

Catalyst

VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM



Model programs for bridging home-school gap, pages 4-8.

Advice books for teachers, parents, pages 9-11.

CATALYST article on black leadership assailed, page 14.

Reformers awaken to parents' role

by Maudlyne Ihejirika

Johnny and Billy both live in the inner city. Their mothers are single and work outside the home. When Johnny returns from school each afternoon, he decides how he will spend his time. Billy's mother sets his schedule, which begins with homework.

Johnny's mother visited his school three times last school year, once for a parent-teacher conference and twice when summoned by Johnny's teacher to discuss uncompleted homework. Billy's mother accompanied him to school the first day of classes, introduced herself to his teacher and discussed her and the teacher's expectations for Billy. She too visited the school three times, twice to find out how Billy was doing.

Billy will do better in school than Johnny will—that's what the experts say. Billy isn't any smarter, and his mother isn't any more caring. But his mother is involved in his education at school and promotes his continued learning at home.

"Academic success is impossible without support from the home and the community," says Reginald M. Clark, a leading researcher on parental influence on pupil learning and a faculty member at California State University, Fullerton. "The school cannot do it alone."

As education reform takes hold across the country, increasing atten-

tion is being paid to the role of parents in improving their children's education. In Chicago, every group represented on local school councils—principals, teachers, community members and parents—believe "more parent involvement" is schools' most urgent need, according to a poll conducted earlier this year by CATALYST.

Different meanings

Parent involvement means different things to different people, from simply enforcing homework rules to helping govern schools, as is happening in Chicago. Tying the definitions together, however, is the recognition that parents are their children's first teachers, that they continue to teach long after class has ended and that they are responsible for guiding their children's progress across the grades.

If children are to reach higher levels of learning, more parents must play these roles better, researchers say, and schools must help them do it.

In some ways, this push to unite home and school is a throwback. In the 19th Century, children's education rested with family and community. Schools were considered an extension of that learning and, as such, were controlled by parents. With the Industrial Revolution and

immigration of the early 20th Century, reformers called for more professional, standardized schools. Bureaucracies were born, eventually isolating and alienating many parents.

Not surprisingly, contemporary reformers focused first on the school, pushing higher standards, longer hours, more testing and the like. Frustrated by negligible results, reformers began looking to parents as well, says Clark, whose *Family Life and School Achievement: Why black children fail or succeed* explores the lives of several low-income families in Chicago.

Today parents and teachers are being asked to stop the finger pointing.

Numbers underscore the necessity. By 12th grade, students have spent 90 percent of their waking hours outside school, Clark points out. Those who spend more of this time in activities that require them to read, write, manipulate numbers, organize, solve problems and the like do better in school, he says, explaining that the practice helps them "internalize" what schools teach.

Further, students who take up leisure reading, hobbies, cultural and educational enrichment activities and conversations with adults and peers, likely had a strong push from their parents or other community members, Clark says. In two different studies Clark showed that students who performed best on school achievement tests were those whose parents or other adults had steered them toward opportunities for continued learning.

Role for other adults

Underscoring the potential contribution of "other adults," Clark describes a program called Community of Caring Persons, where in a case manager seeks out intellectually stimulating activities in the community and lines up a schedule for "at risk" youngsters. The goal is to enable each child to participate regularly in at least one out-of-school activity in each of seven areas: reading and writing, discussion, games, a hobby that teaches a special skill, work or a chore, recreation or sports, culture and fun summer learning.

Adult involvement should guide and support a youngster through at least 40 hours a week in literacy

Six steps for bringing parents on board

For researcher Reginald M. Clark, who has studied people's lives as well as crunched numbers, a good parent outreach program begins with a good educational program inside the school.

"Poorly organized school programs are not in the best position to effectively cultivate parent and community support," he notes.

The following are Clark's recommendations to schools that are serious about capitalizing on the inherent power of parents to influence their children's education. They are excerpted from a paper prepared for the Council of Chief State School Officers.

- ✓ Develop stimulating curricular offerings and a well-organized program of instruction characterized by active teaching.

- ✓ Assess the current state of home-school relations. Find out, for example, how many parents receive adequate, user-friendly information, how comfortable teachers feel with

parents, what lifestyles children lead.

- ✓ Create an inviting climate. For example, write and distribute a policy statement expressing staff's feelings about parent participation, set up dial-a-message hotlines for parents, provide tours for new parents, send personal invitations at the beginning of the school year. And, of course, treat parents with respect and sensitivity.

- ✓ Catalogue available resources, both inside and outside the school, for drawing parents into supportive roles. What, for example, can businesses do?

- ✓ Find ways to put parents in face-to-face communication with friendly and supportive school staff or volunteers.

- ✓ Write a plan for parent involvement activities in support of all curricular areas. "A written plan is enormously helpful at the outset because it brings discipline to the process and helps others perceive your efforts as serious," Clark says.

related activities outside class, Clark says. Those are the hours chalked up by youngsters who score above the national average on standardized achievement tests, he says.

If this kind of parent support of education is going to happen, schools and other institutions will have to encourage and support the parents, experts say.

Far too few schools reach out to parents and treat them as partners, says Joyce L. Epstein, director of the Effective Middle Schools Program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Epstein's surveys of school personnel and parents in 600 Maryland elementary schools found that:

- More than a third of the parents had never met with their children's teachers during a school year.

- Two-thirds never talked with a teacher by phone.

- More than 70 percent never got involved in school volunteer activities.

- And both sides blamed each other, particularly in inner-city schools.

Part of the problem, experts say, is that educators are not prepared to

respond to changes in the structure of families, particularly in urban areas with large proportions of poor, minority and immigrant families. Schools generally behave as though all their children come from English-speaking, middle-class families where dad pursues a career and mom stays home and, therefore, can "keep school hours."

Instead, schools increasingly are being filled with children from families under stress, with children who don't meet traditional school expectations because of differences in family income, parents' education, race, class and style, says James P. Comer, a professor of psychiatry at Yale University and creator of a highly regarded model of parent involvement.

The weakened structure of families also has meant more children are entering school without the skills necessary for academic success. Schools have not responded with a more supportive climate, Comer says. To the contrary, many teachers write off such children and their parents, stereotyping them in a manner that

makes learning impossible, he says.

When staff members view children as bad or having limited potential or view parents as uncaring or incompetent, it is difficult for teachers and students to form the kind of positive emotional bond necessary for academic learning, Comer argues.

"Many teachers will tell you that the parents are not involved, cannot be or do not want to be, and parents in the same schools will say they are involved but that they do not know how to be involved in ways to most effectively help their children," says Epstein.

Indeed, the negative attitude emanating from the school can keep parents away. Feeling intimidated and unwelcome, they do not support the school, and antagonism grows on both sides.

This risk can be especially great for immigrant families, says Barbara Bowman, director of graduate studies at the Erikson Institute in Chicago. Cultural mismatches come in many forms, and sometimes involve teaching children different values than those promoted at home, she notes.

Anne T. Henderson, an associate with the National Committee for Citizens in Education, says educators must transcend their stereotypes of inner-city children and parents.

"We shouldn't identify 'at risk' with any one group," Henderson says. "Family structure isn't necessarily



Michelle Flowers reads to daughters Beatrice (left) and Marchanealle in the babysitting room at Spencer Elementary School.

related to school performance. What counts is family behavior, how family members relate to each other, whether the home environment is conducive to learning, etc. So even a family with very low income that doesn't speak English and maybe even doesn't read can be an effective support for their children. It's the job of the schools to help them be more effective."

Schools, more than parents, are in a position to create the conditions for bringing home and school together, says Comer. The first step, he says, is for school staffs to learn the connection between home relationships, learning and the physical and intellectual growth of children. And it

helps if the situation is structured in a way where teachers can work closely with parents yet retain their status and power, he says.

Under Comer's School Development Program, parents join staff members on a planning and management council that must follow three rules: fault finding is banned, decisions are made by consensus rather than votes and the team cannot paralyze the principal, who, in turn, cannot use the team as a rubber stamp for his or her decisions.

In addition, a parents group, which has its own staff liaison, sponsors workshops and other activities to bolster parenting skills. A so-called mental health team, including a social worker and psychologist, helps parents and staff learn to use knowledge about child development in their work with the children.

Initiated 20 years ago, Comer's program has produced dramatic gains in student achievement at a number of inner-city schools. But with its more powerful local school councils, Chicago has snatched the parent-as-decision-maker spotlight. "Chicago is playing a lighthouse role," says Henderson. "I hope it works."

