

VOLUME V NUMBER 8 MAY 1994

Catalyst

VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

As truancy rises, agencies launch new tactics

by Lorraine V. Forte

In February, Chicagoans were shocked by the case of the "Keystone 19," in which 19 apparently neglected children were removed from a two-bedroom West Side apartment. The oldest, a 14-year-old boy, hadn't been to school for nearly a year; he'd disappeared from one school, transferred to another, then disappeared again.

Reacting to the news, Mayor Richard M. Daley and School Board President D. Sharon Grant rebuked school and central office staff for failing to bring the youth back to school; Grant warned that "heads will roll" once blame was fixed.

But what neither of them mentioned was that the Board of Education had eliminated all its truant officers the year the boy was out of school. In September 1992, the board fired the system's 153 truant officers to save \$4 million and



JOHN BOOZ

Marynette Giles, a truant officer rehired as a counseling aide, still spends most of her time tracking down truants. Here, she leads Haines School students to a bus waiting to take them on a field trip. See story on page 7.

help close a \$156 million budget gap. (The Chicago Teachers Union [CTU], which represents truant officers, is contesting the firings; see story on page 6.)

"Had truant officers been around, that [Keystone incident] never would have happened," asserts June Davis, assistant to the CTU president for

career service issues. Truant officers, she argues, were the system's main line of defense against hard-core truancy.

Chronic truancy was a problem before truant officers were eliminated, but it jumped sharply the year they were fired. (Under the Illinois School Code, a "chronic truant" is a student who is absent without a valid excuse for 10 percent or more of a district's schooldays; in Chicago, that's 18 days.)

In 1992-93, the number of chronic truants in Chicago's public schools rose 14 percent, from 16,289 in 1991-92 to 18,916; those 18,916 truants represent about 5 percent of Chicago's enrollment and nearly half of some 38,000 truants statewide. The number of truancy stops made by police—that is,



■ **NORWOOD PARK SCHOOL** Wholeheartedly holistic. **Page 11.**

■ **REVISED REFORM PLAN** Test scores downplayed. Schools will rate themselves, decide whether to seek help. **Page 22.**

■ **CENTRAL STAFF SHAKEUP** A true-blue reformer gets top post as Big Business makes its presence felt.

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In This Issue: Recouping Losses?

When the Board of Education stripped the school system of truant officers in 1992, it apparently hoped that schools would use their state Chapter 1 money to hire them back to do the same work. It hasn't turned out that way. June Davis of the Chicago Teachers Union estimates that no more than 15 percent of schools have hired truancy staff. Whatever the actual number, it's clear that few schools have filled the void. It's easy to understand why. There are so many things that schools want and need to do to serve the children who attend regularly, that it's a difficult decision to spend money on those who don't.

If there's a silver lining in this story, it's that the Board of Education and other agencies have begun to confront the obvious: Truancy is "a family problem," as Cook County Schools Supt. Lloyd W. Lehman puts it, that can't be solved by schools alone. Both a new board program and a task force convened by Lehman are looking to help parents that can't or don't get their kids to school. Appropriately, that help begins with a stern warning that parents can be hauled into court if they don't fulfill their responsibilities. Sometimes that's enough to do the trick, as schools participating in the board's program have found.

Among big-city school systems, Chicago is not alone in losing truant officers to budget pressures, and may even be in the lead in pursuing a coordinated approach to truancy.



As Contributing Editor Michael Klonsky reports in Updates, Pershing Road actually was listening when it held a series of hearings on Supt. Argie Johnson's proposed Three-Tiered Model for school improvement. The biggest complaint from schools was that Johnson's original proposal used test scores to label them as good, mediocre and bad—regardless of what they were doing to raise student achievement. Central and subdistrict

staff then were to arrange appropriate levels of help.

Now, a revised version puts test scores aside to demand of schools that they evaluate themselves on a wide range of activities—from the frequency of local school council meetings to the number of teachers pursuing continued professional growth. Further, it would be up to schools themselves to *ask* for help.

Even so, the revision reserves for central and subdistrict offices the biggest challenge of all, ensuring that help is available. The plan recognizes—and we can only hope central and district staff do, too—that getting help to schools that need it will require different kinds of administrative jobs. For example, grouping schools with like problems into clusters won't do much good unless the cluster has a coordinator to do the extra work; that's a clear lesson from the many school improvement projects around town.



WORTH PONDERING May 17 is the 40th anniversary of the historic U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* declaring that racially segregated schools are inherently unequal. *Emerge* magazine marks the occasion with a special insert in its May issue. Two excerpts:

"Forty years after *Brown*, we need to be concentrating our efforts on management of our schools and on the access our schools provide for community involvement."

Raymond C. Pierce, deputy assistant secretary, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights

"There are two compelling reasons [why desegregation is a desirable goal]. One is that public school education should be a process of preparing young people to live in society, which is a multiracial society. And part of that is when African-American students are isolated in public schools, they are often isolated from opportunity. The second reason is that school desegregation, in some senses, makes it more likely that African-American students will not be given a different and inferior education than White students are receiving."

Theodore M. Shaw, associate director-counsel, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Linda Levy Lorraine Forte

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1993 Peter Lisagor Award, Best Newsletter.
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school-age children picked up during school hours—rose 26 percent, from 52,828 to 71,094.

Since 1986-87, when the current definition of chronic truancy was adopted, the truancy rate has been on the upswing. It rose 26 percent between 1986-87 and 1987-88, going from 10,559 to 13,902; until last year, the figure held steady at about 16,000.

Schools were shorthanded before the firings, with most sharing a truant officer with at least two other schools. And principals say there is a critical need for *someone* to make home visits, especially in poor communities where many parents have no phones, move often or both.

"This school could use a truant officer every day," says Principal Reva Hairston of Terrell Elementary in the Robert Taylor Homes area; Terrell had truant officer services only 1 1/2 days a week.

"Now, there's really no way to make [parent] contact," says Principal Noel LeVeaux of Mason Elementary on the West Side. "The hard-core truant cases can't be handled at all."

A handful of "attendance officers" have been added to subdistrict offices to help handle truancy cases. But with each

officer assigned to two districts, "it's hard to keep up," says Blondean Y. Davis, superintendent of Subdistrict 10.

Some schools used their state Chapter 1 or other discretionary funds to hire staff to deal with truancy. "What the game plan was, was to have schools pick them up with their discretionary funds, but the principals said 'No,'" says the CTU's Davis; she estimates that, at most, 15 percent of schools hired truancy staff.

Many schools have simply shifted more responsibility to existing staff.

"Now, there's really no way to make [parent] contact. The hard-core truant cases can't be handled at all."

—Noel LeVeaux, principal, Mason Elementary

At Delano Elementary on the West Side, for instance, school-community representative Roberta McNutt says that taking on more attendance work has cut into the time she can spend on her main job—working with families of federal Chapter 1 students. "There's too many kids to service," she says. (Delano was the first school where the Keystone

youth was enrolled; McNutt recalls making several trips to the boy's home before discovering the family had moved.)

The firings also "left a void" in efforts to bring court cases against parents of truants, concedes Joseph Ruiz, director of the board's Office of Student Support. Truant officers brought such cases to court and worked with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office on prosecution.

The impact has been felt as well at the School Children's Aid Society, an 81-year-old volunteer organization that pro-

vides clothes for needy children so that they can attend school. Requests for clothing are down "significantly" since truant officers were eliminated, reports Sylvia Raczky; requests must come through schools, she explains, and truant officers usually made the requests.

New solutions

In the wake of the firings, two new initiatives have begun: a school-based program developed by the School Board, and an anti-truancy task force of public agencies. These initiatives are attempting a comprehensive approach, aiming to pressure parents to get kids to school, and to help solve the social problems that sometimes cause truancy.

"I am pro-truant officer, but there were [truancy] problems even with them," notes Ernest Grant, a coordinator of the new board program. "We have to come up with a new approach. We can't just act as policemen anymore. A truant officer needs to work with families and agencies too. . . . You do need someone to do what they used to do, but it has to be broader than that."

The board initiative is called STRAP, for Student Truant Retrieval Assistance Program; its goal is to use court action, if necessary, to make sure children go to school.

Under STRAP, coordinators are training teachers, on a school-by-school basis,

Attendance drop costs schools \$2 million

Last year, attendance in the Chicago public schools dropped by almost 1 percentage point, from 89.8 percent to 89.1 percent.

That drop cost the Board of Education nearly \$2 million in general state aid this year, according to estimates by the board's department of budget development and analysis. (The estimates showed that, had last year's attendance gone up by 1 percent, state aid would have increased by \$2.7 million; the actual drop of 0.7 percent translates into a loss of \$1.89 million.)

The amount of general state aid districts receive is based in part on the best three months of attendance the previous year; in Chicago, the best three months usually occur during the first four months of the school year.

Last year's drop in attendance has been blamed on the board's 1992 deci-

sion to eliminate truant officers to save \$4 million during the 1992-93 school year. From a strictly financial standpoint, truant officers are cost-effective only if they can boost attendance during a district's best three months of attendance.

However, September and October often *were* the busiest months of the year for Chicago truant officers, recalls former officer Marynette Giles. "We had to round up what we called 'no-shows'—children who decided to extend their summer vacation," she explains.

And as William Rice, director of the board's office of research and planning, points out, looking at the elimination of truant officers only in terms of the school system's budget is short-sighted. "The long-term impact on education is more important," he says.

Lorraine Forte

David Seid (left) passes out prizes to Haines School kindergartners with perfect attendance. Haines Principal Gandy Heaston says the school's incentive program has helped boost attendance from 89 percent in 1989 to its current 94 percent.



JOHN HOOD

in several areas: the technicalities of the state's school attendance law, the need to emphasize to parents the importance of regular attendance and to document each contact made with a family, and how to keep proper attendance records—for example, in ink, not pencil, and with different symbols to indicate absence in the morning, the afternoon or for a full day.

STRAP also instructs teachers in a new procedure: sending parents of truants 5-day and 10-day notices by registered mail, informing them they can be prosecuted if the truancy continues. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a paper trail documenting a school's attempts to contact the parent and solve the truancy problem; such documentation is needed to take parents to court.

"The [state compulsory attendance] laws have been there," says Grant. "What we are pushing now is complete communication between the school and community. We're telling teachers they have to enforce these laws."

Without truant officers, schools will have to designate a staff member to work with the state's attorney. "We have to pull people from other jobs," says Principal Donald Moran of Grant Elementary on the West Side.

Once cases reach court, the board and the state's attorney's office intend to ask the presiding judge to order social service intervention—not fines or other punishment—so that families get needed counseling, medical help or other assis-

tance under court supervision.

"Our goal is to solve the [family's] problems," says Anna Demacopoulos, a deputy supervisor in the state's attorney's office, who is handling the cases. "If parents need intervention, they should get it."

"We're not looking at a \$500 fine," says Ruiz. "We're looking for behavioral change."

"We have to come up with a new approach. We can't just act as policemen anymore."

—Ernest Grant, coordinator,
Student Truant Retrieval Assistance Program

The threat of legal action is critical, some principals believe, because many parents—who are often little more than children themselves—simply don't realize it's crucial to get kids to school.

"They have to know something will happen," says Principal Frederick McNeil of Mayo Elementary in the Douglas area. "Let's put it this way: They need forceful encouragement." McNeil and several other principals report that sending out notices has already prompted some parents to get their children back in school.

But the CTU's Davis believes STRAP places "an undue burden of paperwork" on teachers, and points out that schools

still need someone to make home visits. Recalling her years as a school-community rep tracking down truants, Davis says, "I could call a parent in the morning and at 2 p.m. they wouldn't have a phone. The next week they would have a new phone number."

Also, the cost of sending notices—which schools must pay themselves—can quickly add up, because registered mail costs \$2.29 per letter. And at least one school, Attucks Elementary in Stateway Gardens, has had stacks of the notices returned as "undeliverable" because parents had moved or never picked up their mail.

Meanwhile, a Chicago Truancy Task Force has been meeting monthly for the past year to try to figure out ways to share information and provide services to families. The task force includes the schools, CTU, police, Juvenile Court, Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), state's attorney, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and Illinois Department of Public Aid.

The task force was launched in February 1993 by Cook County Schools Supt. Lloyd W. Lehman, whose office is required by law to provide truancy services to school districts. With only one truant officer to serve all 143 suburban school districts in Cook County, Lehman

had no manpower to help Chicago principals who began calling after their own truant officers were eliminated.

