarantee more money will be distributed to every school, but the formula changes how principals can spend the allocated money (Poiner, 2018). Each school district and state has a unique method of instituting the funding formula and allocates the money where most needed (B. D. Baker et al., 2018; Barnard, 2019; Lee & Polachek, 2018). The qualitative case study narrowed the focus to how one school district in Illinois utilizes student-based budgeting and the impact the budgeting formula has on teachers in the district.

Student-based budgeting has grown in popularity among lawmakers and district officials since the formula was introduced in the late 1990s (Kelleher, 2015). Although student-based budgeting is increasingly popular in urban school districts, school-based budgeting, or traditional school budgeting, is still the more popular method of K–12 funding in the United States (Rosenberg et al., 2019). District officials and lawmakers are vocal on how the trending K–12 budgeting formula provides more student equity than the traditional formula in some urban school districts (Fogarty et al., 2015). Chicago Public Schools Chief Executive Officer Janice Jackson (as cited in Fitzpatrick, 2018) said student-based budgeting is the most equitable way to dole out money.

School-based budgeting is different from student-based budgeting because the model provides resources and money to schools rather than a set budget to schools (Travers & Catallo, 2015). Student-based budgeting is known by other terms such as student-based allocation, backpack funding, weighted student funding, and fair student funding (Barnard, 2019). The growing funding formula is also known as results-based budgeting and equitable student funding (Snell, 2013). Regardless of the various terms used to describe the funding formula, the meaning is the same: Money is distributed to schools based on student enrollment rather than set based on school need (Snell, 2013). Principals do not have access to 100% of the school budgets but generally manage between 40% and 80% of school-level spending, which differs from between 1% and 5% in traditional budgeting models (Travers & Catallo, 2015).

Quantitative and qualitative studies have explored student-based budgeting's impact on education in several states (Barnard, 2019; Fogarty et al., 2015). California and New Jersey, for example, use student-based budgeting statewide. Several cities and counties have implemented a form of student-based budgeting, including Denver, Colorado, and Clark County School District in Nevada (Schulenburg, 2017).

Perspectives of the funding formula have been seen from the lens of lawmakers, district officials, and principals, but little from teachers (Fogarty et al., 2015). Teacher voices have been rarely heard when focusing on educational perceptions and experiences with the funding model. In 2013, Chicago switched the school district funding formula from school-based budgeting to student-based budgeting in the name of funding reform (Kelleher, 2015). The rationale for the switch included improving transparency, providing a fair funding formula, making student achievement a priority, and providing principal autonomy, while holding schools accountable for results (Fogarty et al., 2015).

The purpose of the following sections is to provide a general overview of the perspectives of Illinois teachers stemming from the student-based budgeting funding formula. Historically, funding formulas have been a hot-button issue in the public school arena (Doyle et al., 2012). Decision makers on school funding formulas have predominantly involved educators outside of the classroom, with few to no teachers at the political table (Fogarty et al., 2015).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The collection of relevant literature involved searching related articles on student-based budgeting. Relevant terms for the literature review stemmed from the qualitative case study's research questions, resulting in one major theme: education reform. Subheadings emerged which include funding models, laws and policies, leadership autonomy and accountability, equity, and achievement. The literature search included online databases provided by the American College of Education (ACE) and Google Scholar. Electronic scholarly articles were peer-reviewed. Other relevant resources used to comprise research for the study included news articles, non-journal articles, and historical reports from credible sources. Websites used for the qualitative case study include ETStrategies.org, AERA Education Research, Reason Foundation, Education Policy Analysis Archives, and Sage Journals.

Key phrases utilized to find scholarly articles relevant to the study were categorized and include *qualitative case study*, *qualitative case study in education*, *case studies in Illinois education*, *education reform*, *achievement gap*, *standards testing*, *teacher accountability*, *school report card*, *principal autonomy*, *school choice*, *school closings*, *school turnarounds*, *teacher evaluation*, *teacher equity*, *social equity in education*, *racial equity in education*, *gender equity in education*, *education equity theory*, *equity theory*, *equity theorists*, *educational equity theorists*, *education theories*, *equity vs. equality*, *education reform*, *corporate reform*, *education*



*policies, education segregation, No Child Left Behind Act, Race to the Top, private sector, Every Student Succeeds Act, Brown v. Board of Education, student-based budgeting, fair-student funding, traditional school funding, equity-based funding, fair funding, education equity and charter school funding, state-funding of public schools, Illinois school funding law, Illinois school funding policy, k-12 public school funding, teacher perspectives, teacher attitudes, teachers and decision making, teacher unions, teacher strikes, teacher hiring, and principal accountability.*

### **Theoretical Framework**

When administering the theoretical framework to the qualitative case study, teacher perception of student-based budgeting was the focal point. Teachers working under student-based budgeting are working under a relatively new system established primarily in urban school districts. Some teachers worked previously under a former system and had to adapt to the new system. Because student-based budgeting is a part of school reform, theories guiding the research surrounded equity.

School reformers, lawmakers, and district officials have made claims to provide fairness to ensure students make academic gains. Based on the literature, one relevant overlying theory emerged impacting teachers' perspectives. The theory is equity theory and impacts education, racial, and social equity.

American behavioral psychologist Adams (1963) developed equity theory. The theory is based on the dissonance theory, the belief individuals have a tendency to seek consistency among others' beliefs or opinions. Furthermore, the theory explains if there is inconsistency among attitudes and behaviors, something needs to change to eliminate the dissonance. The original concept appeared in a business-related article. Adams's focus was on the employer–

employee relationship. According to Adams, the relationship between employee and employer should not be seen only as an economic transaction; the relationship should also involve elements of relative justice which supersede business and provide perceptions of equity and inequity. The theory also explains whether the allocation of resources is fair to both relational parties.

Adams's (1963) equity theory indicates people perceive and evaluate relationships with others based on a comparison of one's input into the relationship and outcomes from the relationship to another's inputs and outcomes (Fowler & Brown, 2018). Outputs or outcomes can encompass positive and negative consequences. Adams theorized if the ratio from the input/outcomes and comparison relationships lacks balance, an inequitable relationship will be determined; the level of equity imbalance correlates with the more distress one feels; and the more distress, the likelihood of restoring equity will increase (Fowler & Brown, 2018). The types of inputs and outputs can vary based on several ideas, including the motivation of the employee and employer, and based on the system in which the work was performed (Adams, 1963). An employee's input can include time, experience, education, determination. Outcomes can include job security, salary, recognition, praise, reputation, and benefits.

Carrell and Dittrich (1978), also equity theorists, stated the term *fairness* is more likely to be used in common labor law language. The word is more likely to be used when referring to fair wages or fair disciplinary actions. Carrell and Dittrich claimed the theory has limitations: Demographic and psychological variables can affect a person's perception of equity or fairness. Additionally, equity theory cannot be based merely on the input and output of a relationship but also on the system determining those inputs and outputs. Carrell and Dittrich said a more comprehensive approach to measuring one's perception, and the effects of equity in the

workplace, is by the net balance (overall fairness) to the input and output ratios. Instead of mentioning a compared person, one has the latitude to utilize an internally created standard for comparison.

The equity theory was the framework that guided the qualitative study. Though the equity theory originated from relations in the business sector, ideology can transfer to the education sector (Adams, 1963). Teachers can provide a comprehensive perspective of student-based budgeting concerning equity among teachers, schools, and students. Teachers can use the equity theory when perceiving the input and output of students, school administrators, district officials, and lawmakers (Lucas & Beresford, 2010). Teachers can connect those individual perspectives to the output based on student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and equity in resources for teachers and students (Lucas & Beresford, 2010).

The output of average annual teacher salaries in Illinois being \$67,000 may have a direct correlation with the teacher retention rate of about 86% (Illinois Report Card, 2019). Teachers across the country have gone on strike to protest the lack of school funding. The protest revealed K–12 teachers' feelings indicating the output of low school funding does not match the profession's input of education level and professional requirements (L. Farmer, 2019). For 18 straight years, Americans said a lack of funding was the top issue facing schools (L. Farmer, 2019). Oklahoma is still funding K–12 education, which is 15% below the prerecession school funding era (L. Farmer, 2019). The evidence shows lack of funding correlates to teacher satisfaction.

*Equality* and *equity* in education have been used interchangeably, but the terms are different (Thompson & Thompson, 2018). *Equality* is the belief everyone has the same access to education and learns in the same way (Center for Public Education, 2016). *Equity*, synonymous

with *fairness*, is the belief educators and policymakers develop strategies to support all students, especially those who are disadvantaged based on lack of access and ability (Center for Public Education, 2019).

*Equity* can also be defined as systemic practices and policies which provide accessible quality education to every student where deep and meaningful learning can take place to empower students to be independent learners in society (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). Equity is demonstrated when all students receive differentiated resources based on the specific needs of the school and students in preparation for college or a career upon graduation (Center for Public Education, 2016). Equality implies everyone should receive the same treatment, resources, and access to those resources.

In an equitable classroom environment, teachers foster the unique needs of each student to create an environment which is responsive to all students (Center for Public Education, 2016). An equitable system has no one-size-fits-all standard of a curriculum for teaching and learning; the curriculum, instruction, services, and resources are differentiated to proactively meet the diverse needs of each student to reach academic and societal potential (Thompson & Thompson, 2018). For equity to be effective in education, it is the responsibility of teachers to be consistent in implementing strategies to promote equity (Jurado de los Santos, Moreno-Guerrero, Marin-Marín, & Solar Costa, 2020). Additionally, teachers must organize with agents in the community, actively collaborating to fight against inequity (Jurado de los Santos, Moreno-Guerrero, Marin-Marín, & Solar Costa, 2020).

In public education, evidence shows a disparity in achievement between races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and genders (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). One example of the equity disparity in funding is in Pennsylvania (Fogarty et al., 2015). Pennsylvania has one of the most

inequitable funding systems in the United States, with an \$18,000 spending difference between the highest and lowest spending districts in the state.

### **Research Literature Review**

Education reform is one theme emerging from the review of literature. The major theme is categorized into five sections: school funding models, laws and policies, leadership autonomy and accountability, equity, and student achievement. The first section includes an exploration of how student-based budgeting was a result of school reform (Barnard, 2019). School budgeting reform has mainly impacted urban school districts. The first section, a school funding synopsis, summarizes different U.S. K–12 public school funding models and compares the different models to student-based budgeting. The comparison focuses on teacher, school, and student equity. The definitions, advantages, and disadvantages are highlighted.

The section on laws and policies chronicles laws and policies enacted during the 21st century. Laws and policies have impacted school reform and opened the door for student-based budgeting (Jankov & Caref, 2017). Policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTT), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) were federal initiatives changing school funding and how resources are distributed (Harman, Boden, Karpenski, & Muchowicz, 2019).

The leadership section provides literature on how principals implement student-based budgeting in schools. The section includes details on how teachers are impacted by the principal's implementation. The section also includes principal accountability and autonomy measures and how the implementations vary by district.

The section on equity is the broadest of the five sections, detailing the facets of equity. When researching the literature, student-based budgeting and the perspectives of different levels

of equity were discovered. Teacher equity, student equity, and school equity were factors in the researched budgeting formula.

The section on student-based budgeting research highlights the research on student-based budgeting from a student achievement lens. Research articles discussed how the nontraditional school budgeting formula should theoretically bridge the achievement gap. Principals have the latitude to spend school budgets.

Principals can research what the schools need, resulting in student achievement. The one theme combined with five subcategories addressed the impact student-based budgeting has on teacher perspectives regarding educational equity in the school district. The review revealed a variety of areas in which student-based budgeting laws affect hiring practices. The literature also showed how much money is spent per pupil in a school or district and how much autonomy a principal has when allocating funds in a school.

### **School Reform**

The root of student-based budgeting stemmed from school reform (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). In 2017, the United States spent approximately \$620 billion on K–12 public school education (Kane, 2017). The K–12 public education system serves about 50 million students and employs 6 million adults, mostly teachers, in over 100,000 public schools in about 14,000 school districts (Filardo, 2016). Student achievement was not matching educational spending (McAllister, 2018). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (as cited in DeSilver, 2017) reported 25% of students were proficient in math, 22% were proficient in science, and only 12% were proficient in U.S. history in 2017. School reform met the 21st century with various laws and policies incorporating voucher programs, school privatization through charter

school expansion, public school closings, change of testing measurements, and changes in school funding formulas (Jankov & Caref, 2017).

Student-based budgeting was a phenomenon that started in the late 1990s as a result of reforms to show more equity in schools to bridge, diminish, or eliminate the achievement gap. According to Doyle et al. (2012), the use of student-based budgeting in Connecticut was the basis for improving student performance. The improvement in student performance increased equity in funding, improved budgeting and accountability, and increased transparency. Before the implementation of student-based budgeting, Connecticut's 2006 report card showed schools struggling, with less than half the state's students showing proficiency in reading and only 63% of 10th graders showing math proficiency. After three years of implementing student-based budgeting, the Hartford school district officials discovered the time between when the district approved of the school budget and the time the school year started, student enrollment size often fluctuated. Some school had higher or lower enrollment than expected. However, the funding was not reallocated to match the school enrollment (Doyle et al., 2012). Hartford's school district use of student-based budgeting also revealed principal autonomy over the budget allowed for better use of resources to align with student need rather than the same resources given to each school before student based budging (Doyle et al., 2012).

### **Other U.S. Funding Models**

To understand the rationale for student-based budgeting, comparing the funding model to other popular methods of K–12 public school funding in the United States is necessary. Five traditional forms of funding in the United States are line-item budgeting, percentage add-on budgeting, zero-based budgeting, performance-based budgeting, and site-based budgeting (Doyle

et al., 2012). Each funding model is defined as follows, coupled with the advantages, disadvantages, and similarities.

**Line-item budgeting.** Line-item budgeting, which may be the most widely used approach in K–12 schools, is a historical funding approach which uses a history of expenditure and revenue data to determine how money is allocated to districts and schools (Doyle et al., 2012). The advantage of a line-item K–12 school budgeting model is the budget is organized by specific units and objects (Chan & Morris, 2018). The disadvantage of the formula is it allows for micromanagement without having adequate performance information.

**Percentage add-on budgeting.** Percentage add-on budgeting is another budgeting formula whereby the school district or state may add to the previous year's funding level. For example, if last year's funding for a particular program was \$10,000, if funds are available and proof of a need is shown, an increase in money can be provided. The budgeting formula is simple because there is no investigation to determine what to take away. One disadvantage of the funding model is the one-size-fits-all approach, because schools may need a greater increase than the school allows (Doyle et al., 2012).

**Zero-based budgeting.** Zero-based budgeting is another funding formula whereby the budget starts from \$0 each year, with no reference to the previous year's budget (Yan, 2016). Each item in the zero-based budget is supposed to be justified (Doyle et al., 2012). Staff are usually involved in choosing the allocation of resources, which builds morale with stakeholders and builds trust in the community by having a transparent budget process. Additionally, zero-based budgeting abolishes outdated expenditures while focusing resources where most needed. A con of zero-based budgeting is neither the districts nor schools have the staff or time to effectively address the intricacies the budgeting mode requires (Yan, 2016). In addition to



needing staffing and timing, much paperwork and planning are necessary for full implementation, which some schools do not have (Doyle et al., 2012).

**Performance-based budgeting.** Performance-based budgeting, also known as incentive-based budgeting, is calculated by the standard cost of inputs multiplied by the number of units of an activity or program to be provided within a certain time period (Lang, 2016). The budget must include a detailed narrative of each program or activity. Some lawmakers and district officials favor performance-based budgeting because performance-based budgeting prioritizes measuring and evaluating outcomes (Doyle et al., 2012). School administrators are provided with more information to make analysis and evaluation. Also, individual schools are given budget flexibility as long as school and district goals are met (Lang, 2016). Critics of performance-based budgeting claim a lack of reliable standard cost information (Doyle et al., 2012). Research showed an increased need in student affairs to more effectively align equity objectives (McCamblly & Haley, 2016).

**Site-based budgeting.** Site-based budgeting is similar to student-based budgeting as both decentralize the budget authority and process (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2018). Site-based budgeting is similar to zero-based budgeting as both require some advisory team to help ensure school priority and equity (Doyle et al., 2012). Resources are distributed to individual schools and principals or school administrators to allocate resources based on the alignment of school goals (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2018). Site-based budgeting differs from student-based budgeting because the money does not follow the student but stays at the school or site (Doyle et al., 2012). Site-based budgeting has been considered most practical for schools because the people who best understand the needs of the school are distributing the resources, while staff and community

have a voice, which allows for public support. The site-based budgeting model has been criticized because few school-level administrators are trained to implement the model efficiently.

Table 1 presents an example of how student-based budgeting funds are distributed based on student population and needs of the school. Teacher salaries play a role in the student-based budgeting formula as principals have to manage positions and programs. As shown in Table 1, the higher the student enrollment, the more general funding is received, but this does not guarantee more teachers. Teacher salaries are usually based on experience (Knight, 2019). If teachers are paid less than the average salary, principals may be apt to hire newer or less experienced teachers because doing so allows for more money in the budget. Additionally, allowing teachers to work multiple subjects and grade levels can allow more money to be saved. If teachers make more than the average salary, schools with low enrollment could be more at a deficit and may have to lay off more staff, which can mean less programming for students, resulting in low achievement.

### **Laws and Policies**

Twenty-first-century education reform brought in several reform policies, one of the earliest being spearheaded by President George W. Bush when he instituted NCLB in 2002. NCLB, receiving bipartisan support, charged educators with taking accountability for students' growth, or lack thereof, on standardized tests (Harman et al., 2019). Four principles comprised the NCLB initiative: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and districts, proven education methods, and more school choice for parents (Daniel & Walker, 2014). The overall mission policy mandated 100% of public school students demonstrate proficiency in reading and math by 2014 (Harman et al., 2019). In 2011's provision of NCLB, waivers were

given to states agreeing to tie teachers' overall evaluation scores to students' achievement on standardized or high-stakes tests (Wright, Shields, Black, Banerjee, & Waxman, 2018).

Table 1

*Sample of Student-Based Budgeting Distribution*

Variable	School A	School B
Student population	300	1,000
Amount of funding per student	\$5,000	\$5,000
Overall extra "weight" funding (when schools receive extra funding in budget based on number of English language learners, low-income students, and special needs students)	\$4,000	\$2,000
Average annual teacher salary	\$70,000	\$70,000
Number of teaching positions	25	60
School overall budget	\$1,504,000	\$5,002,000
Money left after paying teachers	-\$246,000	\$802,000

NCLB became increasingly criticized by parents, principals, and teachers for the policy's stern measurement of achievement (Darrow, 2016). Major drawbacks of the act included teachers and parents opposing narrowing the curriculum to focus only on test subjects, using the standardized test as the only criteria for measuring student achievement, and the cost of implementing the new policy. According to Jankov and Caref (2017), NCLB was responsible for the expansion of standardized test scores and charter schools.

Federal school reform policies continued with the Race to the Top program. The reform policy was spearheaded by President Obama in 2009 and received \$4.35 billion in federal funding (Daniel & Walker, 2014). The program was different from NCLB, which focused on

school success, because RTT was a competitive-based initiative which awarded additional funds to school districts and states demonstrating proof of reform strategies to increase achievement.

The reform policy resulted in teacher evaluations based on standardized test scores, closing or turning around low-performing schools, and including more charter schools (Jankov & Caref, 2017). During the RTT era, a study was conducted to research teacher perception of school-level influence, curricular autonomy, pedagogical autonomy, and job satisfaction in RTT states and non-RTT states (Wright et al., 2018). Teachers in RTT states had a small yet negative perception of school-level influence and curricular autonomy. No significant correlation was found with teacher perception of job satisfaction in RTT states versus non-RTT states.

The education reform continued when President Obama passed another federal program, Elementary and Secondary Education Act In 2015. The program was reauthorized from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 enacted by President Lyndon Johnson to end the war on poverty (Darrow, 2016). The measure, which replaced NCLB, continued with test-based accountability even for students with disabilities while giving more control to the states (Essex, 2015). ESSA served as the nation's promise to provide equal educational opportunity for all students, with no exception to race, ethnicity, disability, English language proficiency, or income.

In 2010, the documentary film *Waiting for "Superman"* was released in theaters. The controversial film launched a grassroots campaign, Host A Screening, which ran concurrently with the 2011 state legislative sessions in several states, including Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and New Jersey. Bills on the table during the session were teacher merit pay, contracts for teachers on probationary status, school vouchers, limiting teachers' bargaining rights, and provisions to school funding formulas and charter school funding (Wessel-Powell, 2014). The movie

producers portrayed teacher unions as barriers to quality education by focusing more on raises than students. The bulk of people interviewed in the movie were school district administrators, charter school parents, and students who wanted to go to charter schools. The movie provided little individual public school teacher voice.

Normally, under student-based budgeting, state and local funds are not intermingled with federal funds because federal funds have limitations on how the money can be spent. In February 2018, a pilot program instituted under ESSA, allowed up to 50 school districts flexibility with some earmarked federal money under Title I to use the funds for a student-based budgeting model. The rationale for the latitude was allocated resources based on the number of students and the level of need for students (Barnard, 2018). In the 2018–2019 New Orleans Parish general budget, 98% of the school district's general fund went toward student-based funding, while Prince George County schools utilized 23.5% of the school district's funding in student-based budgeting (Barnard, 2018).

To promote student-based budgeting, or weighted student funding, ESSA authorized a pilot student-based budgeting program for school districts having an interest in participating. Interested districts had to apply to the U.S. Department of Education (Poiner, 2018). The contract allowed the U.S. Department of Education to enter into three-year agreements with a maximum of 50 local school districts to consolidate federal and state funds into a specific weighted funding formula. All monies could be used to directly fund students without limitations. During the initial application process, five school districts applied but only a school district in Puerto Rico was accepted.

School funding continued to be an engaging topic in state legislatures and the courts (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). In many cases, state policy changes were the result of court decisions.

From 1971 to 2010, 42 states' school funding systems were challenged in court; the courts overturned the existing system in 28 of those states (Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2016). Moreover, state lawmakers usually amended the formula parameters, changing how much money is given per child and how much extra may be given to schools with low-income students, special needs students, and English language learners. For example, a state or school district utilizing student-based budgeting adds or subtracts the percentage given to an ELL by adding .25% to the weight or subtracting .25% from the weight in order to meet the needs of the student (Chingos & Blagg, 2017).

**How districts decide on student-based budgeting.** Before districts decide on student-based budgeting as the new funding model, research suggests district officials answer fundamental questions, such as Which costs can be decreased to increase the amount of unrestricted money available? and How can more money in the school district not related to students be transferred to focus directly on students? (Snell, 2013).

***Cleveland's implementation of student-based budgeting.*** Cleveland's implementation of student-based budgeting, and the impact on student achievement and leadership, began in 2012 (Poiner, 2018). In Cleveland's 2016-2017 student-based budgeting plan, principals controlled nearly 50% of the budget, compared to 14% in 2014. In Cleveland's student-based budgeting plan, principals control nearly 50% of the budget, compared to 14% in 2014. Also, in the 2016–2017 school year, 71% of school budgets were managed by the school administration, compared to just 1.8% in 2013.

To help principals carry out the planning and budgeting process, network support teams comprised representatives from several departments, including budgeting, human resources,

special education, and academics (Poiner, 2018). Cleveland principals said the network support teams, not teachers, were the most helpful when developing a school plan.

