



VOCEL

# Building Momentum

2019  
Impact  
Report





VOCEL CORE VALUE

## Put People First

We seek opportunities to show compassion, to build someone up, to connect on a human level and make the world a kinder place. 🧑🏻





**Science at our core, children in our hearts.**

Dear Friend,

It has been five years since we first piloted our early education program, and we are proud to share that 2019 was a breakthrough year for VOCEL. We doubled the number of children and parents we serve in the Child Parent Academy. We launched a new initiative to coach Chicago Public Schools principals on our approach to early learning. And we began to share our model on a national level as part of Frontiers of Innovation at Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child.

As much as we worked to deliver external growth, however, we also joined as a team to further cultivate the people, culture, and beliefs that define us as an organization. We know that the return on this investment will be significant in the years to come, aligning how and where we innovate and keeping us focused on our purpose and mission as we continue to grow.

On the pages that follow, together with our accomplishments and outcomes, we're sharing VOCEL's core values, which were codified in 2019. These inform how we work and interact with each other and those we serve; our vision for a kinder, more equitable world; and underscore our enduring commitment to the future leaders of Chicago.

With gratitude,

  
Barbara Koren  
Chair, Board of Directors

  
Kelly Powers  
Executive Director



VOCAL CORE VALUE

## Welcome All

We convene champions from every corner; we value a collective of powerful, diverse individuals to inspire one another, collaborate, and create change. 🧑🏻‍🤝‍🧑🏻

**Child Parent Academy Sites**  
2019–2020 school year

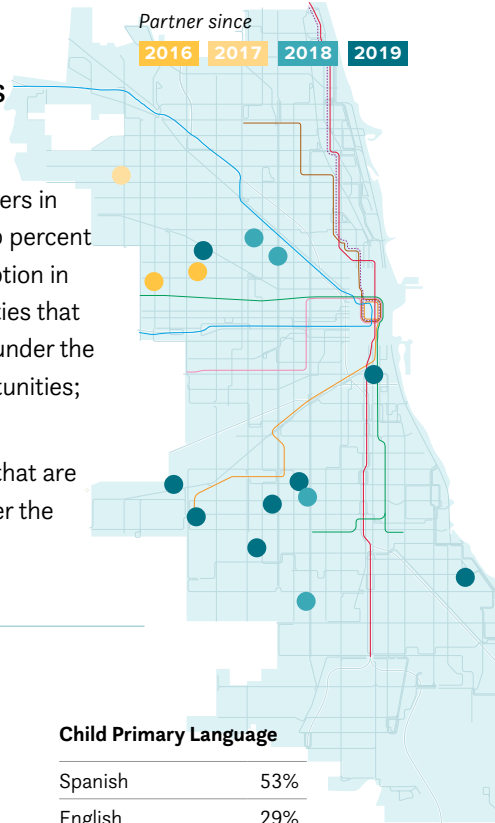
Partner since

2016 2017 2018 2019

## We're bringing quality early learning to more families in more communities across Chicago.

We added seven new Child Parent Academy school partners in 2019, allowing us to serve 150 families and marking a 650 percent growth in our geographic reach since the program's inception in 2016. Our expansion has strategically targeted communities that 1) are growing in population of households with children under the age of five; 2) have limited access to early learning opportunities; and 3) have a higher density of low-income households.

**ABOUT OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS** We work with schools that are actively cultivating strong family involvement and consider the Child Parent Academy part of these efforts.



### About the Families We Serve

Percentage of responses from 2019–2020 school year cohorts

#### Caregiver Education Level

4th–9th grade	23%
10th–12th grade	14%
HS diploma/GED	42%
Assoc. degree/other	5%
Bachelors or higher	13%
Prefer not answer	3%

#### Household Income

Below FPL*	40%
Low income†	77%
Mid/high-income	5%
Prefer not answer	18%

\* Federal Poverty Line (FPL): Annual income of \$25,750 for a family of four.

† Annual income of \$47,638 for a family of four.

#### Child Primary Language

Spanish	53%
English	29%
Spanish & English	13%
Arabic & English	5%

## What Parents Say

Responses from 2018–2019 school year parent satisfaction survey



92%

I know more about my child's development.



100%

My child is better prepared for school.



92%

I feel more supported by other parents.




100%

I would recommend this program to other parents.

### VOCEL CORE VALUE

## Promote Equity

We acknowledge systems of oppression and work to help dismantle them, consistently elevating the voices of our children and families. 



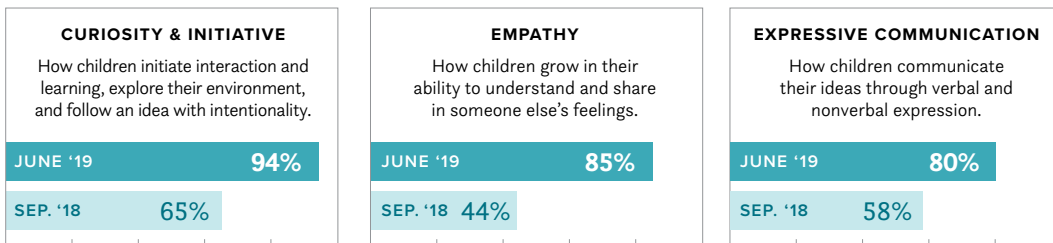
## We believe learning should be hands-on, messy, and fun.