Bringing agencies together made sense, Lehman explains, because "one thing that's clear is that truancy is a family problem. You don't [usually] find a family with two kids where one is truant and one not." The agencies plan to work initially with 20 pilot schools to share information and develop models for combatting truancy.

One controversial CHA proposal entails fining parents of truants and evicting them if the behavior continues. To implement that proposal, the CHA

wants the board to share attendance information; that poses a legal problem for the board because attendance information is in student records, which are confidential. One proposed solution, according to board attorney Patricia Whitten, would be to have parents sign a consent form allowing release of the records as part of their CHA lease.

So far, task force efforts took a step forward in late March, when Chief Judge Harry Comerford of the Cook County Circuit Court granted a request to assign all truancy cases to a single judge in a single courtroom. The new courtroom is in police headquarters at 11th and State.

Previously, truancy cases, which are misdemeanors, were assigned to judges at random; mixed in with felony cases, they often got scant attention.

"We'd have to wait till the end of the day to be heard," says former truant officer Marynette Giles. "Truancy would be the last thing [on the judge's mind]."

Currently, 18 cases, generated through STRAP, were set to be heard in court in April, reports Grant; 41 more have been presented to the state's attorney for prosecution. (The state's attor-

ney's office does not have statistics on the number of truancy cases filed in previous years, according to spokesperson Marcy O'Boyle.)

It's too early to tell whether STRAP can make a dent in the truancy problem. But, noting the example of one young girl—whose parents couldn't be found and who was absent for 42 days—Hairston of Terrell says, "We need some help *prior* to taking them to court."

Amundsen results mixed

Amundsen High in Lincoln Square reports mixed results from court action. Faced with a growing truancy and class-cutting problem, the school announced in 1990 that it would prosecute parents of truants—but only after sending letters and holding meetings with the family and providing counseling to students. "We only go after the ones who are totally non-respondent," says Assistant Principal Pauline Tarvardian.

Each year, the school has forwarded about six cases to the state's attorney; in most instances, the parent transferred

the student to another school. Last year, only one case went before a judge; the parent was found guilty and sentenced to attend local school council meetings.

However, the threat of prosecution has had some impact, with attendance rising and class cuts decreasing soon after the program was announced, Tarvardian reports.

Ruiz notes that STRAP and the task force are seeking to take Amundsen's approach one step farther. "Follow-up [with services] is the real difference."

Task forces "traditionally have had minimal impact," says Principal Noble Pearce of Attucks. But, he adds, "if society can make an impact on these [social] situations then our attendance would go through the roof."

Like others, Giles is taking a wait-and-see attitude. "I encourage anything that will help children, but I don't want truant officers excluded. There's a need for people to go out and knock on doors. It's still one of the most important ways to reach parents and talk with them." ■

Intern Anastasia Benschhoff contributed to this report.

Legal battle over firings could last years

Last December, the Board of Education won Round 2 of its battle with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) over the dismissal of about 350 truant officers, school clerks and library assistants.

But there are several rounds to go, and they could last several more years, according to union lawyer Wayne Giampietro. "I mean, this is a *long* way from being done," he says. An attorney for the School Board agrees that the end isn't in sight.

The union ceded Round 1 in September 1992 when it declined to strike over the firings and instead filed an unfair labor-practice complaint accusing the School Board of bad-faith bargaining. (The firings themselves weren't a violation of the CTU contract because the jobs were not subject to negotiated staffing formulas, as is the case with classroom teachers.)

Five months ago, an administrative law judge for the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board dismissed the union's complaint, giving the board its

Round 2 victory.

This ruling doesn't much surprise Thomas Gibbons, a labor lawyer who heads the Center for Workforce Education at DePaul University. "Bad-faith bargaining is a very hard thing to prove," says Gibbons. "The line between good-faith bargaining and 'surface bargaining' [just going through the motions] can be very fine, so the union had a tough case going in."

For instance, the CTU said that board officials had failed to give union negotiators the information they requested during negotiations. Gibbons says that such a charge is especially hard to prove without producing a "smoking gun," that is, without showing that information which would have helped union negotiators was withheld.

The union also pointed out that both the board and the School Finance Authority had approved the board's budget—without the jobs in question—before board-union talks on the layoffs even began. The union argued that that timing shows the board wasn't serious

about the negotiations.

On this point, says Gibbons, the union would have had "a damn good argument" if the board hadn't been free to amend its budget.

The union has appealed the law judge's ruling to the full labor board.

The arguments in Round 3 are heavy on technicalities. For example, the School Board wants the union's appeal dismissed out of hand because the appeal does not follow the required format precisely. The labor board "has repeatedly required strict conformance to both the letter and the spirit of its rules and regulations and has not hesitated to take decisive action if they have not been fully followed," contends Theodore Clark, an attorney for the firm representing the School Board.

Giampietro expects that the labor board's eventual ruling will be appealed to the Illinois Appellate Court—for Round 4—and the court's decision might be appealed to the state Supreme Court for a fifth and final round.

Dan Weissmann

Truant officer gets rehired—at less pay



"I try and make sure parents get the services they need," says Marynette Giles (right). Here, she talks with the parent of a Haines School student.

by Lorraine V. Forte

It's 9:30 a.m. on a recent rainy Wednesday at Haines Elementary. Marynette Giles, a former truant officer rehired as a counseling aide, has already telephoned the parent of one young girl who's been absent the past few days. The girl, it turned out, had been feeling ill, but her mother promised she would be in school that day.

Before the schoolday began, Giles had been to the home of another parent to tell her the school nurse and psychologist wanted her to come to school for a conference about her child. The woman had no transportation (Haines is in temporary quarters in Englewood while a new school in Armour Square is built to replace the old one), so Giles told her she could ride the school bus.

"Mostly, I'm here to keep attendance up, but I also try and make sure parents get the services they need," says Giles, who also works for Attucks and Mayo schools in the Douglas neighborhood.

Several days earlier, in her office at Attucks, Giles declined to take a

reporter on home visits, citing a rash of shootings in the surrounding Stateway Gardens and Robert Taylor homes following the breakdown of a gang truce.

Just the previous week, she and her daughter, Yvette Giles, Attucks' school-community representative, heard gunshots and decided to cut short their rounds. "We said, OK, that's it for home visits today," recalls Yvette.

Giles, a truant officer since the early 1980s, was working at Haines, Attucks and Mayo when she and the rest of the system's 153 truant officers were fired by the board.

The principals of the three schools were at a Subdistrict 6 principals' meeting when they heard the news, recalls Haines Principal Gandy Heaston. "We thought, what will we do without Mrs. Giles?" With many students living in homes without phones, the schools desperately needed someone to make home visits to track down absent children.

Heaston and her colleagues decided to rework their budgets and use state Chapter 1 money to hire Giles. At first, central office objected, saying the budgets couldn't be amended; the princi-

pals won out, but had to go to Pershing Road together to sign the revised budgets at the same time.

But because the board eliminated the truant officer job category, Giles had to be assigned to an existing position whose job description would encompass truancy work. So she was hired as a guidance counselor aide, a position that fit the bill but pays less and is not represented by the union.

(Truant officers who were rehired typically were hired as counseling aides, reports June Davis of the Chicago Teachers Union; that position pays about \$200 to \$300 less per month than a truant officer's job, according to the board's 1992 salary schedule. Schools can also rehire officers as special services student advocates, a job with higher pay than a truant officer's but also not represented by the union.)

'Fantastic on her feet'

"Mrs. Giles is fantastic on her feet," Heaston says. "She's a true truant officer. No matter where they are, if they're not living at home, if they're homeless, she'll find them." That active style, she adds, "lets the community know, when Mrs. Giles comes looking for you, you better send your child to school."

Because Giles worked for the schools before, she knows each of the surrounding communities. "It's important to have someone who has that kind of rapport in the neighborhood," says Attucks Principal Noble Pearce.

Pointing outside her window at Attucks—with duct tape covering scattered bullet holes in the glass—Giles stresses the need for resources in the area, which has the lowest per-capita income in Chicago. "In our area, we need a truant officer, *two* truant officers, every day."

A typical day for her might include phone calls, home visits, a drive to the School Children's Aid Society to pick up clothing for a youngster or a visit to a food pantry for a child's needy family.

Providing services to *prevent* truancy is as important as tracking children down when they're absent. "Children to me are more than just a number," she says. "We try to deal with the child as a person. If a parent tells us a child is out because he doesn't have shoes or clothing, we try to utilize the services for them." ■

'Parents simply are not aware'

Curie High cuts truancy by tracking kids, telling parents

by Debra Williams

Two school years ago, 21 percent of Curie High School's 3,200 students were chronic truants. Last school year, the truancy rate at the Southwest Side school was down to 14 percent.

The improvement, school officials say, came from a lot of work by the school's attendance staff—including phone calls and letters—to let parents know their kids were not attending school.

In addition, Curie began closely tracking the attendance of students who are prone to cutting class. The so-called blue-sheet program has teachers sign a blue form to confirm that students attended class; the forms are returned daily to the attendance office, which publishes a daily "absence bulletin." The bulletin provides a running tally of absences. If a pattern develops, staff call parents and send letters.

"We go down the list; if there are a

lot of absences, we call the parents," says Arthur Gerson, one of eight full-time workers in the attendance office. "If the parents aren't home, we call the job or an emergency number. A human being can do this; a computer can't."

"A majority of the time," says Principal Walter Pilditch, "parents simply are not aware of what their teenagers are doing. Once I saw a mother drop off her kids at the front door. No sooner than she'd left, they were sneaking out the back door. Telling parents what their teenagers do is a big part of our job."

"We send a letter to parents and, bingo, like magic, we have a line of parents waiting to see us to work out a plan."

Went to school, not to class

That's what happened with Curie students Nekeia Anderson, José España and Dan Ney. During the first semester, all three students would go to school

but not always to class.

"If I had a class I didn't like, I didn't go," says Nekeia, a 15-year-old freshman. "And if my friends wanted to hang out, I'd hang out with them. The school is open campus; it's easy to cut."

She adds that a schedule change that gave her an early-morning class and lunch right before her last class didn't help. During the first semester, Nekeia skipped class 40 times.

"I was always getting up late and would never make my first class," she relates. "And my last class was right after lunch, so I'd skip my last class and lunch and go home early."

José, an 18-year-old sophomore who transferred from Kelly High, reports, "I'd come to school, but I wouldn't go to some of my classes because I didn't know nobody. I hung out in front of the school. I'd go to division so I wouldn't be counted absent for the day, and then I'd go back outside and hang out with my friends."

He adds that his younger brother,

Problems stem from 'not making school a priority'

Ask elementary school staff why children have poor attendance or become truants, and, more often than not, you'll get an answer that boils down to "parents."

Parents keep children home because they need someone to babysit younger children. Or because they need someone to go to the store for them. Or because the child doesn't have a clean shirt. Or because he or she didn't get up on time. And so on.

"It's just not making school a priority," says Roberta McNutt, a school-community representative at Delano Elementary on the West Side. "I don't think children are being told they *have* to come to school. . . . You talk to [parents],

they get them back in school for a while, then it starts back up again."

Mobility is also a factor. In some instances, parents—especially those living in public housing—will move without notifying the school, says Principal Noble Pearce of Attucks Elementary in the Stateway Gardens area. "The way we will find out is when the child is absent from school for three or four days," and someone makes a home visit, he explains.

"The most important thing is communication," Pearce adds. "You have to have a lifeline, you have to have access [to parents]."

Social service intervention would help in situations where a parent can no longer control their child. But adequate

intervention isn't always easy to come by, Pearce asserts.

He tells the story of one young mother of a 12-year-old truant, who admitted she had lost control of the boy. The youth had recently been picked up by police after being caught with a known drug dealer, so Pearce tried to find help for the boy through a police department youth officer. The officer recommended a once-a-week counseling program for the boy, offered through the department, but to Pearce the suggestion was unrealistic, given the situation.

"She can't even bring him to school. How can she make him go to counseling?" Pearce asks. Also, he adds, "She's the tip of the iceberg. There are many



"After a while, it got to be a habit, and I couldn't stop."

—Dan Ney



"I wouldn't go to some of my classes because I didn't know nobody."

—José España



"If my friends wanted to hang out, I'd hang out with them."

—Nekeia Anderson

who is also a sophomore, was cutting classes too. "We both go to school now and I hope I can pull my grades up. I know now that I at least want to finish high school."