In Clark's view, the parent-as-teacher role needs the most attention. "Parents are being asked to do things with youngsters that they've never been trained for, and somehow, by osmosis, they're supposed to already know this stuff. It's a ridiculous assumption to make."

With literacy, 'like mother, like child'

"Don't just involve parents, educate them," says Thomas Sticht, a researcher specializing in adult literacy training.

Speaking at a conference in Chicago last spring, Sticht said that much of the money spent on remedial programs for children should be spent instead on raising the literacy levels of their parents, particularly their mothers.

"If you want to have a real Head Start, you have to start with the heads of the families," he said.

Sticht's recommendation is based on research showing that a child's achievement consistently reflects the educational level of the mother. He pointed, for example, to young

adults who took the Armed Forces qualifying test in 1980. The mother-child connection showed up on every subtest, including mechanical ability, he said.

With more education, pregnant women likely would take better care of themselves and thus avoid low-weight births, which can cause learning problems for their children, he said.

With more education, mothers also would send their children to school with larger vocabularies, and thus help them learn at a faster rate. Better educated mothers also would feel more confident dealing with schools, and thus offer their children more support.

Continued on page 19

Parents helping parents

Course shows parents how to help with homework

by Lynda Gorov

Graduation was an hour away, the refreshments were ready, the children were ready, but the parents weren't. They had one last lesson to complete.

Grouped around two tables—one for Spanish speakers, the other for English speakers—nine parents at Hanson Park Elementary School, 5411 W. Fullerton, quickly reviewed the key points of their course, *Studying at Home*.

Offered by the Academic Development Institute, *Studying at Home* and its sister course, *Reading at Home*, encourage parents to participate in their children's homework. Workshops are led by fellow parents, who pass on easy-to-learn techniques for helping children acquire good study and reading habits.

Parents are taught, for example, how to check daily school assignments, review completed work and set a regular study time for their children. They learn to read to their children or to listen to their children read if they themselves can't. Parents also are encouraged to applaud each other — to get in practice for encouraging their children.

Father signs up

"My son is doing all his homework now," said Ernesto Benitez, the first Hanson Park father to join. Everyone at his table clapped.

"It's teaching them practical things, to be better organized, to have good lighting available, to have their child study in the same place every day, to become a partner of the school," said Ellen Warnsby, the institute's community relations coordinator. "It really applies to all subjects. It gets them in



Gemma Perez helps her daughter, Samantha, get down to work.

the habit, and good study habits are the first step."

The institute put parents in charge of the workshops because it believes participants will speak more freely with leaders who have had similar experiences. "They have to find the answers themselves. We're not here to give them," said Warnsby.

Gemma Perez said she signed up for the program because her daughter, a third-grader, was having behavior problems. Perez said she wanted to know whether other parents had similar problems with their children. Now Perez is a group leader with hopes of becoming a full-time aide at the school.

"The other parents helped me a lot, and this was an opportunity to help other parents," said Perez, who volunteers regularly at Hanson Park. "I just love it. It works for me, and my daughter is doing pretty good. She doesn't get bored any more."

Shah Hina, whose daughters already had good study habits, signed up to "discuss with other parents how to solve our problems. We've given ideas to each other."

ADI, based in Lincoln, Ill., brought its program to Chicago five years ago. Last school year, 37 Chicago schools and 15 suburban schools purchased its services, which cost \$1,900 a year for 60 parents. Also last year, ADI became one of seven innovative family involvement programs selected for study by the U.S. Department of Education.

Both of ADI's courses employ hands-on activities, discussion, simple instructions and applause. They accentuate the positive to help parents overcome the negative. Practicing a family meeting, for example, includes paying a sincere compliment to the person on your left.

Although many of the parents who enrolled at Hanson Park already

were somewhat active in the school, principal Frank DePaul said he did not personally know them before. "I've identified a nucleus out there," he said.

"I talked to teachers before but never really like this," said Ernesto Benitez, who is considering becoming a group leader. "The program is

really practical, and men need to participate in this too."

At the brief graduation ceremony, children squirmed on their parents' laps as DePaul told the group: "In the next three years, we're going to try to get every parent to go through training."

After imploring the graduates to become ambassadors to other par-

ents, DePaul handed out certificates of completion. The youngsters clapped for the moms and the one dad. Then they ran for the brownies. ■

Lynda Gorov is a Chicago writer. For more information, call the Institute at (312) 427-1692.

Teachers helping parents

Program binds home, school

by James H. Riddick Jr.

At Novak-King Elementary School in North Chicago, September marks the beginning of classes for parents as well as children.

As children tackle schoolwork, their parents learn ways to help them. These classes for parents kick off a year-long program aimed at strengthening the tie between home and school for children who have not done well academically.

Called the Home Learning Academy for Parents and Students, the program has been so successful in improving relationships among students, parents and teachers—and raising test scores—that school officials plan to extend it this year to at least 250 parents throughout the district. At Novak-King, 87 parents of third- and fourth-graders participated over the last two years.

Parents not at fault

One of the first lessons parents learn is that they are not to blame for their children's poor performance.

"Parents, regardless of their economic background, really want their children to learn and they want to help them," said Curtis Dorsey, principal of Novak-King. "They just don't know how. They've got the will, but not the skill."

While Dorsey reassures parents, he also admonishes them not to

blame their children's teachers from last year.

"We get the turf battles out of the way," he explained. "We let them know we want to help and we do it. We start from scratch with a clean slate."

Parents begin to acquire support skills during a week of two-hour classes held each September. Their children's teachers give them pointers on self-esteem, positive reinforcement and learning activities they can engage in at home. Teachers also introduce "TRYangles," one-page homework assignments in reading and math that parents must do with their children each week.

One TRYangle, for example, directs parents to lay out 12 pop-bottle tops or coins and ask their children how many ways they can stack them up: "Start with one stack—how many are in it? Now try two stacks—how many are in them? Don't forget—12 stacks of one can count!...Change the number of counters—10, 15, 18, 20, etc."

TRYangles also explain why an assignment is worth doing—in this case, to practice division. An evaluation sheet accompanies each TRYangle so that parents can tell teachers how their children did. In turn, teachers assign TRYangles that address a child's weakness but guarantee some success.

The school supplies all required materials, which Dorsey said is important. "Parents don't buy a

thing," he said.

Teachers are required—and paid—to work four hours after school or on weekends each week to help students in the program or talk with their parents, at times that are convenient for the parents.

Parents also get help from a social worker who visits the school twice a week, linking parents with neighborhood agencies that help them maintain healthy home environments.

Required meetings

In addition to completing TRYangles with their children, academy parents are required to meet with their children's teachers at least four times in addition to what the school requires of all parents.

Leslie Block, a consultant who designed the academy, now laughs at that requirement: "That number was exceeded beyond our wildest expectations. Teachers and parents became friends, and higher expectations evolved on everyone's part."

Beyond design, Block stresses the importance of commitment from the principal. Dorsey, for example, "sells" the program to parents, explaining how the school needs their help and how their children can benefit.

Then the program sells itself.

"It's helped me utilize things in the

Continued on page 19

A Chicago sampler

Schools offer, seek help as they pursue parent partners

FRAN LEE



Spencer parents help in 30 different ways

Three years ago, a dozen parent volunteers joined a half dozen teacher volunteers to create an unbudgeted summer school at Spencer Elementary School, 214 N. Laverne.

At the time, parent Patricia Owens Barron said she got "a lot of static" from neighbors who wondered why she was working without getting paid. Barron predicted, though, that Spencer would attract a lot more volunteers once parents had seen how the children had benefitted from the makeshift summer school.

Barron's prediction has proven true. Today, Spencer is a volunteer powerhouse, with 50 parents engaged in 30 different school support activities. They tutor, help in the office and computer lab, lead reading groups and stake out street corners within five blocks of school to protect children from gang activity as they come and go.

Principal Dyanne Alexander said one key to this success is soliciting parents' ideas and bringing them to fruition. "I'm always at them: Tell me how we can make it better," she said.

As a result of parents' suggestions, Spencer has a babysitting room where parents oversee the children of other parent volunteers, the PTA is raising money to buy lunch for volun-

teers and the gym teacher, a body builder, conducts an after-school exercise program.

Alexander said it has been a joy to watch the mother who suggested the lunch program turn into an "accountant" who keeps track of sign-ups and expenses.

"When parents come here, they expect to contribute," said Alexander. "They don't want to sit around."



HIPPY makes house calls

One hundred thirty-four parents in Lawndale and Humboldt Park are getting at-home help preparing their children for school under the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

HIPPY family educators visit the parents every other week to help them practice using teaching materials dealing with colors, shapes, size, problem solving and other building blocks of school learning. Parents then work with their children 15 minutes each day.