Student-based budgeting has two fund types: locked funds and unlocked funds. Locked funds are under central office control, while unlocked funds are available at the principal's discretion (Poiner, 2018). Cleveland Metropolitan School District did not unlock special education because special education is firmly governed by the students' IEPs and federal policy. An IEP is a legal document for a student who receives special education services to chart a plan to achieve academic, physical, and social-emotional goals through modifications and accommodations in specified content areas (Pounds & Cuevas, 2019).

***Baltimore's and Denver's implementation of student-based budgeting.*** Baltimore is one example of a school district using student-based budgeting aggressively as a way to reform. Between 2008 and 2011, the school district streamlined the central office by decreasing the number of full-time employees by 33% (Snell, 2013). As a result, the central office's priorities shifted to guiding schools, supporting schools while holding the institutions accountable for student achievement. As a result, Baltimore claimed growth in graduation rates and test scores, including national scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Snell, 2013).

Denver is another school district which chose the student-based budgeting formula model after closing eight underutilized (low-enrollment and low-performing) schools (Snell, 2013). Denver's school board estimated transferring students to higher performing schools would save the district approximately \$3.5 million. The extra money would go toward opportunities for the new school and new programs.

***New York City's and Los Angeles' implementation of student-based budgeting.*** While Baltimore and Denver switched from the traditional model of school funding to student-based

budgeting district-wide (Gross & Jochim, 2016), some districts tested the waters by using student-based budgeting in a pilot program. New York City and Los Angeles Unified are examples of using a pilot program as a preliminary step to ensure the funding formula is the right choice (Snell, 2013). The pilot program allowed both districts to fix anticipated problems, design a more effective school-level budgeting tool, and develop principal leaders and mentors.

***Nevada's implementation of student-based budgeting.*** Through bipartisan support, Nevada's lawmakers reorganized Clark County School District in May 2017 to reform the school system funding model. The rationale for the reform was based on the belief the amount of money schools received should be based solely on the number of students enrolled in each school. Every student receiving the same amount is a fair and equitable system, according to Nevada state officials (Schulenburg, 2017). In Nevada's student-based budgeting policy, a local organizational team is mandated comprising teachers, staff members, parents, and the principal. As a part of the policy, principals are to include teachers, parents, and community members in the budgeting process with the idea of promoting a democratic process with all stakeholders (Sinclair & Malen, 2016).

***Student-based budgeting globally.*** Student-based budgeting has also been a phenomenon outside the United States, in places such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia (Chin & Chuang, 2015). The budgeting formula goal is similar to the goal in the United States, which entails decentralization and transitioning more authority to schools to decide policy to allocate resources based on student need. In theory, the funding formula will be successful because the objective is to solicit the perspectives of those closely connected to the students, such as parents.

***Racial impact of education reform.*** According to Daniel and Walker (2014), educational reform, including funding, has negatively impacted African Americans since the



U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which ordered desegregation in all public schools. NCLB and RTT led to poor pedagogical practices with an overemphasis on testing and disciplining students. Jankov and Caref (2017) said reforms are due to the corporate takeover of public education, branding schools with low standardized test scores as failing. School closure becomes inevitable and more charter schools are established, which are filled primarily with African American and Hispanic students. As a result of NCLB, many states terminated open-ended assessments in subjects such as writing, mathematical problem solving, scientific inquiry, and research, replacing some parts of the test with low-level multiple-choice testing, especially in schools serving low-income students of color (Thompson & Thompson, 2018).

The primary strategy for building an equitable education system is access to highly qualified teachers (Thompson & Thompson, 2018). According to Cook-Harvey and Stosich (2016), indicators on the school report card would report proportions of teachers with three or more years of experience, certified teachers in the specified content, and teachers who have demonstrated a higher level of accomplishment through National Board certification.

**Funding formulas.** Funding formulas are the result of policies made to finance education. A funding formula is simply a mathematical equation plugging in numbers and money affecting a situation (Larkin, 2016). Student-based budgeting can be utilized in an array of ways. Attendance is also tied to the student budgeting formula. Districts must decide on how to calculate school attendance. One method of calculation is average daily attendance (Chingos & Blagg, 2017).

**Student-based budgeting formula weights.** Weights are a measurement of student-based budgeting to decide how the money will be allocated to each student. States can have a

higher per-student cost if students carry the following attributes: special education, ELL, and low income. Forty-seven states provide additional funding for special education students, 40 for ELLs, 28 for low-income students, and 25 for students below grade level (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). One reason for the skyrocketing increases in K–12 education in the United States is the rising need for services for special education students and ELLs (Russ & Hawthorne, 2018).

Challenges can come with weighting school funding, such as deciding how to determine the amount of money given to students who fit certain categories such as low-income students, special needs students, and students who are English language learners. What if students fit into two or three of the weighted categories. Will the student receive extra for each or one set-amount? District officials must decide if a student qualifies for two weights, such as being low-income and special education (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Weights can also create incentives for states to increase the number of students who carry additional weight to increase funding.

### **Leadership Autonomy and Accountability**

Traditionally principals have been held accountable for student achievement success and failure. Before student-based budgeting, principals complained of unfairness as the leadership position had little control over student-based budgeting (Travers & Catallo, 2015). The financing mechanism can be implemented by governors, school boards, and superintendents as long as the measure aligns with the existing state education budgets (Snell, 2013). With student-based budgeting, principals have more autonomy with the school budget.

The budget is considered the most powerful tool in either supporting or destroying a principal's credibility (Travis, 2019). The budget is considered a legal document, a framework for operations, a financial planner, and a communication device which articulates the priorities and principles of the school. Areas a principal could address in the budget should be

comprehensive, including personnel, curriculum, curricular enrichment, extracurricular activities, purchasing, building maintenance, and professional development.

According to President Truman (as cited in Travis, 2019), budget figures show more about proposed policy than any speech can. Under the traditional school-based formula, principals, on average, have access to only 5% of the money (Barnard, 2018). According to Barnard, research suggests principal latitude improved student achievement, which student-based budgeting provides. Principals have more access to money under student-based budgeting, but the power is never 100%. Depending on the district, the range of principal control varies.

In student-based budgeting, the money follows the student. But once dollars are allocated to each student, it is not clear how the money is distributed and what factors are taken into account (Ciolino, Kirylo, Miron, & Frazier, 2014). To make student-based budgeting effective, principals and other school leaders must receive training in the budget technicalities and how to distribute resources for student achievement (Rosenberg et al., 2019). Also, principals and the student-based budgeting team must begin planning before the central office distributes the budget to the school, which entails recognizing the school's needs, goals, and resource priorities (Travers & Catallo, 2015). According to research, the flexibility of student-based budgeting affords the principal more latitude to maximize student achievement (Smith, 2015).

In a study using Cleveland's Metropolitan School District, district officials admitted student-based budgeting alone would not be enough to ensure student achievement (Travers & Catallo, 2015). To have a greater impact, district officials connected student-based budgeting with strategic school design, a collaborative practice whereby school administration and teacher leaders began the school year with a student achievement vision, and used discretion to reorganize resources, including people, time, technology, and money to support the vision.

When leaders practice strategic school design with student-based budgeting, successful school reform can occur (Travers & Catallo, 2015). Seven critical factors of the student-based budgeting model are crucial: leadership, flexibility, process, collaboration, preparation, models, and accountability. Rosenberg et al. (2019) also noted seven critical principles school leaders must follow for a successful student-based budgeting model: The formula must be student focused, equitable, transparent, differentiated, predictable, empowering, and aligned with district strategy.

**Challenges with school leaders implementing student-based budgeting.** Some teacher unions have been skeptical of student-based budgeting, arguing more principal control over the budget will provoke contract violations (Rosenberg et al., 2019). In a report based on the Principal Engagement Survey (Chicago Public Education Fund, 2015), 40% of principals responded with the desire more help with student-based budgeting. Practicing two-way communication and including union representation in the school-wide strategic design team could help union members gain the trust of the funding formula and the principal making the decisions (Rosenberg et al., 2019).

In the traditional school funding formula, principals receive support to comply with union contracts and district, state, and federal policy programs (Rosenberg et al., 2019). More coaching and support are needed for the school administration to navigate student-based budgeting and compliance. Even when principals have budgetary autonomy, supervisors of principals still may disagree on how principals should utilize the funds.

**School choice.** Student-based budgeting has been popular with education reformers because, though the funding formula does not provide vouchers to private schools or outside the district in most cases, the money follows the student to the public school of the student's choice

even if the student transfers to another school in the district or a charter school (Barnard, 2018). A charter school is a government-funded school run either by individuals or large-scale providers or educational management organizations (Laitsch, 2016). Charters, one form of school choice, have disproportionately opened in urban areas, consistently facing teacher shortages and disparities in teacher quality (Jabbar, 2018). Also, historically, charters face hardships in attracting and maintaining teachers, for several reasons, one being funding. Many charter schools exist under student-based budgeting by receiving money from the district where the charter school is stationed (Ciolino et al., 2014).

Advocates say student-based budgeting works best when students have a variety of schools from which to choose (Barnard, 2019). The United States is moving away from funding institutions to funding students, with K–12 education mirroring the higher learning formula (Snell, 2013). The country is slowly exiting the public school system funded by local resources and residential assignments and moving toward parent choice and school enrollment. Since December 2012, at least 32 voucher and tax credit programs have been implemented in 16 states, totaling more than \$1 billion in funding following students to schools.

Even though student-based budgeting has afforded more school choice, in some cities like Chicago, Black students are still segregated, with school closures and charter school expansion occurring predominantly in African American and Hispanic neighborhoods (Jankov & Caref, 2017). One school district in the United States known for the sweeping school choice reform is New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina, which killed more than 1,800 people and forced many others to evacuate (Jabbar, 2018). Some scholars believe policymakers took advantage of the New Orleans state of emergency.

In allocating funds and hiring, charter school principals may have more power and autonomy than principals of district-run schools (Ciolino et al., 2014). One common perspective from teachers is, though principals have autonomy with most of the budget, limitations still exist on capital power, especially pertaining to building repairs. One charter school in the New Orleans school district stated she was teaching in a substandard classroom. She said the classroom had mold, and to remove the mold, some ceiling tiles were removed; however, despite the passage of time, the ceiling tiles were still missing and wires were hanging down from the ceiling.

Inequity in school facilities funding also exists with the gap based on the socioeconomics of the students (Filardo, 2016). No federal standards are in place regarding the condition of school facilities and spending capital on school building construction and maintenance. Facilities management is still funded by the central office and is not a part of the principal's discretionary funds in student-based budgeting (Ciolino et al., 2014). Lower income communities spend a higher proportion of money for daily upkeep and operations of the school than wealthier districts.

### **K–12 Equity in the Public School System**

Seventy-five percent of teachers say education funding is too low (L. Farmer, 2019). Fifty percent of K–12 teachers working in underfunded schools are more likely to consider leaving the teaching profession. (Gewertz, 2019). Student-based budgeting and general school funding formulas can show signs of inequity regarding race and socioeconomic status. For example, funding based on attendance can result in less funding if a school has low attendance. Schools with low attendance are usually disadvantaged (Chingos & Blagg, 2017). Students living

in poverty and at-risk students are rapidly increasing in urban and rural communities in the United States (Thompson & Thompson, 2018).

When researching Pennsylvania school districts, Fogarty et al. (2015) found the state to have one of the most inequitable school systems in the nation. Pennsylvania is one of three states with no basic funding formula. Ranked 43rd in the nation in the amount of state funding provided to local schools, Pennsylvania has the third widest funding gap between rich and poor districts. To remedy the inequity in the state, Pittsburgh implemented a form of student-based budgeting. Even though the student-based budgeting formula requires the money to follow each student, more funds can be given to students with special circumstances, such as low-income students, ELLs, and students with special education needs. According to Fogarty et al., a statistically significant correlation existed between student income level and spending, meaning schools with higher percentages of low-income students were not necessarily allocated more funding.

B. D. Baker (2014) said inequity in funding exists between charter schools and public schools. Baker identified a funding gap of 28%, with the average charter school in the United States receiving nearly \$4,000 less in funding than the average public school student. Specifically, Lipman (2018) claimed racism was still apparent through segregation, which impacts schools. Lipman said because Whites and people of color are segregated, school resources were not distributed equitably. Lipman mentioned that even when Whites and people of color were attending the same school, overt racism occurred, such as a tracking system where Blacks and other special programs were usually at the bottom, prolonging segregation.

A tracking system is used by a school system to assign classes to students based on each student's perceived ability based on test scores. Students are then placed in classes with other

students with similar scores and abilities (Domina et al., 2019). Tracking systems usually include high, medium, and low tracks. In her research, Lipman (2018) called for transformational reform. The implementation of student-based budgeting is designed to improve equity between low-income students of color because the money follows the student to the student's public school of choice. Under the student-based budgeting formula, more money, called *weights*, is given to students with unique circumstances, including low-income students, ELLs, and students with special needs (Barnard, 2018).

**Average versus actual teacher salaries.** A critical factor with student-based budgeting and equity is teacher salary. When a principal receives the school's annual budget, teacher salary is part of the package including teacher raises. In traditional funding, principals did not have to consider a teacher's salary because the district provided the staffing, but under student-based budgeting, the principal is given a set budget to configure how to best fund teachers.

Experienced teachers usually make more than new and inexperienced teachers (Doyle et al., 2012). When budgeting for teachers, two popular methods exist for charging a school: average teacher salaries or actual teacher salaries. Average teacher salary means a more established school with more experienced teachers is subsidized by less popular schools with new teachers (Snell, 2013). The majority of school districts in the United States charge for average teacher salaries rather than actual salaries. For example, if the average teacher salary were \$60,000, a school with 10 new teachers and a school with 10 five-year teachers would both be charged \$600,000 on paper. To explain further, schools with less experienced teachers have more discretionary money for more resources, such as after-school programming, teacher training, and more curriculum. To demonstrate teacher equity, under the ESSA, a school district



is required to provide a budget which would pay for the actual salaries of the teachers and not an average salary.

Charging schools with actual teacher salaries instead of average teacher salaries increases equity even though the majority of school districts do not implement this practice (Barnard, 2019). Schools with newer teachers can use discretionary spending on curriculum supplements, professional development, and more staffing. However, under student-based budgeting, the potential for discrimination exists in teacher hiring practices (Doyle et al., 2012).

**Racial equity in K–12 public education.** Achievement equity is not yet a reality in the American public school system, which could be attributed to the achievement barriers across race and socioeconomics (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). The United States is more racially diverse in 2021 than during the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case. In 1960, Whites comprised 85% of the country's population, with Blacks being the largest minority at 11%, while Hispanics and Asians made up 5% combined (Center for Public Education, 2016). In 2016, Whites made up about 60% of the of the U.S. population but are expected to make up less than 50% of the population by 2050.

Equity in education demonstrates students are assigned to schools and programs regardless of race, including gifted education (Ford, Wright, & Washington, 2016). For example, Hispanics make up 25% of the U.S. public school population but only 16% of gifted classes, a 40% discrepancy. Also, African Americans make up 19% of the U.S. public school population but only 10% of gifted classes, a nearly 50% discrepancy (Ford, 2015).

According to Ford (2015), there are 10 ways to remedy the racial inequity in education, with two heavily involving funding at the principal's or district's discretion: provide aggressively proactive training to staff in gifted education and provide culturally responsive education. In

Texas schools, gifted funding is allocated on a per-student basis of up to 5% of the total student population (J. Hodges, 2018). Based on the total budget, 40% is mandated to be spent directly on gifted resources, while 60% is discretionary and can be used to pay for anything from electricity to classroom supplies. Despite the successes of students of color in schools promoting individualism, evidence still indicates minority students are isolated and marginalized, putting limits on educational equity and justice (Kohl & Pizarro, 2016).

Many teachers impacted by the implementation of student-based budgeting teach in urban areas where many students are students of color (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Research focused on the impact an appointed school board has on race, determining if an elected school board has an impact on communities of color, especially Black and brown communities. The appointed school board agreed to close 49 schools, which were predominately located in black neighborhoods, causing students to go to schools farther from home, and causing layoffs or about 5,000 teachers who were mostly black teachers (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019)

Teachers are less likely to remain long term in schools which are predominantly African American than in schools with students of other racial or ethnic identities (Lipman, Gutstein, Gutierrez, & Blanche, 2015). In keeping with the equity theory, concerning teachers in New York, lesser qualified teachers teach poor non-White students (B. D. Baker & Weber, 2016).

**Social equity.** Higher salaries can draw more quality teachers to the profession. For example, a teacher with a relatively high salary is less likely to switch districts when near the top of the salary cap in the district (B. D. Baker & Weber, 2016). In the context of social equity, student-based budgeting advocates argue the budgeting mechanism is the most equitable way to fund K–12 public schools, with each student receiving the same amount of funding (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Also, supporters of student-based budgeting assert the funding mechanism is an

efficient way to fund schools because the district office no longer must waste money on students who are not attending. Lastly, student-based budgeting supporters enjoy the shifting of decentralizing the budget to the principal to decide which enrichment programming (music, arts, foreign language, etc.) best fits the school as the principal is more aware than district officials of school needs.

Critics of student-based budgeting argue the funding model treats every student the same regardless of income (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Furthermore, critics believe student-based budgeting structures force low-enrollment schools to make cuts to programming, extracurricular courses, teachers, and support staff, including clerks, counselors, and assistant principals. As a result, low-enrollment schools in a low-income neighborhood begin to look less attractive, and families exercise the right to school choice, with many parents choosing neighboring privatized charter schools. Also, small schools have more teaching and staff vacancies due to budget cuts and disruptions, making small schools in a student-based budgeting system hard to staff.

### **Student Achievement**

While student-based budgeting is used to seek equity, transparency, and flexibility, the main priority of the model is to increase student achievement (Travers & Catallo, 2015). Student achievement is an issue in K–12 public education. In the United States, achievement is typically measured by multiple standards, including standardized test scores, high school dropout rates, transfer rates, and teacher attrition rates (Lee & Polachek, 2018). Based on the research, student-based budgeting can limit resources. Students receiving about 10%, or about \$1,000 more per year in school funding have resulted in a 3.0-percentage-point growth in college enrollment and a 2.3-percentage-point improvement in degree obtainment (Hyman, 2017).

*Teacher attrition* is defined as teachers leaving the profession or changing schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). According to Thompson and Thompson (2018), K–12 education can be achieved when the home, school, and community work as a cohesive unit to build high self-esteem in the child. When discussing the achievement gap, the comparison is usually by race (mainly Black and Hispanic students) in comparison to White students. Defining, measuring, and holding the appropriate people accountable for student achievement continues to be debated.

According to the literature reviewed, student-based budgeting could remedy the achievement gap. Under student-based budgeting, the money follows the student wherever the student goes (Travers & Catallo, 2015). One remedy to combat the perpetuation of poverty in urban and rural schools is through the installation of collaborative school leadership, which seeks to provide equitable and quality education where the school, family, and community work in partnership. (Thompson & Thompson, 2018). According to Jackson et al. (2016), increases in per-pupil funding by 10% each year over a 12-year span resulted in about 7% higher wages and over a 3% decrease in poverty for graduates.

### **The Gap in Literature**

A gap in the literature exists regarding teachers' perspectives on the impact of student-based budgeting. The federal government is opening the door to involving more teachers in policymaking (Brown, 2015). The number of teacher opportunities to engage in policy has grown since the turn of the 21st century. In addition to teacher unions, other educational organizations help train teachers to get involved in influencing educational policy. Organizations influencing local, state, and national education policies include National Network of State

Teachers of the Year, Teach Plus, Hope Street Group, America Achieves, Educators 4 Excellence, Leadership for Educational Equity, and Teach for America.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education provides two Teaching Ambassador Fellowships, which allow teachers to work collaboratively on a proposed or established educational policy with lawmakers to provide professional input for one school year part-time while still teaching full-time (Brown, 2015). The teachers will read bills or proposals and add opinions to the final bill. Teachers will also analyze and evaluate current educational policies and make recommendations for modifications if necessary. Teachers can also write opinion-editorials to newspapers to provide perspectives on educational policies and how the policies impacts some specific aspect of education. The need for research on teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting's impact continues because teachers make up the bulk of employees in any school district. Funding affects the employment of teachers, the resources teachers use in the classroom, and the number of students teachers teach at one time. Discovering the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of teachers can influence how principals, district officials, and lawmakers make future decisions regarding student-based budgeting. Illinois teachers' insight can influence lawmakers to allow teachers to have a permanent place in collaborating with district officials and policymakers on educational policies. The measure may allow for more balanced decision making in school districts.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature related to K–12 public school teachers' perspectives and experiences with student-based budgeting, a funding formula rising in popularity, mostly in urban school districts, was provided. The literature highlighted a variety of implementations in different school districts, either district-wide or state-wide. Also, the literature revealed a variety of 21st-century

laws and policies which prepared the way for student-based budgeting to enter the realm of education. Furthermore, reasons for support and criticism of student-based budgeting were detailed from multiple perspectives, including district officials, principals, and lawmakers. Few qualitative and quantitative studies on student-based budgeting using teachers as subjects exist.

After analyzing the literature, four themes became apparent under the main topic of school reform: laws and policies, school leadership, school equity, and student achievement. Subthemes under equity emerged, including racial, social, and gender equity. The literature gave the reason for why the studied topic is under researched, with a gap in the literature on Illinois teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting and how the school funding model is used to practice equity in the school system, including equity in resources and funding for students.

The literature revealed many student-based budgeting models are practiced in urban school districts where the majority of student populations are African American and Hispanic. Based on the research, teachers are impacted by the funding formula in multiple ways. One aspect is employment. Because the money follows students rather than schools, a school with low enrollment can lose positions. Teachers, who work in the district where the qualitative case study was conducted, can also lose positions if the school closes because there is no guarantee of being hired at another school in the district. Student-based budgeting, also known as weighted school funding, is attracting more districts, with some implementing the program district-wide or beginning with a pilot (Travers & Catallo, 2015).

The purpose of the study was to narrow the gap in literature while expanding the knowledge and understanding of how teachers experience student-based budgeting's impact. Based on the literature and synthesizing information, student-based budgeting is the result of 21st-century school reforms to remedy minimal student achievement by providing equity to all

students (Chin & Chuang, 2015). The budgeting method affords principals the latitude to differentiate fund allocation based on the school's specific needs (Travers & Catallo, 2015).

Principals are also challenged with the financial task of being compliant when given a set amount of funds for the school year despite the need being higher than the budget (Kelleher, 2015). Student-based budgeting can be most effective when the school has an inclusive design team which includes teachers to provide input (Travers & Catallo, 2015).

The following sections address the qualitative case study's research and design methods to conduct the study. The three questions which guided the qualitative case study are presented along with the rationale. Also included are details of the role of the researcher, research procedures, reliability and validity of the qualitative case study, and ethical procedures. The strategic instrumentation and permissions to conduct the study are further chronicled. Additionally, data analysis procedures for the qualitative case study are defined.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Student-based budgeting is a K–12 public school funding method whereby school funding is based on the number of students enrolled in the school (Travers & Catallo, 2015). For example, if each enrolled student receives \$4,000 from the district and the school has 600 students, the school receives \$2.4 million. Weights, or additional funds, may be added if the school has a population of low-income students, ELLs, or special needs learners. The principal must use the set amount to pay salaries of teachers and other staff members who provide core and extracurricular programs for students. Each school principal has the autonomy to decide which programming best fits the school (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). For instance, one principal can use funds to pay for a full-time music teacher, while another principal may use funds to pay for a school librarian. Depending on the amount of money in the fixed budget, a principal may or may not be able to afford both positions (Vevea, 2014).