Dan, a 17-year-old senior, says that he cut so many classes and got so far behind in class work, that he figured it was too late to return.

"Before my senior year, I'd cut a class every once in a while, but this year, I cut 19 days straight," Dan says. "I would come to school, sit outside

with my friends, go to division and then go back outside. After a while, it got to be a habit, and I couldn't stop."

Nekeia, José and Dan are now part of the blue-sheet program. In fact, José asked to join. "I knew that if I kept cutting, I was going to get suspended, then maybe kicked out of school," he says. "I knew I needed help staying in school, so I asked to be put in the program. I needed someone to stay on my back."

Pilditch acknowledges that having an open campus—meaning kids can

leave the building, typically for lunch, without permission—can contribute to truancy.

He says, however, that a closed campus is not an option for Curie because the school is overcrowded and doesn't have enough space to keep students inside for lunch. "We had seven lunchrooms, but the board closed three for budgetary reasons," Pilditch explains. "We can't keep everybody in. We just keep plugging away at improving our attendance." ■

parents in her situation."

As important as the family environment is, sometimes children's perception of school can have just as great an impact, says Principal Carl Lawson of Price Elementary in Kenwood.

"I've seen kids come out of [extremely troubled] homes you'd never think they could get out of, and they come to school," he says. "I've seen kids come out of homes where you'd think they have no trouble coming, but they don't. You can take that kid to court, take his mama to jail, and he still won't come. But if we can convince a kid school is exciting, he will."

Lawson wrote his doctoral dissertation on truancy and, as part of his research, set up a program in which for-

mer truants were responsible for tutoring each other. The experience taught him that "teachers, even more so than a peer, have more influence on attendance. If teachers inadvertently send signals to a kid not to come—maybe by saying, 'Don't come if you don't have your homework done'—then they won't. I don't think teachers know that enough."

Combating truancy is a different ball game in high schools. At Kenwood Academy, where truancy went from 8 percent in 1991-92 to 26 percent in 1992-93, the year truant officers were fired, parents usually cooperate to improve attendance but the student doesn't, says attendance coordinator Robert Nowosielski.

Students with poor attendance are asked to sign a "performance contract" stating they will improve, but often that doesn't help "because the student's attitude hasn't changed," Nowosielski says.

Kenwood students who are absent 20 or more days in a row are dropped from the enrollment roster; the school usually drops five to 15 students per month, Nowosielski reports.

This year, Kenwood eliminated in-school suspension for poor attendance in order to free Nowosielski, who supervised the suspended students, to do more attendance work. As for truant officers, he says, "Certainly there's enough business out there to justify someone doing it full time."

Lorraine Forte

Truant officers down, out in other cities

by Debra Williams

Chicago is not the only city struggling with the loss of truant officers due to budget constraints.

Last year, for instance, the Los Angeles Unified School District cut all 179 of its pupil services and attendance counselors. As in Chicago, schools could use their own funds to hire their own staff, but those that didn't are receiving "minimal services," according to Cheryl Fayson of the pupil services and attendance office.

New York City has also lost a number of its attendance teachers in recent years due to attrition. And Milwaukee, which has never had truancy staff, recently launched the city's first anti-truancy program.

Here's a snapshot of what these and other cities are doing.

DETROIT

ENROLLMENT 170,000

TRUANCY STAFFERS 45 (6 supervisors and 39 officers/agents)

RATIO TO STUDENTS 1 to 3,778

ATTENDANCE RATE 91 percent

CURRENT APPROACH Each high school has been given a dean of students to focus on attendance. (In Chicago, assistant principals often are assigned to attendance.) Also, 14 schools opted to use federal funds to hire their own additional attendance officers.

Civic organizations also provide money for anti-truancy initiatives. Each year, for instance, the Rotary Club distributes some \$8,000, in grants of \$100 to \$500, to teachers who have created programs that help boost attendance.

Another group, the Goodfellows Old Newsboys, helps raise funds to help schools purchase clothing for children who need it; lack of clothing, the school district found, is one of the main

reasons children don't attend school. And the United Way provides grants to the district for eyeglasses and hearing aids for children.

LOS ANGELES

ENROLLMENT 639,687

TRUANCY STAFFERS None

ATTENDANCE RATE 89 percent

CURRENT APPROACH In 1991, the Los Angeles District Attorney's Juvenile Department created ACT (Abolish Chronic Truancy), designed to help students with attendance problems before they become hard-core truants.

The head of the juvenile department, Tom Higgins, and his staff currently work with 18 schools. Higgins' staff meets with parents to explain why it is important that children attend school and to let parents know they can be prosecuted if children don't attend. Parenting classes and tutoring for students are also provided. ACT has been so successful that the state recently provided funding for three deputies for the program.

ST. LOUIS

ENROLLMENT 42,692

TRUANCY STAFFERS None

ATTENDANCE RATE 89 percent

CURRENT APPROACH Truants are picked up by police during school hours and taken to one of two centers. In 1991-92, the first year of the program, 1,814 students were picked up. In 1992-93, the figure dropped to 1,359.

For the last six years, St. Louis has also had a "Be There" attendance incentive program. Maritz Inc., a St. Louis-based motivational firm, has provided money each year for prizes, such as tickets to concerts and sporting events, for students and schools that improve their attendance rates.

NEW YORK

ENROLLMENT 1,016,728

TRUANCY STAFFERS 217 "attendance teachers"

RATIO TO STUDENTS 1 to 4,685

ATTENDANCE RATE 85 percent

CURRENT APPROACH Police recently launched a plan to round up teenage truants and return them to one of six designated high schools, where they are interviewed by an attendance teacher and returned to their home school. Parents are also notified of the student's truancy.

Schools are required to develop their own attendance programs, which are then filed in the district office (the New York school system has 32 districts); each district must also develop its own districtwide attendance program. Schools also rely heavily on aides and other ancillary staff to do attendance work.

MILWAUKEE

ENROLLMENT 100,000

TRUANCY STAFFERS None

ATTENDANCE RATE 88 percent

CURRENT APPROACH In late 1993, Milwaukee started TABS (Truancy Abatement/Burglary Suppression), a \$1 million, two-year program funded by the state and designed to reduce truancy as well as daytime crime committed by truants. Under TABS, four full-time police officers patrol the streets and pick up truants—which they could not do before unless the youths were suspected of committing crimes—and take them to one of two TABS centers. Parents are then notified to pick the students up. Truants also receive counseling from the Boys & Girls Club. More than 600 children had been picked up by early February, and attendance rose slightly, by 0.08 percent. ■

Front Lines



TONY GETSIC

Fifth-graders conduct a science experiment comparing surface tension in different liquids.

Norwood Park School

Embracing '90s way' of teaching

by Grant Pick

A tall boy in a "Pearl Jam" T-shirt draws the blinds one morning in the 8th-grade classroom at Norwood Park School. Teacher Barbara Kato flips on an overhead projector and flashes a student's writing sample on the screen up front.

It's a wild-West tale, beginning: "Chuck 'Eagle Eye' Jackson was jest killed right outside of town two hours ago." Kato asks the students to divide the unbroken text into paragraphs.

"Would you make a new break there?" she asks, pointing to a stretch of narrative having to do with a saloon shooting. The kids debate the issue passionately, finally agreeing on where to start a fresh paragraph. "Now, where's

the next independent thought?" she asks. "There, or there—where?"

Soon the 8th-graders are paragraphing their own short stories, huddled in pairs either in the classroom or out in the hallway.

The paragraphing exercise represents a form of instruction called "process writing," which gets students putting words to paper before worrying about proper grammar or punctuation, and it's just one instance of the progressive curriculum that informs Norwood Park, a small school on the Northwest Side.

The school, following a holistic model, wants its students to learn through projects, not through disjointed exercises, to read real books instead of basal readers and to be judged less by standardized test performance and more

through displays of their best work.

The turn toward such goals came under a new principal and, more than anything, through the efforts of the faculty. "You have at Norwood Park a prime example of teacher empowerment," says Sara Spurlark, associate director of the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago, who conducted an evaluation of Norwood Park. "Everyone to whom we spoke at the school was very complimentary about the principal, but when we talked to the teachers about who runs things, they said, 'We do.'"

Norwood Park occupies half of a red-brick, circa-1916 building fronting a broad lawn; the offices of Subdistrict 1 take up the other half. Only 87 of the 270 students hail from the school's modest, triangular-shaped attendance area. Another 30 walk from the greater neighborhood, and the rest are bused in from Austin, Kelvyn Park and Albany Park as part of the School Board's voluntary transfer program. The student body is one-half white, one-quarter Hispanic, 20 percent black and 5 percent Asian. There is only one class per grade, and though some ability grouping exists, it's limited.

First principal resigned

Norwood Park once shared a principal with nearby Onahan School, but with reform, the local school council (LSC) was accorded the right to pick its own administrator. The LSC selected Anthony Ambrosio, the longtime assistant principal, who soon came to odds with the council. Ambrosio says that during his year at the helm he boosted neighborhood enrollment and ended split-grade classes, but some teachers complain that he ignored the wishes of the professional personnel advisory committee (PPAC). Matters came to a head when Ambrosio's decision to move 1st-grade teacher Shari Frost to 4th grade was aired with the LSC. "If I couldn't be the educational leader of the building, I didn't have to be there, so I resigned," relates Ambrosio, who now teaches at Northeastern Illinois University. (Frost stayed put.)

The search for Ambrosio's replacement drew scores of applicants, including Jane Rosen, a curriculum coordinator at Pritzker School with a doctorate in educational psychology. She had only just received a state-issued Type 75 certificate, entitling her to be a principal, but her inexperience appealed to the Norwood Park community. "We wanted someone who would do things differently," says Griselle Diaz-Gemmati, an 8th-grade teacher.

Rosen arrived at Norwood Park on Valentine's Day 1991 and immediately began working on a cooperative model of running the place. "If I made everything up myself in my office, no one

"can thrash things out without me looking over their shoulders."

Otherwise, the staff gets together for 90 minutes one Friday a month—time made up by shaving seven minutes off each lunch hour—specifically to plan for the future. The six committees that help develop the school improvement plan—on reading and writing, math and science, school climate and discipline, inter-grade integration, parent involvement and fine arts—are heavily populated by teachers. In order that—God forbid—no chance to communicate is lost, Rosen engineered a special Norwood Park bulletin on the Board of Education's computer net-

"I don't want to minimize the test successes, but the kind of indicators I'm interested in are different."

— Jane Rosen, principal

would have ownership in the result," explains Rosen. Drawing together council members, parents, teachers and local businessmen, she convened a two-afternoon retreat in the school library ("I think we ordered a pizza," Rosen laughs), facilitated by Designs for Change. Participants hammered out a vision statement and a new school improvement plan that had a progressive tilt. In general, Rosen took the position that she was less a boss than a facilitator. "When Jane walks into your room, she has the air of an observer, not an inspector," relates Diaz-Gemmati. "She's just one of our colleagues."

Today, Norwood Park is a province of teacher power, galvanized by Rosen and the small, 20-member faculty. The teachers gather for a weekly, before-school staff meeting, and there's a Thursday-morning PPAC meeting that draws a good crowd, relates Rosen, "because the teachers know that important decisions are made there—and if they aren't around, they aren't going to get their way." Rosen says she shows up only on invitation so that her teachers

work so that teachers can leave messages for one another after hours.

The school curriculum includes heavy doses of progressivism. Through the Chicago Area Writing Project, a function of National-Louis University, a half dozen teachers and Rosen have been trained in process writing, and they, in turn, have passed on their skills to others. The idea, says Barbara Kato (currently on leave from Norwood Park to co-lead the Writing Project), is "to get kids to put things down on paper before we take out a fine-line pen to point out the errors." The 8th-graders under her direction last fall not only wrote pieces of fiction, but also completed a research paper and a business letter, going through multiple, ungraded drafts before delivering a final product.

Reading is based not on basal readers but on novels and picture books, which the students take up in various forums—as a whole group, in clusters called "reading circles" and in individual conferences with the teacher. Each teacher is allocated \$700 in state Chapter 1 funds to purchase classroom

literature. The school library has doubled in number of volumes, and a youngster's turn at library is coupled with time in the computer lab; the joint period is termed the "lib-lab."