"The program helps parents become their child's primary teacher," explained Ron Stuyvesant, community services director for ChildServe, which operates the program.

For more information, contact HIPPY at 1580 N. Northwest Hwy., Suite 11, Park Ridge, Ill., 60068 (708) 298-1500.



Bass School looks to little things

Bass Elementary School, 1140 W. 66th, has many parents who volunteer to work at the school but few who follow teachers' suggestions for working with their own children, says principal Marcella Gillie.

To help bridge that gap, Bass is planning a series of breakfasts, lunches and ceremonies to bring parents and teachers together in a more social setting.

Susan McAllister Swap, an author and professor whose focus is home-school partnerships, says such activities can improve teachers' attitudes about parents, too.

"In traditional urban schools, where the dominant philosophy is that parents are deficient as caregivers, it seems important to design an array of activities which serves to bring teachers and parents together as people," she wrote in a recent journal of the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, Mass.

Swap also would applaud the decision of the Bass Local School Council to use some of its new supplemental money to hire a full-time social worker and a full-time nurse.

Swap noted that Boston's Ellis School was most successful in reaching hard-to-reach parents by using a family support team to help them line

up housing, social services, health services and the like and by providing such self-improvement classes as English as a second language and high school completion.

"These activities drew on parent strengths and were based on a philosophy of empowerment," she explained.



Every parent a literacy aide

Every parent has a story to tell, and that is enough to make them "literacy aides" both inside and outside their children's classrooms, says the Erikson Institute, an affiliate of Loyola University.

Like most other authorities on early childhood education, the Erikson Institute wants schools to rethink their approach to teaching beginning reading and writing. And at six inner-city elementary schools, it has enlisted parents in the cause.

Under the Erikson approach—advocated by the Board of Education as well—young children would no longer fill out worksheets and practice isolated skills. Rather, they would engage in activities that show that written words have meaning and, thereby, be encouraged to learn how to share their own thoughts through print.

At Humboldt Elementary School, 2620 W. Hirsch, Connie T. Jones, a five-year teacher's aide, has begun sharing her stories with her son and his classmates.

"It has been good for the kids and me, too," said Jones, a high school dropout who hopes to earn a General Educational Development certificate. "When you drop out of school, sometimes you need to get used to picking up on things again. Now I know how to deal with a lot more things."

The Erikson program is a non-threatening way for parents to pick up on reading and writing. Parents start with oral storytelling and then,

when they are comfortable, write down their stories for the children. If necessary, parents can dictate the stories to someone else. Parents also are encouraged to read, write and talk about written words that children see in everyday life.

"We don't care if they read cereal boxes," said Deirdre Graziano, an Erikson field coordinator and research associate. "Just read!"

Von Humboldt principal Edwin Tyska said he embraced the Erikson program, despite some resistance from faculty, because "the old approach wasn't working. This is what we're committed to, and next year we're going whole hog."



Reform money buys parent helper

Josephine Logan-Woods, principal of Betsy Ross Elementary, 6059 S. Wabash, met Norvella Carter, an educational consultant specializing in parent involvement, when both were working on doctoral degrees.

Logan-Woods then watched Carter deftly work with parents at several West Side schools to get them to read to their children 15 minutes each day. "The reading scores went up and stayed up," said Logan-Woods.

Now, with supplemental money school reform has freed up, the principal has brought Carter to Betsy Ross School.

"She's a very warm, compassionate, accepting individual who makes everybody feel comfortable," Logan-Woods said of her new consultant.

Carter's first activity at Betsy Ross was a survey of parents' opinions of and suggestions for the school. Almost two-thirds of parents responded. Logan-Woods awaits Carter's report and prescription. Carter also will conduct monthly workshops for parents.

"The focus is to empower parents as capable managers of their children's education," said Logan-Woods.



EPIC starts early with parent education

At six elementary schools, parents, teachers and community organizations are being drawn together to promote character development in children.

The ultimate goal is to ensure that these children grow up to become responsible parents themselves.

Called Effective Parenting Information for Children (EPIC), the program is based on the premise that the seeds for parenting are planted early in a child's life, when she (or he) is developing her own attitudes and behaviors.

EPIC seeks to shape these attitudes and behaviors by creating a mutually reinforcing network among the three major influences in a child's life, home, school and community.

Trained EPIC volunteers conduct a series of six, two-hour workshops where parents learn how to reinforce a school's curriculum at home. Parents are taught, for example, to maintain eye contact with a child when talking with him or her, as a way to promote listening. Parents also are taught how to set up structured play and rest times.

EPIC's work with teachers focuses on ways to foster self-esteem, problem solving, decision making and responsible behavior. EPIC also teaches school support staff, such as lunchroom aides and clerks, about the importance of their dealings with children.

With knowledge about the children in hand, EPIC seeks out community services to complete the network.

Moos Elementary School, 1711 N. California Ave., is one of the Chicago schools where EPIC has been operating for the past year.

Program coordinator Helen Reif says test results already show improvement in children's self-esteem, responsibility, adherence to rules and decision making.

EPIC is operated by the National

Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1600, Chicago, Ill. 60604 (312) 663-3520.



Carter helps parents with parenting

Carter Elementary School, 5740 S. Michigan, has begun semi-weekly parenting classes for 10 parents with children younger than three.

"Our parents are very young and need to be able to improve on their parenting skills," said principal Rita Mitchell. "And we want them to understand their very important role in their children's education, and how we can be a resource to them."

A child development professional from the Erikson Institute leads each session, which might include movies on child development and parenting, exchanges of books and clothing or guest speakers.

Parents also get to share their experiences—in areas ranging from child discipline to relations between husband and wife.

By helping young parents, Carter Elementary also hopes to forge an early, strong link between home and school. "Until that happens, there will be no educational impact on the students we teach," said Mitchell.



Summer program snowballs

1. Children who are read to become better readers. 2. Disadvantaged children typically lose academic ground over the summer.

Reavis Elementary School, 834 E. 50th, put these two research findings

together to convince the Heller Foundation to pay for a Read Aloud program for 140 children in the summer of 1989.

Since then the program has snowballed.

First it rolled into the regular school year, with parents volunteering to read to small groups of children two hours each day.

As a result, 15 parents decided to brush up on their own reading, writing and critical thinking skills, and the Literacy Council of Chicago was called in to help.

"The program made it possible for parents to pursue their education while monitoring their child's education," said Michael Lenzi, training coordinator for the Literacy Council.

The Literacy Council is located at 77 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill. 60602 (312) 374-3446.



Principal strolls through Taylor homes

The reputation of the Robert Taylor Homes does not daunt Reva Hairston, principal of Terrell Elementary School, 5410 S. State. Just about every school day Hairston strolls through one of the five public housing buildings whose children attend her school, chatting with the mothers she meets.

Each fall, teachers who are new to Terrell accompany Hairston on her rounds.

"I want teachers to get a feel of what the children go through every day to get to school," said Hairston. "If the children can walk through the broken glass and the smell or urine, then the teachers should be twice as determined to teach them something."

During the school year, Hairston also makes a point of becoming acquainted with parents on a one-to-one basis.

Further, a school leadership team occasionally holds meetings inside Robert Taylor homes, to accommodate parents who cannot come to the school.



Etc., etc., etc.

■ Grant Elementary School, 145 S. Campbell, conducts field trips for parents as well as children. Visits to the Museum of Science and Industry, Art Institute of Chicago and other cultural and educational institutions are aimed at encouraging parents to involve their children in these learning experiences, which bolster the Three Rs.

■ Corliss High School, 821 E. 103rd, has formed a parent cadre to help teachers with students who have behavior problems, deliver homework to students who are ill and reach out to other parents. The cadre meets weekly to make plans and monthly to hear a speaker on such topics as drug abuse prevention and planned parenthood.

■ Clay Elementary School, 13231 S. Burley, doesn't take its parents for granted. Parents are applauded and invited to speak at an annual parent recognition day, which includes tributes by the principal and teachers.

■ Goethe Elementary School, 2236 N. Rockwell, turned a large closet into a lending library for parents. Teachers stock the shelves with books, games and other educational materials. Parent volunteers staff this parent-teacher center.

■ A booklet describing some two dozen parent support programs operating in and around the Chicago public schools will be mailed to every public school principal this fall. It is being compiled and distributed by the College of Education at Roosevelt University.