In the studied Illinois school district, the central office supplements the schools' budgets by paying for certain positions. The positions include one school counselor, one school clerk, and one assistant principal. Starting in the 2018–2019 school year, special education teachers' salaries also came from the central office's budget rather than the school's budget. According to Karp (2019), special education teaching positions are one of the hardest teaching positions to fill.

Student-based budgeting is a funding phenomenon in public K–12 schools which commenced in the late 1990s (Fogarty et al., 2015). The funding trend is practiced primarily in urban school districts such as Denver, Houston, and Seattle. Student-based budgeting has been implemented statewide in some states such as Nevada and California.

The student-based budgeting funding model differs from the traditional funding formula referred to as school-based budgeting or position-based budgeting. In school- or position-based



budgeting, the central office pays for school positions and does not give the primary responsibility to principals to decide how to fund positions. Researchers have evaluated the benefits of the student-based budgeting funding formula (Hourigan, 2016), as adequate school funding is paramount for providing quality education (Jackson et al., 2016).

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore the impact student-based budgeting has on teachers. Perspectives and experiences from district leaders and policymakers, which heavily show support for the student-based budgeting model, have been documented. Little research on teachers' views on the topic is presented. Recording teachers' perspectives and experiences may provide insight into how student-based budgeting is being implemented.

Teachers are integral stakeholders in the building and may directly see how funds impact equity in the school (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Though teachers have little to no influence on how the budgeting formula is utilized in the school or district, teachers influence ways to fundraise for the school (Abdi, 2015).

The study explored how educational equity is practiced in a school and district. The following research questions guided the qualitative case study to gain comprehensive perspectives and experiences of teachers:

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' experiences with student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' views on equity in education in a large Illinois urban school district?

The qualitative research studied the effect of student-based budgeting on teachers. The following sections describe the research methodology used for the study, including target population, sampling methods, instrumentation, data collection, and validity and reliability. Also included are the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, data analysis, and ethical procedures utilized in the study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

A qualitative case study was the design of the research, which can be defined as an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir, & Waseem, 2019). The design is common in social science but is also used in the education field (Baškarada, 2014). The research design suited the study because its approach provides a specific, up-close, detailed examination of a subject of a case in its real-life form (Creswell & Gutterman, 2015). The study explored how student-based budgeting is implemented in an urban Illinois school district and how teachers are affected by the implementation.

The qualitative case study is an appropriate design for the research because it focused on teachers, a specific group of people working directly inside the school system and in the school building. Teachers were the chosen demographic of the study because the group of educators do not make budgeting decisions but is aware of how money is utilized in the school. Teachers' salaries come from funds allocated to each school from the student-based budgeting method (S. Farmer & Baber, 2019). Teachers are tasked with teaching students using a set amount of resources provided by the school based on the principal's priorities. Teachers were able to offer an explanation for the observed phenomenon (Gammelgaard, 2017).

The use of a qualitative case study captures the thoughts and feelings of a particular group of people in a study which is challenging in conventional research approaches (Baškarada,

2014). Teacher participants from an Illinois school district expressed the effects of student-based budgeting on the career chosen as public school teachers in a semistructured focus group setting (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). The research design was appropriate and beneficial for answering the research questions because a diverse group of teachers shared experiences with other teachers in a nonthreatening environment without fear of retaliation or judgment, which sets the atmosphere for free exchange.

The type of study focused on why and how observed behaviors occurred (Sutton, 2015). Focusing on observed behaviors justifies why a focus group format was implemented in the qualitative study: to help participants identify, share, and clarify viewpoints and specific experiences. The online focus group promoted synergy and spontaneity and encouraged participants to comment, explain, share, and disagree (Tausch & Menold, 2016).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher implemented multiple roles for the study, including observer and facilitator. In qualitative research, it is customary to specify the researcher's roles in the study because many researchers are involved in every stage of the research process from concept to interviewing to coding (Mahnaz, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Mahnaz, & Cheraghi, 2014). A code is a detailed concept interpreted by the researcher to ascertain the core meaning of the data (Theron, 2015).

Participants were observed during the focus group portion of the study while answering eight questions. The primary purpose of intentional observation was to capture the human experience without judgment, assumption, or generalization (Ghirotto, 2016). The focus group was facilitated for continuity, monitoring equity in participant airtime, making clarifications, and answering questions objectively, if necessary.

Encounters with potential participants may have included participating in the same district professional development sessions or delegate meetings facilitated by the Chicago Teachers Union. To avoid ethical conflicts over validity or reliability, teachers who were current or past coworkers or had casual relationships with the researcher, who is a teacher in the school district, were excluded from the study. No participant of the qualitative case study worked as a subordinate or immediate colleague to the researcher during the professional workday. The purpose of the decision was to eliminate the possible false perception of demonstrating power, control, or bias during any aspect of the study (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Additionally, no conflicts of interest were demonstrated during the study. No use of incentives for participation was given to focus group participants.

To manage variables of participant interaction outside of the study, a focus group meeting was held in an environment free from any school district or union affiliation and influence. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus group took place on Zoom. The school district did not use Zoom as a virtual platform. Therefore, a personal Zoom account was created to detach the study from district influence.

Conducting the focus group online was more feasible to ensure participants did not feel unsafe in the physical environment. After suggesting social distancing in a physical space by sitting six feet apart, with everyone wearing a mask, two-thirds of participants still felt uncomfortable. Additionally, wearing a mask during the focus group could have led to errors during automatic transcription. To avoid ambiguity, words were clearly defined in detail and, when necessary, read aloud, which enabled participants to ask clarifying or probing questions (Haines, 2017).

## **Research Procedures**

This section highlights the processes used to conduct the study. Case study research has grown in popularity in the education sector where the planning, preparation, and implementation of the process afford a unique opportunity for credible research (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). The section also highlights the rationale for the target population and sample size (Boddy, 2016). Following professional research protocols promoted efficiency within the qualitative case study. Further information detailing the instrumentation is provided, including the use of the following instruments: online survey, in-person focus group, and questionnaire.

### **Population and Sample Selection**

The Illinois school district had over 15,000 teachers who met the qualifications to participate in the qualitative study. The sample of 21 participants was less than 1% of the target population. The number of participants was appropriate for the qualitative case study (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). Qualitative case study samples tend to be small to gain an in-depth case-focused analysis. One widely used sampling method in qualitative studies is purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when a targeted sample needs to be reached quickly (Ames, Glenton, & Lewis, 2019). For the qualitative case study, maximum variation/heterogeneity was the chosen method of purposeful sample to provide a diverse range of cases relevant to a specific phenomenon (Crossman, 2020).

A rigorous process was implemented to determine the participation criteria. Evaluating who would be included and excluded in the qualitative study was paramount to the validity of the study. Criteria evaluation was necessary for the qualitative case study because common participant criteria errors, such as using the same variable to define both the inclusion and exclusion criteria, can occur (Patino & Ferreira, 2018).

Participants must have met specific criteria. The target population of the study included K–12 active classroom teachers from an Illinois school district. Active classroom teachers are teachers who are teaching in the classroom during the school year of the study. The teacher must have been employed for a minimum of three years in the studied school district. The participant must be a currently employed full-time teacher in the studied school district.

Teachers who demonstrated bias or had little to no knowledge of student-based budgeting were excluded from the study. The excluded participants included teachers who were laid off, were on maternity or paternity leave, were on short-term disability, were under investigation, had a pending lawsuit or complaint against the district, and teachers who had less than three years of experience with the district. Prekindergarten teachers were also excluded from the qualitative case study because prekindergarten classes receive funding directly from the state and are not affected by the district's student-based budgeting funding formula.

The rationale for the criteria allowed the qualitative study to have participants with ample experience with student-based budgeting to provide a thorough perspective. Novice teachers and experienced teachers new to the district were not likely to be knowledgeable enough to have formulated an opinion of the funding formula. Additionally, new teachers may lack the capacity to articulate a thorough experience with student-based budgeting. Also, teachers employed with the district traditionally reach tenure after three years. Teachers with less than three years of experience have probationary status. Probationary teachers receive little to no protection against nonrenewal and may fear expressing true feelings and experiences. A teacher is nonrenewed when the principal does not extend an invitation for the upcoming school year. Probationary teachers may have apprehension in participating in the study even if confidentiality is provided and retaliation against a teacher in a study is prohibited by the school district's policy. To have

an array of perspectives from qualified participants, selected teachers ranged in content areas and grade levels taught.

Participants worked with a variety of student demographics based on student race, socioeconomic status, academic progress, and school population. The qualitative case study research method was used to capture participants' subjective experiences centered on a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative case study used purposeful sampling to choose participants. Purposeful sampling includes participants who are familiar with the phenomenon of study who are willing to express experiences and perspectives in an articulate manner (Palinkas et al., 2015). Specifically, the participants were chosen to discuss experiences with student-based budgeting, comparing and contrasting a variety of experiences based on grade level, subject taught, experiences with other schools, and other budgeting systems such as school-based budgeting.

Several methods for recruiting members were utilized in the qualitative case study. Creative measures were used for recruiting participants because doctoral students are limited to research funding (Rodney, Keller, & Ainsworth, 2016). The Chicago Teachers Union assisted with recruitment by sending an e-mail of the study to its members soliciting the participation of eligible teachers, validating the authenticity and validity of the study (see Appendix A). The Chicago Teachers Union leadership sent the flyer (see Appendix B) about the qualitative case study via e-mail in the organization's weekly e-mail updates to members.

Membership to the Chicago Teachers Union is not automatic. Teachers have the choice to join by filling out a membership card online. Educators who are not a part of the union are less than one percent, with the majority of the one percent being new teachers with less than three years of experience. Non-members were not able to be reached because union membership is

only known by each school delegate. The teachers union leadership did not provide the information for the study. Soliciting a nonmember through a personal email presented a challenge. One challenge with reaching non-members was the study was conducted during the summer months where reaching out to each school delegate to obtain the personal email of non-members of the union was an arduous task. Delegates did not respond to emails and no delegate responded with the names of non-members who were willing to participate. The measures for participant selection were fully inclusive for eligible candidates who fit the sampling parameters (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015).

An original online survey was utilized to gather basic statistical information about the participants, such as age, race, education level, years of service, content taught, and grade level taught (see Appendix C). The survey was used to prescreen potential participants to ensure the teachers fit the criteria and to ensure inclusivity to create diversity (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). The survey also gathered information on the school demographics where the participant was employed, including the number of students enrolled, percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch, percentage of students with special needs, and percentage of ELLs. The survey was original because no survey had been created to target the population of participants and gather particular data. The purpose of a survey is to access important characteristics from a large sample of people quickly. In qualitative research, a survey often details human behavior (Ponto, 2016).

The method of data collection included subject matter experts (SMEs) providing professional judgments and suggestions for focus group questions and the questionnaire (see Appendix D). The four focus groups took place on Zoom and were recorded. The study participants were asked eight open-ended questions (Weller et al., 2018). Upon completion of the



focus groups, participants received a transcript of the respective recording via personal e-mail addresses. Participants also received a questionnaire via personal e-mail (Bolarinwa, 2015). The questionnaire was created through Google Forms.

To ensure the accuracy of the qualitative case study, field tests were implemented. SMEs were utilized. The SMEs had a broad knowledge of the studied subject and the target sample population to provide effective critiques to the instrumentation and data collection process. A school district official, teacher union official, teacher with five years of experience, and retired teacher with 35 years of experience provided feedback on removing bias and loaded wording.

The eight open-ended questions aligned with the research questions. Student-based budgeting is funds given to schools based on the number of students enrolled. Each student receives the same amount of money. Exceptions or “weights” are given to students who may be low-income, ELLs, or have special needs. Each question was based specifically on how student-based budgeting is designed. The phenomenon of student-based budgeting includes a principal with one set budget based solely on the number of students, and the principal has the autonomy to allocate funds where needed. The field test provided feedback on how to modify focus group questions to ensure objectivity and eliminate subjectivity and assumptions.

To maintain specific and academic standards in the qualitative case study, strict standards for human protection were incorporated to protect participants against exploitation (Surmiak, 2018). To ensure accuracy, interviews were recorded only with participants’ permission. The focus group participants viewed the respective transcripts for accuracy. To protect the rights of the participants, an informed consent form was provided. The form had a written explanation of the purpose of the study, including design, objectives, procedure, and benefits, and the rights of the participants (Nusbaum, Douglas, Damus, Paasche-Orlow, & Estrella-Luna, 2017). A signed

consent form was collected from each participant before the start of data collection (see Appendix E).

Participants were safeguarded by using participant IDs and nondisclosure of information shared during data collection. All research participants participated in the study voluntarily. In the online Zoom focus groups, participants were protected from online hackers. The Zoom invite was only sent to participants. The invitations were sent separately. In each e-mail, the first name along with the grade cluster and school enrollment code were given to the participant to maintain confidentiality and to assist with coding. Participants were reminded to identify themselves using the code when speaking in the focus groups to ensure proper transcription. Numbers were coded by grade level, content taught, and school demographics. A password was issued to each participant to log on. Once logged on to Zoom, there was a waiting room. E-mails were verified before entering the Zoom meeting. Once in the meeting, participants were told again participation was voluntary and exiting the study at any time was allowed without questions.

### **Instrumentation**

Instruments are the tools used to gather information for an eligible study. Instruments used for the qualitative case study included a survey, focus groups with transcription and field notes, a questionnaire, and member checking. The instruments were suitable for the qualitative case study because participants were able to demonstrate unique involvement in the study, and the instruments allowed for large amounts of data to be coded and categorized (Sutton, 2015).

An original survey was created to access statistical information from participants, including years of service, grade level and subject taught, level of education, gender, race, school rating, and student demographics. The purpose of a survey is to access important characteristics

from a large sample of people quickly. In qualitative research, a survey often details human behavior (Ponto, 2016; see Appendix C).

The focus group portion of the study included eight open-ended questions capturing the views, perspectives, and experiences of the participants. Questions were asked orally. Each participant received an e-mailed copy of the questions one day in advance to process thoughts and answer effectively. Unlike a one-on-one interview, participants were the only ones guiding one another in the course of the conversations (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018).

The eight open-ended questions were appropriate for the qualitative case study as the questions allowed the participants to explain the personal and professional effects of student-based budgeting based on the specified content area, grade level, and years of service (see Appendix F). Because the teachers had a variety of backgrounds and were employed in schools with different budgets, the sum of people's experience can offer more than one single interpretation in grasping the social phenomenon (Paradis, O'Brien, Nimmon, Bandiera, & Martimianakis, 2016).

The online questionnaire (see Appendix G) was distributed to all participants immediately after each focus group. The questionnaire, consisting of four questions, was a Google Forms document sent to each participant's e-mail address. The purpose of the questionnaire was to allow participants one-on-one time to reflect on recently shared ideas, with no potential influence from other participants.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection section includes a discussion of how data collection occurred in the qualitative case study. A preliminary survey, virtual focus groups with transcripts and field notes, and a questionnaire were the instruments used in the qualitative case study, which generated a

large amount of data (Sutton, 2015). An online survey was given as an alternative to a physical survey, as mandated medical quarantine was in place for citizens of the district. Online surveys were sent to each participant's e-mail address to select a variety of eligible participants. Surveys of selected participants were downloaded into Microsoft Word and put into a PDF file. A secure link where the survey was housed was included in the e-mail for participants to click. After surveys were conducted, teachers who met the criteria were purposely selected for the focus groups.

Twenty-seven participants were selected and divided into four heterogeneous focus groups. The rationale for the number of participants allowed for the absence of two participants per group while still meeting the minimum number of participants needed for a qualitative case study. Each focus group was divided into three categories of participants. The three categories of participants were based on school enrollment. The phenomenon of student-based budgeting means teacher staffing and programming are based solely on the number of students enrolled. Gathering perspectives from the teachers working with different school populations was sought in the qualitative case study. One category of teachers was employed in schools with one to 300 students. The second category of teacher participants was employed in schools with 301 to 700 students. The third category of teachers was employed in schools with more than 700 students. Focus group questions and questionnaires were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Data Preparation**

All documents, including surveys, SMEs' critiques, focus groups transcripts and field notes, consent forms, and questionnaires were housed securely in Microsoft Word. Documents were saved in PDF format to keep from being edited without the express permission of involved

parties. To prepare for data analysis and to prevent any distorted data from entering the final analysis, recorded notes used in the focus group were transcribed through the online transcription service Rev.com. Field notes were coupled with the transcripts to capture notes on impressions, behaviors, and nonverbal cues which are not properly captured through audio recording (Sutton, 2015). Field note behaviors included laughing, gestures, long pauses, and looks of discomfort.

### **Data Analysis**

The premise of the qualitative case study was to synthesize the experiences and perceptions of teachers to interpret the meaning of how teachers are impacted by student-based budgeting and if student-based budgeting demonstrates educational equity. When analyzing the data, several categories were used. Narrative analysis was used to summarize the data (Parcell & Baker, 2017). Narrative analysis was an appropriate method for the qualitative case study because the method involves focusing on the experiences of each participant and the unique experience and perspective of student-based budgeting (Parcell & Baker, 2017). The qualitative case content analysis online focus groups, focus group transcripts, and questionnaires. Behavioral data were taken only from the focus group portion. Discourse analysis was also gathered from the focus group portion of the study in order to observe participant interaction. The data were coded using a list of positive and negative responses.

### **Reliability and Validity**

In a qualitative study, establishing reliability and validity is necessary. Reliability demonstrates consistency, which means if the same test were performed with another group with the same demographics, the outcome would be the same. Validity refers to the extent to which the measurement measures what it is intended to measure (Palinkas et al., 2015). Both reliability and validity were shown through online surveys, focus groups' transcripts, and questionnaires.

Trustworthiness was proven by using four components: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research because there is no one right answer in qualitative research, no absolutes, and not just one reality as in quantitative research (Anney, 2014). Therefore, ensuring qualitative practices are not measured through quantitative measures was enforced.

Credibility and dependability were established in the qualitative study through triangulation implementation and discussing and clarifying potential research bias. The study was executed in three ways—SMEs' analysis of questions, semistructured focus groups, and a questionnaire after the focus group—ensuring triangulation. Member checking was also utilized in the qualitative case study to establish credibility and dependability (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Member checking affords each voluntary participant an opportunity to review the recorded data, including a transcript of the audio recording, which occurred through the Zoom online platform. The categories of teachers were based on school enrollment. The phenomenon of student-based budgeting involves schools funding based on student enrollment, which is how teachers are hired and salary is determined.

The first category of teachers in the online focus groups was from low-enrollment schools with one to 300 students. The second category of teachers was from medium-enrollment schools with 301 to 700 students. The third category of teachers was from high-enrollment schools with more than 700 students.

Participants reviewed a copy of the respective transcribed focus group interview for accuracy. Having participants check data validated the collection process, increasing credibility and participation involvement (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Having

participants view transcripts also ensured the ethics of the research were preserved (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015).

Transferability in qualitative research means the same as generalizability or external validity in quantitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Transferability cannot prove a study's findings will be applicable, but transferability demonstrates the research findings could be relevant in other contexts, situations, settings, and populations. Transferability applies to the qualitative study because other teachers' experiences and perspectives on how the profession is affected by student-based budgeting would be similar. The findings, variables, and instruments from the qualitative study may be useful in other urban school districts using student-based budgeting. Transferability is an imperative factor in a qualitative case study because many school districts in other cities outside Illinois can use the study to better help district and political officials analyze for similarities in perspectives and experiences in order to improve or maintain the funding formula.

Confirmability is the final aspect of trustworthiness, which means the results of the research can be corroborated with others and validated by others. The interpretations from the qualitative case study were solely based on the data gained from the online surveys, focus groups with transcription and field notes, a questionnaire, and member checking (Anney, 2014). Based on the variety of responses from study group participants by grade level, subject taught, and student demographics taught, confirmability was evidenced in the qualitative case study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Qualitative researchers can face ethical challenges different from those faced by quantitative researchers because, unlike quantitative research in which data are numerical and more concise, qualitative research relies on the interpretation and synthesis of participants'

information (Mahnaz et al., 2014). Following ethical standards is the highest priority of the study to ensure participants are protected and valid and reliable research can occur. For the study to be bias-free, strict standards and procedures were demonstrated in each step. To further decrease bias, interaction with participants for the qualitative case study was professional and not casual. Dialogue only occurred among participants, with no outside influence.

An informed consent form required participants to indicate only professional conduct was instituted during participation in research, there was no coercion to respond in a certain way, and all experiences, perceptions, and opinions were original with no outside influence (Haines, 2017). Participants were informed orally and in written form of the purpose of the research and that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Written and oral notification occurred before the virtual groups. Participants were told study participation could end at any time during the study with no questions asked. To protect the identities of participants and schools, fictitious names were used.

To protect adult participants' information and the credible reputation of the research, the ACE IRB reviewed the qualitative case study proposal to ensure the study met requirements for interviewing adult participants. The school district research review board provided preliminary permission to conduct the study (see Appendix H) contingent upon approval of the ACE IRB. Once the ACE IRB approved the instruments for the qualitative case study, the school district research review board provided full permission to conduct the study (see Appendix I).

A comprehensive proposal of the qualitative case study was sent to the school district's research review board seeking approval to interview teacher employees. The ACE IRB also approved the proposal to interview study participants in an ethical manner. Appendix J is



evidence of the Illinois school district's guidelines for doctoral candidates and other researchers who wish to study employees, students, or parents in the district.

### **Chapter Summary**

The rationale for the research methodology, selection process, instruments, and ethical procedures for the qualitative case study were detailed. The qualitative case study acquired teacher perspectives and experiences of the impact of student-based budgeting on teachers. Included were the selection process for participants and selection rationale, the types of instruments used in the study to demonstrate triangulation, and the rationale for the chosen instruments. The data collection process and ethical procedures also were highlighted. The following sections outline the results of the qualitative case study.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore Illinois K–12 public school teachers' perceptions, opinions, and experiences with student-based budgeting regarding equity in education. Active classroom teachers from an Illinois school district where the student-based budgeting formula is practiced were the voluntary participants of the study. Online focus groups through Zoom made up the primary data collection for Illinois teacher participants to articulate perspectives of the budgeting formula based on experiences and perceptions in the workplace.

The results section of the qualitative case study commences with the participant selection process, followed by the focus group procedures. The research questions of the qualitative case study were guided by the equity theory developed by Adams (1963). The four semistructured focus groups provided detailed information leading to valid outcomes and themes, which are detailed in the following sections.

The qualitative case study was guided by the equity theory, which is considered a justice theory. The theory was originated by American behavioral psychologist Adams (1963). The theory was used to ascertain if the allocation of resources is fair between relational parties. Adams likened equity to the correlation between ratios: the contributions the individual makes to the rewards for each individual. Adams, when describing equity, referenced the dissonance theory, the belief individuals have a tendency to seek consistency among others' beliefs or opinions. The equity theory states if inconsistency exists among attitudes and behaviors, something needs to change to eliminate the dissonance (Adams, 1963). Additionally, the foundation of the justice theory is the belief individuals enjoy fair treatment. The original concept appeared in a business-related article. The behavioral psychologist's focus was the employer–employee relationship. Adams said the relationship should not be seen as just an

economic transaction, but the relationship should also involve elements of relative justice, which supersedes business and provides perceptions of equity and inequity. The theory also explains whether the allocation of resources is fair to both relational parties.