Our innovative approach is grounded in child development, attachment, and pedagogy. As their first and best teachers, parents receive insights and support to help their children develop capabilities that promote academic success.

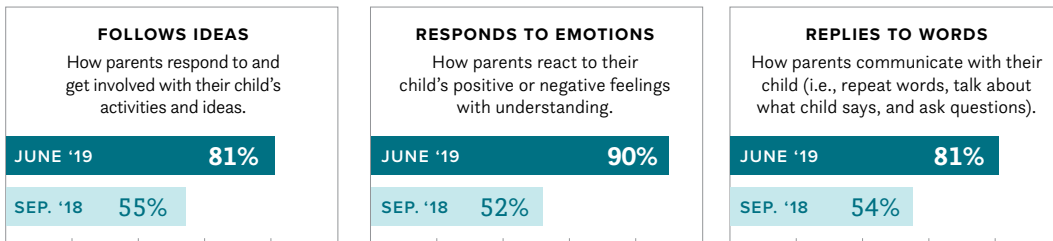
### PRESCHOOL READINESS & PARENT RESPONSIVENESS

In the 2018–2019 school year, we served 75 families who met weekly for 10 months at eight different sites. We measured their proficiencies at the beginning and end of the session.

**Progress Towards Preschool Readiness:** Average proficiency on VOCEL's measures of preschool readiness in children



**Improvements in Adult-Child Interactions:** Average proficiency on VOCEL's measures of parent responsiveness





VOCEL CORE VALUE

## Innovate with Intention

We work purposefully to identify challenges both big and small, learn, grow and lead; we tackle the tough stuff and do it all over again. 🧑🏾





## ENGAGING WITH FRONTIERS OF INNOVATION



Center on the Developing Child  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



## How we're building our programs to achieve breakthrough outcomes.

At Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, leading researchers and early education experts are working to drive science-based innovation that achieves breakthrough outcomes for children and families facing adversity.

In 2019, VOCEL was invited into the Center's **Frontiers of Innovation Learning Community**, a cohort of on-the-ground initiatives determined to have the potential to achieve population-level impact at scale. Over the last 10 months, we've been working with the Center's team to calibrate and expand our evaluation models and then use these findings to refine our program design to increase impact.

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### ABOUT THE FRONTIERS OF INNOVATION LEARNING COMMUNITY

The Frontiers of Innovation Learning Community is a diverse cadre of early-stage programs that have the potential to catalyze new developments in the field of early education. While no two projects in the portfolio look the same, all share an overarching theory of change, which hypothesizes that in order to achieve breakthrough outcomes for children, we must actively build the self-regulation skills, executive functioning, and mental health of the adults who care for them.



VOCEL CORE VALUE

## Embrace the Child Within

We prioritize fun, approaching our work with playfulness and joy. 🧒



## We're sharing our approach with the people and environments that impact Chicago's youngest learners.

In the fall of 2019, Chicago Public Schools rolled out an exciting and ambitious plan to make full-day preschool available to every four-year-old in Chicago. With 2,800 new preschool seats, public elementary schools across the city are expanding their programs, staff, and buildings to reach the youngest learners.

With support from The Chicago Public Education Fund, VOCEL is piloting the **Building Early Learning Leaders** (BELL) initiative, a new principal-coaching program where we share our early learning philosophy to create strong and vibrant pre-K classroom environments in Chicago public schools.

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### VOCEL'S EARLY LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

We believe young children learn best in the context of relationships and environments where there are three key characteristics:



High levels of emotional support.



Many opportunities for children to be creative, experiment, and own their learning.



Frequent and robust communication between adults and children, and among children.

## 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

We hosted the inaugural session of VOCEL's **Summer Fam Bam** at our headquarters in the Austin neighborhood. Over 40 children, parents, and caregivers engaged in play-based classes.



VOCEL's team and representatives attended 18 community festivals and back-to-school events **reaching over 800 community members** and promoting VOCEL's programming.



Purpose-driven marketing firm CIVILIAN generously donated their time and talent to help us **revamp our brand narrative.**



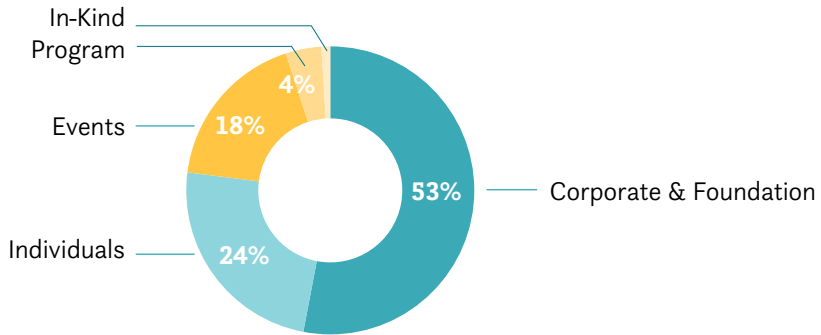
**We shared our mission, vision, and approach** in 14 different presentations with over 1,400 audience members.