■ A 28-page newsletter describing model parent-school partnership programs across the country is available from the Family Resource Coalition, a national organization for family and parent support groups. Individual copies are \$3.50, with bulk discounts available. Contact Joan Silvern, editor, "Family Resource Coalition Report," Suite 1625, 230 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60601 (312) 726-4750. ■

Reviews

Books for school leaders

Guides gather activities, advice

by Marcella Gillie

From an outline for planning a parent outreach program to suggestions for kitchen chemistry, *The Home as Learning Center: The family as educator* is a comprehensive, well written handbook on parent involvement.

Aimed at teachers and administrators, the 132-page book weaves research into practical advice and concludes each chapter with a list of references that tap newspapers, journals and state documents as well as scholarly and children's books.

The references themselves—repeat-

ed alphabetically at the back of the book, just before the index—constitute a compact bibliography on parent involvement in education, ranging, for example, from *Research-based Guidelines and Strategies to Train Teachers for Parent Involvement* to *Things to do with Water*.

The chapters on academic subjects—writing, math, art and the like—include home learning activities for children of every age. There aren't many new ideas here, but they are well organized.

Written by two Chicago education professors, Margaret Kelly Carroll of St. Xavier College and Kay Monroe Smith of Loyola University, *The Home as Learning Center* provides a wealth of information on working with parents. What's missing are suggestions for the essential first step, capturing parents' attention and time.

A similar publication, *What Students Need to Know*, is aimed at schools, churches and community organizations that want to convey to parents, as early as possible, the knowledge and skills children need to get into and succeed in college.

It is published by the National Urban League's National Education Initiative in cooperation with The College Board, sponsor of the SAT college entrance exam.

What Students Need to Know offers pointers on conducting parent workshops and devotes a chapter to

each school subject, providing a definition, learning goals, related careers and ways parents can encourage children's achievement.

Miscellaneous advice, grouped under subsections called "Facts parents should know," includes, for example: Children who have a gap of one year or more in their foreign language studies are likely to forget a great deal of what they have learned.

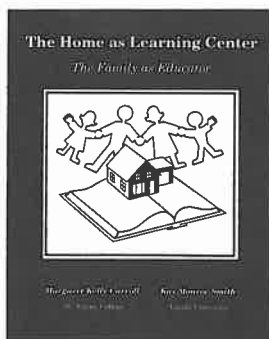
WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

(1989) National Education Initiative, National Urban League, 500 E. 62nd St., New York City, N.Y. 10021 (contact Stephanie Robinson). 144 pages.

Unfortunately, the book assumes more knowledge and sophistication about education than may be present in all schools, churches and community organizations. Readers are given no clues for more fully understanding or explaining such statements as: "Students should be able to understand the basic procedures of the social sciences, such as the development and testing of assumptions."

In the hands of a very good teacher, however, *What Students Need to Know* can be a good resource. ■

Marcella Gillie is principal of Bass Elementary School.



THE HOME AS LEARNING CENTER:

The family as educator by Margaret Kelly Carroll and Kay Monroe Smith. (1990) Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 2461 Kerper Blvd., P.O. Box 539, Dubuque, Iowa 52004. 132 pages.

Books for parents

Four variations on a theme

by Barbara T. Bowman

Parents looking for advice on how to help their children make the most of school have an increasing number of books to choose from.

Four of the more solid, recent additions to this genre are *Making the Best of Schools* by Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton, *The National PTA Talks to Parents* by Melitta Cutright, *The Elementary School Handbook* by Joanne Oppenheim and *Parent Power: A program to help your child succeed in school* by Sherry Ferguson and Lawrence Mazin.

The books have many similarities:

- They all advocate an active role for parents in improving the academic achievement of their children, emphasizing the importance of home life and parental oversight in building the characteristics that lead to school success.

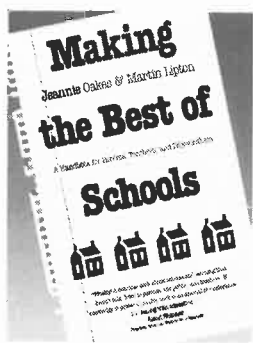
- They all stress the importance of understanding the culture of schools (what they do and why they do it the way they do) and the goals and objectives of the curriculum (what and how schools teach).

- They all provide parents with the most current information on "best practices," such as positive discipline, problem solving in mathematics instruction and whole-language approaches to literacy.

- They all alert parents to children's special needs and the responsibility of schools to provide educational services for special children in the least restrictive environments.

- And they all encourage parents to approach conflicts with school personnel as positively as possible, recognizing the constraints of school administrators and teachers, and to be prepared to compromise when possible.

Despite these similarities, the



MAKING THE BEST OF SCHOOLS by Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton. (1990) Yale University Press, 92A Yale Station, New Haven, Conn. 06520. 314 pages.

books are not interchangeable. Each author focuses on somewhat different aspects of the parent's role.

In *Parent Power*, Ferguson and Mazin write: "A child's best teachers are parents who support and encourage learning." The authors recommend that parents teach many of the same skills and concepts that the school teaches. For example, parents are encouraged to rehearse their children on test-taking strategies, to make connections between cars and physics, to review study sheets with their children and to teach their children various body movements.

The book also stresses the kind of home environment that is most likely to help children's school performance—one in which television viewing is limited and self-esteem enhanced, for example—and the importance of parents themselves modeling hard work and academic interests.

Parent Power accepts the status quo of schools and tells parents how to prepare children to be successful in

them. It would be most useful to parents who are satisfied with their children's school and want to improve their children's performance.

In *The Elementary School Handbook*, Oppenheim writes: "Once the new sneakers, lunchbox and back-to-school supplies have been bought, where does the parent fit into the educational process?" Her answer is more far-reaching than Ferguson and Martin's in that she believes parents have the responsibility of judging the quality of their children's school.

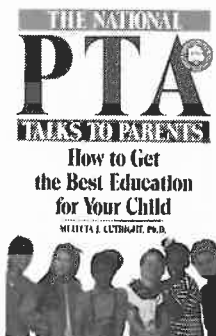
Oppenheim provides an excellent summary of what and how schools can teach to match the varying degrees of readiness that children bring to the early grades.

A section on racism and on tracking and testing as discriminatory practices was particularly refreshing and seldom found in books not written specifically for parents from racial and ethnic minorities.

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HANDBOOK by Joanne Oppenheim. (1989) Pantheon Books, 201 E. 50th St., 27th Floor, New York City, N.Y. 10022. 303 pages.

PARENT POWER: A program to help your child succeed in school by Sherry Ferguson and Lawrence Mazin. (1989) Clarkson N. Potter, Inc./Publishers, 225 Park Ave. South, New York City, N.Y. 10003. 184 pages.

Although Oppenheim encourages parents to teach the same concepts and skills that are taught in school, she often embeds them in home activities, such as teaching math through cooking. Oppenheim seems to see the parent role more as complement-



THE NATIONAL PTA TALKS TO PARENTS by Melitta J. Cutright. (1989) Doubleday, 666 Fifth Av., New York City, N.Y. 10103. 291 pages.

ing rather than duplicating that of the teacher's. This is an excellent book for parents who want to understand more about how and what young children should learn at home and at school.

In *The National PTA Talks to Parents*, Melitta Cutright says parents

can improve their children's school performance by playing an active role in the school. While providing plenty of information on what parents can do at home, the clear message of this book is how valuable the PTA is in helping parents help their children.

Cutright seems to see less need than Ferguson & Mazin and Oppenheim do for parents to teach the school curriculum, focusing more on school practices and their effects on children at home. The book covers a wide range of individual problems: What should I do if my child gets a bad teacher? What should parents do about AIDS, drugs and sex education? And the PTA is there with advice, activities and resources to help. Parents interested in good information about how to help their children and the value of the PTA will find this book useful.

In *Making the Best of Schools*, Oakes and Lipton write: "We also know that making the best of schools requires more than parents' steady advocacy for their own children. It requires a firm commitment to the

highest education for all children."

This book is the most ambitious of the four reviewed here because its goal is to change schools, not just for the children of the parent-reader, but for all children. The authors outline how schools need to be reformed to serve children better, and they provide background for understanding why this is so difficult.

Making the Best covers what children should learn in school, how they should be evaluated and what parents should do to help their children with school-related skills and concepts. Most important, it challenges parents to get involved in making their own child's school better and making school better for all children. This is an excellent introduction for parents who want to see their own child's education in the broader context of school reform. ■

Barbara T. Bowman is director of graduate studies at the Erikson Institute, an affiliate of Loyola University that specializes in early childhood education.

Recipes for instilling caring, confidence, other good traits

How do you teach a child responsibility or perseverance or common sense or all the other good behaviors that make for a self-satisfying, productive life?