The qualitative case study was guided by three research questions. The questions were integral to the study and were integrated into the focus group questions and the questionnaire. The research questions were created with guidance from the equity theory, providing a framework for the qualitative case study.

Research Question 1 asked, What are teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district? The question examined teachers' opinions of the rationale for student-based budgeting by the school district and how the formula has affected the quality of education of K–12 students. Additionally, comparing and contrasting the budgeting formula to another variation of student-based budgeting was examined to ascertain which budgeting formula is more beneficial for district stakeholders. The question also asked why the former budgeting formula may have been abandoned in order to implement student-based budgeting.

Research Question 2 asked, What are teachers' experiences with student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district? The question asked participants to examine day-to-day realities of student-based budgeting in the classroom, school, and district. The question also explored how student-based budgeting impacted interactions with school administration, colleagues, students, families, the teachers union, community members, and district and political officials. Analyzing the experiences of the participants revealed if the budgeting formula impacted teachers in different ways based on grade level, years of service, content area, school enrollment, school location, or socioeconomic status of students' families.

Research Question 3 asked, What are teachers' views on equity in education in a large Illinois urban school district? The question provided participants the opportunity to detail the meaning of equity. The way participants perceive equity can vary according to the level of equity student-based budgeting provides. Additionally, the question asked teachers to explore feelings about the budgeting formula's impact on the educational quality of students in the district. Furthermore, participants' knowledge of equity was examined and how equity can exist in a K–12 public school system.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection included using a survey, four focus groups with transcription and field notes, a questionnaire, and member checking. The use of instruments is common in qualitative studies. The procedural use of the instruments demonstrated triangulation, which is necessary to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the qualitative case study (Dikko, 2016).

The qualitative case study included 27 teachers in an Illinois school district. The voluntary participants were purposely chosen to be a part of a focus group. Approximately 15,000 eligible candidates received an official e-mail from the district's teachers union. Two e-mail blasts were sent in the same week, on June 10 and June 13, 2020. The e-mail articulated the purpose of the study, the criteria, the name and contact information of the researcher, and the primary method of the study, which was a virtual focus group. The flyer for the study was also included in the e-mail (see Appendix B). Forty-three interested people responded by e-mail or phone. After prescreening the candidates for years of service, grade taught, and school enrollment, 30 candidates were eligible and invited to participate in the focus group.

Twenty-one was a sufficient number for the selected qualitative case study for evidence of saturation (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Thirty candidates were selected in case some of the

teachers chose to exit the study. Three participants did not complete the study. The first participant had to exit due to having a baby earlier than expected, the second participant could not continue with the study due to illness, and the third participant was unable to finish the study while on vacation because Internet connectivity was not strong enough to stay connected to the focus group.

After the 30 participants were deemed eligible for the study, participants received separate e-mails with next steps. Three actions were given to participants: completing a statistical survey through Google Forms (see Appendix C); reading, signing, and returning the informed voluntary participant consent form; and selecting dates and times available for a focus group. Each participant responded by the June 30, 2020, deadline. Schedules for the virtual focus groups were sent out on July 1, 2020. The dates and times of the four focus groups were Tuesday, July 7, 2020, at 3:00 p.m.; Saturday, July 11, 2020, at 11:00 a.m.; Sunday, July 12, 2020, at noon; and Friday, July 17, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. To maintain strict online security, a username and passcode were given to each participant. Participants were stationed in a virtual waiting room before entry until names and e-mails were verified. Data collection began on June 28 and ended on July 20, 2020.

The 27 participants were divided into four heterogeneous focus groups. Heterogeneous grouping was selected to have participants hear and glean information from other perspectives and experiences so comparisons and contrasts could be made. Each focus group was asked to choose four dates and time of best availability. Each participant was aware the focus group would be online. The goal of the research was to complete the focus groups within five weeks after participant selection in order to begin data analysis in a timely manner. The time frame between collecting data from the first focus group to the fourth was 10 days.

Each virtual focus group session comprised eight questions. Each focus group had seven participants, with the exception of the first focus group, which had six participants. Three to 10 participants per focus group is a rational number for discussions lasting up to 90 minutes to afford each participant the opportunity to engage (Nyumba et al., 2018). Each focus group was recorded with the permission of the participants. After the recording of each focus group, an automated transcript was completed. Each participant received an e-mailed copy of the transcribed version of the focus group with each participant's comments highlighted so the participant could easily locate responses in order to analyze for accuracy. Participants also received a questionnaire (see Appendix G) to gather new perspectives and information as a result of the focus group.

Of the 27 study participants, 10 were male and 17 were female. Seven teachers worked at low-enrollment schools, 10 at medium-enrollment schools, and 10 at high-enrollment schools. Twenty-three teachers had earned advanced degrees, either a master's degree or above.

To maintain participant confidentiality during the focus groups, each teacher was identified by first name and school enrollment code. The first name was followed by two letter codes. The first letter represented the grade cluster. Grades K–5 used the letter E, middle school grades used the letter M, and high school grades used the letter H. The second code represented the category of school enrollment where the participant worked. For example, participants in low-enrollment schools with one to 350 students used the letter A, participants in medium-enrollment schools with 350 to 700 students used the letter B, and participants in high-enrollment schools with more than 700 students used the letter C. For example, “Mary EB” reveals Mary works in a medium-enrollment elementary school. Using the codes helped identify participants and code the experiences and themes.

The first focus group took place on July 7, 2020. The seven participants had agreed on the time. An hour before the focus group, one participant asked to be rescheduled due to an emergency. The first focus group lasted 70 minutes. The second focus group took place on July 11, 2020, at 11:00 a.m. and lasted 64 minutes. Seven participants were present at the second focus group. The third focus group took place on July 12, 2020, at noon and lasted 67 minutes. Seven participants were present during the third focus group. The fourth focus group took place on July 17, 2020, at 4:30 p.m. and lasted 71 minutes. Seven participants were present during the fourth focus group.

Unusual circumstances occurred during the focus groups. One participant who was scheduled for the first focus group had to reschedule and participated in the second focus group. Another participant was scheduled for the third focus group but rescheduled for the fourth focus group. Participant AZ came to the fourth focus group 18 minutes late due to technical issues logging in to Zoom. The same participant exited the focus group 11 minutes before the conclusion due to an emergency. In the fourth focus group, Participant Y had an unstable Internet connection; due to the technical difficulty, the participant was asked to repeat comments two times. Some of the participant's original responses were not fully transcribed by the Rev transcription service. A subsequent private conversation with Participant Y obtained clarity from the transcript to ensure accuracy. As a result, Participant Y responded to the questions through e-mail which were not picked up by transcription. Table 2 describes the demographics of the elementary and middle school focus group participants in the qualitative case study. The diversity of teacher participants added a variety of perspectives, experiences, and opinions to ascertain similarities and differences among low-, medium-, and high-enrollment schools.

Table 2

*Elementary and Middle School Teacher Participants*

Participant ID	School enrollment	Grades taught	Content taught	% students receiving free or reduced lunch	% students of color
A	277	K–4	All	76–100	76–100
B	468	K–8	Physical education	76–100	76–100
C	831	6–8	Science	26–50	26–50
D	750	K	All	26–50	26–50
F	460	K–5	ELA, social studies	76–100	76–100
H	375	K–5	ELA	76–100	76–100
I	300	6–8	SPED, math	76–100	76–100
J	291	6–8	Math	76–100	76–100
K	625	6–8	ELA, social studies	76–100	76–100
M	571	K–5	ELA, social studies	76–100	76–100
O	850	6–8	Science, ESL	76–100	76–100
P	337	6–8	SPED, ELA	76–100	76–100
T	341	K–5	ELA	76–100	76–100
U	550	K–5	Math	76–100	76–100
V	1,360	K–5	All	76–100	76–100
X	500	6–8	Science	76–100	76–100
Y	465	6–8	ELA	0–25	0–25
Z	265	K–5	SPED, ELA, math	76–100	76–100

*Note:* ELA = English language arts; SPED = special education; ESL = English as a second language.

Table 3 provides a demographic description of the teacher participants in high school. All teachers are tenured with more than three years of experience; the average high school teacher



had 13 years' experience. To preserve the confidentiality of participants, the experience level is not provided.

Table 3

*High School Teacher Participants*

Participant ID	School enrollment	Grades taught	Content taught	% students receiving free or reduced lunch	% students of color
E	1,036	9–12	Librarian	76–100	76–100
G	500	9–12	Social studies	51–75	76–100
L	652	9–12	SPED, ELA, science	51–75	76–100
N	2,250	9–12	Business, computer science, math	51–75	51–75
Q	1,349	9–12	Math	76–100	76–100
R	1,000	9–12	Social studies	76–100	76–100
S	450	9–12	Social studies	76–100	76–100
W	753	9–12	Math	76–100	76–100
AZ	143	9–12	Theater, digital media	76–100	76–100

*Note:* ELA = English language arts; SPED = special education.

All participants met the requirements for the study. All participants had been employed for a minimum of three years in the district studied. Additionally, teachers were able to articulate an accurate definition of student-based budgeting in the preliminary survey. Demonstrating an understanding of student-based budgeting was vital to participating in the focus group because teachers could have candid discourse regarding general perceptions and personal experiences.

Each of the four focus groups was audio recorded on Zoom. Before each focus group, the voluntary participation form was summarized, and participants were told participation was

voluntary and the participant could exit the focus group at any time without explanation or feeling pressure to remain. Each participant was assured of confidentiality. Additionally, detailed notes were taken, including verbal and nonverbal cues and the probing and clarifying questions which arose from the original open-ended questions.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

Analyzing and making interpretations of the data proved to be a lengthy process. To maintain confidentiality of data, the following security procedures were practiced. Raw data, including participant selection surveys, focus group recordings, questionnaires, transcripts, and informed consent forms, were stored electronically. The focus groups were completed using the proper protocols and guided by the purpose of the qualitative case study. Proper protocols included informing participants participation was voluntary, participation will remain confidential, and first names were used in the focus groups for participants and the researcher to better identify one another. The names of schools were not mentioned, nor years of experience, neither the subject level or grades taught. Letters were used to identify the participants in the written and oral defense of the dissertation. Participants were told the focus groups would be recorded, the estimated time of the focus group, and the number of questions which would be asked. Table 4 presents the themes and subthemes gathered from the qualitative case study. Five major themes emerged, and each theme had a minimum of two subthemes.

After listening to the response of participants from all four focus groups, data was synthesized by writing down repeated experiences and perspectives of participants. The repetition of certain topics transcended all of the focus groups including grade levels of participants, years of service, and content taught. The number of participants and how often the topic was spoken in detail were tallied with the top five discussion topics becoming themes. The

differing points of view were categorized based on the demographics of the participants. For example, teacher stress stemming from the consequence of student-based budgeting was mentioned by 25 out of 27 participants and accounted for approximately 25 percent of the discussion time in each focus group.

Table 4

*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Theme 1: Teacher stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work overload</li> <li>• Understaffed</li> <li>• Teaching undesirable subjects</li> <li>• Fear of losing position</li> <li>• Pressure to fundraise</li> </ul>
Theme 2: Inequity in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of Black educators</li> <li>• Lack of morale</li> <li>• Teacher mobility</li> <li>• Imbalance of content and grade-level resources</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• School closures</li> </ul>
Theme 3: Principals' priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance and enrollment</li> <li>• Staffing practices</li> <li>• Test scores</li> </ul>
Theme 4: Lack of trust in the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 20th day rule</li> <li>• De-professionalization of teachers</li> </ul>
Theme 5: Teacher advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation in school organizations</li> <li>• Parent communication</li> </ul>

**Theme 1: Teacher Stress**

Teachers are reporting more stress in the workplace. Ninety-four percent of middle school teachers are stressed, and the burden needs to be reduced to improve student outcomes (Herman, Prewitt, Eddy, Savale, & Reinke, 2020). Based on responses from the 27 teacher

participants, teacher stress was an impact from student-based budgeting. Differing reasons were given to stress. High school teachers' stress was based more on teaching more subjects than contracted for while elementary and middle school teachers attributed stress teaching more subjects without ample resources.

**Work overload.** Because the bulk of student-based budgeting goes toward school staff salaries, little money is left for instructional materials. Lack of books was the main instructional concern participants faced in the schools. Teachers perceived administrators use the lack of funding for instructional materials to criticize textbooks and workbooks, claiming the books hinder creative instruction. Teachers are then pressured with the task of finding and vetting more online instructional materials, which takes approximately two hours weekly. In addition, the educators said once high-quality materials are located, another two hours per week are spent making copies and compiling instructional materials. "Even with making copies, that is sometimes an issue. The administration may say that we are making too many copies. Last school year, in the 2018–2019 school year, we ran out of copy paper in February," stated Participant C.

**Understaffed.** Of the 12 high school teachers among the four focus groups, all 12 admitted to teaching an extra class which was not a part of the original schedule for the school year. At least one class was added to the participants' schedules after the start of the school year. The action was implemented rather than hiring an extra teacher. The action resulted in four participants teaching a class without proper certification. According to participants, the Illinois State Board of Education notes a teacher can teach a class without proper certification as long as the class is not 50% of the teacher's caseload. Some high school teachers, who teach five classes daily, are pressured to teach a sixth class because there is not enough money in the budget to hire

a full-time teacher. “It is cheaper to pay just an extra hour per day rather than hire a full-time teacher,” according to Participant Q.

**Teaching undesirable subjects.** Some teaching positions are covered by the school district and not under the jurisdiction of the principal in the individual school. For example, special education and preschool teacher positions come from the central office’s budget. The two positions are unique and have certain mandates by the state. As a result, the principal does not have to consider the salary of a pre-K or special education teacher. Three participants (two from the second focus group, one from the third focus group) stated veteran teachers with certifications in special education or preschool are at risk of being removed from teaching a subject enjoyed by the educator. In order for principals to balance the fixed school budgets, veteran teachers have been switched from teaching science to teaching special education.

Participant H was told, ““Even though you are the greatest ELA [English language arts] teacher, I can’t afford to keep you in my budget.”” Participant H was told about the change at the end of the school year and was placed as a special education teacher the following school year. Participant U, who works in a low-enrollment school, shared a similar experience:

As we lose students, we have less and less resources for the things we need. The librarian got pulled from being a librarian to be a special education teacher because it was cheaper and because she was certified in that area. So, staff don’t teach what they love, and arts education has to be sacrificed because they are deemed as less important.

**Fear of losing position.** Each year, most teachers earn two raises. One raise is a cost-of-living raise which every teacher in the district receives July 1, the start of the fiscal year. The second raise is a step raise which teachers earn for years of service. The raise is earned on the anniversary of the teacher’s start date. As a teacher’s salary increases, the fear of losing the

position increases. The fear comes from the set amount of funding schools receive annually for student-based budgeting. Teachers' salary raises must also be accounted for in the budget.

According to participants, principals use several strategies to force teachers to leave the school or transfer into a position which is covered by the district rather than the school. If the strategies do not work, principals may seek to fire the veteran teachers by providing low evaluations based on classroom observations. According to six participants, one strategy principals have used to provoke a veteran teacher to transfer schools in order to have more funding is to switch a teacher's grade or content assignment. For example, a teacher who has taught kindergarten for 12 years could be forced by the principal to teach middle school science with only a week's notice. Principals have the power to change the grade and subject taught by teachers if the educators have the appropriate credentials.

Though Participant L has credentials in pre-K–12, the teacher has always taught middle and high school students in a departmentalized fashion. The veteran teacher said the principal was accustomed to switching veteran teachers annually. Participant L said,

After teaching fifth grade for three years, they [veteran teachers] would be moved to kindergarten. . . . My principal said, "Oh, if you are here next year, I will need you in pre-K," so I went back to [teaching] high school because I never taught anyone below seventh grade. That was her [the principal] signal to get me to leave. I knew it would take a couple of years to be a good pre-K teacher.

Participant J also was forced to leave middle school math, which comprises Grades 6–8 and 11- to 14-year-old students. The veteran teacher had 21 years in education but had never taught third-grade math. Participant J said the summer vacation was spent learning effective strategies on teaching lower-level math content to 7- and 8-year-old students. When the

following school year began, the teacher received low ratings from the principal for low student engagement and lack of content knowledge of third-grade math. Participant J received an overall *unsatisfactory* rating, which can be grounds for layoff, according to the district, even if a teacher was tenured but the teacher failed the remediation process.

Tenure is normally obtained by the district after three years of service. Remediation because of Participant J's *unsatisfactory* rating was completed. Remediation occurs when the principal places the low-rated teacher on an improvement plan. The principal creates goals for the teacher to meet by a specified time. A consulting teacher is provided by the school district to advise the teacher under remediation on strategies to improve teacher practices and student learning. The consulting entails weekly in-person observations for approximately half the school year and a recommendation made by the consulting teacher to the principal regarding whether the teacher should be considered *proficient* or still *unsatisfactory*. A consulting teacher is a teacher with at least three years of experience who received a high rating on the last evaluation. Even with a positive recommendation from the consulting teacher, the principal still chose to fire Participant J. If a teacher does not pass the remediation process, the teacher is not only let go from the school but also fired from the district. At the time of layoff, Participant J made an annual salary of \$99,000. A new teacher with a bachelor's degree makes an average of \$54,000 annually in the school district.

After the layoff by the principal's recommendation, Participant J spent two years in arbitration, challenging the layoff, claiming the *unsatisfactory* rating was unjustified and was only a result of having a high salary. Participant J showed evidence of student growth and proof of meeting goals the principal had set during the remediation process. Participant J won the case, was hired back by the district, and received a check for lost wages.

Participant J subsequently interviewed with three schools for a middle school math position. The teacher thought the experience as not only a math teacher but also a math coach would compel principals to offer the teacher a position. The first two principals were leaders of low-enrollment schools. Participant J said,

I received an offer from each one. And about two days after the offer, the principals said they really liked me, but they had to rescind their offer because I cost too much for their budgets. I thought, here we go again.

After the third interview, in a medium-enrollment school, Participant J was finally offered a seventh-grade math teaching position.

Participant H perceived veteran teachers are punished because if a teacher wants to switch schools to be closer to home or desires a change in environment, the teacher is hesitant because the teacher likely will not be hired despite expertise. The teacher will cost more than principals are willing to spend. Participant C stated, “I am the cost of two teachers.”

Besides veteran teachers with a decade or more of experience, art teachers and librarians seem most at risk of losing teaching positions. The positions are perceived to be more of a luxury than a necessity. Participant E said, “Less than a third of schools in the district have a librarian.” Participant E is a high school librarian who has managed to keep the librarian position when more than half of librarian positions have been eliminated from the school district in the last 10 years. Participant E said,

I only have a bachelor’s degree. Once I figured out how student-based budgeting works, I chose not to go back to school to earn anymore degrees. I do not want to cost too much so the principal will be tempted to get rid of me if the budget gets cut.



Participant E was referring to teachers' salaries increasing based on their level of education. Participant D had a different perspective than Participant E. Participant D felt compelled to go back to school to earn as many degrees and certifications as possible to remain relevant and marketable to maintain employment in her school and across the district. Participant D has a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, an English language arts (ELA) endorsement, a math endorsement, a science endorsement, a social studies endorsement, an English as a second language endorsement, and is currently earning an endorsement in special education. "This way I will not be fired even if they close my current position. I would have to be placed somewhere else in the school building because I also have the most seniority," Participant D said. Table 5 presents the six pay lanes categorized by the school district studied based on education attainment. The table is a comparison between a first-year teacher and a teacher with 10 years of experience. When referring to salary compensation in the third column, the data show the teacher's annual salary including the pension pickup by the district.

The responses from the veteran teachers answered Research Question 2: What are teachers' experiences with student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district? The participants' experiences illustrated the fears of veteran teachers. From the participants' experiences, experience and dedication are deemed less valuable by the district and some school principals than maintaining a strict school budget. The responses about veteran teachers' fears of losing teaching positions also showed schools with higher enrollment may have greater flexibility in hiring more experienced teachers because more students mean more money. As a result, low-enrollment schools may be more likely to have less experienced teachers than medium- or high-enrollment schools. Additionally, based on the responses, teachers at low-

enrollment schools are more likely to teach multiple grade levels and subjects, causing more stress than departmentalized teachers who teach one grade level and have one content focus.

Table 5

*School District Pay Lanes-Based Education Attainment*

Lane	Educational attainment	Salary compensation based on 1 year of experience for the 2019–2020 school year	Salary compensation based on 10 years of experience for the 2019–2020 school year
1	Bachelor’s degree	\$58,365	\$80,528
2	Master’s degree	\$62,408	\$84,570
3	Master’s + 15 credit hours	\$64,429	\$86,592
4	Master’s + 30 credit hours	\$66,450	\$88,612
5	Master’s + 45 credit hours	\$68,472	\$90,633
6	Doctoral degree	\$70,494	\$92,655

*Note:* When referring to salary compensation in the third column, the data show the teacher’s annual salary including the pension pickup by the district. The data are from *The 2019–2024 Tentative Agreement. Agreement Between the Board of Education of the City of Chicago and the Chicago Teachers Union, Local No. 1, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO*, by Chicago Teachers Union, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.ctulocal1.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PSRPAITablesforCTUvote2019.pdf>

**Pressure to fundraise.** Participants said the bulk of student-based budgeting goes toward paying staff salaries, predominantly teacher salaries. As a result, instructional materials and extracurricular programming may be lacking. Teachers admitted to asking parents for support to obtain resources. According to participants, teachers who teach in affluent neighborhoods tend to ask parents for class supplies. School fundraisers are often the norm where parents write a check for resources. Teachers who service the students of affluent families said parents do not mind helping because they know the donations are cheaper than paying for private school. Participant B stated, “One year, parents donated about \$150,000. The fundraising paid for an extra teacher,

teacher aide, and instructional materials such as copy paper, ink for printers, and other stationery.”

The schools with the lowest budgets are in the neighborhoods of Black students, according to Participant U:

The schools have higher needs because they have a higher need population. Those parents don't have enough time or energy to fundraise. Many of our parents are focused on housing, and we have many mobile families, which causes our enrollment to fluctuate. Sometimes our enrollment is at a medium level and we seem to do okay with providing resources, and other times we are low, which causes us to cut staff, and we are back struggling again,

The third-year teacher continued: “You have people who need the most but provided the least,” according to Participant U.

Teachers of low-income students admit fundraising does not help garner enough money to cause a tangible change. Participants who teach low-income students stated it is a challenge to even have parents pay for field trips. Participant H said the school initiated a fundraiser by partnering with a restaurant chain. The fundraiser, called Family School Night, encouraged families to visit the restaurant at a specified time, buy a meal, and mingle with the school staff. The restaurant chain allowed the school to keep 20% of the revenue made during the four hours of the event, which equaled \$600. The money was used to buy copy paper and art supplies.