Above 4th grade, two math-and-science teachers—a kind of mini-department—now concentrate on teaching the subjects, integrating them and making for as many hands-on experiences as possible. The idea is to learn through doing. "The kids will make a car go down a ramp, then figure out how high a ball will bounce," says Rosen. The school boasts a new science lab, fully stocked with microscopes, beakers and Bunsen burners and paid for principally with state Chapter 1 funds. While math is still imparted by textbook, there is also a healthy reliance on "manipulatives"—pattern blocks, sticks, clocks and rods.

Early on, Rosen encountered Bruce Creger, president of Safeco Electric, a maker of cellular phone accessories, at a local Chamber of Commerce meeting. She was startled to discover he didn't know her school existed, though it's located within blocks of his company. "I promised to help her out," says Creger, "and she never forgot that." Rosen convinced Creger to establish a mentoring program at the school for older youngsters, easing the way by securing a \$20,000 state grant to launch the effort.

Lunchtime learning

Last year, Safeco engineers helped stage a project to see who could fashion the best device to cushion a falling egg—the winners all made parachutes—and another one to make erector-set machines to push kitty litter across the floor. This year, the upper grades are aflood with projects: an in-class factory to manufacture fabric-covered picture frames, a school store with supplies on consignment from the local druggist and a look at how toys work.

At Norwood Park, the lunch hour previously comprised 15 minutes to eat and 45 minutes to romp outside. Now, however, the students are directed to the library or computer lab and are encouraged to play chess, bingo or a

The school library plays a major role in Norwood Park's reading program, with the librarian doubling as a reading resource teacher and using both roles to help students choose books. Here, 3rd-graders scan the shelves.



TONY GERSTIC

range of sports. The school also has a literary magazine.

Yet, there have been problems.

The school community had to fight two attempts by the Board of Education to consolidate Norwood Park with Onahan School. "For a long while, we were living like we were doomed," Rosen recalls.

At first, says LSC Chair Fred Behnke, some parents were angered that they lacked the free-and-easy access to the classrooms they had enjoyed under Ambrosio. "We have had a strict visitor policy since I've been here," Rosen acknowledges, pointing to the need for security. "We have to know who everybody is."

In 1991, four faculty members, troubled by Rosen's holistic ways, quit the school. And last year, some families left after they crossed swords with Rosen, in large part over the principal's push toward progressive methods.

Parental involvement remains low, says PTA President Nancy Ceglarek, because there are still few neighborhood families with children at the school, two-career parents are hard pressed to volunteer and the parents of the bused students live too far away. "We see the same people over and over," says Ceglarek, who this year changed the PTA to the Parent-Teacher-Student Organization so that youngsters could pitch in with such activities as the holi-

day craft sale.

Under Rosen, however, Norwood Park has experienced its share of highs. Diaz-Gemmati won a Golden Apple Award last spring, and in March, Susan Kajiwara-Ansai, the 4th- and 5th-grade math and science specialist, won a second Golden Apple for the school. (According to the Golden Apple Foundation, two city schools, Inter-American and Kenwood, can likewise claim two winners, and Westcott School in Northbrook previously saw two of its teachers win in consecutive years.)

The youngsters are performing better, though test results are mixed. On the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, 8th graders are doing better over the last three years, though performance in reading and math remains well below national averages. Last year, the 8th-grade posted dramatic gains in reading, math and writing scores on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP) tests. Rosen is the first to point out that conditions surrounding the IGAP gains were unique: The skilled Diaz-Gemmati taught the higher-scoring 8th-graders for two years in a row, and that class was, for various reasons, more stable than the prior year's 8th grade.

"I don't want to minimize the test successes," says Rosen, "but the kind of indicators I'm interested in are different. When I go into the classrooms, I want to see the students leaning for-

ward, staring, seriously engaged. I want them tackling challenging content, asking questions and sometimes not getting it. Those are the measures I'm interested in, and you can't see them on a test score."

Recently, the staff has been concentrating on crafting new gauges of assessment in reading, math and writing. In math, students periodically tackle selected math problems and are rated as "novice," "apprentice," "proficient" or "distinguished." A recent exercise had 5th-graders puzzling over how much a customer would spend on pencils and paper at the school store, and how much change he or she would receive.

Youngsters keep a log of their independent reading, turn in lab reports quarterly and regularly present their teachers with a finished story or essay, to be rated on a six-point scale. Each classroom is also beginning to keep portfolios of student work.

Dittos no more

As this year comes to a close, so, too, does Rosen's tenure at Norwood Park. In May, she will take up new duties as executive director of the Golden Apple Foundation. "It's agony and it's ecstasy," she says. "I feel I'm letting go of the child I've created, but the teachers are in a good position to carry on, if they can find a principal who will support them." Says LSC Chair Behnke, "Jane will be missed. You look up the phrase 'shared decision making,' and Jane's picture is there. I don't agree 100 percent with what she's done, but I do like her concepts."

It is those concepts the school community is intent on maintaining as it searches for Rosen's successor. "I graduated from Norwood Park in 1973," says PTA President Ceglarek. "I learned off dittos and out of workbooks, by cramming in chapters in social studies. My children, though, are reading novels and learning math and science as a combined subject. I like that—it's the '90s way of learning." ■

Grant Pick is a Chicago writer.

Comer Project clears path so teachers can teach

by Barbara Monsor

The only language these children understand is force." So teachers in inner-city schools sometimes tell staff from Youth Guidance, a social agency providing programs for at-risk Chicago youth from offices in 34 Chicago public schools.

Recently, I served for one period as a substitute teacher for 23 of "these children" so that their teacher could attend an inservice. Before I could present an assignment to this group of 3rd-graders, one unusually large and always moving boy, seated in the first row, reached across the girl behind him to jab at the boy behind her. Immediately, a little girl seated on the opposite side of the room walked to the blackboard tray, picked up a long ruler and handed it to me. Her expression of satisfaction and his of fear told me what would normally happen next.

The classroom grew chaotic. While the uncontrollable boy was in the back of the classroom with an aide, and several children loudly demanded more attention, I struggled to keep the whole class working. At the end of the period, the teacher burst into the room and exploded. Silence was instantaneous. Liveliness and interest disappeared

Barbara Monsor is a part-time staff member at Youth Guidance, responsible for research and data-gathering for the Comer School Development Project. The mother of six children, she has been a school district board member and a PTA board member.

from the children's faces, replaced by fear, hopelessness and withdrawal. Order was restored.

Teachers are not alone in thinking that intimidation and force are the only answers. Questionnaires completed not long ago by 222 5th- to 8th-graders in four Near West Side schools showed that 76 percent of students usually work out problems by hitting and fighting, shouting and arguing. Parents,

their parents are living in their own Third World country. In a recent study of several West Side schools, 56 percent of the children reported someone near to them had died during the *previous year*, and 55 percent reported they had heard shooting in the *previous year*. Fifty-four percent reported feeling "very sad" at least once a month, and 70 percent reported feeling "really mad at other people" at least once a month.

Teachers are not alone in thinking that intimidation and force are the only answers.

too, often lack better ways to solve problems without the use of force. Perhaps it isn't surprising that teachers very often blame parents for their problems with classroom management.

Threats and violence may help to maintain order. However, all the evidence shows that the resulting fear and resentment are the enemy of learning. The central drama of the classroom becomes not the excitement and mastery of learning, but the excitement and mastery of battle. On this battleground, almost without knowing it, many teachers have lost faith in their ability to teach. Administrators have become cynical about the goals they no doubt once cherished. Both have persuaded themselves that "these children" and their families are to blame.

For their part, the children and

The culture clash between teachers and these blameless, frightened and underdeveloped children creates a conflict of haves and have nots—of worthy and unworthy—that destroys personal relationships that should support growth and learning. In this atmosphere, rife with cultural misunderstanding, school staff often conclude, usually incorrectly, that the parents and families don't care about their children.

14 schools participating

To address these problems, Dr. James Comer, a child psychiatrist at the Yale Child Guidance Center, developed a program over 20 years ago at inner-city schools in New Haven, Conn., to change the way teachers, students and

parents interact. The goal was to create a climate in which all children can learn. The Comer School Development Project has changed the character of typical inner-city schools in New Haven from places where few could learn to schools where nearly everyone learns, from bottom-of-the-chart performance to top grades and good behavior. The program is currently being replicated in 14 Chicago public schools by Youth Guidance.

Abandon fault-finding

Any truly effective solution will not produce results overnight. To create change, the Comer Project starts with a realistic understanding of the emotional and developmental needs of children, and a belief that children and parents, as well as school staff, are capable of doing better—and want to do better. It requires that the needs of *children* be primary, that they become the focus of a complete revision of the existing system of school governance. All parties are encouraged to abandon fault-finding and accept change. In general, the program is designed to provide the support teachers must have if they are to be able to teach.

In order to break the mold of cynicism and frustration, three teams are established: the School Planning and Management Team, the Mental Health Team and the Parent Team. Everyone

must participate, using no-fault problem solving and shared decision making. Parents are sought out as essential partners. All school groups are represented at the decision-making level. Everyone, as part of a constituency group, is encouraged to provide feedback to the School Planning and Management Team. Training is provided in conflict management and problem-solving skills. The Mental Health Team is expected to find and provide counseling and social skills resources.

In the classroom situation I was in, for example, the disruptive youth could have been sent to a time-out room or to a social worker who would have the skills to begin to address the causes of his behavior. A parent would have been present in the classroom to provide support to children and assist with classroom management. The Mental Health Team would have worked to solve the problems of grossly underdeveloped children, and to improve general school climate.

Parents would have been invited in before problems emerged; they would have been received with enthusiasm and understanding, not criticism and humiliation. Teachers often say they don't have the time to welcome the presence of parents, but parental participation is vital. When parents are welcomed, not humiliated, they support efforts for order and learning. When parents are nearby, children feel safer and can relax and be more polite.

Also, curriculum and group-process specialists provide assistance to principals in their efforts to integrate improved curriculum, teaching methods and leadership techniques.

All parties can stop the blaming and begin to solve the problems.

In the Chicago replication of the Comer Project, social workers from Youth Guidance act as in-school facilitators to coach school staff on Comer principles and participatory management, and to support teachers and administrators as they learn to use the Comer plan components to solve their problems. The Youth Guidance social workers work with school staff on child development principles and group process, and maintain contact between the school staff and program headquarters in New Haven.

'Not utopia'

This is not utopia; many problems remain. In urban education, powerful political stakeholders, including schools of education, legislatures, suburban districts, central office staffs, unions and boards of education have carved up the turf. In Chicago, principals have matured in a system in which the School Board and the unions—and their adversarial relationship—have robbed principals of significant authority, leaving them with an overload of bureaucratic details as their domain.



JOHN BOOZ

Riis School on the Near West Side is part of the Comer Project. Here, Riis students listen to instructions before beginning a science experiment on electricity.

School reform was designed to alter that, but has in many ways increased the bureaucratic load without giving principals bottom-line authority. Principals are accountable for student performance without having complete control of budgets and personnel. Preoccupation with details crowds out more important tasks: curriculum development, improvements in school climate and teacher supervision, support and remediation. It is hard for principals to accept that it may be necessary for them to delegate some control in order to increase their authority.

Problem-solving skills needed

Schools of education, for the most part, have failed to provide teachers with training in management of the human relationship problems presented by teaching. We find that the major source of discipline referrals by teachers is student challenge, or perceived challenge, to teacher authority. Problem-solving skills, applied in the classroom, would reduce the likelihood that children could avoid their tasks and get the upper hand in this way.

Inefficiencies in the management of the counseling function have become so institutionalized that school psychologists and counselors are not oriented to assist teachers with individual students, or to assist students with their sometimes serious problems.

Many instances can be found of schools that work, schools with purposeful and charismatic principals and dedicated and skilled teachers. The challenge for us is to create systems that work in environments where the problems described here are perceived by the participants as overwhelming.

The Comer School Development Project is one model that works at the school and community level to involve those closest to the problem in gradual and enduring change. Motivation for change at the school level will be the recapture of the joy of seeing children grow and learn. The underlying economic problems in inner-city communities cannot be wished away. But these youth and their needs and problems will not be silenced by neglect. We know they want help, and we know they can learn. And they are, after all, our children. ■

Letters

Commission should rate applicants highly qualified, qualified or not qualified

Currently, there are several bills floating around Springfield that would change the way Chicago selects its School Board members. The Chicago Board of Education has chosen, appropriately, to remain neutral on these bills. However, individual board members do have opinions on them.

I have been active in Chicago schools for more than 20 years. And as a past member of the School Board Nominating Commission and a current member of the School Board, I have several recommendations.