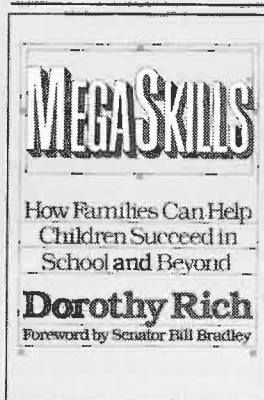
In *MegaSkills: How families can help children succeed in school and beyond*, Dorothy Rich offers 95 suggestions. Here's one, aimed at responsibility:

Get an alarm clock, a paper bag and one slip of paper for each member of the family. On one slip of paper write "wake up," on the others "wake me up." Throw the slips into the bag and have everyone in the family pull out a slip. Everyone with "wake me up" tells "wake up" what time they need to get out of bed the next day. "Wake up" sets the alarm clock for five minutes before the earliest time chosen. The next morning, "wake up" makes his or her rounds.

"We parents go to work even when we don't feel like it," writes Rich, who founded The Home and School Institute 26 years ago. "We

call our employers when we'll be out sick or when we are late. Children need to know this and need to copy our behavior."

In addition to responsibility, Rich's



MEGASKILLS: How families can help children succeed in school and beyond by Dorothy Rich. (1988) Houghton Mifflin Company, One Beacon St., Boston, Mass. 02108. 351 pages.

book tackles nine other attitudes and behaviors: confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense and problem solving.

And now there is *MegaSkills*, the workshop.

Susie Yule, a Lake County (Ill.) case worker who deals with dropouts, has given *MegaSkills* workshops in towns as diverse as upper-income Barrington and struggling North Chicago.

"What I like about *MegaSkills* is that it works for a broad range of parents," she said.

The shared experiences and mutual support that develop from the workshops are extra benefits, she added.

Yule said a one-day training session for workshop leaders will be held Nov. 2 in Chicago. The \$270 fee includes parent workshop materials. For additional information, call Yule at (708) 223-3400.

Linda Lenz

Opinions

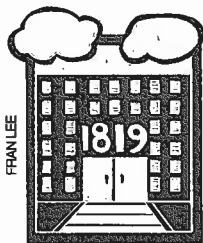
Superintendent strikes back Critics off mark, no help

by Ted D. Kimbrough

In June, the Alliance for Better Chicago Schools, which includes architects of the Chicago School Reform Act as well as local school council members, issued an 18-page critique of Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough and the Interim Board of Education, giving them both a D- for the second semester.

School system leaders were faulted for providing untimely, inadequate information and service, failing to recruit outstanding principals and teachers, poorly constructed curriculum guides, failing to pursue an improved student assessment system and insufficient restructuring of the central office.

Kimbrough issued this response.



Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship.

With that observation, a Greek philosopher gives us a sound perspective on the current struggle over the implementation of school reform.

Repeatedly over the seven months since I became general superintendent of schools, I have been told by critics who present themselves as insightful that the administration of the Chicago Public Schools has not caught up with reform progress being made on the local level.

Repeatedly I am told "Pershing Road" is blocking reform. Certainly that is the case. Isn't that why we have the School Reform Act, because of administrative reluctance to implement reform voluntarily?



Ted D. Kimbrough, an instantly embattled school superintendent.

What those who prefer to criticize rather than craft neglect to say, however, is that it will take more than a few months to solve problems that have been decades in the making.

Let's look at some examples.

■ **Administrative leadership:** One of my first acts as superintendent was to advertise nationally for top administrative positions. My plan was to bring in the best the nation has to offer, either in the public or private sectors. What happened? The state refused to waive its requirement that these administrators go back to school for education credits. The hiring process was delayed while we tried to change that, and when we lost the battle in Springfield, the best candidates from private industry slipped out of our grasp.

■ **Public information:** I immediately commissioned a full audit of all communications functions. The results reflect much of what the critics have said. But unlike the critics, the audit recommends solid remedies. My new

budget calls for a computerized information center to give quick answers to basic questions over the telephone, an expanded communications department to coordinate virtually all public information functions and new restraints on the flood of paperwork that has drowned our local school councils.

■ **Unrealistic deadlines:** This fall, we will issue a calendar of the year's deadlines. That will arm our local school councils with advance warning of required projects. However, it will not solve the true deadline crunch, which is created by conflicting deadlines imposed upon us all by state and federal agencies.

■ **School support services:** Here, again, improvements are coming. This fall, we will launch streamlined personnel procedures, new curriculum guidelines and new bus contracts with strict performance standards. We are now developing a plan to subcontract portions of our purchasing and warehousing operation, to

gain the benefit of advances made in private industry.

■ Staff obstructionists: I am continually called upon to "discipline staff who obstruct school reform." Never has that call included the name of a single employee—at any level—against whom I failed to take action after charges were proven. In fact, I have disciplined several staffers who attempted to block local school council activity. Vague charges may serve to foment public impatience with my administration, but they do so without a basis in fact.

■ School Service Centers: Recognizing that nothing truly worth pursuing comes easily, I know that these centers, bringing traditional central-office services into the community, must be created slowly. With ample opportunity for local school council involvement, I know we can make a good concept even better.

I am told these centers will recreate the old subdistrict power base. How can that be, when the law took

the authority for school staffing and budgets away from the subdistricts and gave it to the schools, where it belongs? Understanding the concern that there be no opportunity for the old power structure to re-emerge, I am proposing checks and balances that will protect local school control of the centers' services and personnel, as well as of the monitoring of the centers' performance.

I am told the money earmarked for the School Service Centers should be given instead to individual schools, to buy services as they see fit. Overlooking the implication that the schools would buy the services directly from the organizations launching this criticism, I would point out the total per school would be only \$6,000. That's hardly enough to buy supplies for new service staff, much less to pay their salaries.

This concept of School Service Centers is a bold plan for downsizing the Pershing Road bureaucracy and putting our services into the local

school community, as the School Reform Act dictates. [*Under a compromise plan, both approaches to school support will be tried on a pilot basis. Editor*]

While much lip service is paid to the notion of empowering local school councils, I am struck by the hypocrisy of groups that continually vie for the role of sole spokesperson for our councils. It is time to let the elected representatives speak for their own constituents. That is the only way to hear the full range of needs and opinions represented by our 6,000 council members.

There is much to be done, and I won't be sidetracked by bickering over who is the true heir to reform. As superintendent, I have the duty and obligation to get the job done, and that is my commitment. I only hope those who are now content to criticize from the sidelines will roll up their sleeves and join me in the crafting of a revolutionary new school system. ■

Schools should give, too

by John Kretzmann



"All communities contain their own human and economic wealth. Finding these resources and linking them in sustained partnerships with schools will be

a formidable task."

That is one of the major challenges put by the Carnegie Council's Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents (1980). Closer to home, building "sustained partnerships" between schools and local communities is at the heart of Chicago's new school reform movement. Neighborhood and school reform leaders know that, to a great extent, schools thrive when their communities thrive, and schools suffer when their communities experience hard times. Educational revitalization and com-

munity revitalization are mutually reinforcing; they should be pursued in tandem.

The challenge raises these questions: What kinds of partnerships between schools and communities are possible? What makes sense educationally? How might both the mission of the school and the well-being of the community be best served by rethinking the opportunities for partnership?

There are two complementary and equally important ways of approaching these questions. Very simply, the first asks, What can our community do for our school? and the second, What can our school do for our community?

The first approach invites us to assess the educational potential of a wide range of people and organizations outside the school. Already school reformers are tapping the

resources of businesses, social service providers, cultural and higher education institutions and civic and community-based organizations. These beginnings indicate a widespread willingness on the part of nonschool people to contribute to the educational enterprise, thereby expanding significantly the resources available to schools.

Clearly, this first approach can be expanded much further. Leaders of one public school we at the Neighborhood Innovations Network are involved with have undertaken a thorough inventory of nonschool educational resources in their community. They anticipate building strong and lasting relationships with a wide range of organizations and individuals.

The second way of approaching school-community relationships—asking what the school can do for the

community—is a less conventional question. Professional educators tend to be single-mindedly school-centered in their ideas about education, looking to the community for resources for their schools while failing to see the school as a set of resources for the community.

That approach is short-sighted for a number of reasons:

■ Schools are key stakeholders in the well-being of their communities. If schools contribute to community improvement, their students, teachers, staff and operations likely will benefit.

■ By extending themselves into communities, schools can help teach students to be responsible citizens and show them how school work relates to the world beyond.