## FINANCIALS

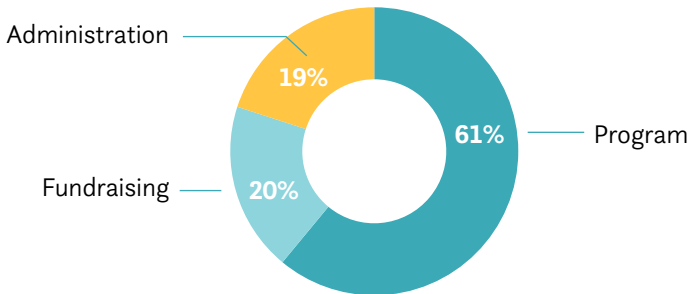
For the fiscal year running September 2018 through August 2019.  
*Audited statements available on request.*

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### REVENUE BY CATEGORY



### EXPENSES BY CATEGORY



*In FY19, VOCEL increased organizational capacity for fundraising and operational growth to support the expansion of the Child Parent Academy and other pilot initiatives.*



## “We invest in VOCEL’s mission because it aligns with our own to elevate and strengthen Chicago communities.”

**JOHN BUCK** | CEO, The John Buck Company

In 2019, VOCEL was honored to be the signature beneficiary of The John Buck Company Foundation’s 31st Annual Spring Fling. As the real estate community’s largest fundraiser, the event raised more than \$900,000, with \$250,000 going to support VOCEL’s programs.\*

As a key funder since 2014, this transformative gift is only the latest chapter in VOCEL’s ongoing partnership with the Foundation. “We are very conservative with our investments,” says Donna Wright, Chair of the Foundation’s Civic Involvement Committee. “We were drawn to VOCEL’s model because it aligns with our strategy to focus on early education for children age zero to three, but we also monitor the impact of our giving. We’ve been following VOCEL’s growth closely from the beginning.”



Pictured, from left to right: VOCEL’s Kelly Powers and Jesse Ilhardt together with John Buck and VOCEL Board Chair Barbara Koren; the event brings together more than 2,500 attendees and 125 sponsors along the Chicago River at the Merchandise Mart; Donna Wright, Dawn Dolan, and Sherri Davis of the The John Buck Company.

## VOCEL's village of supporters is fueling our growth and momentum.

\*Part of multi-year gift

†Multiplied impact with matching gift

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### \$75,000+

IMC\*

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### \$50,000- \$74,999

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Please note: Funding from The Chicago Public Education Fund (referenced on page 9 of this report) and the gift from The John Buck Company Foundation's 2019 Spring Fling (on page 12) are both being received in the 2020 fiscal year.

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Lisa Kueng &  
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## EARLY EXPRESSIONS LUNCHEON

# Our annual celebration of innovation in early learning.

Every year, 400+ early learning advocates and supporters gather at VOCEL's annual Early Expressions Luncheon to celebrate innovations in the field and hear thoughtful discussion on a range of issues, including national policy, breakthrough advancements in pedagogy and research, and representation within the sector. Since 2015, this event has raised nearly \$1 million to support VOCEL's programming and continued growth.

### KEYNOTE PRESENTERS



**2019**  
**Myra Jones-Taylor**  
ZERO to THREE



**2018**  
**Philip Fisher, PhD**  
Center on the  
Developing Child at  
Harvard University



**2017**  
**Arne Duncan**  
Emerson Collective,  
Former U.S. Secretary  
of Education



**2016**  
**Bruce Perry, MD, PhD**  
The ChildTrauma  
Academy



**2015**  
**Dana Suskind, MD**  
Thirty Million Words  
Initiative, UChicago  
Medicine

### THE 2019 EVENT RAISED NEARLY \$250,000 TO SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMS



Pictured from left to right at 2019's sold-out luncheon at the Standard Club: Lucy Asadorian, Larry Damron, and Etta Boot; VOCEL Co-Founder and Managing Director of Programs Jesse Illhardt; VIP Reception; Lisa Wiersma and Adam Arents of IMC with Woody McCally of the Finnegan Family Foundation.

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Finance Manager

**Silvia Aguilar**

Program Intern

**Nicole Culver**

Program Intern

**Eanara Ghoulsh**

Program Intern

**Samantha Jurvich**

Development Intern

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## ABOUT THE PHOTOS IN THIS REPORT


In December 2019, we sent photographers out to Carson Elementary in Gage Park, National Teacher's Academy in Near South Side, and VOCEL's headquarters at New Moms in Austin to chronicle a typical two-hour Child Parent Academy session and capture our approach to early learning in action.

*Photo credits:* Sarah Dickerson of Wildwood Photography and Jen Ellis of Jennifer Ellis Photography.



VOCEL CORE VALUE

## **Build a Better Tomorrow**

With passion for early education at the forefront, we pursue growth and improvement in everything we do to create meaningful and lasting impact. 



**Science at our core, children in our hearts.**

**VIEWING OUR CHILDREN AS EMERGING LEADERS**

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