■ Downsize the board from the current 15 members to nine. State averages for board membership are around seven, but to be representative, large urban systems like Chicago require a larger group. However, 15 positions make for tiresome and lengthy decision making, even on relatively minor matters. Furthermore, the board's relatively large size has aggravated factionalism and internal politicking, and led to micro-management and staff meddling.

■ Let the mayor fill the nine positions from among current board members, giving each a term ranging from one to three years. Beginning in 1995, the terms of three members would expire each year and be filled by new members.

We must not establish an interim board for the next 12 months and then replace it with an entirely new board in May 1995. There is a long learning curve for new board members that becomes even longer when the entire body is new. And massive retirements have left the public schools without an understanding of past decisions. Further, the issues facing this system over the next 18 months, including budget shortfalls and contract negotiations, require strong continuity.

■ Do not establish an elected school board, especially one with election districts. If Chicago had an elected school board, special interests, economic control and politics would become even more of a burden than we currently endure. In visiting a large urban system with seven elective districts, it became immediately evident to me that decisions were based on pork-barrel politics; if one district got a program, all districts got the same program, even if the system could

not justify seven such programs. A system with severely diminished resources such as Chicago can ill afford another layer of provincial wrangling over limited dollars.

■ Keep the School Board Nominating Commission but modify the process. A school system with true site-based management needs strong local input at all levels of the educational process, especially in selecting decision makers. Although far from perfect, the current process for selecting Commission members allows for such input.

However, the Commission should adopt a set of criteria that it applies equally to all applicants. There is a real need to move away from politics and attempts to control the votes of current board members, and toward finding and screening qualified board candidates. Focusing Commission activities on whether individual candidates have the skill and knowledge to make decisions on complex educational, political and business management issues would significantly improve the process.

■ Require the Nominating Commission to forward the names of *all* applicants to the mayor, with ratings of Highly Qualified, Qualified and Not Qualified. This method allows the Commission to give clear indications about every individual who applies and to demonstrate consensus preferences—those rated Highly Qualified.

The current practice of giving the mayor three candidates for each vacancy has kept qualified candidates off the board. And it has focused past Commission deliberations on racial makeup and politics and generally wasted time.

As the city's chief political leader, the mayor, not the Commission, should address such issues as the demographic makeup of the board (including race, gender and geographic location) and representation of constituencies and civic interests.

■ If the mayor doesn't appoint members within a specified time period, the choice should revert to the Nominating Commission, with the City Council giving final approval. This would avoid problems with unfilled vacancies and board members serving on expired terms.

Chicago needs a School Board that reflects its diversity and can demonstrate a commitment to educational excellence through reform. We also need board members who have the knowledge and experience to make policy decisions for a massive human endeavor that spends \$2.8 billion of our tax dollars each year, employs 45,000 citizens and helps mold the future for 410,000 children. We must do better in all areas of public education, including the way we select board members.

*Stephen R. Ballis, member
Chicago Board of Education*

Article on Franklin misleading, LSC was deliberate

I would like to comment on and clarify what I believe to be a rather misleading article by Debra Williams in the April *CATALYST* regarding the selection of our principal at the Franklin Fine Arts Center.

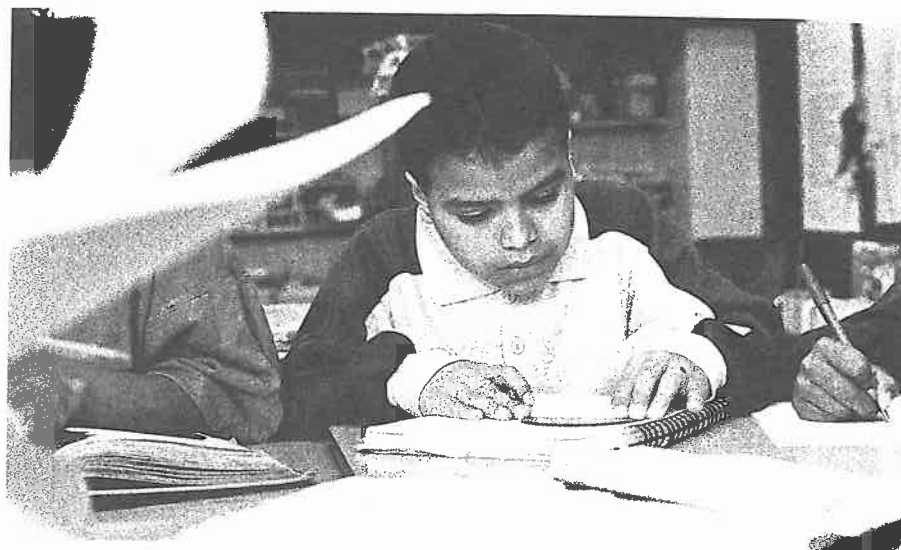
Contrary to what was written, the choice of Patricia Wells as principal was by no means done haphazardly, nor was it simply "lucky" that she was the one selected. The selection process, though not as thorough as initially envisioned by some parents, was truncated (not "scuttled") with good reason. And while the finale, as executed, was unplanned, it came about as a result of deciding on the best of the options facing us.

In August, after the broad-based selection process was underway, it became imperative to select an interim principal; Franklin's principal had set her resignation date at August 20, and the assistant principal had just announced her intention to accept early retirement. The selection process in place was designed to take 90-120 days (or well into October/November), and the local school council felt committed to having an interim principal in place when the school opened, if not before.

Working with James Maloney, the superintendent of Subdistrict 2, the council identified and interviewed several candidates. Though all were qualified, Ms. Wells stood out as being the best suited to the school. She came highly recommended not only by Dr. Maloney but also by her former principal and peers. Her background and references were checked out in detail. I know. I followed through and reported to the council members myself, as I was council chair at the time.

At the debriefing following the interviews, Ms. Wells was overwhelmingly selected as the best candidate and promptly offered the interim post.

By the time school opened in September, Ms. Wells had gained the respect and support of the entire school staff (not an easy task, as



they had been devoted to their previous leader, Alice Maresh). Parents, too, were quick to recognize her vision, her leadership abilities and her winning personality. It was clearly a marvelous "fit" for the school.

At the meeting referred to in the article, the primary choice facing the local school council—though it was not quite as simple as that—became one of either extending the selection process to select a permanent principal, who could be offered the position for only, at most, eight months (the remainder of the existing contract), or offering Ms. Wells the opportunity to serve out the contract.

Given her outstanding performance up to that time and our concern about disrupting the school by possibly naming a third principal in three months, it was clear that a decision to offer her a contract to fulfill the unexpired term was not only fair to her, but would be in the best interests of the children in the school. There was pressure to be sure. But it was less the idea of possibly losing other "good people" than it was that, by not selecting Ms. Wells, we opened ourselves to the possibility of her accepting a similar post at another school during the uncertainty of the prolonged interviewing process.

The bottom line is: The Franklin Local School Council made a conscious decision to take a positive action that they viewed as being of greatest benefit to the children of Franklin, even though some parents, steeped in the belief that the process underway was critical to the concept of the reform movement, felt otherwise.

Some of us, including myself, believed that we already had an ideal candidate on board and that extending the process would only do more harm than good. There was also the distinct possibility that a new local school council—elections were to take place in October, prior to the anticipated final selection—might have further delayed the

process, increasing the chances of our losing Ms. Wells to another school.

Were we lucky? Perhaps so, for Patricia Wells has surpassed even the highest of everyone's expectations. But certainly not "haphazard." Certainly not without giving considerable thought to what would ultimately be best for the children. And isn't that what the local school councils—and school reform—are really supposed to be about?

*Mark Chernansky, former chair
Franklin Fine Arts Center
Local School Council*

'Old' Cluster Initiative helped

This is a thank you letter to Greg Darnieder and Jerry Bell, formerly of the Chicago Cluster Initiative, who came to Bowen High School in August of 1992 and asked, "What can we do to help you?"

Sitting through more meetings than I would attempt to count, they patiently offered suggestions and brought to our school resources that we could not have imagined. In particular, they brought Bowen together with its feeder elementary schools.

Good change agents work *with* their clients, and that is what Greg and Jerry did. Because of the benefits they brought to Bowen, I find it difficult to understand why the Cluster leadership felt it was necessary to change its direction, as indicated in Dan Weissmann's article in the April 1994 issue of *CATALYST*.

Ironically, the innovations proudly described by our local school council president at the Board of Education's hearings on the Three-Tiered Model for School Improvement are the result of our collaboration with the Cluster.

*Joann Podkul, teacher
Bowen High School*

By feeding the test score frenzy, Shanker undercuts serious change efforts

Editor's note: Following is an excerpt from a letter sent to Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, in response to a recent New York Times column criticizing a report by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. CATALYST reported on the column in its April 1994 issue.

I am writing in response to your column of Mar. 13, 1994 in the *New York Times*, entitled "Where We Stand: The Chicago Reform." I believe that you have significantly misrepresented our report, "A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago." In addition, I believe that the general perspective you offered is likely to undermine serious efforts toward school improvement wherever they are occurring.

It is important to be clear that this report is not the work of the "owners" of reform, as you suggest. I am principal author of the report and am not one of the original "Chicago school reformers," nor are any of my co-authors. Rather, the report is a product of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, an independent federation of Chicago-area organizations which have come together to undertake a range of research activities designed to advance school improvement in the city and assess the progress of school reform.

Your article claims that the report "ducks" the question of improvement in student achievement. This is not the case. The report states specifically that the primary long-term standpoint for judging school reform is improvement in student learning. But we also discuss the inappropriateness of short-term achievement trends for judging the progress of school reform at the relatively early point at which this study was undertaken.

One needs to be mindful that our project began in fall 1992 and was released in summer 1993. The only data available was through the 1991-92 school year. At this time, individual schools had, at best, two years working under reform.

This caution presented, the report nonetheless discusses what principals in actively restructuring schools say about student achievement. Although these principals are encouraged by the progress to date, they are also realistic about how far they have to go. In short, the report clearly indicates that real improvement in student achievement still lies ahead.

While the interpretive commentary at

the end of the report offers a judgment that school reform is working, that judgment is set in the following context: "Is the restructuring of the Chicago public school system evolving in ways that can lead to major improvements in student learning?"

In looking at restructuring efforts in the business community, for example, few expect the short-term bottom line to improve immediately. Major corporate restructuring can take 10 or more years, and improved profitability may not appear until relatively late in the process. It is only when it comes to schools that we seem willing to impose "short-term improvements in the bottom line" as the primary standard for judging the progress of restructuring.

In my view, the overemphasis on immediate improvements in student achievement will ultimately undermine all efforts to promote the deep-seated changes needed to improve the effectiveness of schools. My concern here applies to evaluating any broad-scale effort to change, whether it be Chicago school reform, voucher initiatives or other systemic reform activities. By feeding the test score frenzy, you weaken the possibility of sustaining the efforts needed for meaningful school improvement, both for initiatives you may dislike as well as those you endorse.

*Anthony S. Bryk
Professor of Education,
University of Chicago
Director,*

*Center for School Improvement and
Consortium on Chicago School Research*

Abysmal 3rd-grade scores due to reading program cuts?

After reading Linda Lenz's articles in the March issue on testing and the Chicago Public Schools, several thoughts came to mind. The first dealt with her answer to the question, What can test scores tell us about student achievement in the Chicago Public Schools since the onset of reform? Lenz answered "nothing definitive," which is a radically different answer from that given by Designs for Change when scores on the 1993 Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP) tests were released.

In a study titled "Chicago Achievement Scores and Graduation Rates Since Reform," which received widespread media coverage, Designs for Change argued that



the IGAP scores and scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency showed "a pattern of positive results." I have these scores loaded on my computer's statistical program and must say that Lenz's answer is a closer approximation to the reality that little progress has been made during reform in regards to improvement of standardized test scores.

I also agree with William Ayers, who was quoted in the March issue, that these tests, in many ways, are more measures of socio-economic status than of intellectual status.

The next thought that came to mind was in regards to the abysmal 3rd-grade IGAP reading scores, which dropped 44 points during the period of reform. Here, it should be noted that in 1991, the austerity-minded Board of Education cut \$11.5 million from the Reading Improvement Program. This cut affected more than 300 elementary schools. The board argued that most of these programs could be picked up through the schools' state Chapter 1 funds—of course, they also said that about many other cuts, including the 153 truant officers that were laid off in 1992. Maybe the chickens are coming home to roost, and the fox is guarding the hen house!