■ By participating in community life, schools demonstrate to community members who have no school ties that schools are crucial institutions worthy of their support.

But how do we begin to understand the school in this new way? First we can look at school resources, which fall generally into the categories of budget, physical facilities

and people. Then we can seek ways to focus these resources on new purposes that both enhance the school's educational mission and contribute to the development of the community.

Here are some suggestions:

■ School budget. Local school councils, which now have legal authority over a local school's budget, might consider purchasing from and contracting with local vendors and suppliers when possible, thus contributing to the well-being of the local economy.

■ School facilities. If school facilities can be made available in non-school hours, the community development possibilities are enormous. Already local leaders are exploring projects such as child care centers, job training and vocational education programs, recycling enterprises, catering businesses and a host of student-run ventures.

■ School personnel, including students, teachers and other workers. Turning their skills and energies toward community development could provide the most crucial links in the new partnership. As part of their

studies, students might compile community histories, conduct local market surveys, expand a school newspaper into the community, enter apprenticeships with local businesses and on and on. Similarly, teachers and other school personnel, even those who live outside the immediate neighborhood, represent an enormous collection of skills and talents to be tapped for community-building purposes.

A growing number of local school and community leaders already is exploring two-way partnerships between schools and communities. Like them, we are convinced that the rewards will be better schools, better education and better communities. ■

John Kretzmann is director of the Neighborhood Innovations Network.

Free copies of the 22-page booklet "School Participation in Local Community Economic Development: Ideas for Getting Started" may be obtained from the Neighborhood Innovations Network, Center for Urban and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, Ill. 60208.

Letters

'Black leadership' article wrong on reform history, Designs for Change

In its May 1990 issue CATALYST gave voice to the hostility and suspicion many black leaders feel toward some of the chief architects of the Chicago School Reform Act. The article, by Alex Poinsett, generated a wide range of responses, from vigorous applause to condemnation. One group, Designs for Change, submitted a rebuttal, excerpted below.

Your article "School reform, black leaders: their impact on each other" by Alex Poinsett contained a blatantly inaccurate history of Chicago school reform and the role of African-Americans in it; basic distortions about our organization, Designs for Change; and racial slurs.

The great strength of the school reform movement since its inception has been its

multiracial leadership and constituency. The Poinsett article attempts to rewrite this history to support a single, racially divisive viewpoint: The false thesis that school reform was crafted by whites without significant involvement from African-American leaders knowledgeable about education.

The article, for example, fails to mention the contribution of the late Al Raby, an African-American leader of the civil rights movement in Chicago during the 1950s and Mayor Harold Washington's campaign manager. Mr. Raby secured the legal and lobbying assistance that made much of the work of the coalition possible and participated in all important decision-making meetings that shaped the law.

The article understates the contribution

of former Rep. Carol Moseley Braun (D-Chicago), who was Mayor Washington's floor leader in the Illinois House. Braun not only introduced, but actively shaped the bill that became the basis for the school reform law in spring 1988.

To correct all the inaccuracies about the history of school reform would take an analysis far longer than the article itself. Here is a sampling of its most glaring errors and omissions.

■ The article states that the leaders of such organizations as the Urban League, Midwest Community Council and The Woodlawn Organization were the primary force in settling the fall 1987 school strike, as they "finally confronted both the Board and the teachers union with an ultimatum: Resolve your differences or we'll open the schools ourselves." Although these groups did become active in the last two weeks of the strike, the primary resistance to the strike came from a variety of African-American, Hispanic and white parent and community groups who began working separately around their own schools and then came together.

Within the African-American and Hispanic communities, the most extensive organizing was done by a multiracial coalition called the People's Coalition for Educational Reform that was led by

Centers for New Horizons (Sokoni Karanja), Marcy-Newberry Center (Ben Kendrick) and Network for Youth Services (Tomas Sanabria) and also included Designs for Change and other groups who later became part of the citywide school reform coalition.

The coalition organized the largest demonstration at Board of Education. Thus, sustained pressures to settle the strike came primarily from the emerging multiracial coalition that ultimately led the fight for the school reform law.

■ As the strike ended, one of the most critical events that shaped the school reform legislation began. Chicagoans United to Reform Education (the C.U.R.E. coalition) had been working for a year to develop a plan for restructuring the school system. In April, 1987, C.U.R.E. had held a citywide conference—attended by 400 parents from 80 schools—to get feedback on its ideas. At that point, C.U.R.E. consisted of representatives from the groups noted above as well as Loyola School of Education, Near North Development Corp. and the Save Our Cities Coalition.

The 65-page outline that emerged from 50 hours of meetings contained most of the concepts and the specific language that ultimately appeared in the school reform law.

Black groups participated

Among the 13 people who participated, the majority were African Americans who had between 10 and 50 years of involvement in efforts to improve education in Chicago, including Earl Durham, Regina Stewart, Sokoni Karanja, Coretta McFerrin, Al Raby, Joan Slay and Kelvin Strong.

In the CATALYST article, the existence of this group is never mentioned, and the bill developed by C.U.R.E. and introduced by Braun and Sen. Miguel Del Valle is characterized simply as the work of Don Moore of Designs for Change. (In a related error, the article incorrectly states that the bill, which the writer credits to Designs for Change, was initially introduced in spring 1987.)

In characterizing the process by which the reform bill finally was crafted, the CATALYST article quotes the Rev. Kenneth B. Smith, who did not participate in the Springfield negotiations, but who asserts: "Just a few groups, such as representatives of Designs for Change and Chicago Panel, went to the State Legislature. That's why some people said the black community was cut out. The blacks who participated don't represent black groups."

In fact, the Alliance for Better Chicago Schools, a coalition of 40 community, parent and business groups who were central in passing the bill, included members from such black-controlled groups as Action

Coalition of Englewood, Clarence Darrow Center, We Can, Developing Communities Project and G.R.E.A.T. Community Coalition, along with the black-controlled groups in C.U.R.E. and multiracial organizations that had significant African-American leadership.

Further, the key reform leader from the business community was Warren Bacon, an African-American who was president of Chicago United and an early supporter of Harold Washington's candidacy for mayor. Finally, the clear majority of parents who went to Springfield to lobby for the bill were African-American and Hispanic. This is one reason why all but two members of the Black Caucus from Chicago voted in favor of the bill.

A 'cartoon version'

In addition to other African-American leaders and groups noted above, Operation PUSH was represented by Leon Finney, who as a participant in negotiations held in House Speaker Michael Madigan's office, agreed to the contents of the bill when it was passed in July 1988, although PUSH later changed its position and opposed the bill.

As for our organization, the CATALYST article gives its readers a cartoon version. It introduces Designs for Change as "a prominent downtown educational research group that loudly espouses concern for the education of black children," then asserts that "Designs, in particular, is distrusted by a large number of [unnamed] black community leaders." As one progresses through the article, Designs for Change is depicted either explicitly or by implication through statements like the following:

■ "Others charge that many of the new leaders he cites are inadvertent pawns created by his Chicago Panel, a self-serving business community, and Designs for Change..."

■ "...experimenting with black children."

■ "white boys making millions of dollars on the backs of our children."

These characterizations run counter to the facts:

■ DFC's board of directors is two-thirds African-American or Hispanic, as is its staff.

■ Since 1985 until the present, DFC has provided training and organizing assistance to parent leaders on the Near South Side (primarily in public housing). From this effort grew a grassroots coalition of African-American parents who formed an organization called South Side SCHOOLWATCH, which was instrumental in winning Black Caucus votes.

■ Before the local school council elections, DFC trained 150 volunteers who, in turn, provided 6 hours of training to 3,500 candidates for local school coun-

cils in virtually every city neighborhood. Of these 150 volunteers, 66 were African-American, 34 were Hispanic, 43 were Anglo and 7 were Asian.

■ Subsequent to the election DFC has provided six to 40 hours of free training and advice to 75 local school councils, again in virtually every neighborhood.

■ As a nonprofit organization, DFC does not "make money" for its work. Our highest salary is less than that of a starting principal in the school system.

Opponents of reform have repeatedly sought to weaken and divert the movement by telling African-Americans that the reform movement was dominated by whites who had "designed reform to fail," by telling whites that reform was a plot to shift most of the school system's resources to predominantly minority schools, etc. Neither we nor the other members of the school reform movement will be intimidated by efforts to divide us, such as the scurrilous falsehoods about DFC that are woven through this article.

Substandard journalism

The "School reform, black leaders" article raises questions about the journalistic standards of CATALYST, questions dealing with accuracy, fairness, balance and the purpose of printing racial slurs.