Teachers also are asked by school administrators to use preparation periods and free time outside of work hours to seek donations through Donors Choose or to apply for grants. Donors Choose is a website teachers utilize to solicit the general public, businesses, and nonprofit organizations for financial contributions or tangible resources for classroom or school needs. The

educator creates an online profile describing school demographics, school need and rationale, and may include a visual to provoke sympathy from potential donors. Participant T teaches at a low-income and low-enrollment school. She completed a Donors Choose proposal and received a wireless listening center and flexible seating. (Flexible seating replaces the traditional seating arrangement where students sit in a set space. The format provides different seating options and allows students to choose where they sit. The purpose is to reduce the amount of time sitting in one location). Participant T said,

It took me about two hours to complete the grant, and about five months to get fully funded. . . . My students and I were excited to get fully funded, but I felt we had to wait too long to get 21st-century resources to improve academics. These resources should already be a part of budgeting.

In the district studied, elementary teachers are afforded four self-directed preparation periods per week, with one principal-directed preparation period per week. The preparation periods are an hour in length. Teachers can use the time to lesson plan, assess student work, collaborate with colleagues, communicate with parents, and do research. Adding fundraising to the preparation schedule can increase stress among teachers. Normally, students are participating in extracurricular courses while teachers are self-directed. Participant G said 97% of the school's budget went to staff salaries and no money was in the budget to purchase uniforms for the high school's soccer team. Participant G commented,

I had to buy food, uniforms, and safety equipment. I had to go out and beg people that I know for money. I know a lot of people in business, and those who have money that are tied to education. . . . My school is always running out of hand soap. I did not get a

document camera, and no adapter cords to go with technology. Though we are a selective enrollment [high] school, there is no extra money.

A selective enrollment school is a school where a student must complete an application and take a test to be considered or accepted to attend the school. At the time of the study, the district studied had 11 selective enrollment high schools (Barrow, Sartain, & Torre, 2018). In the 2015–2016 school year, about 13,400 students applied for 3,600 seats in the selective enrollment high schools, with high-achieving students believing the selective enrollment schools would provide a challenging academic education (Barrow et al., 2018). Critics have claimed the schools disproportionately enroll affluent students and take money away from neighborhood schools.

Only 8% of students from the lowest socioeconomic status attend the most competitive selective enrollment schools. Eighteen percent of students from the lowest socioeconomic status attend the most competitive selective enrollment high schools (Barrow et al., 2018). The data answered Research Question 3: What are teachers' views on equity in education in a large Illinois urban school district? The facts can be interpreted as quality education is skewed toward affluent students at the elementary school level, increasing chances in gaining acceptance at a highly coveted selective enrollment school.

Three participants stated teachers should not have to write grants for resources or programs the district should automatically provide. Participant J and colleagues wrote a grant to obtain one laptop for each student, totaling 291. The district did not provide the laptops, and, according to Participant J, not enough money was in the school's budget to pay for instructional resources of that magnitude, which was nearly \$200,000. "If it were not for generous donations from businesses and nonprofit organizations, I do not know how far behind our students would be," Participant J said.

Participant K perceived student-based budgeting is not the problem, the amount of money provided per pupil by the district is the issue. The veteran teacher stated, since the onset of student-based budgeting, the perception has been the amount of funding per pupil from the district has plummeted. The participant said because of the lack of funding, constant visits are being made to websites such as Donors Choose to seek donations for the class. According to Participant K,

I am not a grant writer, but the lack of money students are receiving forces me to go beyond my job assignment and spend hours writing grants and researching when I could be focusing on lesson plans. It is just not fair.

The responses regarding Theme 1: teacher stress answered Research Question 1—What are teachers’ perspectives of student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district?—and revealed how teachers perceive student-based budgeting as a hindrance to quality education. The responses showed teachers are working hours outside of the classroom in roles as grant writers and fundraisers in order to obtain foundational resources for student learning.

## **Theme 2: Inequity in Education**

Teachers were asked what inequity in education looks like. Inequity is the unequal allotment of school or district resources, which include experienced teachers, school programming, and school funding. Inequity in education impacts a variety of stakeholders, including students, teachers, school administration, families, and communities. College attainment by children of families of the nation’s lowest income bracket has increased from 6% to 9% in 45 years (*Inequity Is the Problem in Education*, 2016). Additionally, the education inequity stemming from student-based budgeting promotes unfair competition among districts

and charter schools, causing instability in some school enrollments. Other impacts of inequities in the district studied include high teacher mobility.

**Loss of Black educators.** Black educators have been decimated from the school district, according to Participant D. The teacher participant said when 50+ schools closed in 2013, the majority of the school closures were in predominantly African American communities and the teachers were Black and have not been replenished. Twenty-one percent of teachers in the district studied are African American, down from 41% in 2000 (Emmanuel, 2018). The schools were closed mainly because of low enrollment. Participant D stated, “The district punishes school with declining enrollments, which primarily affects African Americans students and teachers.”

**Lack of morale.** Inequities can cause dissension among the teaching staff. Inequity can also cause competitiveness and jealousy because, depending on the principal’s priorities, more money can be spent on a certain grade level, grade cluster, or subject area. For example, Participant B said the elementary school principal pours money into the primary grades (K–3) and ensures no overcrowding occurs. According to Participant B, the administration would be willing to hire more teachers and teacher assistants if the need surfaced. However, Participant B perceived the principal does not have the same passion for intermediate and middle school grades. According to Participant B,

Sixth- through eighth-grade classes have over 30 students, but primary does not go past 25. Upper grade teachers have complained of working harder than the primary teachers, and when primary teachers complain about an issue, the upper grade teachers think they are spoiled.

Another example came from Participant Z, who said principals should not continue to pour money into one grade band or subject area each year. The teacher said the unequal distribution has and will continue to cause a strain in teacher trust and administration. The imbalance can tear down morale among teachers. Participant X stated when the principal prioritizes reading and math because of high-stakes testing, the bias causes teachers to compete for the principal's attention and explain why one content area is more important than another. "Teachers stop collaborating and they stop sharing resources. Instead, they start having private meetings with the principal, asking for things they need without another teacher opposing," said Participant X. Participant AZ believes student-based budgeting does not have the capacity to meet the needs of all students:

It [student-based budgeting] is not equitable. It cannot be equitable. There are fixed costs to running a school building, whether it is electricity, lunch, or breakfast. This will be true no matter the size of the school. If you have more students, you have more money to spend for the things you need. If you have 50 students, you don't have enough money to pay for the fixed costs it takes to run a building. There is no way this approach to funding can be equitable to schools across our city.

Participant W agreed with Participant AZ's perception and said,

It's [student-based budgeting] not equitable; it's built more on equality, an equal amount of funds per child. There should be a floor-level basis so all schools should give their student body a high-quality education even if you have 50 students. You still should have reading, writing, arithmetic at a high level, and equality doesn't work because our students are so different. We are taught as educators to differentiate, but the funding is not differentiated.



**Teacher mobility.** Teachers may voluntarily leave a school due to a lack of support in schools with low enrollment. Participant O stated,

I was a middle school science teacher in a tiny school, under enrolled. I didn't want to be the only science teacher in the whole school. After a while, there was no professional opportunity for growth. I wanted to be at a school where I could bounce ideas off of another science teacher. Now I am at a large school where there are sixth-grade, seventh-grade, and eighth-grade science teachers. This larger school also has a reading, math, and science coach. The smaller school I was at did not have that.

Participant V, who teaches at an elementary school with 1,200 students and 94 staff members, admitted, "We always lose teachers at the end of the school year either voluntarily or because a position is cut or because we lose students to charters, [or] students move out of the neighborhood or the district." Participant V said three to five staff members are cut annually; "some are lucky to get back after the 20th day." The 20th day is the time frame the school district allows before cutting or adding positions and funding to individual schools. In the focus groups, 17 of the 27 participants (63%) said student-based budgeting was the reason for staff loss and teacher mobility.

When elementary school principals select programming for the school year, tested core subjects such as reading and math normally take precedence. Non tested core subjects are next in priority, such as social studies, science, and writing. Extracurricular subjects are third tier, based on participants' perceptions. PE takes precedence over other extracurricular classes because the district has placed mandates on the number of minutes students should spend in physical activity. Technology is second tier because the technology teacher can have dual roles: providing a class for students and supporting the staff in troubleshooting hardware and software issues. Next on

the priority list, according to participants, is art. Art has precedence over music because music requires instruments, music books, and music stands, according to Participant U. Music and library are the last priorities, according to Participant F. Participant H said,

Our school never has art and music in the same school year. We have music for three years. When he [music teacher] was asked not to come back by our principal, we received an art teacher. Now we have a music room full of instruments and music stands, but no music teacher. They are really hard to come by now. They have been chased out of the system.

The practice of prioritizing some programming over other programming results in the perception extracurricular teachers, such as art, music, and library teachers, are the least essential, according to Participant U. Teachers who teach core subjects which are not tested, such as social studies and science, are next. Having a low priority for non tested subjects has resulted in teachers leaving low-enrollment and low-income schools to work in high-enrollment schools with high-income students. The actions can perpetuate the achievement gap for Black and Hispanic students.

Participant K had experience with the district's previous funding formula:

We used to have quota positions where every school was given a certain number of positions based on the enrollment. The individual schools did not have to budget teacher salaries, but with the transition of student-based budgeting, principals are not given a certain amount of positions, instead a certain amount of money which has to be divided among the teachers, and other resources they [the school] need.

Participant K said the entire concept shows inequity and diminishes the value of veteran teachers: "There is no way a principal should have to think about the salary of a teacher. I am

sure principals are hurting by this process as well.” More new teachers in schools and few veteran teachers to provide mentorship, Participant E said, can increase discipline problems, adding more teacher stress and contributing to increased teacher mobility. Table 6 displays an average comparison of low-, medium-, and high-enrollment elementary schools in the school district. The table shows resources the school may provide based on student enrollment and how often. The information was gathered and synthesized from the four focus groups participants. Data was also taken from the school district’s website by viewing the profile and programming information of each school.

**Imbalance or content and grade-level resources.** Based on focus group discussions, some schools have a certain priority focus. For Participant F, technology, science curriculum, and one-to-one technology for third, sixth, and eighth grades are high priorities for the school’s principal. Participant F said,

There was so much time we had to dedicate to this initiative. Teachers had to drop everything and do science challenges. That time took away from social studies, and even some reading lacked because the focus on science, and they ran out of time. . . . This [mandate] went for those that were not science or technology teachers. All classes had to incorporate lessons including typing or learning how to operate a computer. Even though we had a technology teacher, all teachers were responsible for teaching some sort of technology in the classroom. Social studies instruction completely went and reading instruction lacked.

Table 6

*Low-, Medium-, and High-Enrollment Elementary School Comparison*

Position and program	250 students Low-enrollment school	500 students Medium-enrollment school	1,000 students High-enrollment school
English language arts (ELA)	1 (Grades 3–5) 1 (Grades 6–8)	1 per grade level	1 per grade level
Science teacher	No (filled by a substitute teacher)	Yes	Yes
Social studies teacher	No (taught by ELA teacher)	No (taught by ELA teacher)	Yes
Math teacher	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher assistant	2	3	5
Librarian	No	No	Yes
Art teacher	Yes	No	Yes
Music teacher	No	Yes	Yes
Dance	No	No	Yes
Nurse	Once a week	Twice a week	Daily
Psychologist	Twice a week	Twice a week	Daily
Social worker	Twice a week	Twice a week	Daily
After-school sports	No	Boys' and girls' basketball	Boys'/girls' basketball, volleyball, soccer, gymnastics, band, ballet, photography, theater

Participant B agreed with Participant F's assessment of the impact of principals' priorities, stating those who teach social studies have no social studies workbooks. Participant B said each year reading and math seem to have priority for resources because the subjects are tested and high stakes. Both Participant B and Participant F said have been told by each principal

to focus on nonfiction text as a way of teaching social studies. Practicing the strategy was just another way of teaching another reading course since nonfiction texts account for at least a third of the reading questions on the school district's standardized tests.

**Competition.** Participant X perceived student-based budgeting was implemented to create competition, similar to the business world, to compete for students. Schools with more students receive more funding, hire more staff, add more programming, and attract more students. Participant W said there was one full-time position to pay someone to advertise for the school. "We also had a recruitment director, but he was ineffective, causing a cascading effect of enrollment [decreasing enrollment] in our school."

According to six participants from the four focus groups, student-based budgeting was designed to give parents more choices, which will ultimately put low-enrollment schools at an even greater disadvantage. The competition can put more pressure on low-enrollment schools to accept students outside the neighborhood boundaries who may be disruptive. The students may have been kicked out of previous schools due to behavioral issues and a low-enrollment school would accept the child and tolerate the disruptive behavior because the school needs the money. In 2018, the district enrollment had dropped 18%, or 80,000 students, since 2000 (Szalinski, 2019). According to Participant X,

SBB [student-based budgeting] drives the school choice agenda. The majority of charter schools are stationed in neighborhoods of Black and brown students. They [charter schools] are funneling money away from neighborhood schools that are underenrolled. Then schools will close themselves. This way the district does not get blamed. It's a nasty agenda but masking it under student-based budgeting.

Participant M had similar feelings about student-based budgeting as Participant Y. Participant M referred to the implementation of student-based budgeting as a “scheme” three times during the second focus group. Participant M said,

Budgets are going to get cut, so the rationale is to appear cuts are being done in a fair way. The public got sold on the student-based budgeting scheme by neoliberal-policy institutions as way of creating rationale for their harmful policies.

Participants perceived student-based budgeting was also implemented to transfer financial responsibility to the local level with administration rather than the district. According to Participant AZ,

With student-based budgeting, the district was able to create a level of chaos in schools to promote charter schools as an alternative. It plays into an agenda to reduce the size of the district and to eliminate schools that are already struggling. Student-based budgeting was part of reform in the business institutions. Schools can’t run like that. They were not meant to run like that.

Participant X said, “We lost art and computer teachers. The middle school ELA teacher just got endorsed in special ed that has been vacant for three years, so now we don’t have an ELA [teacher] for the upper grades.”

**Housing.** Participant U believed the school of employment is under enrolled because of the lack of housing regulations in the state of Illinois. Participant U said, “Students have to leave schools in their neighborhood due to gentrification. They are forced out because they cannot afford the high rent.” Gentrification policies implemented by former Chicago mayors have pushed many African Americans out of the city, which affected the school enrollment in communities where African Americans predominantly live. The statements regarding the

subtheme answered Research Question 3—What are teachers’ views on equity in education in a large Illinois urban school district?—demonstrating teachers’ views on equity in the district and how student-based budgeting impacts equity.

**School closures.** If schools are low-enrollment, students will not receive the staffing and programming necessary to have a quality education. According to Participant I, who has taught high school history for 18 years, if a student attends a high school with a population of less than 400, the student will not be well serviced. Participant I said, “It’s impossible. The student will want to leave and find a better option, and if they leave, experienced teachers will lose their job, because who will hire them?”

Four high schools, set in one predominantly low-income African American neighborhood, were closed in 2018 due to low enrollments (Masterson, 2018). Ninety percent of the students living in the neighborhood of school closures traveled outside the community to attend high school (Masterson, 2018). However, a new \$85 million high school was built in the same neighborhood the same year (Masterson, 2018).

### **Theme 3: Principal Autonomy and Priorities**

What differentiates student-based budgeting from other K–12 public school funding models is the principal’s autonomy when managing school funds. In other budgeting models, the district or central office manages the majority of the school budgets. During the focus groups, participants revealed perceptions on how principal autonomy and priorities impacted the school culture and climate.

**Enrollment and attendance.** Based on the conversations in all four focus groups, student enrollment is the primary way schools received money under the funding formula. According to participants, student recruitment has evolved to a business model. Participants

perceived school administrators do not mind trying to convince parents to transfer students out of schools whether inside or outside the attendance boundaries. Principals who are anxious to increase enrollment sometimes make negative comments about another school, according to Participant W. Administration in School A, for example, may mention a lack of programs or lack of disciplined students in School B, motivating a parent to unenroll their child from School B and enroll the child in School A. The more students School A has, the happier the principal. The school receives more money, but the temptation of gaining more money from student-based budgeting can cause a school administrator to behave unethically. According to Participant W, “We would send flyers of our schools to residents who had their child in private school. It did not matter if our school was already overcrowded, principals wanted more students.”

Attendance incentives are a part of the school culture. Five elementary teacher participants said part of the job is creating attendance plans. Participant O stated,

I have to think of weekly classroom incentives, call parents daily when a child is absent, write the daily attendance on the door, and write a weekly reflection on how attendance affected my instruction. This is a lot of work in addition to my content lesson plans.

Additionally, six elementary and three high school teachers had to put a halt on instruction once a month because students were pulled from class to participate in school-wide attendance incentives. The monthly attendance incentive time could range from 45 minutes to about three hours, which equated to half the school day for students. Teachers would take turns on who would chaperone and stay behind to watch students who did not have perfect attendance for the month. In Participant J’s point of view, the incentives get out of hand: “We have game buses, movie time, field trips during the school day.”



Participant Z said attendance seems to be more of a priority than academics. The views were echoed by Participant J, who said academic incentives are not given at his school either.

Participant Z said,

Students who are on the honor roll but don't have perfect attendance have to wait until the end of the quarter to be recognized at an assembly where they are just given a certificate, and sometimes we may not have an assembly. There is no game bus for our honor roll students. Students who get good get grades and may be absent for a legitimate reason, such as going to the dentist to tighten their braces or staying home because they actually feel sick, [are] overlooked. How can we motivate them in academics?

Participant Z said more work than planning and chaperoning is involved with attendance incentives; sometimes the work entails putting food together: "Parties, DJs, movie days—which means we had to pop popcorn and pour pop into cups." Participant V perceived some principals abuse the autonomy of student-based budgeting:

Teachers in my building were let go because my boss felt that he owed someone at the network [group of schools in a district] a favor. The network downsized. We lost three teaching positions for the network people. At one point we had five network people to work as teacher leaders. They were not in the classroom. They were close to retirement. It was stressful for a lot of people in the building. They would just reprimand people. They would treat teachers and students like commodities.

The schools in the district studied are placed in 17 networks. The network leaders typically provide administrative development, strategic support, and leadership guidance to the schools which are part of the network. Additionally, network offices have a chief officer who

leads the office. Networks also provide instructional support leaders who make school visits throughout the year to monitor learning and the climate and culture of the school.

Elementary and primary teachers perceived, because so much emphasis was put on attendance, negative behavior was overlooked. Students who did not live in the school attendance area and were misbehaving would still be accepted. Participant M stated,

This put more stress on teachers with teaching in overcrowded classroom and added discipline issues. So instead of hiring more [teachers] for the overcrowding issue or providing relief for students with repeated disciplinary issues, I was just told to improve my classroom management.

Participant U said, “Principals have had conversations with me on how to convince parents to stay in the school when they want to leave. One parent said they were out of here because they didn’t like the way we were planning graduation.” Participant U said the parent had to be appeased to keep four children enrolled in the school. Attendance and enrollment were a big deal because both affect the school rating. Lack of student attendance can knock a school’s rating down, which can make the school look less attractive to parents. According to Participant D, “Our school cannot run without 800 students in it, so we lottery students outside the attendance area. Without our 1+ rating, parents will not seek to want to put their [students] on the waiting list.” Participant C agreed:

My school’s rating went from a 1+ to a 1 simply because of attendance. This meant the loss of 20 students, the loss of a lot of money—and the loss of a whole lot of money means the loss of a teacher position at our school every year. That’s what happens when you play this game. There are so many impacts of it.

**COVID-19 impact.** Participant V stated the COVID-19 pandemic revealed more inequities in student-based budgeting:

We lost 500 students. We went from 1,700 to 1,200 students this year. We had to lay off five teachers and two support staff. Students went back to their native lands such as Mexico, India, and Pakistan between March and May. We don't know if they are coming back.

Participant V said the school leaders were researching ways to recruit students in the surrounding area who attend private and charter schools, and even the daycares, in the school's attendance proximity. Participant V continued, "We lost \$350,000, so we may be losing more if we have students bleed out and leave the building."

According to Participant X, COVID-19 meant less need for physical materials due to remote learning: "COVID-19 allowed teachers to take home materials, and money was spent on remote learning for professional development." Participants said money was spent so all students can receive laptops in order for the students to learn at home. However, Participant X perceived ancillary or extracurricular staff would be laid off the subsequent school year because the art teacher just earned a certification in special education and school administrators expressed more special education teachers are needed in the school, while indicating low attendance was evidenced in the extracurricular classes during remote learning.

Based on the information about COVID-19's impact on student-based budgeting, enrollment and attendance correlates with the quality of education students receive as well as whether a teacher retains a position. If the school has high enrollment, students are likely to have a variety of teachers and programming. If a school has low enrollment, the likelihood students would be in a fully staffed school with experienced teachers decreases.

**Staffing practices.** Participants stated though the principles of student-based budgeting include school administrators being afforded the flexibility to use funds best suited to meet the needs of the school community, in practice, flexibility is not possible when a set amount is given and the school needs more money to function. For example, Participant S said principals are forced to make decisions which are not based on pedagogical research. He stated school administrators could be well-intentioned but do not have the flexibility due to restraints on the amount given. Participant S said, “Principals are given a budget and basically told, ‘Work with that.’”

Participant AZ said student-based budgeting impacts administration and provokes abuse of the budget allocation because there is a lack of accountability to the central office. After responding to the question, How has student-based budgeting shaped your school and the priorities of your school leadership? Participant AZ responded,

We have never been allowed to have an assistant principal because our school is so small, but received a AP [assistant principal] this year at a cost of \$111,000, and we lost two teaching positions because of it. In previous years, a number of schools that I have been affiliated or familiar with have struggled with administration stacking the office and eliminating teachers.

Participant AZ said the principal’s financial autonomy with student-based budgeting salaries negatively impacts the classroom:

Principals need to be held accountable for the tradeoff. If principals have two assistant principals or two deans, that impacts the number of teachers and class sizes. This makes a ripple effect, but no accountability for hiring practices. They [principals] have a lot of tricks. They can change [teachers’] positions. They can alter a teacher’s classification

within the school without accountability. Prior to student-based budgeting [in the district], principals did not enter into that kind of game playing with teachers' jobs and livelihoods because they didn't have mechanisms to move teachers in and out of buildings that student-based budgeting affords them.

**Hiring more inexperienced teachers.** Student-based budgeting is different from school-based budgeting, also known as position-based budgeting. Position-based budgeting required the district or central office to pay for teaching staff, and the salary did not come from the principal's school budget. The principal did not have to consider how much a teacher will cost, in position-based budgeting. When the Illinois school district implemented student-based budgeting, principals started viewing salaries, not just experience, before making a decision to hire.

Participant C said, "I am the cost of two teachers." Based on Participant C's 19 years of service, the experienced educator can make a minimum base salary of \$94,353 for the 2019–2020 school year based on the district's pay schedule.

Participant D mentioned, "Our school suffered low enrollment over the last two years. Our school recruits students in a selective enrollment process. We lost 411,000 [dollars] in funding, resulting in layoff of teachers." Principals lay teachers off and shift them into roles or subjects they do not want to teach. Administration hires inexperienced teachers because they are low-cost, and principals do not engage and support experienced teachers. "It's like teachers are no longer valued for their experience. Student-based budgeting just puts somebody in the classroom so it can function," Participant D said. Participant Y stated,

A trend is when a teacher retires, we are able to hire someone with high experience because the previous school year budget covered it. However, we wanted to hire an art teacher. We only had enough money to hire a teacher straight out of college. Because

principals had to pay raises in the budget, the budget could not cover all the positions in the school.

Participant Y mentioned the art position went from a full-time to a half-time position.