*Rodney D. Estvan
graduate student in education,
St. Xavier University
parent, Blaine Elementary*

CATALYST welcomes guest editorials and letters to the editor. Send them to CATALYST/Opinions, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, Ill. 60604. They may be edited for clarity and space.

Elsewhere

NEW YORK CITY

Chancellor out, back in. What happens when the mayor of the nation's largest city tries to impose financial oversight and staff cuts on the school superintendent?

Schools Chancellor Ramon C. Cortines submitted his resignation, then rescinded it two days later, over Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's insistence that Cortines fire two senior staff members and accept an appointee who would report directly to the mayor on the system's finances, according to the April 11 issue of the *New York Times*.

Cortines withdrew his resignation after an agreement was brokered by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo. Giuliani gave up his insistence that Cortines fire the board's budget director and a press spokesman, while Cortines agreed to accept the appointee.

The appointee, attorney Herman Badillo, ran unsuccessfully for city comptroller on Giuliani's ticket last fall. He will work under the supervision of the city's Department of Investigations.

Cortines, former superintendent in San Francisco, replaced outspoken Chancellor Joseph Fernandez. Cortines' eight-month tenure had been a peaceful one until Giuliani began a campaign to shrink the system's huge bureaucracy. In New York State's five largest school systems, school boards operate autonomously but are fiscally dependent on city government; Giuliani had used his control of the purse strings to push for the elimination of 2,500 positions in central office, which employs about 6,300 people.

Cortines had agreed to eliminate 500 vacancies and 700 already-filled positions, according to the April 20 issue of *Education Week*. But he resisted further cuts, prompting the mayor to announce he would appoint Badillo. Giuliani also then pushed for Cortines to fire board spokesman John H.

Beckman, who worked for former Mayor David Dinkins, and longtime budget director Leonard Hellenbrand.

After several tense meetings at which Giuliani reportedly gave Cortines an ultimatum to accept Badillo and fire Beckman and Hellenbrand, Cortines resigned. He "resented a monitor being placed over him as though he couldn't be trusted or had done something wrong," said Frank Sobrino, a spokesman for the chancellor.

Board President Carol Gresser then called on Cuomo to mediate the dispute, which threatened to lead to another expensive and difficult search for chancellor, as well as school boycotts by community activists. David Enger, a spokesman for Cuomo, said Cuomo feared there would be widespread disruptions in the school system if the resignation was made final.

As part of the agreement, the schools will cut 2,500 positions from central office and the administration of the city's 32 community school districts.

Cuomo's intervention "saved us from walking over the precipice," said Jon Moscow, executive director of the Parents Coalition for Education. "But now that the chancellor's here, the problems still remain."

"The collision between the chancellor and the mayor shows that dependent school districts do not work as a form of government," said Noreen Connell, executive director of the Education Priorities Panel, a coalition of civic groups.

Observers fear more flare-ups as long as City Hall has financial control. "The state and city have vastly different expectations for what the boards should do, so they [the boards] are trying to serve both masters," said Stephen K. Allinger, executive director of the New York State Special Commission on Education Structures, Policies and Practices, a task force appointed by Cuomo. Allinger's panel urged last year that the school districts be freed from fiscal control by cities.

HARTFORD, CONN.

Going private. The School Board is considering hiring Education Alternatives, a private company that runs schools in Baltimore and Dade County, Fla., to take over all 32 of Hartford's schools, according to the April 19 issue of the *New York Times*.

District officials say six of nine board members support the plan; the remaining three are opposed or undecided. The board was expected to act on the plan within two weeks.

"We need major surgery," said Thelma Dickerson, vice chair of the board and a supporter of the plan. "We've constantly put on Band-Aids. After so many, they keep erupting and you have a serious problem."

Under the plan, the company would receive about \$8,450 per student, the same amount spent by the district. The company would have to pay for salaries, pensions, books, maintenance and services. The board has told the company it would reject any contract that includes layoffs of staff members.

MINNEAPOLIS

No to performance pay. A union arbitrator has rejected the district's plan to give teachers 1-percent bonuses for raising student achievement instead of standard pay raises, according to the March 30 issue of *Education Week*.

The pay-for-performance plan was hatched by Peter Hutchinson, head of the St. Paul-based consulting firm Public Strategies Group Inc., which was hired to run the district last year.

Teachers will receive a 1.25 percent raise next year and a 2.5 percent raise the following year; the union had wanted 2.7 percent both years.

Michael Klonsky, Lorraine Forte

Grants

New grants for program planning

The Fund for Educational Reform has expanded its grant making to include support for classroom improvement projects, so long as they involve various members of the school community.

The fund's new planning grants, of up to \$5,000 a year, can be used to develop or modify school improvement plans, to explore new teaching methods or to plan for the implementation or expansion of an educational program.

Peggy Gordon, the fund's executive director, said the new grants are for projects that will include teachers, parents, principals and, if possible, community members. "We're trying to encourage the kind of collaborative efforts that haven't been taking place," said Gordon. "Hopefully, they will have an impact on the classroom."

Still available are small grants, of up to \$2,500, to support, among other things, local school council training and efforts to increase parent and community involvement. The one-time grants are for short-term projects.

Gordon said the fund will continue its small-grant program for at least a year, but intends then to focus on the planning grants. "We're trying to get rid of 'Christmas tree' programs," she said, referring to a recent research finding that many Chicago schools have accumulated unrelated programs. "We want integrated plans."

All Chicago public schools, local school councils and professional personnel advisory committees are eligible to apply. The fund also will accept applications from groups of schools planning to work together and from non-profit groups working with individual schools.

Grant money cannot be used for council operating costs, direct grants to



TONY GETSIC

Students at Bateman Elementary in Albany Park have added a link to this paper chain for every book they've read since last November, as part of a program called Links-to-Literacy, which brings together schools, families, businesses and libraries in encouraging kids to read. Partners include Marshall Field's, Helene Curtis, the Chicago Public Library and 100 Chicago public schools.

individuals, incentive payments or gifts, basic school supplies or the operation of a newly instituted program.

Guidelines for program proposals are flexible; Gordon encourages potential applicants to call to discuss plans.

Established following passage of the Chicago School Reform Act, the Fund for Educational Reform is a project of several Chicago-area foundations and corporate giving programs that wanted to supplement their existing programs with quick-turnaround grants with flexible guidelines.

Applications must be made on official application forms and are accepted throughout the year; applicants generally are notified about acceptance or rejection within four to six weeks.

To apply, call or write: Peggy Gordon, Director, Fund for Educational Reform, 1 E. Wacker Dr., Suite 2900, Chicago, Ill. 60601. (312) 321-5789.

Anastasia Benschoff

School-to-work grant bid

A partnership between the Chicago Panel on School Policy and the National Alliance of Business (NAB) has been selected to write Chicago's proposal for funding under the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act.

The act, an initiative of the Clinton Administration, has committed up to \$300 million for states to create pilot projects that prepare students for a rapidly changing work force.

Barbara Buell, the Panel's new assistant director, says Chicago's proposal will include a collaboration among various interest groups, including employers, labor, educators, local school councils, community organizations and social service agencies.

The partners' bid to write the funding proposal was selected by a committee made up of representatives of the mayor's office, City Colleges of Chicago, the Board of Education, community-based organizations and businesses. The proposal is being developed with a \$70,000 federal grant. *Debra Williams*

Other grant news:

■ **AID FOR BILINGUAL TEACHERS** Bilingual teachers who now hold only temporary

provisional teaching certificates can get assistance toward obtaining a permanent certificate through a four-year, \$600,000 program at the University of Illinois at Chicago, funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The program provides financial aid and other support to teachers taking graduate-level courses leading to a master's degree and state certification in elementary education.

Participants are encouraged to continue teaching in the Chicago public schools once they complete the program and become certified.

■ **HANDS-ON BOTANY** With the help of grants from the National Gardening Association, the North Shore Garden Club and the City of Chicago's Department of Environment, students at Casals Elementary recently planted the first tree of a new garden that will be used to teach botany with a hands-on approach. Students will plant vegetable gardens, herbs, annual and perennial flowers, a woodland plot and plants native to the Illinois prairie. The project was planned with help from members of the Greater North-Pulaski Development Corp. *Lorraine Forte*

Grant Briefs

American National Bank

■ \$10,000 to the Goldblatt Partners Grant for Junior Achievement which sends 40 bank employees each month to teach credit education to students at Goldblatt School.

Chicago Community Trust

■ \$130,000 over two years to the Community Renewal Society for CATALYST.

■ \$48,000 to the Wheaton Eye Foundation to support its comprehensive low-vision program for students in Chicago public schools.

■ \$10,000 to the Rochelle Lee Fund to support the expansion of the children's library program in 21 additional Chicago public schools.

Chicago Foundation for Education

■ \$149,332 to 444 Chicago public school elementary teachers to carry out their proposals for making learning more effective and exciting.

■ \$18,400 to 70 Chicago public school elementary teachers who have devel-

oped and tested successful projects in their classrooms and share their ideas and lesson plans with other interested teachers.

■ \$22,000 to 120 Chicago public school elementary teachers to help them adapt innovative projects for their classrooms.



GATX Corporation

■ \$8,500 to the Golden Apple Foundation for the Golden Apple Scholars Program, which provides financial and moral support for students seeking to become teachers in low-income communities.

Polk Brothers Foundation

■ \$25,000 to the Chicago Panel on School Policy for training and information services.

■ \$25,000 to the Anti-Defamation

League of Chicago to provide training for students and teachers in Chicago public schools experiencing racial or ethnic conflict.

■ \$25,000 to the Chicago Arts Collaborative for Teachers for a summer workshop to help Chicago public school teachers learn to integrate the arts into classroom studies.

■ \$20,000 to the Chicago Algebra Project in support of the Special Outreach Initiative, which helps prepare former Algebra Project students for high school.

Fel-Pro Mecklenburger Foundation

■ \$4,000 to the Chicago Panel on School Policy for training and information to local school councils.

■ \$2,500 to the Golden Apple Foundation for the Golden Apple Scholars program which prepares low-income minority students for teaching in low-income communities.

■ \$1,500 to the Young Chicago Authors for operating support.

■ \$1,000 to Art Resources in Teaching

for a visual arts education program in Chicago public elementary schools.

Northern Charitable Trust

■ \$5,000 to the Imagination Theater for the dropout retrieval program at Wells High.

■ \$4,000 to Wells High for its summer writing program.

Wieboldt Foundation

■ \$10,000 to the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project for general operating support for two years.

■ \$6,000 to Chicago Association of Local School Councils for operating support.

Personnel

■ Regina McGram, former director of communications for Voices for Illinois Children, has been named executive director of the Wieboldt Foundation.

Grants is a cooperative project of CATALYST and the Donors Forum of Chicago. It was compiled by Debra Williams.

Test scores no longer central to Three-Tier plan

by Michael Klonsky

Is it possible? Is central office capable of responding to voices from the local school community? A new version of Supt. Argie Johnson's Three-Tiered Model for School Improvement may cause some of the system's most hardened cynics to reconsider this question.

The April 7 renovation of Pershing Road's most recent attempt at hands-on school improvement reflects many of the criticisms leveled at initial drafts by dozens of principals, local school council members and school reform leaders. Speaking before School Board members during a month of hearings, the grassroots activists expressed opposition to several of the plan's main features, including:

- Its use of standardized test scores to sort schools into three tiers, regardless of what schools were doing to improve student achievement. "Reform was in its infancy" when the data were gathered, argued Neil Bosanko, chair of the Bowen High School Local School Council. Bowen likely would have wound up in the bottom tier even though it has undertaken a number of initiatives to upgrade education. (See *CATALYST*, April 1994.)

- Providing that central and subdistrict staff arrange help for schools, which was viewed as top-down intervention, albeit of a gentle nature.

- The apparent intention to shift resources from one school to another, which Johnson denied would happen.

"Test scores are important, but we will now include a number of other things in our assessment of how schools



Pat Harvey, the highly regarded principal of Hefferan Elementary, is now special assistant to the superintendent. (See story on page 25.)

are doing," says Pat Harvey, who as Johnson's new executive assistant is in charge of shepherding final revisions and overseeing implementation of the three-tiered plan.

In a "fundamental shift," the revised plan asks schools to rate themselves on 49 "process characteristics," such as teachers' pursuit of continued professional growth, local school council training, school improvement planning and assessment procedures.

"Most schools will find themselves to be on different tiers for different characteristics," the plan stresses.