Further, a number of civic leaders have cited racial divisiveness as the city's top problem. Since the school reform movement has demonstrated its capacity to bring people together across racial and ethnic lines, what responsibility does CATALYST have for promoting racial understanding, rather than divisiveness?

CATALYST's sister publication, *The Chicago Reporter*, has, in our judgment, adhered to high standards of accuracy and integrity in precisely these areas. Chicago's historic school reform movement needs a publication of similar quality to chronicle its development. Judging by this article, you have a way to go.

Jerry Waters, Chair
Earl Durham, Vice Chair
Designs for Change Board of Directors

Editor's response: The article, indeed, should have mentioned DFC's partners in the C.U.R.E. coalition and the work of that group. The editor, not the author, was responsible for that omission. In general, however, a number of the challenges are, in our judgment, matters of interpretation rather than fact.

We at CATALYST do not presume to know the whole truth about the actions or motives of the architects, supporters and critics of school reform. To help readers decide for themselves, we will publish representative views and build from those.

Bulletin

REFORM UPDATES

Experiment in school support

The summer's big tug-of-war over how to provide more support to schools ended with a compromise agreement to test two plans.

Schools in two subdistricts will be served by beefed up subdistrict offices, renamed district service centers. Two other subdistricts will divvy a comparable amount of money among their schools.

Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough initially proposed shifting 11 percent of central-office workers to subdistrict offices so that all schools could get help closer to home.

The ABCs coalition protested, contending the move was a step back toward bureaucratic control. The coalition proposed, instead, that support money go directly to schools and that schools be allowed to form their own networks.

The Parent/Community Council and Chicago Principals Association applauded Kimbrough's subdistrict proposal, citing the pressing need for school support. James Deanes, chair of the PCC, objected to the ABCs approach, contending not all schools are ready to use the money wisely.

At the insistence of the Interim Board of Education, Kimbrough altered his plan to provide that school council representatives could decide what services the district service centers would offer and would be involved in their evaluation. Further, center employees would not have to come from central office.

Under continuing pressure from ABCs, the board finally agreed to the experiment, an approach rarely taken by the Chicago Public Schools. An outside consulting firm will be retained to evaluate both pilot programs. Kimbrough plans to recom-

mend one for citywide implementation in 1991-92.

Untangling communications

"A school could not find the curriculum guides it ordered from the central warehouse. It turned out that the central office had packed the guides in boxes marked 'apples.' They were eventually discovered in the school's refrigerator."

This is one of the more amusing horror stories in a 123-page communication "audit" of the Chicago public schools, conducted by outside consultants and funded by Leadership for Quality Education.

Acting on its advice, Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough took steps to:

- Create an information center in the Office of School Reform that will use updated computer banks to retrieve information and keep records on incoming calls. Operators will follow up on any inquiry they must refer elsewhere, checking to see if the caller received needed information.

- Hire a materials editor and production specialist to control the quality and quantity of central office publications.

The communications audit also recommends, among other things:

- Appointing an ombudsman to receive complaints.

- Creating a resource clearinghouse to, among other things, catalogue and evaluate training, funding and other resources available inside and outside the school system.

Parent group raises red flag

In the first of a series of reform evaluations, the Parent/Community Council expressed concern that "special interest groups" are ignoring parents in their quest to shape school reform.

"The new authority figures are operating in somewhat of a detached manner from the broader community and apparently prefer the limited par-

ticipation of individuals and groups of their choosing," the report said, without identifying the groups.

The PCC called on the Chicago School Finance Authority, charged with overseeing reform, to provide an open forum so that all interests can be heard. It also urged the School Board to adopt standards for school council training that would apply to both internal and external groups. And it urged the Illinois State Board of Education to conduct periodic reviews of reform initiatives.

Free copies of the report can be obtained by calling (312) 427-8999.

Manufacturers sign up

The Illinois Manufacturers Association has formed an education foundation to promote increased accountability, productivity and excellence in education.

The foundation also aims to strengthen vocational education, including apprenticeships for teenagers and retraining current workers. A clearinghouse is being established to distribute information on programs that, among other things, encourage choice and provide incentives for educators and students.

For more information call (312) 922-6575.

TEACHERS

Math, science academy The school system's 17,000 teachers of math and science will learn contemporary, hands-on teaching methods at a new academy designed to serve as a national model.

The brainchild of Nobel Prize-winning physicist Leon Lederman, the Academy for Mathematics and Science Teachers will open in December on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Fifty

teachers will be invited to enroll in a 10-week program that will adapt to meet individual school needs.

With a pledge of \$2 million from the U.S. Department of Energy, the academy is seeking another \$9 million for 1990-91 and more than \$30 million for each subsequent school year. The bulk of the money would pay the salaries of specially trained substitute teachers, who would fill in for those attending the academy.

APPOINTMENTS

New reform posts Ronald Sistrunk, formerly in the community development office of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, was tapped for executive director of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform.

Lafayette Ford, chair of the School Board Nominating Commission, is the new director of education at the Executive Service Corps. Ford had been a subforeman in the city's sewer department.

Germaine C. Gordon, formerly a research and policy development consultant in the office of Mayor Harold Washington, is executive director of the Parent/Community Council's School Reform Monitoring Project. While at City Hall, she worked for the Education Summit.

Patrick Keleher, formerly policy director of Chicago United, is executive director of the Illinois Manufacturers Association's new education foundation.

Daley's delay Mayor Richard M. Daley drew protestors to his office door when he failed to meet a requirement in state law that he act on Board of Education nominees within 30 days of receiving them.

He belatedly chose seven individuals—four blacks, two whites and one Hispanic—sending the School Board Nominating Commission off to compile new three-person slates for each of the eight other vacancies on the School Board. (Daley received the new slates in early August.)

His choices are Albert Logan, retired Peoples Gas executive and former teacher, for a one-year term; and Clinton Barstow, business administration dean at Chicago State University, and Patricia Lyons Daley, former teacher, for two-year terms.

For three-year terms Daley chose Stephen Ballis, Lincoln Park real estate developer, and Nathaniel Jarrett, pastor of Martin Temple A.M.E. Zion Church and president of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago.

Florence Cox, a former president of Chicago Region PTA, and Maria Vargas, a senior order clerk for Illinois Bell Telephone Co. and past president of the Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association, were nominated for four-year terms.

Kimbrough's picks Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough filled five of seven top administrative posts.

Adrienne Bailey, academic affairs vice president at The College Board and a former member of the Illinois Board of Education, will become deputy superintendent for instructional services. She replaces Chicago school veteran Margaret Harrigan, who will head up the office of human resources.

Thomas Hehir, manager of student support services for Boston's public schools, will become associate superintendent for special education and pupil support.

Robert Saddler will stay on as deputy superintendent for field operations. Paul Vega, an attorney and former Malcolm X College administrator,

will become associate superintendent for school reform implementation. Kimbrough also is searching for a chief attorney and chief financial officer.

RESEARCH

Flunking practices vary

Twenty-three schools retained more than 20 percent of their first-graders for another year of first grade, while 81 schools flunked fewer than 2 percent of their first-graders.

This disparity in pupil retention practices in the Chicago public schools was uncovered in a study by the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance.

First-graders were most likely to be retained, with 8.9 percent held back in June, 1989. The retention rate tapered off to 3 percent at sixth grade and rose slightly in seventh grade and again in eighth grade.

Students who are retained are much more likely to drop out of school eventually than are similar students who were promoted, studies have shown. Further, even students who survive flunking do not make higher academic gains than similar students who never were retained.

Teachers skeptical Signs of continuing teacher skepticism about school reform emerged in a survey of 100 teachers conducted at 10 South Side schools in June.

Seventy percent predicted schools will become politicized, 52 percent said parents would interfere with school operations, and 46 percent predicted parents will lose interest in local school councils (26 percent said they were not sure).

Teachers generally saw few benefits from the first year of reform. Forty-four percent said parent involvement

was up, and 37 percent said teachers are more involved in making decisions. But only 16 percent said teacher morale had improved.

The survey was conducted by Earl J. Ogletree, education professor at Chicago State University, and Effie McHenry, assistant principal at Wentworth Elementary School, 6950 S. Sangamon.

CONFERENCES

Reform forums School improvement plans and the role of the business and religious communities in school reform will be the topics at upcoming forums sponsored by the Community Renewal Society and Roosevelt University.

All forums will be held from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the society, 332 S. Michigan, Suite 500.