When an ancillary or extracurricular activity is cut, principals have the option to keep the teacher half-time if the budget allows. Having a half-time position allows the teacher to work two to three days a week in one school. The teacher is then tasked with looking for a position at another school in the district to obtain full-time employment. Participant X said,

I have been a victim of having my position cut, but my principal finagled the budget to get me hired back. You have to hope somebody retires. When veteran teachers retire, we were able to hire two teachers on her salary, but it came with a cost. A lot of training was involved with trying to get other staff members to take on mentoring. It was a hassle because of time and effort it took. We all took on the responsibility of guiding the new teacher so they would not be fired so we can have continuity at our school. This lowered morale in the building.

Participant W said,

My school was at an uptick in its population and I was able to teach just geometry. Now that the student population is going down, we have to lose positions. I'm tenure, so I don't fear losing my position [but] now I must teach three different maths because of a lack of positions. You can't focus as much because you have to teach more subjects.

Participant B stated, "We have two PE teachers because we have to provide [physical activity] minutes to 830 students, and all over, our class sizes are over 30, every single class. The money is used on staffing. We don't have anything extra." The statement revealed even when

some schools have a lot of students, there is still little extra funding going to programming outside of core instruction.

Participant S stated when the high school received a new principal about six years ago, the perception was the administration tried to empty the building of veteran teachers. Participant S said he had 13 years of experience at the time. “The only teachers who did not make a proficient rating were the veteran teachers. All those that did earn a proficient rating or better were teachers under 10 years, most were under seven,” according to Participant S. In the district, four ratings are given to teachers based on observations and student performance based on test scores. The four ratings are *unsatisfactory*, *satisfactory*, *proficient*, and *distinguished*. Even if a teacher is tenured, if given an *unsatisfactory* rating, the teacher can be laid off if the teacher fails the remediation process. If the tenured teacher receives a *satisfactory* rating for two consecutive years, the rating equates to an *unsatisfactory*, and layoff can be an option after the remediation process.

Based on Participant U’s professional school experience, the principal hired two expensive people to work in the school, and two staff were dismissed. “It disrupted the flow of our school. She [principal] hired two administrators. People let go were security and teacher assistants,” Participant U said. Participant Z said the principal’s priority was retaining staff, who were mostly veteran teachers; however, the principal had enough funding to outsource an art teacher. Participant Z said,

The principal had to contract out and find companies and organizations that were willing to come in and do art for a low cost. It was hard, and some parts of the year there was not art. They [students] had to repeat gym or technology.

**Test scores.** According to the focus group participants, a priority of school administrators is test scores. Participant D said, “It [test scores] was a priority in our professional development, and it is priority in our evaluation. The test scores affect the rating of a school and a teacher. The principal tells us [teachers] to keep those scores up.” In Participant D’s reference of a school rating, all schools in the district receive a rating based on the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP; Walker Burke & Kunichoff, 2018). The five-tiered ratings are as follows: Level 1+, Level 1, Level 2+, Level 2, and Level 3. Level 1+ is the highest rating a school can receive, while Level 3 is the lowest rating. The indicators, which influence the SQRP ratings include students’ performance on standardized tests, student academic growth, attendance, graduation rates, and school culture and climate. The majority of Level 1+ schools are in affluent White neighborhoods, while the majority of Level 3 schools are in low-income neighborhoods of predominantly African American and Latino students. Participant I said,

The ratings are geared towards parents, and it causes a wait list to get into certain schools.

If a school has anything lower than a Level 1, parents do not want their children to attend that school. The school looks unattractive and the perception is the school is a “bad school.”

#### **Theme 4: Lack of Trust in the District**

Based on the focus group conversations and participant questionnaires, student-based budgeting methods have caused teachers to mistrust the school district’s priority in providing quality education for all students. Participant C labeled student-based budgeting an “austerity budget” because the implementation of the funding formula is a way of manipulating the general public to support defunding schools because the schools are not meeting district expectations and hurt low-income families. Participant R added, “Every school is not given what they need to



meet district expectations. It is a *Hunger Games* system, and students lose out.” Without prompting, seven participants (25%) stated student-based budgeting only looks equitable on paper or in theory, but is not equitable in practice.

**The 20th day rule.** At the end of the school year, principals are given a budget for the upcoming school year based on projected enrollment. The money does not follow the student if the student transfers after the 20th day; the money stays at the first school unless the transfer happened prior to the 20th school day. Participants perceive overcrowded public schools and charter schools try to wait until the 20th day to officially transfer a student out of the school because the school keeps the funds from student-based budgeting for the entire school year. The school receiving the transferred student does not receive the money for the child after the 20th day. Principals can advocate for more money in the school year to resource the students, but no guarantees are made.

According to teacher participants, the 20th day rule puts low-enrollment and low-rated schools at a greater disadvantage to provide quality education, becoming more susceptible to school closure. Four participants experienced students enrolling in school after the 20th day or even in the middle of the school year from another district school, or charter school, or even from out of state. Participants said class sizes increase, causing more time spent on acclimating new pupils to the new environment, rearranging seating in already-overcrowded classrooms, and more student work for teachers to grade, increasing teacher stress. Based on Participant T’s experience, many new students have special needs and may not receive instructional minutes mandated by the state because of a lack of special education teachers in the school. The lack of special education teachers is likely to impact predominantly African American students who are more likely to be at low-enrollment and low-rated schools.

**De-professionalization of teachers.** According to Participant D, more veteran teachers are pushed out and new ones are hired to save money. Additionally, according to three participants, the district is seeking one-to-one technology where each student is provided a Chromebook. “This is just another tactic to put technology in front of every student so you can shove more kids into a classroom. There is deep de-professionalization and it devalues what the human contact can give to a child,” Participant D added.

### **Theme 5: Collective Teacher Advocacy**

While discussing the impact of student-based budgeting, participants agreed one way to fight inequity in education is teacher advocacy. Voicing inequities to parents, students, and on multiple media platforms can help provide the general public with a holistic view of how school budgeting correlates with student achievement. Two primary strategies of teacher advocacy arose as a result of the four focus group discussions.

**Active participation in school organizations.** Participant V said teachers must become more active in school community organizations. Three of the school organizations Participant V mentioned were the Professional Problems Committee, the Professional Personnel Leadership Committee, and the Local School Council (LSC) as well as content departments. The Professional Problems Committee is headed by the school delegate and elected members to discuss working conditions with the school administration. The Professional Personnel Leadership Committee is a state-mandated committee whose purpose is to develop and recommend educational programming matters to the principal and LSC. The LSC is a governing body made up of school staff, parents of students, and community members. The group monitors the school improvement plan and school budget and selects and renews a principal’s contract (Swanson, 2005).

Participant V said, “I tell teachers to meet with their school teams, then make needs known to the school delegate, and then make it known to the principal with the LSC.” The delegate ensures the contract is enforced and not violated by school administrators. The delegate holds monthly meetings with staff members who are members of the Chicago Teachers Union to keep members abreast of the latest information. The delegate also represents the teachers’ wants when a vote is taken at the monthly union meeting. Participant X said teachers need to have a plan in place and bring the plan to the principal with solutions and not wait for the principal to make the judgment. Participant Z recommended teachers organize by creating grade-level and subject-matter committees to discuss curriculum needs. “We are not going to be intimidated by the principal. People should not just represent themselves; [they should] operate as one and become more verbal,” Participant Z said as a way to remedy the imbalance of power between administration and teaching staff. Participant V said the district and state should be held accountable to listen to teachers regarding what the basic needs are:

We should have a seat at the table and not just leave it on the leaders of the teacher union though they do great work. The district needs to include teachers and the process of creating and formulating a criterion.

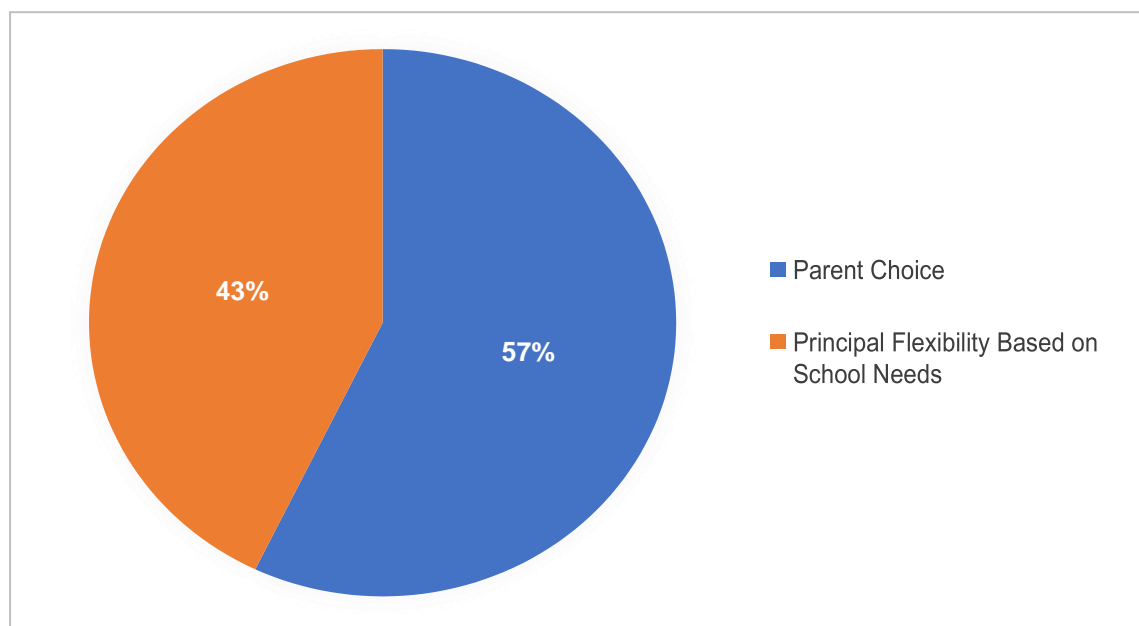
Three of the 27 participants said student-based budgeting should not be considered the only culprit for the lack of human and material resources in a school. Principal mismanagement is more harmful than student-based budgeting itself. Participant H said, “Though I work in a low-income school, there is nothing I asked for that I was denied. There were always enough supplies for my classroom.” Participant H advises teachers to look more closely at the budget to ensure the school goals are aligned with how the money is spent.

**Parent and community communication.** To improve the quality of education for all students, focus group participants said collaboration with the parents is necessary to create a needs assessment of the school. Participants agreed consistent meetings with parents, whether in person or online, are necessary to maintain a positive relationship in order to work and advocate together with school administration, district officials, and potential donors for quality education for all schools regardless of the number of students in each school. “We are told as teachers to differentiate our instruction based on the student need, but the district does not differentiate funding based on the needs of the school,” according to Participant K. Participant W said,

Community has to be looked at. You have to consider schools located in a high-crime neighborhood. What does that school need to function well and to educate students? Are the students below, at, or above grade level? The questions help determine the type of staff and programming needed for the school. This is also in addition to the teachers.

Participant Z added, “We may need more intervention specialists, art, counseling, social workers, nursing services, and homeless coordinators. This is why we have to know our families, talk with them, get them involved and keep them involved.”

Figure 1 displays teacher participants’ perceived advantages of student-based budgeting. Advantages were few compared to the perceived disadvantages. The benefits were more geared toward the flexibility of parents and principal choices.



*Figure 1:* Teacher perceptions of the advantages of student-based budgeting.

Figure 2 presents disadvantages of student-based budgeting practices in the district. The majority of participants cited more disadvantages than advantages. The figure shows the answer to Research Question 1: What are teachers' perspectives of student-based budgeting in a large Illinois urban school district? Figures 1 and 2 are evidence of participants' displeasure with the budgeting formula and a variety of negative outcomes.

### **Questionnaire**

The four-question questionnaire was given to participants upon completion of the virtual focus group (see Appendix G). The responses from the focus group revealed the majority of participants were displeased with one or more areas of student-based budgeting. Participants said professional opinions of the budgeting formula did not change as a result of the focus group, but participants stated having a heterogeneous group provided a comprehensive view on how student-based budgeting has impacted K–12 teachers.

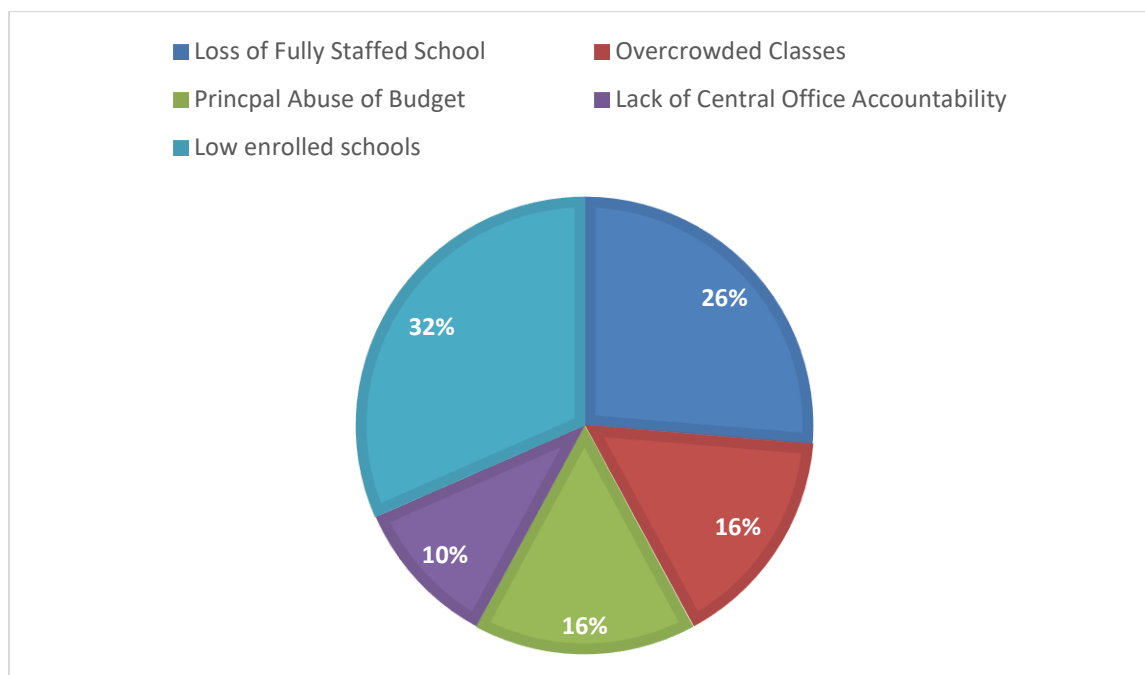
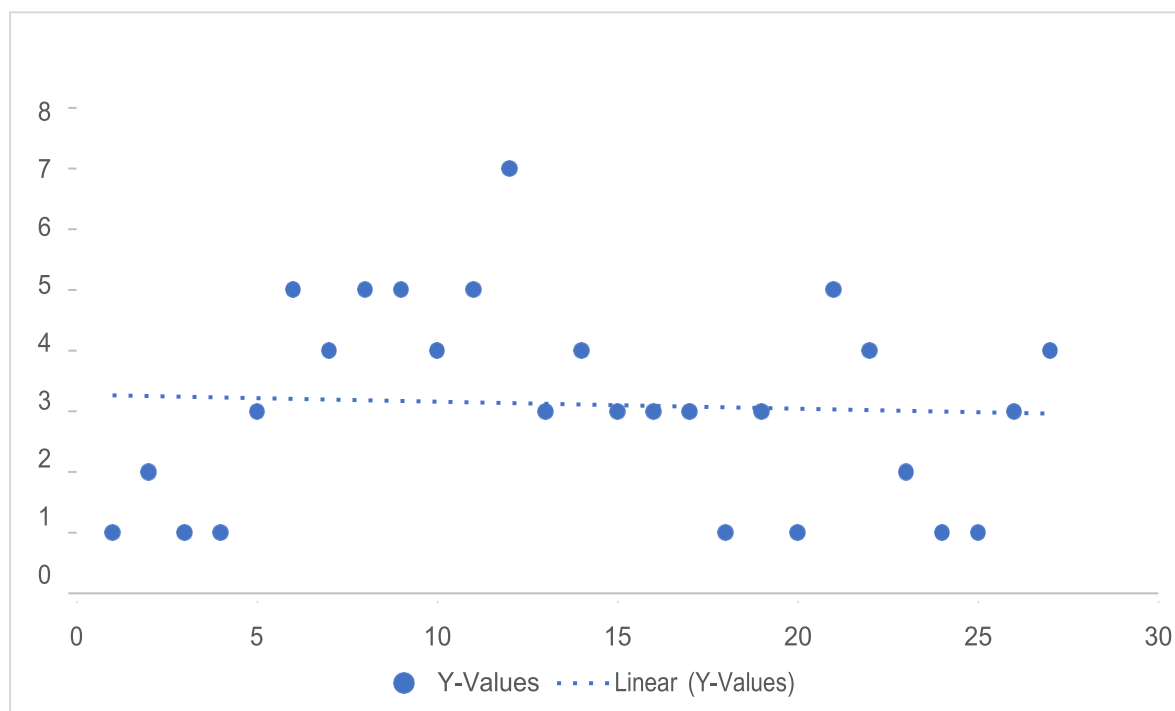


Figure 2: Teacher perceptions of student-based budgeting's disadvantages.

Figure 3 highlights participants' satisfaction with student-based budgeting on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being *most satisfied*. Based on the figure, the majority of participants were dissatisfied, with most marks at or below 5. The participants' perceptions of student-based budgeting could mirror those of the population of teachers in the district.

### Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity section emphasizes the credibility of the qualitative case study whereby threats were eliminated or controlled. Removing or minimizing threats is paramount to safeguarding the in-depth dependability of research outcomes (Souza, Alexandre, & Guirardello, 2017). Additionally, the process of how transferability and reliability strategies were practiced in the qualitative case study was described.



*Figure 3: Student-based budgeting teacher satisfaction levels.*

### **Credibility and Dependability**

To demonstrate credibility and dependability in the study, member checking was implemented. Member checking was the final piece to the triangulation method of the qualitative case study (Darawsheh, 2014). Within four days following each focus group, an e-mail was sent to each focus group participant with an automated transcript. The transcript was downloaded through Rev.com. The member checking afforded participants the opportunity to review and provide feedback on errors (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2017). Member checking increases the level of credibility and trustworthiness, which are the backbone of high-quality qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016).

**Transferability**

The outcomes of the qualitative research are inherently transferable. The research findings could be applicable in similar environments. Triangulation was instituted in the qualitative case study to justify identified themes. Additionally, participants were K–12 teachers who taught a variety of content areas and grade levels, had varying years of service, and taught in different school cultures and environments across the district.

**Dependability**

The results from the qualitative case study confirm dependability because research procedures were clearly explained in multiple settings. Procedures were explained thoroughly through an e-mail to participants. Additionally, the procedures and purpose were explained through the informed consent form. Furthermore, protocols were explained at the start of the virtual focus group once all participants were present.

**Confirmability**

The outcomes of the data demonstrated confirmability with the use of SMEs. The variety of teachers used in the research and checking the transcript for accuracy also demonstrated confirmability. Confirmability was established by proving findings, and the findings' interpretations were acquired strictly from empirical data and not made from assumptions.

**Chapter Summary**

The theory of student-based budgeting versus the reality of student-based budgeting was described. On paper, providing the same amount of money per student, with some extra funds for low-income, special education, and ELL populations, seems to demonstrate equity in addition to equality. However, in practice, the budgeting formula paints a complicated picture which shows many schools are struggling to provide basic educational services to all K–12 learners. Some



schools are without full-time teachers. Day-to-day substitute teachers can teach a middle school science class for part of or even the entire school year even if not endorsed because the budget does not allow for a full-time endorsed science teacher. Some students can go without art or music for the duration the students' entire elementary tenure.

Based on the teachers' perceptions of student-based budgeting, the common feeling is the budgeting model hurts veteran teachers. The budgeting formula hinders the quality of education for all students, especially African American and Hispanic students who are educated in low-enrollment schools. Additionally, the teachers perceive the district is provoking too much competition among schools. Whichever schools can obtain the most students after the 20th day of school are mostly likely to have sufficient resources to provide a quality education. A quality education would occur if the school administrator utilized the budget ethically, not using nepotism or cronyism. However, even when trying to compete for students, low-enrollment schools usually have fewer resources to recruit students and provide a comprehensive education. Additionally, the SQRP can impede schools with low ratings to enroll new students because the rating can provide the perception the school is failing students (Walker Burke, 2019).

Teachers have observed school leadership using assertive measures to gain as many resources as possible, such as gymnastics, a content teacher per grade level, after-school tutoring, and sports. The cost comes with overcrowded classrooms, with 30 or more students, and added pressure of teachers to spend more time on fundraising projects such as writing grants or creating a fundraiser involving family, staff, and community commitments. Much of a teacher's time involved in fundraising occurs outside of the seven-hour school day.

Upon synthesizing and analyzing data from the 27 teacher participants, the fiscal responsibility of schools has shifted from the central office to the school principal, who is only

one person. As a result, the blame for school failure could also be shifted to the school administration and not the district. The transition of responsibility could influence stakeholders to perceive if or when problems occur in school, the problems would be considered an individual school issue and not a district-wide systemic issue. If the situation becomes routine, little to no demand would be made of the school district to make reforms.

Following are discussions and conclusions from the qualitative case study. The chapter includes findings, interpretations, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, implications for leadership, and a conclusion. Also included is a summary of the research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore active classroom teachers' perspectives, experiences, and opinions of the impact of student-based budgeting practices in an Illinois school district. A significant gap in the literature indicated the lack of teachers' points of view of the K–12 budgeting formula nationwide. Scholarly research has shown the advantages and disadvantages of student-based budgeting from a quantitative angle. The review of literature also showed political and district officials' mostly positive views of student-based budgeting.

The study provided an in-depth analysis of the effect of student-based budgeting on student equity and laid the groundwork for future studies of the effectiveness of student-based budgeting and the impact the budgeting model has on student achievement and teacher practice. The following sections include the findings, interpretations, and conclusions from the qualitative case study. The following sections also include limitations, recommendations, implications for leadership, and a conclusion.

### Findings, Interpretations, Conclusions

Based on the responses and themes from the four focus groups of K–12 teachers, student-based budgeting sounds equitable on paper, but the funding formula demonstrates inequity in practice. Generally, in the student-based budgeting formula, schools are funded with an equal amount of dollars per pupil. *Equality* and *equity* are not the same. According to participants' definitions, *equality* means providing everyone with the same resources, while *equity* means providing the necessary resources to ensure success.

Student-based budgeting has a set amount of money in the school budget even before considering and assessing the diverse needs of each school, with the exception of extra funding for special education, low-income, and ELL students. As a result, many students in low-

enrollment schools lack resources for a well-rounded education, which perpetuates the achievement gap especially among students of color.

Based on participants' perception of low-quality and inequitable education in the district, the school district loses over 1,000 students annually, which leads to teachers and school support staff being laid off. The loss of students has led to school closures; some school buildings remain abandoned in residential areas. The school district has used limited methods to remedy the lack of education quality. Special education teachers, who service about 15% of the district's student population, were no longer a part of student-based budgeting beginning in the 2018–2019 school year. The position was paid for by the district. As a result, more students received a qualified and experienced special education teacher, and the schools had fewer special education vacancies.