The principal, local school council and professional personnel advisory committee all would have to sign off on the ratings.

The schools' analyses would be fed into a computer for tabulation; the findings would then be used to help design needed programs and services.

The plan identifies five types of help:

- Classes focused on a particular process characteristic.

- On-site individualized assistance by one or more experts.

- Networking or partnering of schools.

- Clustering of schools with complementary strengths and needs.

- Distributing information about successful strategies from other schools and school districts.

Schools themselves would decide whether to seek help and what kind of help to request. The plan also warns that they may have to use some of their own money.

Gone from the plan are the School Improvement Teams—which were to include central, subdistrict and school staff—that had been proposed for bottom-tier, or Tier III, schools. Instead, subdistrict superintendents are to "organize and encourage improvement efforts in their districts."

In the end, though, test scores likely will be the measure of improvement. "As schools improve their processes, their students' achievement is expected to improve. . . . Failure to improve over four years would provide a basis for recommending a school be placed into remediation."

Schools will be expected to show progress on both the state IGAP tests and assessments now being developed to measure attainment of Chicago's new learning standards. (See *CATALYST*, December 1993.)

Revisions of the three-tiered plan are being guided by a 22-member advisory group Harvey pulled together. The group includes researchers, principals, local school council members, teachers and all 11 subdistrict superintendents.

Response to the current draft is due May 11, with the final plan scheduled for completion May 16. ■

New tier definitions

TIER I Schools that are “largely self-reliant” in regard to a particular characteristic and need “very little outside support.”

TIER II Schools that would “benefit from some outside support. In most cases, this would take the form of a group activity (seminar, training, etc.).”

TIER III Schools that would “benefit from significant outside support. . . . This support could take a variety of forms,” including classes, on-site assistance and networking with other schools.



Drummond School kindergartners (from left) Mayra Santiago, Genesis Dobolla, Cesar Plascencia and Angelica Piña settle in for “Story Time.”

Here’s how schools would rate themselves

Below are samples of the 49 “process characteristics” that schools would use to evaluate themselves under a proposed revision of Supt. Argie Johnson’s Three-Tiered Model for School Improvement.

Characteristics	Tier I	Tier II	Tier III
Local School Council			
Meetings	Regular, with quorum	Occasionally, sometimes without quorum	Frequently lacking quorum
Committee Structure	Formally organized	Ad hoc committees	No committee structure
School Improvement Plan			
Addresses students’ needs	Fully	Moderately	Insufficiently
Process of development	Open and inclusive	Controlled by small group	Developed by principal
Innovation	Frequent experimentation and innovation in instruction, organization and operation	Some experimentation and innovation	Little or no experimentation and innovation
State Quality Review	Exceeds standards in most categories	Meets standards in most categories	Does not meet standards in most categories
Teaching staff			
Professional growth	Most teachers pursuing continued professional growth	Some teachers pursuing continued professional growth	Few teachers pursuing continued professional growth
PPAC	Very active: has significant impact on instructional program	Moderately active: has some impact on instructional program	Limited activity: has little impact on instructional program
Teacher attendance	95 percent or better	90-95 percent	Less than 90 percent
External connections			
Parent involvement	High	Medium	Low
School networks	Extensive participation with other schools	Limited participation with other schools	No participation with other schools

Board, reform groups pledge cooperation in Springfield

by Anastasia Benshoff

The Chicago Board of Education and an ad-hoc coalition of school reformers have made their spring legislation wish lists. High priorities for both groups include increasing state funding for schools, mandating four-year contracts for principals, ensuring bilingual services for preschoolers and eliminating conflicts between state and local standards for schools.

Topping the groups' agendas is legislation that would force the state to come up with more money for schools. The board is supporting a bill that would establish a commission to develop a new funding method by June 1995. "The reality of that happening, I can't say," says Richard J. Guidice, the board's chief lobbyist. "But we have all these task forces saying we're going to study this and that. Let's just do it."

The coalition says it will support *any* legislation that will ensure stable and equitable funding. Ken McNeil, director of the CityWide Coalition for School Reform, says funding reform will be the groups' toughest legislative battle. "The whole area of school funding is extremely problematic," he says.

The board and the coalition also want to repeal a law that limits new principals to the unexpired terms of the principals they replace. The groups are supporting a bill that would give local school councils (LSCs) the authority to offer four-year contracts to all principals.

A series of bills that ensures bilingual services for preschoolers also has the support of both the board and the reform groups. The bills would require preschool teachers whose classes are at least 50 percent limited-English-proficient to hold bilingual education certificates; current preschool teachers would be exempt from the requirement.

The groups also want to reconcile the school improvement planning and assessment requirements spelled out by the Chicago School Reform Act and the

State Accountability Act. The board and coalition say the two sets of standards require duplicative efforts; they want schools to be able to define their own testing and assessment processes.

The board and reform groups also are helping each other in areas where their wish lists don't overlap.

"I am most optimistic about the newfound cooperation between reform groups and the board," says coalition member Diana Nelson. "We've got commitments from them to work together on 97 percent of the issues."

Nelson concedes, though, that board opposition is expected on several reform-group proposals, including a "reserved powers clause" that would let LSCs assume all powers not expressly given to the School Board. The reformers say such a clause is needed to ensure that schools control day-to-day school maintenance and operations.

The following are other measures being pushed by the ad-hoc coalition:

■ **STATE CHAPTER 1** Restoring Chapter 1 funds that were used to help balance the board's 1993-94 and 1994-95 budgets. The coalition wants all new revenues generated for Chicago Public Schools to go first to Chapter 1 "deficits," which are \$16 million this year and are expected to be \$16 million

next school year.

■ **LSC ELECTIONS** Shifting LSC elections to spring report card pick-up days, which typically draw a large parent turnout. Currently, LSC elections must be held before the sixth week of school; they have been marked by low voter turnout. Under the new proposal, LSC members would have time to get training before taking office in July.

■ **SCHOOL BOARD SELECTION** Guaranteeing that LSCs are involved in the board selection process. The coalition opposes a bill that would disband the School Board Nominating Commission and would allow for direct mayoral appointment of board members.

■ **TEACHER LSC REPS** Allowing full-time substitute teachers to vote for the teacher LSC representative. The coalition says that state law is unclear on this point.

■ **ENERGY CONSERVATION** Supporting energy conservation plans that include incentives for schools. The coalition is supporting a bill that says LSCs can keep 50 percent of the net savings on their energy bills. Currently, all money saved goes into the central budget.

■ **PARKING REVENUES** Allowing LSCs and subdistricts to lease their parking areas provided they give 50 percent of revenues to the board. The coalition wants LSCs and subdistricts to have a clear legal right to parking revenues.

■ **INTERNAL ACCOUNTS** Giving LSCs authority to oversee internal accounts, which include money raised from vending machines and site-based fundraising events. The coalition says LSC oversight will prevent diversion of funds for personal use.



POWELL'S PHOTOGRAPHY, INC.

Congratulations to Whitney Young High School for placing fifth in the U. S. Academic Decathlon, and an apology for misidentifying student James Megquier as the principal in the April issue. (Top row, from left) Marko Skukan, Jill Anderson, Tukoi Jarrett, Coach Larry Minkoff, Principal Powhatan Collins, James Megquier, Lincoln Chandler, Scott Glab, Assistant Coach Steve Grossman. (Kneeling, from left) Eric Mui, Debrell Head and Linda Cheng.

■ **CURRICULUM POWERS** Clearly defining the roles of the board, LSCs and schools in establishing curriculum.

■ **ARBITRATION** Establishing an arbitration process for disputes within LSCs and between LSCs and the board. A binding arbitration process would serve as a low-cost, timely alternative to litigation, the reformers say.

In addition, the coalition is actively opposing all school voucher legislation, which it says would lead to substandard public schools and siphon money away from public schools. The group also is against a bill to break up the Chicago

system into nine school districts, abolishing LSCs in the process.

The School Board is pushing the following:

■ **PENSIONERS** Allowing Chicago teacher pensioners to serve as substitute teachers 100 days a year, instead of the current 75. In other Illinois districts, retired teachers may work 100 days a year without affecting their pensions.

■ **TENURE** Restoring teacher tenure for principals and administrators who hold valid Illinois teaching certificates.

■ **SEX OFFENDERS** Prohibiting people

convicted of a sexual offense from serving on an LSC. Guidice says the board wants such legislation as a preventive measure.

■ **CONTRACTS** Allowing the board to sign service and commodity contracts of up to three years; currently, there is a one-year limit. The board says that longer contracts would save money.

■ **FUND SHIFT** Allowing the board to charge Management Information Systems costs to the building fund instead of the general education fund. The board says this will help balance the budget. ■

Back at Pershing Road, Harvey has reformers smiling

by Michael Klonsky

The staff shakeup at Pershing Road rumbled on last month with the appointment of Pat Harvey, an innovative principal, to the new post of special assistant to Supt. Argie Johnson.

Harvey is Johnson's first appointment that school reform leaders praised. "She's the first appointee who actually turned around a school under reform," notes Donald Moore, executive director of the reform group Designs for Change. "She has already been helpful in correcting some of the misinformation that the board put out concerning principal selection and has helped revised the Three-Tiered Plan."

Harvey has been charged principally with overseeing implementation of Johnson's Three-Tiered Model for School Improvement. However, she also is expected to assume many of the high-profile responsibilities initially assigned to Executive Assistant Robert Johnson (no relation to the superintendent), whom insiders say is being moved into a lesser administrative arena.

For example, Harvey is attending meetings of the broad-based group dealing with central office reorganization, and she is on a new task force that is reviewing School Board rules to see

if they conform to school reform.

Members of the latter group credit her with prompting the recent rescision of two reform-office directives dealing with the selection of principals.

In a March 30 memo to principals, subdistrict superintendents and local school council members, Johnson made clear that subdistrict superintendents did not have to be involved and that principals did not have to approve any surveys used in the principal selection process.

Harvey's appointment also is a sign of the increased direct involvement of the business community in School Board affairs. (See *CATALYST*, February 1994.) Both the Financial Research and Advisory Committee and Leadership for Quality Education highly touted her to the superintendent; she is but the first of several top-level personnel moves in which they are expected to have heavy input.

Three executive search firms have volunteered to find candidates for management positions under both Supt. Johnson and Chief Financial Officer Charley Gillispie, who, in the wake of last fall's financial crisis, reports directly to the board. The posts include:

■ **Head of Strategic Planning**, a new post under Johnson.

■ **Director of Management Information Systems**, now held by Acting Director Frank Guerrieri.

■ **Head of School Operations**, vacant since the firing of Jo Ann Wooden Roberts only months after Johnson chose her.

■ **Head of Procurement and Contracts**, a new post overseeing purchasing, warehousing, real estate, insurance management and contracts.

■ **Head of Building Operation and Maintenance**, vacant since the forced resignation two months ago of veteran administrator James Harney.

■ **Director of Real Estate**; former legislative aide Vaughn Barber is acting director.

In addition, board insiders say other highly visible administrators likely will be replaced this year.

For Pat Harvey, her new job brings her back to a familiar place; she worked in the board's desegregation office from 1985 to 1990, when she was selected as principal of Hefferan Elementary School in Austin.

Under Harvey, Hefferan has become a highly regarded school with extensive parent involvement and professional development for teachers. Hefferan was one of six "actively restructuring" schools featured in last year's school reform assessment by the Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Harvey also is one of several reform-minded principals who recently left their schools to take other leadership roles.

"This troubles me," acknowledges Harvey. Speaking of her own situation, she says: "Hefferan is on the road to systemic change. But Pat Harvey was not the change agent, just a worker for change. They have a strong LSC and a great group of teachers." ■

Since last issue

Law office rescinds transfer of South Shore teacher LSC rep

A teacher who was transferred from South Shore High School after helping deny the principal a new contract has been returned to the school.

On Feb. 24, Edwin Brown, a teacher member of the local school council, joined four other LSC members in denying the school's new principal, Eddie Washington, the six votes he needed for a full four-year contract. On March 8, Brown, a 27-year veteran at South Shore, received a transfer notice. (See *CATALYST*, April 1994.)

On March 16, the Board of Education's law department ordered Brown's return to South Shore. Board lawyer Miguel Rodriguez says the original transfer abridged Brown's contractual rights as a teacher. The transfer also posed "a very, very strong potential as a First Amendment violation" because it appeared that Washington had acted out of vengeance, Rodriguez adds.

Washington could not be reached for comment.