The dates, topics and moderators are: Sept. 7, the possibilities and limits of school improvement plans, Rep. John Cullerton (D-Chicago); Oct. 26, models for school improvement plans, Thomas Corcoran, secretary of the Board of Education; Nov. 9, the role of the business and religious communities in Chicago school reform, the Rev. Kenneth B. Smith, president of Chicago Theological Center.

For principals only Creating vision statements and agendas will be discussed at the first in a series of "principal fellowships" sponsored by the Community Renewal Society.

The session will be held from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sept. 13 at the society, 332 S. Michigan, Suite 500. Len Sirotzki, director of the DuPage-Kane Counties Education Service Center, will be the speaker. For more information, call Nelson Ndove (312) 427-4830.

Education technology The use of technology in schools can be explored through workshops and demonstrations at a free exposition scheduled for noon to 5 p.m. Oct. 21 at Hermann Hall, 3241 S. Federal.

"Schools of Tomorrow Today" also will offer workshops on grant writing for local technology projects. The expo is being sponsored by the North Central Regional Educational

Laboratory in cooperation with the Chicago Public Schools and Illinois Institute of Technology. Advance registration is required.

The laboratory also will sponsor a conference, "Technology to Improve Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools," Oct. 21-23 at the Midland Hotel. For information on the conference and registration for the expo call Carole Fine at NCREL (708) 941-7677.

School sports Researchers, journalists and coaches will be among the speakers at "School Sport as an Educational Tool," a national conference scheduled for Sept. 20 and 21 at the University of Chicago.

It is being sponsored by the Institute for Athletics and Education, 5845 S. Ellis. The registration fee is \$125. For additional information call (312) 702-8288.

Family Resource Coalition "Building communities" will be the theme of the third annual conference of the Family Resource Coalition, scheduled for Oct. 17-21 in the Palmer House Hotel.

The coalition strives to build support and resources within communities in order to empower families, enhance the capacities of parents and foster the optimal development of children. For more information about activities, publications and the conference, contact the coalition at 230 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1625, Chicago, Ill., 60601 (312) 726-4750.

TELEVISION

A tale of two schools WTTW-TV (Channel 11) followed two local school councils through the first year of reform for a documentary scheduled for broadcast at 8 p.m. Sept. 20.

The schools are Dumas Elementary, 6650 S. Ellis, and Collins High School, 1313 S. Sacramento. The documentary will focus primarily on the schools' parents and principals.

Weeklong look at education Innovative educational ideas and programs will be spotlighted in a series of broadcasts and conferences that

CBS-TV (Channel 2) has scheduled for the week of Sept. 3.

News features on education will be aired during morning and evening news shows. Charles Kuralt will host a two-hour special at 8 p.m. Sept. 6. A national teleconference will follow after the local news.

FOR KIDS

Ladybug takes off A new monthly magazine aimed at stimulating imagination, sensitivity and a sense of humor is available for children two to seven.

Ladybug contains literature, art and educational games. It was launched by the publishers of *Cricket*, an award-winning magazine for children six to 14. An annual subscription costs \$29.97. For more information write or call *Ladybug*, P.O. Box 58342, Boulder, Colo., 80322 (800)-BUG-PALS.

RESOURCES

Preventing teen parent dropout Flyers for pregnant teens and teenage parents are available from the Illinois Caucus on Teenage Pregnancy.

The flyers spell out the girls' educational rights and responsibilities. The caucus, which is monitoring a number of Chicago programs aimed at keeping young mothers in school, also offers help to schools and organizations working on this challenge. For more information, call Jenny Knauss or Diane Fager (312) 427-4460.

Out in the country Pleasant Valley Outdoor Center, a 460-acre farm that doubles as a camp, offers a variety of opportunities for enriching classroom education.

Staff is prepared to help teachers teach about the environment or use the environment to teach the Three Rs. Classes may visit twice a year, to experience seasonal changes. The camp, located outside Woodstock in McHenry County, also can serve as a retreat site. For more information call (815) 338-5080 or (708) 669-3535.

The State of Missouri came to that conclusion six years ago, when it launched a program to help parents of newborns and toddlers learn effective child-rearing skills. Every school district must offer the help, which includes parent seminars and home visits by a child development professional. A 1990 follow-up study of the first participants found that the children, now heading into second grade, scored significantly higher on reading and math tests than did comparable children who did not participate.

Beethoven project

Another ambitious parenting program, the Beethoven Project, is completing its third year at Robert Taylor Homes. The name derives from the goal of ensuring that youngsters who enroll in Beethoven Elementary School's kindergartens in 1993 are ready for school learning. At its core is a drop-in center, where residents as well as professionals work with mothers and their children.

Programs to help parents and to bring parents and educators together are multiplying rapidly. Advocates warn, however, that they won't produce overnight gains. Further, parent involvement is not the end-all of educational improvement, says Epstein. A good school can still overcome a parent participation deficit, she says.

"People must realize that parent involvement is not a substitute for an excellent school," says Epstein, echoing Clark, Comer and others. "It's about helping more children to succeed—all children, all school grades, all families. It is a process, not an event, and it takes time and collaboration between all sides." ■

Maudlyne Ihejirika is a reporter for the Chicago Sun-Times.

Essays and letters should be addressed to CATALYST/Opinions, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, Ill., 60604. They may be edited for clarity and space. Include your name, address, and phone number.

home to help my child review skills," said Betty Obiazi, who, with her son Eugene, has been an academy participant for two years. "I never thought of things like that before. We would just go through the books. I never thought I was that creative."

"I'm more involved," she added. "I talk to his teacher more. I felt his teacher had fresh ideas and was willing to work with me to help the child. She would wait until I got off from work, and meet with me at school at 5:30 to talk about his work."

Teacher Cheryl Blaney said the program "definitely bridges the communication gap between parent and teacher." She added that the experience also prompted her to fine-tune some of her teaching.

Test scores up

And everyone is buoyed by the rise in test scores. Initially below average, all 46 pupils who participated in the program for both years achieved or surpassed national averages. For 10 of them, the gains reflected what normally is expected after four or five years of instruction, rather than only two.

Novak-King's Home Learning Academy has been underwritten each year by a \$6,000 grant, first from the Field Foundation and then from Allstate Insurance Co. Dorsey said the program needs its own coordinator, which would double the cost.

The district's expansion plans call for more social workers, reading and math specialists to help teachers update their teaching and sensitivity training to help teachers work with a culturally diverse student body, which is two-thirds minority and mainly black. Further, children and parents could enroll as early as first grade.

"We need to intervene as early as possible," said Block. "It's more cost effective than trying to reach the child after he has fallen behind." ■

James H. Riddick Jr. is a Chicago writer. For more information about the Home Learning Academy for Parents and Students, contact Leslie Block (708) 675-2937.

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Catalyst
VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

Bright Ideas

Students pick favorite teachers

At Evanston Township High School, just north of Chicago, freshmen single out their favorite teachers each month, offering recognition where it counts.

In nominating teachers, students must explain why they believe their choices merit recognition. The teacher with the most nominations gets a \$50 gift certificate to a local restaurant and is interviewed on the school's cable television channel, WKIT. All nominees get the ballots singing their praises.

"Sometimes teaching can seem like a thankless job," said assistant principal Denise Martin. "This gives teachers a chance to shine."

Similarly, teachers recognize one freshman each quarter who has excelled in some area, including kindness and sensitivity.

Winners get \$5 gift certificates to the school store and are honored at an appreciation breakfast.

Denise Martin (708) 492-3800.



Leon Fields points out his favorite fish to Balinda Smiley.

Ministers help CVS students

At Chicago Vocational High School, 2100 E. 87th, 25 ministers from throughout the city have banded

Send tips about bright ideas to *CATALYST*/Bright Ideas. Include your name and phone number.

together to help students with discipline and social problems.

Teachers report such students to the ministerial council, which then questions and advises them.

"We try to appeal to them with reason and pride," said the Rev. Thomas Jackson Jr., pastor of the New Original Church of God in Christ and council founder.

The program provides positive role models for black students while

enhancing ministers' knowledge about the problems of youths in their communities, he said.

Rev. Thomas Jackson Jr. (312) 978-0947.

Following a fish story

The 45-gallon aquarium in the classroom of special education teacher Everett Edwards at Terrell Elementary School, 5410 S. State, is more than decoration.

It's a living lesson in pollution and its impact. Students monitor the water in the aquarium and the condition of the fish, periodically replacing water to maintain its PH balance.

The project entails reading, writing, math and group cooperation, notes Edwards. Students also get to show off their knowledge by giving "tours" to inquiring students. "The kids are very thorough," said Edwards. "I rarely have to interject information."

Everett Edwards (312) 536-7420.

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