The responses of focus group participants confirmed the equity theory by psychologist Adams (1963). Teachers, who are workers, perceive systemic unequal distribution of resources allocated to individual schools by the Illinois school district. The perceived inequity has made teachers feel professional contributions to the school district outweigh the benefits received from the school district. Based on the perceptions and experiences of participants, the high amount of stress due to teaching extra courses in overcrowded classrooms, spending hours outside of work fundraising, and being in constant fear of losing one's position after reaching 10 years of experience are not equal to the benefits of a biweekly paycheck.

Additionally, teachers must observe some students, predominantly African Americans and Hispanics, receive a low-quality education due to a lack of programming, lack of experienced and passionate teachers, and school closures. According to Adams's (1963) equity theory, the structures and results have caused unhappy teachers who seek to become education advocates to reform systemic inequity stemming from student-based budgeting. According to

participants, examples of teacher advocacy include creating and participating in school committees, becoming actively involved in the local teachers union, and becoming a part of the LSC to see and approve how money is being allocated by principals.

DeSilver (2017) reported 25% of students were proficient in math, 22% in science, and just 12% in U.S. history in 2017. The lack of students reaching grade-level attainment on standardized test scores can stem from school funding inequities in the school district. As study participants mentioned, equity is not practiced in the school district studied. Schools are essentially given the same amount of money per student, with added weights based on low-income, special needs, and ELL students.

Some schools do not have enough programming to provide a comprehensive education because the student enrollment is low. Students can go without a science teacher, social studies teacher, math teacher, or even a reading teacher. The class can be taught by a substitute teacher or remain vacant for the year. Going without a content teacher does not prevent a student from having to take the annual standardized test, which ascertains the student's proficiency level.

The results support the evidence stating quality teachers are paramount in improving the proficiency levels of students (Thompson & Thompson, 2018). Quality teachers are teachers with three or more years of experience, certified in the content taught, and those who have achieved National Board certification status. To assist students with achievement, experienced teachers need to be accounted for in the budget. Schools with low achievement have a need for experienced teachers, but the opposite seems to occur in the student-based budgeting system in Illinois. Low-achievement schools are likely to have low enrollment, with a greater chance of having a smaller staff and more inexperienced teachers.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study include lack of variety in nonverbal behavior cues. Using an online platform limited the amount of movement and facial expressions of the participants. Ten of the 27 participants did not have cameras on 50% to 100% of the time during the focus groups. This was a limitation because facial expressions can help ascertain confusion, disagreement or disagreement to a comment. Another limitation included the lack of full participation of one participant due to technical difficulties in logging on to the Zoom platform; the participant participated for only 30 minutes, although the focus group lasted more than an hour.

The qualitative case study was also limited to one set of teachers. The qualitative case study excluded principals, teacher assistants, school clerks, and clinicians. School administrators, or principals, are the leaders who finalize the budget. Gathering the perspectives of administrators could have provided insight into the impact student-based budgeting has on students, teachers, and administration. Gathering information from school clerks could have answered the following budget questions: What materials was the most money spent on? How often do teachers ask the clerk for materials? How often does the office run out of materials? How quickly are resources replenished?

All of the aforementioned groups are inside the school daily and see the outcomes of funding. Based on the data analyses, teachers perceived principals' priorities to be imbalanced, which impacts the quality of education. Some of the perceived imbalances include prioritizing newer teachers over veteran teachers, attendance and enrollment over discipline, benchmark grades (grades students can repeat: 3, 6, 8) over non benchmark grades, and tested subjects over non tested subjects. Further, responses from principals or school administrators could show areas

of agreement or disagreement. The variety of voices could provide more of an inclusive insight into how student-based budgeting impacts educators and education.

Another limitation in the qualitative case study was most of the teacher participants were veteran teachers. Only three participants had less than 10 years of experience, including two participants with eight years with the district and one participant with three years. New teachers, especially teachers who are recent college graduates, have shown limited to no knowledge of the district's funding formula. The lack of experience with and knowledge of how student-based budgeting works made participating in the qualitative case study challenging. Also, based on the preliminary survey, novice teachers had little to no knowledge of the district's previous funding formulas or budgeting formulas of other states and school districts to make meaningful comparisons.

Focus group participants mentioned perceptions of how extracurricular teachers, such as librarians, art, and music teachers are impacted by student-based budgeting. However, no art or music teacher was a participant in the study. The one art teacher who responded to the study was a first-year teacher in the district and a recent college graduate who showed no knowledge in the preliminary survey of how student-based budgeting works. The two music teachers who responded to participate in the study had close business and personal ties with the researcher, which prevented the teachers from participating in the study, to prevent bias and credibility concerns. Garnering the experiences and perceptions from music and art teachers may have strengthened the study either by describing the personal experiences or validating the perspectives of other participants during the focus group portion of the qualitative case study. The general perceptions were art and music teachers are dispensable and the least essential teachers because some schools in the district do not fill one or both of the positions in the school.

### **Recommendations**

As school systems strive to ensure education is equitable, student need, not a set budget, must be the priority when implementing a fair funding formula. For an equitable funding formula to exist, more inclusivity needs to occur when creating an extensive budgeting formula. The school board needs to involve all educator stakeholders: teachers, principals, clinicians, and teacher assistants. Budget formula creation should also include families and community members. Each school, even in the same district, has unique needs requiring specific rather than general dialogue on what positions, programs, and structures should be put in place to ensure academic progress.

To hold the district's school board more accountable, the school board should become an elected body, not appointed by the mayor. The school district studied is the only school district in Illinois without an elected school board. The practice of appointing school board members occurred in 1995 (Lipman et al., 2015). Based on the focus groups, teachers perceived the school board members are more accountable to the mayor than to the general public, students, teachers, or families. School board members have been known to make unanimous votes on major school policy issues.

Providing school resources based only on student enrollment does not demonstrate equity when some schools need more. Participants suggested schools cannot provide a quality education if the school population falls below a certain threshold. The statement suggests staffing will be too minimal to require the minimum number of courses needed for a well-rounded education especially in a high school setting. Technical careers, magnet programs, International Baccalaureate programs, and Advanced Placement courses cannot be offered if student enrollment is low.



Based on the focus group discussions, student-based budgeting is not an equitable budgeting formula. Students may receive the same amount of money per enrollment, but the money does not equate to a diverse supply of quality resources, a diverse teaching staff, or extracurricular activities which meet the unique needs of each specific school population. If student-based budgeting is not equal, then the budgeting model is still far from equitable. Equity entails providing the resources necessary for achievement. Equity sometimes provides some schools with more and others with less based on need. No student or school should have to go without resources because school enrollment is low.

More inclusive communication among district and school staff, families, and communities could ensure each student receives the funding necessary for the school to function. Participants agreed schools are a function of the community. Districts and school administration having meaningful conversations with neighborhoods and communities before setting a budget is prerequisite for success.

The amount of money per student provided by the district is low and can be increased. The amount of money per pupil spent by the district in the 2019–2020 school year was \$4,506.93 (Quig, 2019). The recommendation calls for the district to review other school districts and how much money is spent per pupil. Additionally, property taxes are the main source of school funding in the district. If a neighborhood has either inexpensive homes or few homes and residents, schools will continue to be under resourced. The money given to the school district by federal, state, and local governments should be distributed in an equitable manner, ensuring all schools, regardless of size, are fully staffed with comprehensive programming during school and after school.

### **Implications for Leadership**

The results from the research can change how districts fund education to ensure equity across income levels, racial demographics, and low-enrollment schools. Based on the district's data and participants' perspectives and experiences, declining student enrollment in the district is an annual occurrence, especially in neighborhoods with students of color. Also, some subjects are hard to staff, such as science, advanced math, foreign language, and technology.

Families living in communities with declining public school enrollment have transferred from neighborhood public schools into charter schools in the same neighborhoods, private schools, or schools outside the district. Families who have chosen to send children to charter schools do so with the perception the students will receive a higher quality education because district officials have branded many charter schools as high-quality options (Ali & Watson, 2017). Low-income families will leave a neighborhood or the state due to gentrification, lacking the ability to afford increased rent in a state with a ban on rent control (Dukmasova, 2019).

About 400,000 residents left Illinois from 2009 to 2019 due to housing (Loury, 2020). Housing advocacy must occur in order to keep families stabilized and children in the schools. Partnerships with the school district, housing department, or nonprofit organizations focusing on affordable housing are needed.

The results of the qualitative case study present an opportunity for school districts implementing student-based budgeting to view education with a comprehensive lens and the different variables which affect a student's quality of education before deciding on a school budgeting model. Based on the data analysis of the research, factors impacting K–12 public education in Illinois include lack of affordable housing; lack of fully staffed schools to meet the

academic, social, emotional, physical, and mental needs of students; and lack of competent principals who practice ethics and advocacy when hiring and prioritizing programming.

Research-based decisions with empirical data need to be in place before considering how much money to provide to a school. Neighborhood and community needs must be investigated by the school and the district because schools exist for the growth and empowerment of a community. For example, schools in neighborhoods with many families living in temporary housing may need to staff a housing liaison who can connect families to affordable housing options. Schools in neighborhoods where many languages are spoken should have multiple bilingual teachers in place. Schools in high-crime areas should earmark funding for before- and after-school programming to keep students safe and off the streets.

One way to stop an unfair advantage of competing for students is to eliminate the SQRP school ratings. The majority of Level 1 and Level 1+ schools are situated in affluent White neighborhoods, while the majority of Level 2 and Level 3 schools are in low-income African American and Hispanic neighborhoods. Instead, displaying a school's strength and showing how weaknesses are being addressed can show families the district is invested in all schools rather than displaying punitive ratings. School ratings can be perceived as punitive because any rating under a Level 1 reveals where a school is weak, such as test scores, parent engagement, and programs. Additionally, some schools with a rating lower than a Level 1 can be on probation.

Probation means the school needs additional supports because the school is not fully meeting the needs of students. Families seeing a school is on probation can cause a negative perception of the school, causing the family to look for other educational options for the school-age child. As a result, the school on probation can lose more students and receive even less funding under the student-based budgeting model. The low ratings, which are in predominantly

African American communities, can compel families to travel outside of communities to other schools in the district.

Another opportunity for leadership in the district is to not punish schools based on attendance, which also impacts SQRP ratings. The district no longer provides truant officers. The primary role of truant officers, who were assigned to schools in the district, was to investigate chronic absence and tardiness of enrolled students. The investigations involved calling and visiting the homes of the truant students and observing the children's neighborhoods (O'Brien, 2017). A student was considered truant if the student missed nine or more days without an excuse. Reinstating truant officers as a support system to students and families could decrease chronic truancy while increasing attendance and possibly increasing test scores and student achievement. Truant officers should be staffed by the district and not the principal's budget because a principal can deem the position as nonessential or too costly and may place funds elsewhere.

If truant officers appear and low SQRP ratings disappear, schools can look more attractive to families. Quality schools are one reason families move to certain neighborhoods. Using quality schools to attract families can increase the population of the city and increase school enrollment. If student-based budgeting is to continue, student enrollment must increase as well as the per-pupil amount. Providing equity can decrease teacher stress, and the educators can spend fewer or even no hours on fundraising, affording teachers more time to focus on classroom instruction.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to gather participants' perspectives of the effect student-based budgeting has on teachers to ascertain whether inequity exists in the

formula. Based on findings from the qualitative case study, the student-based budgeting formula model puts low-income schools and low-enrollment schools, students of color, veteran teachers, and extracurricular teachers at a disadvantage.

Based on the experiences and perceptions of the teacher participants, students from low-income families are suffering the most because of the school district's implementation of student-based budgeting. Low-income students, especially students in low-enrollment schools, are most likely to attend schools with teacher vacancies, with a lack of programming options.

These students are likely not to receive a comprehensive education. The students are likely to be without an art teacher, a music teacher, a librarian, a science teacher, and a special education teacher. As a result, staff are stressed because substitute teachers and teachers without certification may be hired instead. Teachers in the school building take on extra classes or the position goes unfilled.

African Americans and Hispanics account for more than 80% of the students in the school district, but are likely unable to compete in sports or academics with school district's affluent counterparts due to a lack of staffing, overworked staff, and lack of funding due to student-based budgeting. Many low- and medium-enrollment neighborhood schools in African American and Hispanic neighborhoods have limited to no competitive sports programs sanctioned by the district. Since the implementation of student-based budgeting, experienced teachers are viewed more as a liability to the school and district rather than an asset to student achievement.

Principals making statements such as, "I need a second-grade teacher but with no more than four years of experience," shows student-based budgeting forces principals to put budget over achievement. Experienced teachers are not honored, and the district provides incentives for

veteran teacher to take early retirement while receiving fewer annual step (experience) raises than a new teacher. Once a teacher reaches 14 years of experience in the district, a three-year halt in step raises occurs until the teacher reaches the 17th year.

After special education teachers were no longer counted as part of the student-based budgeting and were paid for by the district, more special education teachers have been hired by school principals. Many of the special education teachers who were hired were veterans with more than 10 years of experience. Hiring more special education teachers allowed for students with IEPs to meet state-required instructional minutes and allowed the school to be compliant when audits take place. Students with IEPs were also able to achieve goals and build more trusting relationships with staff.

Any time academic achievement is not a priority in a school budget, deficiencies in funding will occur. The implementation of student-based budgeting has presented flaws which have impacted the district since 2014. More per-pupil funding must occur. The district needs to reallocate property taxes to be divided equitably among all schools in the district, not just by neighborhoods. Schools should be fully staffed, and no teacher should be overlooked and not hired due to years of experience and education attainment, which would require a higher salary than an inexperienced teacher. Principals must be held accountable to ensure schools are fully staffed, and annual professional development on budgeting must be provided to ensure principals know how to allocate funds properly.

*Public education* should no longer be synonymous with *low quality*. All students, rich, poor, or middle-class, deserve a high-quality education which will cultivate gifts, skills, and passions. To make quality education a reality, a needs assessment should be made. The money must be found, and budgeted around student needs.

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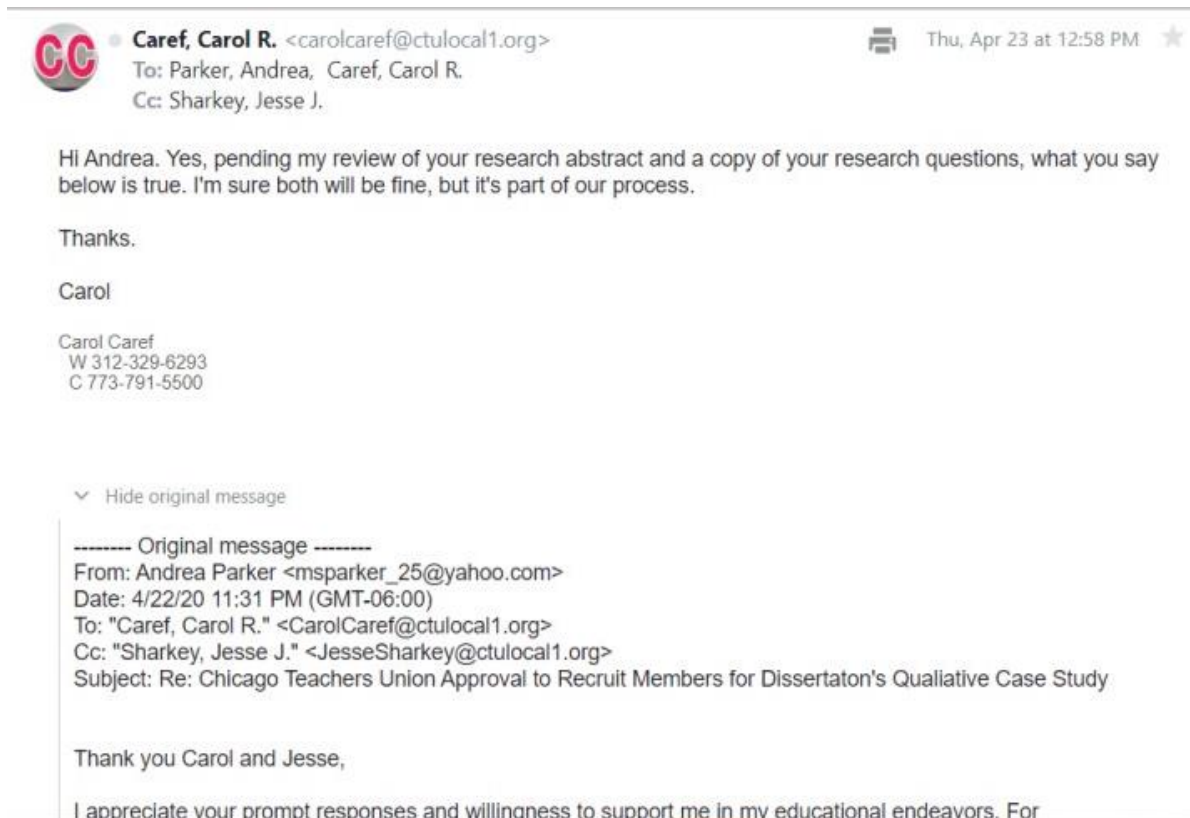
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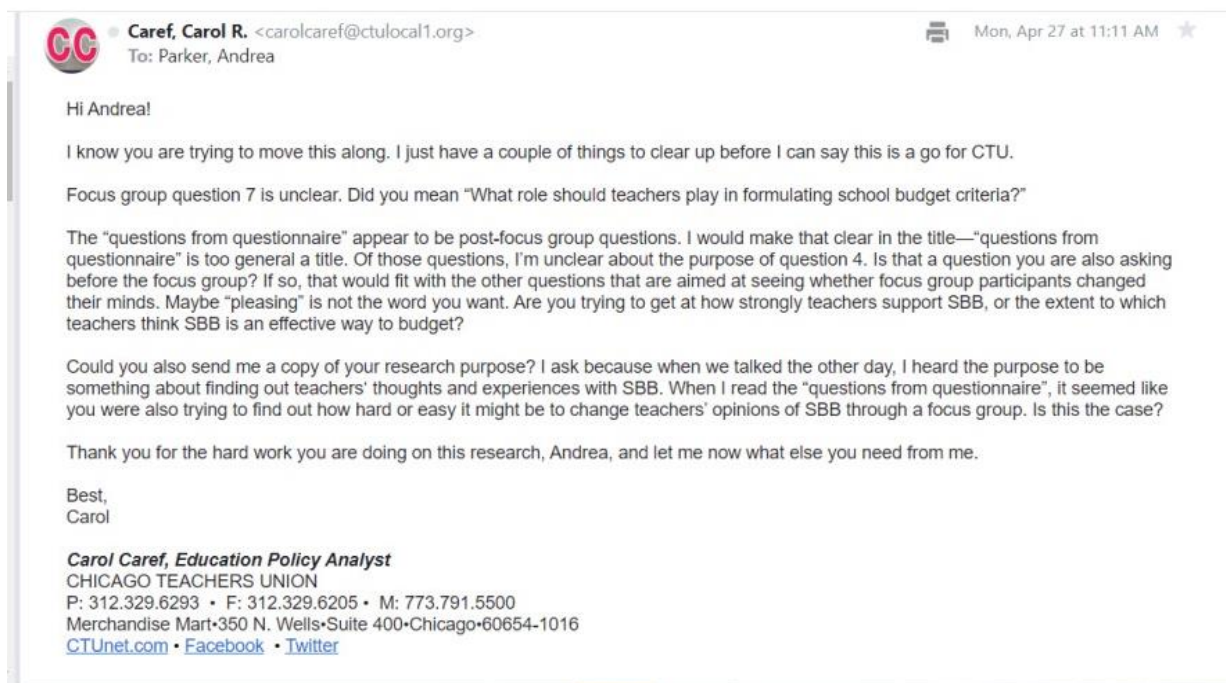
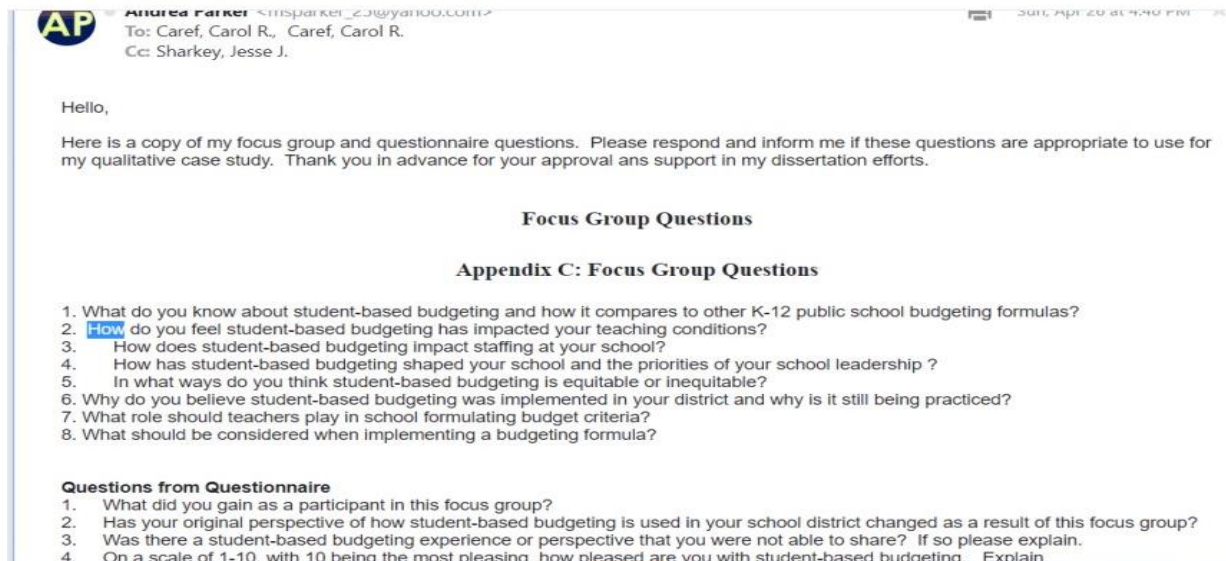
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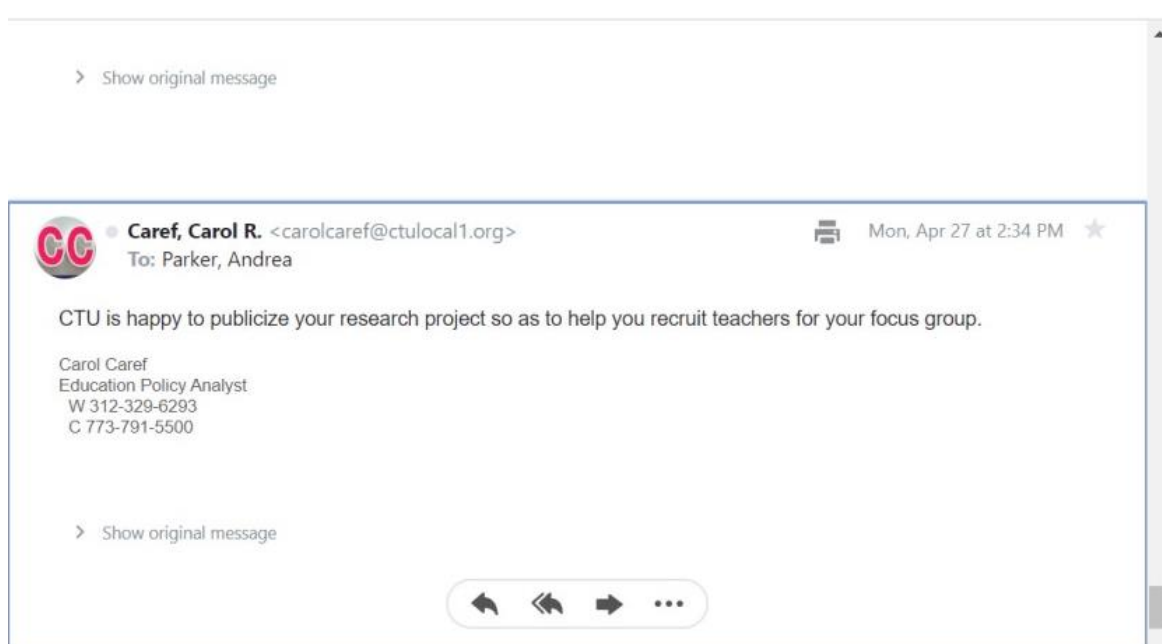
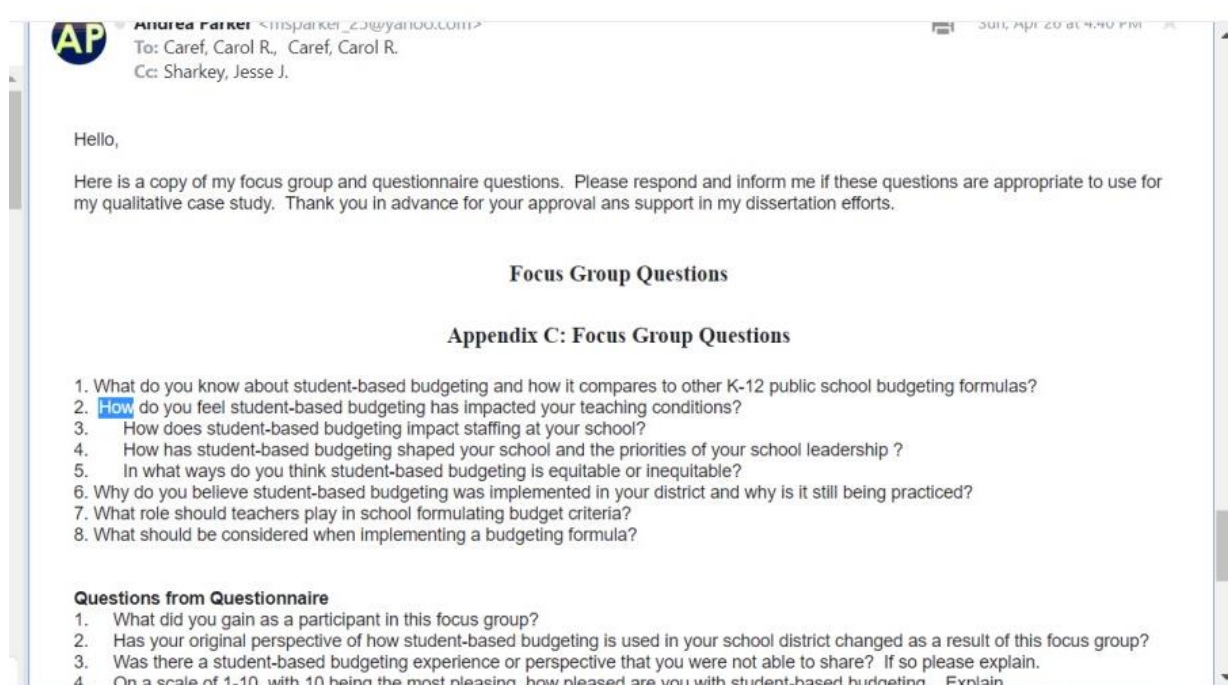
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## Appendix A: Chicago Teachers Union Approval to Recruit Teacher Participants