Brown appeared delighted to be back at South Shore. Though Washington offered him no explanation for the transfer, Brown insists he bears no grudge and would not hold the incident against him if he applies for principal.

Meanwhile, Washington has filed suit against the board and the South Shore LSC, contending his performance contract required him to be notified by Feb. 1 of the council's intention to either renew or deny him a contract. In addition, the suit maintains that it takes only five, not six, votes to ensure a contract for a sitting principal, a contention disputed by board lawyer Rodriguez.

Meanwhile, the LSC remains mired in controversy. After Washington was denied a new contract, four LSC members allied against him advertised a vacancy in the Board of Education's personnel bulletin. That riled the pro-Washington faction, but on March 24,

after an appeal by School Board members Florence Cox and the Rev. Darryl James, the council passed a motion to begin the selection process.

Herbert Hedgeman, a community representative among five new members elected last October, faults Washington for being downright obstreperous. "Since we got here, he has resisted us—he's knocked us down like dogs—and that has only drawn us together," he says.

Elaine Bailey Johnson, a teacher rep on the council who supports Washington, begs to differ. "We have people on the council now with no other agenda than selecting a principal other than Dr. Washington," Johnson says. "They aren't concerned about the school itself."

Johnson suggested that Washington, who was an assistant principal at South Shore until he moved up last August, would be resubmitting his name for the principalship. "I imagine anybody interested would apply." She also held out hope that the LSC could come together around a candidate. "If you have people who are concerned about the students of South Shore, I'm sure we'll have some type of consensus," explains Johnson. *Grant Pick*

More than 1,100 apply for early retirement

More than 1,100 Chicago public school employees with teaching certificates have applied for the second round of early retirement, slightly exceeding the School Board's estimates.

They include 33 principals, 30 assistant principals, 335 elementary teachers, 401 high school teachers and 17 central office employees, for a total of 1,146, or 13 percent of those eligible to apply.

Minority principals up

The percentage of African-American and Hispanic principals has risen steadily under reform, with blacks hitting the 50 percent mark this year.

When principal selection was in the hands of central office, minority contenders often asserted that the system discriminated against them.

Compared to student enrollment, Hispanic principals are seriously underrepresented, blacks are slightly underrepresented, and whites are seriously overrepresented. However, compared to the teaching staff, which forms the pool for principals, whites are moderately underrepresented and blacks and Hispanics slightly overrepresented.

The following is the racial breakdown of principals.

	White	Black	Hispanic
1989	56%	37%	7%
1990	52%	41%	7%
1991	45%	47%	8%
1992	44%	48%	8%
1994	39%	50%	11%

Note: 1989-1992 data are as of Oct. 31; October 1993 data have not been released; 1994 data are from January.

Source: Chicago Public School reports

The board had counted on 1,000 workers taking early retirement this year, which would save an estimated \$4 million in next year's budget. The savings come as the board fills the vacant positions with less senior and, therefore, less expensive workers.

Employees had to apply by March 1 and have until May 1 to withdraw their applications if they change their minds.

Last year, 4,000 employees, including some 1,300 career service workers, took the option, enabling the board to save more than \$12 million for the current school year.

Called 5 + 5, the program enables employees who are at least 50 years old to retire with benefits equal to what they would get if they worked five more years. It was authorized by the Legislature for only 1993 and 1994.

Nikki Hopewell

Comings and goings

MOVING IN/ON **Kenneth R. Holt**, a 25-year veteran FBI agent, has been named inspector general for the Chicago public schools. Holt has worked on investigations of the Cook County Sheriff's police and the Teamsters Union pension fund. . . . **Barbara Buell**, former associate dean of the evening division at Robert Morris College, has been named assistant director of the Chicago Panel on School Policy. Buell has also been a consultant to non-profit groups on membership development, public relations and marketing. . . . **Pat Gladden**, an attorney for 15 years with Washington National Insurance, has joined the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project as a part-time staffer. She will work on Mondays and Wednesdays and is able to take calls in Spanish. Phone: (312) 332-2494.

NEW DIGS Leadership for Quality Education has moved to One First National Plaza, Suite 3120, Chicago, Ill. 60603-2006. Phone (312) 541-4050 Fax (312) 541-4099.

BRAVO! **Betty J. Greer**, principal of Hartigan Elementary in the Douglas neighborhood, has been named one of 10 winners nationwide in the 1994 Reader's Digest American Hero in Education Awards. Greer will receive \$5,000; her school will receive \$10,000. . . . **Savannah Smith**, a 2nd-grade teacher and a 21-year veteran of Brown Elementary on the Near West Side, is one of 50 teachers nationwide to be named to the Association of Science and Technology Center's 1994 National Honor Roll.

REMEMBERING MICHAEL'S FATHER A new school built to relieve overcrowding in Rogers Park has been named the **James Jordan Community School**, in honor of the slain father of former Chicago Bulls star Michael Jordan. The school, at 7414 N. Wolcott, will relieve overcrowding at Field, Gale and Armstrong elementary schools.

AT PERSHING ROAD **Andrew Gilchrist**, former director of accounting and control, has been promoted to controller. . . . **Carol L. Wooley**, former administrator of Subdistrict 6, has been named acting director of the bureau of personnel services and staffing. . . . **Buzz Sawyer** has been promoted to senior advisor to the chief financial officer for revenue and legislative support; Sawyer was a coordinator in the department of budget development and analysis.

IN THE FIELD **Blondean Y. Davis**, former principal of Gompers Elementary, is the new superintendent of Subdistrict 10.

STUDENT COMMITTEE Officers of the High School Local School Council Student Representatives Committee are: **Marshall Harris**, president, Lane Tech High and student rep to the School Board; **Lakeisha**

Hamilton, recording secretary, Kenwood Academy; and **Tameka Harris**, assistant recording secretary, Lindblom.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR *All of Us Together: The Story of Inclusion at the Kinzie School*, by Kinzie Principal **Jeri Banks**, is slated for publication by Gallaudet University Press in June. Copies can be ordered from Gallaudet University Press, 800 Florida Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. . . . *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*, by **William Ayers**, a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has been selected as Book of the Year by Kappa Delta Pi, an international education honor society. Drawing on his experiences as a teacher and parent, Ayers lays out his philosophy of teaching.



Education "hero" Betty J. Greer

PRINCIPALS RETAINED The following principals have received new four-year contracts, expiring in June 1998: **Spencer Adams**, Gillispie; **Gloria J. Archbold**, Leland; **Bruce R. Brown**, Clark; **Jacqueline Connolly**, Cameron; **Carol G. Edwards**, Beale; **Everett L. Edwards II**, Byrd; **Betty Allen Green**, Herzl; **Carol Hardin**, Abbott; **William Harnedy**, Lenart Gifted; **Ellen F. Jones**, Burnham; **Fred Kravarik**, Marquette; **Mary Lee Lasher**, Albany Park; **Linda C. Layne**, Fenger; **Barbara C. Moore**, Howe; **Karen L. Morris**, Saucedo Scholastic; **Efrain Orduz**, Lafayette; **Mirna Ortiz**, Nobel; **George Pazell**, Aldridge; **Mary Ann Pollett**, Montefiore; **Moses Ross**, Graham Training Center; **Linda Sienkiewicz**, Piccolo; **Andrew J. Tinich**, Lincoln; **Mary E. Usher**, Blair Early Childhood Center; **Gladys A. Vaccarezza**, Blaine; **Effie S. Vinson**, Melody; **Barbara J. Wade**, Byford; **Inez G. Walton**, Morgan.

NEW PRINCIPALS The following assistant and acting principals have received contracts expiring June 1995: **Lionel Bordelon**, Kozminski; **Karen L. Kerr**, Bond; **Gaynell Moore**, Reed; **Janice Preston**, Ryder (formerly at Jefferson); **Gloria Stratton**, Nifios Heroes; **Albert L. Sterling**, Stagg.

The following assistant and acting principals have received contracts expiring June 1994: **Rosie B. Ard**, King Elementary; **Almeda Felmster**, Ruggles; **Denise M.**

Gamble, Herbert; **Solomon Gibbs**, McNair Academic; **Faye Grays**, Near North Career Metro High; **Constance Martin**, Tanner; **Carmen C. Martinez**, Wells High; **Johnnie M. Newton**, Burke; **W. Delores Robinson**, Summer.

SMALL GRANTS WORKSHOPS The Chicago Foundation for Education will hold its sixth annual grants workshop on June 4 at Dyett Middle School, 555 E. 51st St. Projects from the Foundation's Impact II mentoring program, which helps teachers share their ideas with colleagues, will be featured; sessions also will be held on grant writing, character education and other topics. Registration and continental breakfast begin at 8:30 a.m. Cost is \$10. For more information, call the Foundation at (312) 670-2323. The Foundation's new address is 400 N. Michigan, Room 311, Chicago, Ill. 60611. Fax (312) 670-2029.

RESOLVING CONFLICT The Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution is sponsoring a conference on ways to teach students to mediate conflict. The conference will be held June 22-24, at the Arlington Park Hilton Conference Center in Arlington Heights. Discounts on registration are offered to students and to groups of three or more. For information and registration fees, call the Institute at (217) 523-6080.

BROWN V. BOARD The impact of the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools, and the current state of urban education are the focus of a conference to be held May 16-17 at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Circle Center, 750 S. Halsted. Speakers will include **Barbara Sizemore**, dean of DePaul University's School of Education; **Lascelles Anderson**, director of UIC's Center for Urban Educational Research and Development; and **Asa G. Hilliard III**, professor of education at Georgia State University. Registration is \$50; deadline is May 2. For more information, call (312) 996-5225.

QUALITY SCHOOLS **Dr. William Glasser**, author of *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion*, will speak at two conferences in May. On May 17, Glasser will speak at the Holiday Inn, 17040 S. Halsted, Harvey; on May 20, at the Inland Meeting & Exposition Center,



William Glasser

400 E. Ogden, Westmont.

For more information, call Gordon Johnson at (708) 747-2701.

Lorraine Forte, Linda Lenz

Bright Ideas

Mollison teacher provides safe passage

"Come straight home after school. Lock the doors. Don't let anyone in! And make sure you do your homework."

These admonitions from working parents have taken on new meaning for 56 children at Mollison Elementary School in Grand Boulevard; the children are part of a Big Buddy program that seeks to ensure their safety when parents can't be home to welcome them back from school.

If a child "feels threatened or scared" he or she is not going to learn, explains Gregory McLaughlin, a Mollison physical education teacher who initiated the program. "Deal with his security, and you can teach him." Before joining the Mollison staff two years ago, McLaughlin, 48, was a civilian director for the Chicago Police Department; he is the father of three children.

Each day, McLaughlin walks five to 10 children home after school. Once or twice a week, he makes after-school phone checks on other children in the program, keeping careful track of the time of the calls and who answered the phone—and checking for any reports of trouble.

Children are encouraged to call a



JOHN BOOZER

Greg McLaughlin walks students (left to right) Amanda Boozer, Michelle Boozer and Tamisha Freeman home from school.

hot line to report troubling incidents, which McLaughlin relays to police. As a result of all this communication, says McLaughlin, police have stopped older boys from harassing young girls who were on their way home from school.

"I feel much safer," reports Michelle Boozer, 11, who with her sister, Amanda, 9, are in the Big Buddy program.

And their mother is relieved. "I feel

much better knowing someone at the school looks out for them, because I can't always pick them up," says Meriam Dean-Boozer.

Although safety is the main objective, the Big Buddy program also seeks to motivate the children to do well in school.

Each morning, prior to class, the group gathers in the school's auditorium, where McLaughlin examines children's

homework. He tries to arrange tutoring for any child who is falling behind in reading, spelling or mathematics.

In addition, guest speakers are invited to weekly mentoring sessions to discuss such issues as grades, career choices, safety, community relations and personal conflicts.

And McLaughlin used a \$400 grant from the National Foundation for Education to purchase Big Buddy T-shirts and take children on an outing to the Discovery Zone, a children's recreational center.

Helping him make arrangements is Mark Cheeks, owner of a local laundromat. Cheeks, whose brother was murdered in a car-jacking incident a few years ago, says that because he grew up in Robert Taylor Homes he can relate to the youngsters.

More than 75 other Mollison students await enrollment in the program, says McLaughlin, who adds that, "like the Army," he needs a few good volunteers to accommodate everyone.

For additional information, call Gregory McLaughlin at (312) 535-1804.

Kelli Worley

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