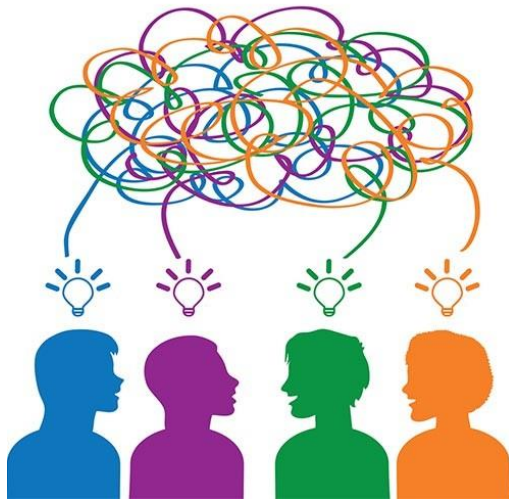






## Appendix B: Flyer to Recruit Teacher Participants

# Teacher Participants Needed!!!



Your voice is needed on your views and experiences of student-based budgeting

In order to participate in the study, candidates must be:

- **Knowledgeable of student-based budgeting**
- **An active classroom teacher**
- **Wiling to participate in an online survey, focus group, and questionnaire**

Online Focus group dates and times are flexible

Please contact Andrea Parker by phone at 773.807.1126 by email at [msparkers25@yahoo.com](mailto:msparkers25@yahoo.com)

Your participation is 100 percent voluntary and confidential

## Appendix C: Preliminary Survey and Participant Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been employed with the current school district? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. female
3. What subject and grade level to you teach? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your highest level of education? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Currently, is the academic level of your school?
  - a. 1+
  - b. 1
  - c. 2+
  - d. 2
  - e. 3
6. In your current school, what percentage of students are eligible for free lunch? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the geographic location of your school?
  - a. North
  - b. Northwest
  - c. South Loop
  - d. West
  - e. Southwest
  - f. Southeast
  - g. Far south
8. How many schools have you worked for while in the district? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you ever been laid off due to budget cuts? \_\_\_\_\_ If so how many? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is the number of enrolled students at your school? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What percentage of students at your school receive free or reduced lunch? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your school's percentage of English Language Learners? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is your schools percentage of students with special needs? \_\_\_\_\_
14. On a scale from 1-10, how familiar are you with student-based budgeting, with 1 being the least knowledgeable and 10 being the most knowledgeable? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Appendix D: Subject Matter Expert Questions

1. What are your experiences with student-based budgeting?
2. How does student-based budgeting impact your day-to-day workload?
3. How does student-based budgeting compare to the district's previous budgeting formula?
4. What are the benefits and disadvantages of student-based budgeting?

## Appendix E: Consent for Participation in Research Focus Group Interview

**Prospective Research Participant:** Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

### Project Information

**Project Title:** Public School Teachers' Perspective of Student Based Budgeting A Qualitative Case Study

**Researcher:** Andrea Parker

**Organization:** The American College of Education

**Email:** msparker\_25@yahoo.com      **Telephone:** 773.807.1126

**Researcher's Faculty Member:** Dr. Howard Moskowitz

**Organization and Position:** The American College of Education/Doctoral Dissertation Coordinator

**Email:** [moskowitz.howard@ace.edu](mailto:moskowitz.howard@ace.edu)

### Introduction

I am **Andrea Parker** and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education. I am doing research under the guidance and supervision of my Chair, **Dr. Howard Moskowitz**. I will give you some information about the project and invite you to be part of this research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain words you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them then.

### Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a qualitative case research study which seeks to understand the beliefs and perceptions of student-based budgeting from teachers and the impact the funding formula

has had on their career. This qualitative study will closely examine how viewpoints, behaviors and experiences of k-12 classroom teachers from an Illinois urban school district.

### **Research Design and Procedures**

The study will use a **qualitative** methodology and **case study** research design. Survey questions will be disseminated to potential participants to discover eligibility. The study will comprise of **20** participants, randomly selected, who will participate in a **focus group** and a questionnaire. The 27 participants will be divided into three groups based on school enrollment: school with low enrollment from 0-300 students, medium enrollment 301-700, and high enrollment from 701 and up. The study will involve online interaction among participants to be conducted on Zoom. After the focus group, a debrief session will occur which will include a questionnaire sent electronically through Google Forms. Participants will also be given a transcript of the focus group. The data from the research will be reviewed five other individuals who are part of my college's Institutional Review Board. The Institutional Review Board will review and assess that researcher followed guidelines implemented by the American College of Education.

### **Participant selection**

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your experience as an experienced k-12 teacher, who can contribute much to the knowledge and understanding of student-based budgeting, which meets the criteria for this study. Participant selection criteria:

1. Active K-12 classroom teacher in a public school
2. At least 3 years of experience in current school district
3. Able to clearly define and explain student-based budgeting

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate. If you choose not to participate, there will be no punitive repercussions and you do not have to participate. If you select to participate in this study, you may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

### **Procedures**

We are inviting you to participate in this research study. If you agree, you will be asked to participate. The type of questions asked will be direct open-ended questions based on your personal experience or perceptions.

### **Duration**

The focus group portion of the research study will require approximately 60 minutes to complete. If you are selected to participate in the focus group, the time expected will be a maximum of 60. If you are chosen to complete the questionnaire immediately after the focus group, the time allotted for completing the questionnaire will be approximately 10 minutes. The questionnaire will be emailed to your secure email address upon completion of the focus group.

**Risks**

You will be asked to share personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question. The focus portion of the study will take place through a Zoom online platform. Meeting identification number and passcodes will be sent to the secure email addresses of potential participants. On the day of the focus group, once participants have entered the identification and passcode for the focus group, participants will be sent in a virtual waiting room until credentials are verified.

**Benefits**

While there will be no direct financial benefit to you, your participation is likely to help us find out more about how student-based budgeting has impacted teachers. The potential benefits of this study will aid the furthering discussions among stakeholders including educators, district officials, and lawmakers. This will help in improving equitable funding formulas to districts that implement student-based budgeting.

**Reimbursement**

There will be no financial reimbursement for the focus group study.

**Confidentiality**

I will not share information about you or anything you say to anyone. During the defense of the doctoral dissertation, data collected will be presented to the dissertation committee. The data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted computer file. Any information about you will be coded and will not have a direct correlation, which directly identifies you as the participant, your school or colleagues. Only I will know what your number is, and I will secure your information.

**Sharing the Results**

At the end of the research study, the results will be available for each participant. It is anticipated to publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

Participation is voluntary. At any time, you wish to end your participation in the research study, you may do so without repercussions.

**Questions About the Study**



If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact my cell phone number at 773.807.1126. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email [IRB@ace.edu](mailto:IRB@ace.edu).

**Certificate of Consent**

I have read the information about this study, or it has been read to me. I acknowledge why I have been asked to be a participant in the research study. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I certify I am at least 18 years of age. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print or Type Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily. A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print or type name of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

I have accurately read or witnessed the accurate reading of the assent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm the individual has freely given assent.

Print or type name of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of lead researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of faculty member: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS**

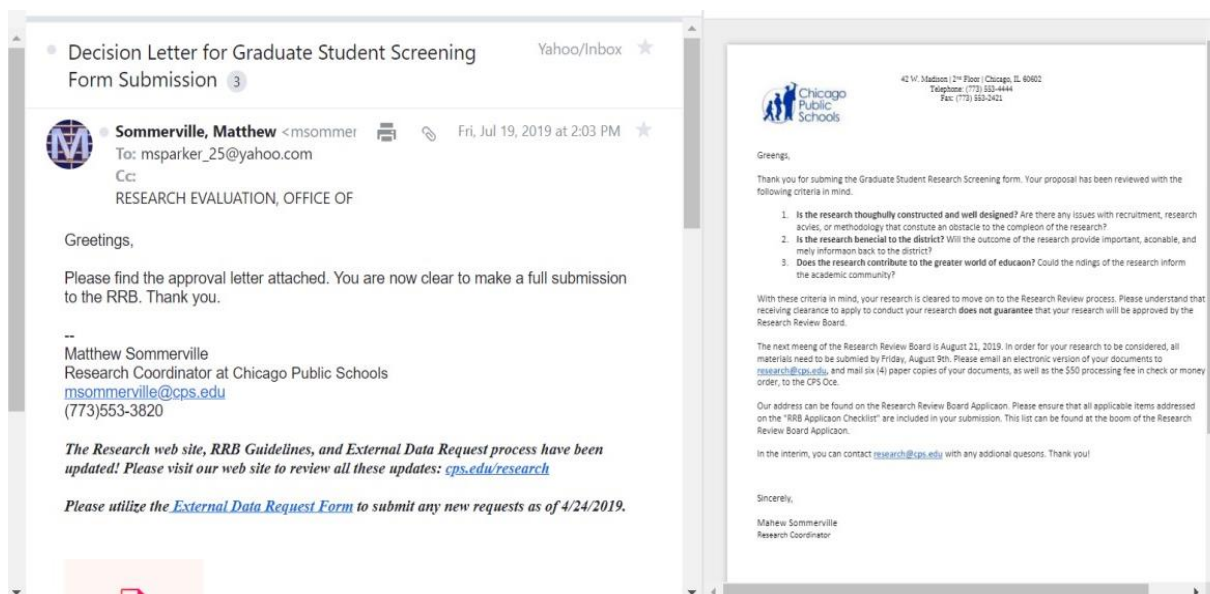
### Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

1. What do you know about student-based budgeting and how it compares to other K-12 school budgeting formulas?
2. How has student-based budgeting impacted your teaching conditions?
3. How does student-based budgeting impact staffing at your school?
4. How has student-based budgeting shaped your school and the priorities of your school leadership ?
5. In what ways do you think student-based budgeting is equitable or inequitable?
6. Why do you believe student-based budgeting was implemented in your district and why is it still being practiced?
7. What role should teachers play in school formulating budget criteria?
8. What should be considered before implementing a budgeting formula?

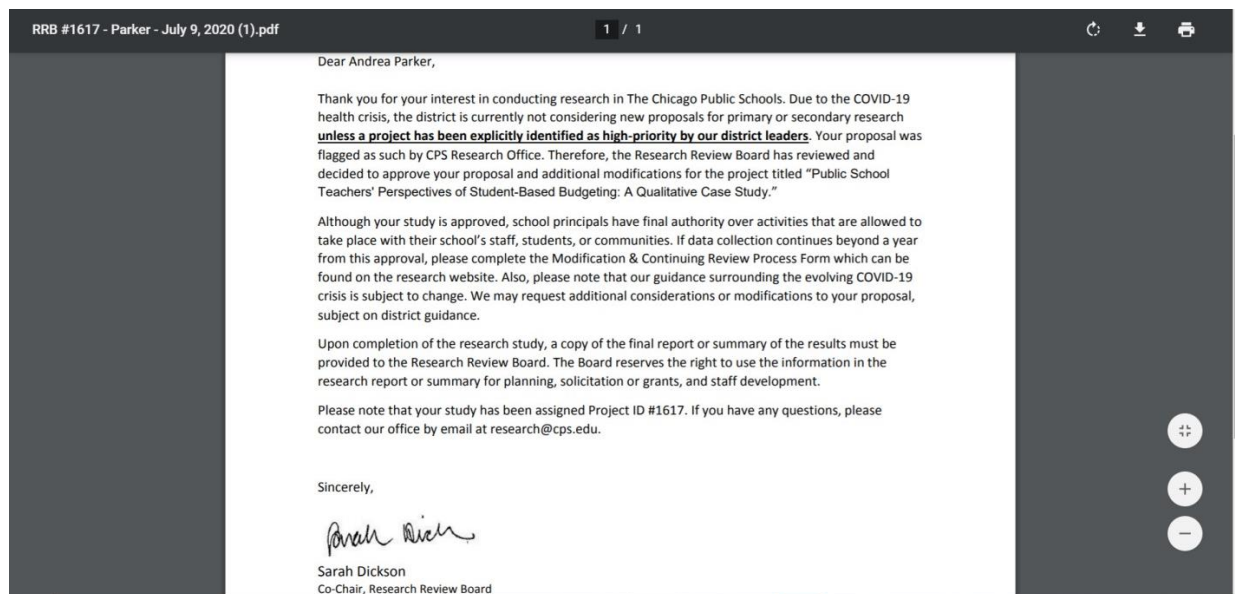
## Appendix G: Questionnaire

1. What did you gain as a participant in this focus group?
2. Has your perspective of student-based budgeting changed as a result of this focus group?
3. Was there a student-based budgeting experience or perspective that you were not able to share? If so please explain.
4. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most pleasing, how pleased are you with student-based budgeting. Explain

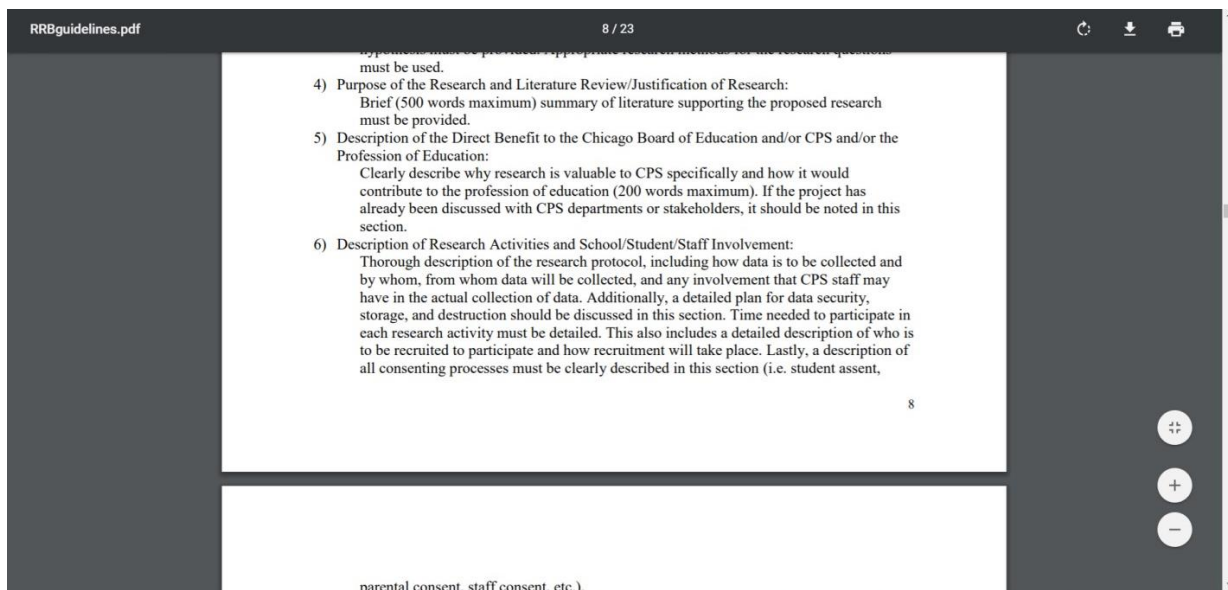
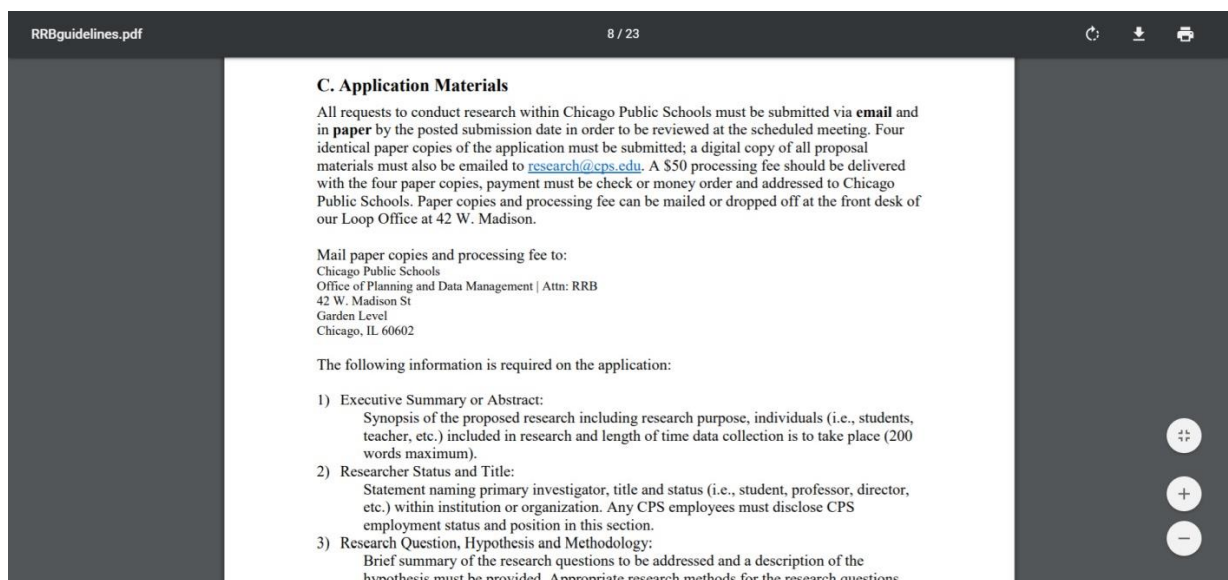
## Appendix H: Screenshot of District's Preliminary Permission to Conduct Study



## Appendix I: School District Research Review Board Approval to Conduct Research



## Appendix J: Research Review Board Guidelines for Interviewing Participants



- parental consent, staff consent, etc.).
- 7) Timeline of Research:  
Timeline of research must include start and end date of all research activities and data collection. Researcher should also clearly outline the amount of time necessary to complete data collection. We strongly encourage submission of requests at least sixty (60) days in advance of proposed research commencement.
  - 8) Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval:  
If the research includes an intervention or interaction with a living person (i.e., student, teacher or parent) that would not occur but for the research, or if the researcher will obtain identifiable private data or information, then the researcher must get advance approval from an IRB. Surveys, interviews, videotaped observations, questionnaires and reviews of student files are all interventions or interactions that would require IRB review and approval. Research that is typically exempted from IRB approval must include an exemption letter see page 20 for more information about IRB approval.
  - 9) Copy of all study instruments:  
This includes, but is not limited to, protocols for any planned survey, interview, observation, or focus group. This also includes any assessments administered to students. Any instrument planned for digital administration (i.e. online surveys) is not exempt from this review; the content of digital instruments must be provided to the RRB via a web link, or it can be transposed onto a Word or PDF document.
  - 10) IRB approved and stamped copy of the informed parental consent form(s):  
All external research surveys, assessments, analyses or evaluations require the prior written and *active* informed consent of a parent, or legal guardian, on behalf of a minor student before data collection commences.
  - 11) IRB approved and stamped copy of the student assent form(s):  
Students who are between the ages of 12 (6<sup>th</sup> grade) and 17 are required to sign an assent form. This form should include many of the elements described in the parental consent form and the text of the form should be at an appropriate reading level to ensure students understand their participation in the research project.
  - 12) IRB approved and stamped copy of the staff/adult consent form:

- form. This form should include many of the elements described in the parental consent form and the text of the form should be at an appropriate reading level to ensure students understand their participation in the research project.
- 12) IRB approved and stamped copy of the staff/adult consent form:  
Active informed consent forms must also be signed by any CPS staff, parent, or student at least 18 years of age asked to participate in research. If your study includes students who are ages 18 or older, they must be provided with informed consent forms. The informed consent forms for students ages 18 or over must include all of the elements described for a parental consent form (except for the PPRA language).

#### **D. Types of Study Approval**

The RRB's approval/acknowledgement of any external research study should be considered conditional and subject to further approval by the school principal(s) and research subject(s) that form the basis for the proposed study. A principal may place restrictions on an External Researcher's access to students and staff to minimize disruption to school activities. All external research is limited approval and requires the approval of the principal and of the study participants. Participation in research activities is voluntary.